

An Anatomy of Marginality: Figures of the Eternal Return and the Apocalypse in Chilean Post-Dictatorial Fiction¹

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One of the most promising fields in contemporary Latin American literary criticism focuses on the notion of *post-dictatorship*, which designates both the need to confront the task of mourning victims of genocides recently carried out in Latin America and the many transformations undergone by culture and the arts in the aftermath of these genocides.² The military dictatorships have put in crisis various beliefs, subjects, and themes, and, more importantly, certain modes of representation. In Chile, the passage from Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government to Pinochet's bloody dictatorship was notably traumatic, and exile took a severe toll upon the country's cultural and artistic spheres. Activist, engagé precoup literature was forced to rethink its basic postulates, especially regarding its relationship with language. In the renovated fiction that emerged toward the late 1970s, when the arts began the slow process of coming to terms with the violent 1973 interruption, no figure looms larger than that of Diamela Eltit. Having written the most innovative, risk-taking fiction of recent years in Chile, Eltit has helped inaugurate a new period in her country's literature. In this article I analyze two of Eltit's novels, *Lumpérica* (1983) and *Los vigilantes* (1994), with a view to inquiring into the ways in which these two exemplary texts have dealt with the tasks, constraints, and challenges faced by post-dictatorship literary writing.

Diamela Eltit's first novel, *Lumpérica*, formed part of a larger artistic scenario. After the violent interruption caused by the 1973 coup, the crisis in activist art, and the phenomenon of exile, a series of written, visual, and performative works began, as early as 1975 and flourishing to the full around the end of the decade, to question

the norms of representation and the relation between art, life, and politics in Chile. Named *Escena de avanzada* by its most important theoretician, Nelly Richard, this variety of productions made Chile's symbolic memory their privileged focus of intervention. An inaugural moment in this process was the publication of *Manuscritos*, a one-issue magazine edited by Ronald Kay and designed by Catalina Parra, where the intertwining of image and text gave testimony to the decisive entrance of the urban space as a major interlocutor for the poetic text. Ronald Kay's collection of fragments entitled "Re-writing," which carried the subtitle: "Street: The Physics of Poetic Mathematics," affirmed that "The crowd's passing through the letter, the trace left by it, is the *impression* that one effectively has to read" (26). Words such as "trace," "impression," and "inscription" are indicative of a vocabulary that would gain prominence in Chilean art, especially in the theorization of memory. Kay's juxtaposition of text and grayish photos of Santiago offered an image of the break-punctuated urban experience under dictatorship, an experience which the poetic voice could only perceive as unspeakable. One of the *avanzada's* consistent concerns was the limits of the sayable, not as a result of external determinations such as censorship, but instead as a consequence of language's very limits. As Pablo Oyarzún would later point out, "the essential spin of the *avanzada*, in this regard, is to suffer the primary predicament of the unspeakable as something clandestine to its very speaker, which disarticulates the framework of individual and collective identities" ("Arte en Chile" 311).³

In locating Diamela Eltit's work at least two discursive spectra must be kept in mind: that of the experimental visual arts (Carlos Leppe, Eugenio Dittborn, and Carlos Altamirano), and the Department of Humanistic Studies, where Ronald Kay, Raúl Zurita, Eugenia Brito, Rodrigo Cánovas, Eltit herself, and others collaborated in the production of new literary theories and practices. Around 1979, the *Colectivo de Acciones de Arte* was formed. Comprised of two writers (Diamela Eltit and Raúl Zurita), two visual artists (Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo), and a sociologist (Fernando Barcells), it was responsible for two major performances in the city. The first, "Para no morir de hambre en el arte" 'In order not to starve to death in art' (1979), staged a distribution of powdered milk in a Santiago shanty town, accompanied by a poem—published in the magazine *Hoy*—exhorting the reader to "imagine that the shortage of milk in Chile

today resembles this page," and by the public reading in five languages of a piece portraying the Chilean situation in front of the United Nations building in Santiago. A box containing milk, the *Hoy* issue, and a copy of the text read at the U.N. were left in the art gallery Centro Imagen, followed by a parade of milk trucks through the city and the hanging of a white sheet over the Museum, as a metaphor for "closure and continuing hunger" (Richard, *Margins* 56). In the second performance, "¡Ay Sudamérica!" (1981), the group threw 400,000 pamphlets over Santiago from a plane; the text read "the work of improving the accepted standard of living is the only valid art form / the only exhibit(ion) / the only worthwhile work of art. Everyone who works, even in the mind, to extend their living space is an artist." Nelly Richard has noted the intricate rhetoric of such interventions: "preachy, exhortative, activist, utopian, consciousness-raising, prophetic, etc" (*Insubordinación* 40). In forging a link with the city, these performances "operated in a space that provided an alternative to the art institution" (*Margins* 57) and would become key references for much post-coup Chilean literature.

At that moment the question of photography became central to the artistic debate in Chile (Oyarzún, "Parpadeo" 32), from its role as "guardian of memory" to experimental disruptions conveyed by posing, simulation, and masquerade. Foregrounding the photographic space as a privileged trace of memory, Eugenio Dittborn worked on anonymous collective reminiscences in his 1977 "Fosa Común" 'Ordinary Grave,' a collection of photographs focused on the task of mourning, and in *Caput Mortuum Red*, a photoserigraph that exhibited a discolored, worn-out image of a young man next to a serial number. This concern was also manifested in Lotty Rosenfeld's performance entitled "A Mile of Crosses on the Pavement," in which she glued a piece of white cloth across the dividing lines on the streets to form a chain of crosses in Washington, D.C., the Northern Chilean desert, and the border between Chile and Argentina. Rosenfeld thus mobilized the semantic field of "cross," thereby alluding to serial deaths and generalized mourning. Two other visual artists submitted the body to segmentation, denaturalization, and resignification. In *El Perchero*, Carlos Leppe foregrounded as artifact a transgendered body rendered in pieces;⁴ Juan Domingo Dávila "combines in his pictorial system the comic's narrativity, the nude tradition, psychoanalytic questioning and obscene provocation" (Oyarzún, "Arte" 323).⁵ All these developments

presupposed a convergence of various theoretical experiences in Chile:

semiology and post-structuralism, the concern for art's sociality at the uneven levels of media, modes and material support of artistic production, the critique of meaning-fixing, of the transparency of the real and of the politico-militant consolidation of the creative will, the claiming of the signifier, margin, and interrogation of institutions have all functioned not only as descriptive, analytical or organizing ideas but also as imperatives for these productions. (Oyarzún, "Arte en Chile," 322)

Much of the best literature that emerged at that moment—Diego Maqueira's *La Tirana*, Raúl Zurita's *Purgatorio* and *Anteparáiso*, Diamela Eltit's *Lumpérica*, Gonzalo Muñoz's *Exit* and *Este*, etc.—interacted with the visual arts and incorporated into itself dramatic referents as a principle of construction. Black masses, sacrifices, a theatrical and travestied sexuality, invariably with much make-up and *mise en scène*, strove to unsettle the boundaries between life and art. Several of these texts proposed rituals and riddles, not infrequently overcodifying themselves into allegorical machines. In the visual arts interruptive strategies (collage, cut-up, montage, quotation) became a privileged structuring principle. On the theoretical front, Patricio Marchant's writing—in dialogue with Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and the psychoanalytic tradition—elaborated extensively on the notion of *scene* in its psychoanalytic, performative, and poetic dimensions.⁶ The new Chilean literature was decisively informed by critical theory and the visual arts. In this sense, an inevitable cryptification ensued, as concern over art's conditions of production led into an investigation of its own existence: "the aspect of opacity that typifies many of these works [is] not due to arbitrary hermeticism, but rather to an overcodification of its elements and denotations: a certain version, then, of a ciphered language" (Oyarzún, "Arte en Chile" 311).

Some texts rose to the status of emblems by condensing imagistic kernels that elaborated experience under dictatorship. Raúl Zurita, most notably, achieved quite an impact with the collection of poems entitled *Purgatorio* (1979) and *Anteparáiso* (1982). A telling phenomenon in the history of his reception was a blessing by Pe. Ignacio Valente, Chile's official literary critic and reviewer for the country's widest-circulating newspaper, the ultra-conservative *El Mercurio*. Pe. Valente appropriated Zurita's grandiose resemantization of the

Chilean landscape and his design of a Christian pattern of fall and salvation, lauding him as the true successor of Pablo Neruda and Nicanor Parra. His analysis enveloped Zurita's poetry in a conservative Catholic rhetoric that neutralized the unsettling assemblages of Zurita's poetic language. The text's destructive thrust to break down genres, images, historical messages, national ontologies, etc. lost its battle with the Christian message also embedded in Zurita's text. In a struggle over the interpretation of one of Chile's most celebrated poets, the conservative establishment confronted an avant-gardism fascinated with "the voluntarism of his utterances" (Richard, *Margins* 79), both of which were represented in the very figure of Zurita. Meanwhile, Zurita's poetic production itself was absorbed by post-dictatorial clichés, becoming increasingly patriotic and kitsch in its songs to and praises of the Chilean transition.⁷

Be that as it may, it is important to note the image of the polis as *wounded body* permeating Zurita's and Eltit's early work, as well as these works' offer of an aesthetic ritual which might effect a redemptive, quasi-religious form of restitution. To a series of practices that reposed the questions of art/life and art/politics, Zurita's work had the attractive attribute of "canceling and undermining the poetic self," proposing a "pathology of the individual which was also a pathology of society" (Valdés, qtd. in Cánovas, *Lihn* 81). Nelly Richard has shed light on the symbolics of self-sacrificial practice, concluding that "at a time when the real is forbidden, there is a *demand for the symbolic*, a demand which their [Zurita's and Eltit's] Christian message is able to satisfy" (Richard, *Margins* 68). In a time when art no longer sang epic praises of political hope but could not avoid coming to terms with its social mode of existence either, self-sacrifice often became the privileged gesture of immersion into the collective. With Zurita, "art was Religion again, and from its platform it demanded belief as a mode of reading" (Brito 87). What was most seductive about Zurita's early poetry was its prosopopoeic potential, its staging of the wounded poet as "emissary goat that expiated the guilt and grief of the social body in a moment when the country found its symbolic expression in such penance" (Pérez 55).

In order to contextualize Diamela Eltit's work, then, it is imperative to keep in mind these practices, in their trans-genre/gender operations upon the body and the urban space, their decidedly provocative, exhortative rhetoric, their radical fragmentation, and their redemptive-religious kernel. Like Diego Maqueira's *La tirana*, Eltit's

Lumpérica displays the blasphemous, profane element proper to all black masses. Whereas *La tirana* took as interlocutor the infinite *mise en abyme* of Diego Velázquez's *Las meninas*—the convergence of a geopolitical scene (America, Chile, the mestizo) with an Oedipal one (mother/son, artist/artwork), *Lumpérica*'s filmic component highlights an acute awareness of the paradoxes of the gaze. The various layers of the signifier "Lumpérica" thus have to be attended to: the name evokes "America," "lumpen," and "woman," but also (and crucially to the structure and politics of the novel) it brings to mind *lumen*, i.e. light and the whole semantic web of vision.

In what follows I propose analyses of *Lumpérica* and *Los vigilantes*, while referring the reader, whenever possible, to the growing bibliography on Eltit.⁸ As Marina Arrate has shown in the case of Eltit's *Por la patria*—"there is no story, just scenes" (81)—also in *Lumpérica* one finds not a paraphrasable plot but a scenic pattern, re-emerging in different forms: a public square, alternately well and badly lit, inevitably cold as in the peak of the Santiago winter, occupied by a few beggars and the protagonist L. Iluminada. This scene dizzily becomes a black mass, a cinematic representation, a political takeover, an erotic communion, a poetic protest, and a nihilistic embrace of destitution. More often than not it becomes more than one thing at the same time, while frequently suspending that becoming in order to present an interrogation, a minimalist poem or a metaliterary reflection, only to return again to the public square scene in the bitter cold of Santiago. L. Iluminada has undergone "loss of proper name" (10) and "the cold in this plaza is the time being marked to suppose oneself a proper name, given by the signboard [*letrero*], which will light up and fade away, rhythmic and ritual" (9). The text begins to establish a link between public sphere, proper name, and the lights. This oneiric space announces a possible restitution within what is otherwise a heap of destitutional remains. Djelal Kadir has noted that

The lumpen of America in Eltit's *Lumpérica* has its personification, its ironically and paradoxically *unmasked* prosopopoeia, in the female figure of the novel's protagonist, L. Iluminada. A glaring figure that in turn glares, she is illumined starkness that sheds her *institutional* vestments so that by her light the *destitutional* remnants might come to life, take on discursive weight and political visibility, breach their ghostliness, reclaim their banished reality, and do so at the spatial and symbolic center of society's habitat—the town square, now become the

permanent home of the homeless at strictly sanctioned hours of the day and spotlighted hours of the night. (183)

The body and voice of L. Iluminada collect these destitute remnants and offer them the fiction of a restitutive utopia: "the square lit up by the electric web guarantees a fiction in the city" (9). The spotlight's name-giving power lends form to this utopian scene. At the moments when the square empties and the spotlight is turned off, the mass of bodies tends to disappear in the background of a text that reads like a movie script. This is the moment of dissolution and loss of proper names. The reign of terror hovering over the city in *Lumpérica* thus has nothing to do with the "terror of the crowd" depicted in the *flâneur* tradition; it is rather the terror provoked by the *absence* of the beggars. In L. Iluminada's relation to the crowd there is immersion in the collective, not dandy-esque voyeurism. The only exterior gaze left is the camera, the lights that operate from above and remind of all of the threats of the outside.

The first chapter, composed of a series of filmic takes of the public square, associates three semantic knots of great importance for the novel. As Eugenia Brito has pointed out, "writing in *Lumpérica* submerges (drowns) in three crossroads: woman, lumpen and america" (196). Eltit associates a minoritarian and indigent "america," suffocated by the cold city air, with a female body where make-up and wound converge. The first chapter's scenic dimensions include stage directions and later critiques of each take, producing a Brechtian effect whereby identification with the bodies of lumpen (*Lumpe-*) and woman (*-érica*) is precluded by carefully placed metafilmic interruptions. The reader is *shown* a scene, and shown also that he or she is watching.

The camera is a source of true terror in *Lumpérica*. It presides over the feminization of the beggars' destitute bodies in the public square, as well as the transformation of L. Iluminada herself into a figure of prosopopoeic communion with them. The signboard "keeps handing out proper names" (21), constituting the instance whereby subjectification takes place, in the precise sense of being-before-interpellation, or being-before-the-law.⁹

the luminous board covers them with distinct tones, shades them, conditions them. (10)

So the spotlight, in full autonomy, calls them literary names. (11)

They're waiting for their turn, for the spotlight to confirm them as existence, to name them differently. (21)

Under the scrutiny of such a gaze, an individual female body and the collective body of the destitute come into being. They emerge as a function of the gaze, i.e. their proper names are endowed by it: "had the spotlight not fallen on the center of the square these would not have acceded to the privilege of the baptized one" (39). The "baptized one" is L.Illuminada herself, baptism appearing (as one among several Christian images in the novel) to announce the spotlight's name-giving powers, in a ritual which is either highly sexualized—"A primogenitor, she presents herself absent on guard, of her own will she is ready for the spotlight's control which, in darkness, acquires its deep penetration" (21)—or painfully eroticized: "She smashes her head against the tree time and again . . . shows herself in the bliss [*goce*] of her own wound, interrogates it with her nails, and if pain exists, it is obvious her state leads to ecstasies" (19).

The name-endowing instance is a phallic one, but L.Illuminada and the collective of indigent bodies in the plaza invent another sexuality, founded on rubbing ("frottes"), disseminated and decidedly anonymous. The cold in the plaza encourages rubbing and touching; the gesture of survival becomes indistinguishable from an erotic practice. Therein L.Illuminada undergoes her several becomings: her becoming-collective-voice, her own objectification by the violence of the lights (a subject formation scene in the most classical sense: constitution-by-interpellation of law), and also her becoming-subject of a gaze which, in its turn, objectifies the crowd of beggars. In a moment when they light the fire at the square, the narrative voice notes:

They will remain protected from the cold, so she can continue contemplating them under the spotlight and examining them in the perfection of their poses. . . . That's why her gaze is attentive and her face desiring. The cold no longer matters, she would lose the pleasure of observation if she mixed with one of them. . . . Like a traveling camera, her gaze. (33)

Hence the convergence of several gazes: the narrative voice, the lights—name-givers and identity-endowers in the scene—the camera that films, and L.Illuminada's eye following the anonymous mass of bodies at the square. The "seduced one"—L.Illuminada, *la*

seducida (38)—is thus “conquered in conquering” (38). The text is then interrupted and the reader abruptly presented with the second chapter, a police interrogation under dictatorship. The plaza will eventually return, and the final movement of the novel—the tenth chapter of this “inverse *decameron*” (Kadir 185)—concludes at dawn, with L. Iluminada shearing her hair in an empty and bitterly cold square where the dispossessed are no longer present: “Everything has been a rehearsal. Illumination is only for one night” (Brito 198).

In the second chapter, as the inquisitor’s language spins logic around while questioning a man on his suspicious presence at the square with the beggars, Eltit proposes an anti-cathartic, analytical relation with the absurdity of the conversation. No outbursts of identification surface; all violence has been transferred to the bestiality of the inquisitor’s language. Eltit points to the violence but does not exploit its victims. Redundancies, logical contradictions, and repetitions all contribute to framing the scene for the reader, who is further forced to step back at the end of the interrogation, when the text fades into a movie script: “background, scene upon scene: interrogator and interrogated” (55). Five chapters later the questioning returns, now concerning this anonymous man’s minute-long contact with L. Iluminada, as he once held her when she stumbled and fell at the square. There again the interrogation ends with the statement “the lights will be turned on at the square. The show will go on” (148), as the city assumes that inevitable appearance of normality most proper to the worst, truly terror-filled moments.

All who accused Diamela Eltit of obscurantism, hermeticism, etc. were at least receiving the impact of a true question: Eltit’s text is indeed illegible—certainly not in the sense they imagined, but rather in the Barthesian sense of *that which cannot be read, only written*, the writerly text. Throughout the novel, with the possible exception of the police interrogations (Chapters 2 and 7, written in a dry, demetaphorized Spanish, totally reduced to the nudity of its circular logic), Eltit submits language to a de-anecdotalization that defies paraphrase. One can always attempt to rewrite *Lumpérica*, but never to “read” it with depth-hermeneutic apparatuses. Eltit is inserted in a tradition—to simplify an immense problem, let us call it the *baroque* tradition—for which there is no reserve of meaning not translated into the exteriority of language. Eltit takes her text to the limits of a calculated erasure of the anecdotal, the novelistic, in favor of the poetic as such, as in the following passages (each of

which appears isolated on one page), where the orgiastic (*vac/a-nal* recalling *bacanal*), the eschatological, the animalesque (*mugir* = to bellow, *vaca* = cow) and the feminine (*muge/r*) come together to resignify the rubbing of bodies in the plaza:

Woma/neighin' shaves and her hand finally feeds the green un-
ties and
maya she erects and orgi-astic her form.

Anal'yzes the plot=weaving of the skin: the hand locks and
phobia
is a claw.

Woma/neighing patrols bodily Brahma her wick ed hand that
denounces her & bellows. (152-54)¹⁰

Besides invoking the baroque of Quevedo, Góngora, and Sor Juana and the neo-baroque of Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy, *Lumpérica* formally dialogues with a tradition of Chilean poetry reaching as far back as Vicente Huidobro (in its filmic manner of cutting and interrupting discourse, the mimetic relation with film being one of the novel's major structural threads), through Gabriela Mistral and on to Raúl Zurita. Like Mistral, it investigates the attributes of certain scenes, dramatic condensations that take on the character of emblems. As in Zurita, that scene is often one of sacrifice, one in which language is used in a sacred register.¹¹

Lumpérica very consciously presents itself as a lure, a spectacle in a ten-round cyclical version. The third round is that of animalization, as the same scene in the square returns, now with protagonist and lumpen neighing and bellowing under the impassive lights and camera: "Because neither her neighing nor the expert strength of her bellowing have succeeded in dissolving the powerful mark of this spotlight which has stolen her only presence before the pale ones, shielded behind its letters" (69). The protagonist takes over here in the persona of a mare, confounded with the lumpen, surviving by screaming and rubbing. She attempts "to erase the camera's expectation, to avoid the friction of scenes" (73). This is again a moment of disappearance of proper names, as the *animal lumpérico* "has no name other than that of its class" (75). The third chapter reinforces a recurrent motif in *Lumpérica*: the ideological function of the spotlight as namer, contrasted with the fleeting, ephemeral utopia of loss of name in the collective, which the pro-

tagonist experiences in the anonymous moments of darkness: "If the light, if the light were turned off, the plot would really start" (111).

The fourth chapter eroticizes the scene, as the camera closes in on the protagonist: "Irreducible, her waist sets itself teasing by staking out erogenous zones in the rocking that makes room for her torso and the displacement of her muscles" (90). She is presented as a gazed-at body—"her eyes generate in my eyes the same twin gaze" (88)—until she "transposes her first scene" (91), bypasses the filming instance, as it were, in order to peek at a primal and violent sex encounter, a scene populated with specters of incest:

Incest(ed) her caste recognizes in her face the face of the father, which the father's face sends to her when her hips, in the same form as the insatiable father. Animaesque hipped to her evil mothermadonna, who raises her matrix in the soil peeled off by the pater's impulse

pulls back

the teat, this voluminous milky portion robs her and her starving muzzle sucks from the father his product loaned to continue her, the savage mater occluded and squeezing the teat with delight

the flow bursts forth
flooding her cervix

Milky-flooding the bare one with smoothing sticky liquid. (91-92)

For the protagonist, "the surname incests [*l'incesta el apellido*]" (92). The terror of incest reappears as inheritance of the name.¹² All naming brings with it a violence, a cut into the fabric of anonymity that assigns loci to each subject. All names are names of the father. Woman in *Lumpérica* comes into being by inheriting the father's name in a scene of incest: "The lewdness of the proper name moaned by the *pater* who consoles her" (92).

The abyss over which L.Illuminada hangs in her relation with the collective is the abyss of prosopopoeia, the possibility that she might lend a voice, as it were, to an anonymous mass. Appearing as a phantasmic image joining the crowd of beggars, L.Illuminada is made subject of a prosopopoeia with the faded collective voice, in a utopian erasure of proper name. An excerpt entitled "Writing as Evasion," in the sequence of pieces on writing that make up the sixth chapter, concludes:

Intensely pale I adorn myself
 daubed to mirror myself in these holes
 multiplied by brain stimuli
 that situate me on the verge of an abyss
 which will irredeemably attract me. (128)

The poem is framed by a note written at the bottom of the page, giving another moment in the relation between the female protagonist and the lumpen:

She wrote:
 I keep peeling myself off, a Madonna, right, I open myself.
 (128)

After this erotic expiation through writing, a piece on "Writing as Objective" ends with a "mode of concluding hope" (129), which announces the "reconstituted city" of "Writing as Illumination" on the following page. This section ends with a return to mournful destitution: "there were the defeated and the dead. Nothing else" (133). This acceptance of the task of mourning leads to the conclusion of the chapter:

She wrote
 illumined, whole, lit up. (134)

At least twice the subject of writing collapses into the subject of the written, in a deliberate zooming of the protagonist into the persona of Diamela Eltit. The second, most decisive instance occurs when a dimly lit photograph of Diamela Eltit's wounded arms introduces the eighth chapter, the "General Rehearsal," which narrates one of the novel's self-sacrificial moments. In a true parody of the asepsis of medical discourse, the script relates with surgical precision how the protagonist performs a series of cuts upon her skin. The spatial-filmic reference is here completely taken over by hyper-realist minimalism. The scene recalls Eltit's performance entitled *Maipú* (1980), where she washed the pavement in front of a brothel, inflicted a series of wounds to herself, and read parts of *Lumpérica* to a group of prostitutes. Speaking of her interest in zones of exclusion (brothels, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, etc.), Eltit affirmed: "My concern is to expose these places, to become one with them with my physical presence. . . . It is a form of individual pain confronting the collective pain" (qtd. in Richard, *Margins* 73).

Lumpérica is, at the same time, a staging and a critique, a yearning for and skeptical disavowal of the possibility of such communion.

Lumpérica is a night-long reverie which closes down with the day dawning upon L. Iluminada in a deserted square. The ball of masks and prosopopoeias ends with the first morning pedestrian giving testimony to the city's return to the unbearable reality of "lights and proper names." *Lumpérica* announces the utopia of anonymity while foreshadowing its approaching defeat. Here resides one of the text's recurrent tensions: it purports to exist as an epic of marginality by turning the figure of the marginal into one of epic proportions. This desire exists, however, in tension with the novel's very structure, which is that of a ten-step walk along Calvary, concluded with the closing of the nocturnal cycle, i.e. all in all the very structure of the *eternal return*. This framework suggests, then, that an epic of marginality can only be a fallacious one, for all epic is by definition an epic of the center. To marginals the possibility of speaking epically is not given. And when that possibility is granted them by prosopopoeia, they find themselves inevitably placed at the center, at best transformed into a rhetorical function of the center. Hence the dialogical duplicity of everything in *Lumpérica*: at the same time it presents a compensatory epic and a reflection on the impossibility of such epic. If the odyssey finds its coda in the circular conclusion of a cycle and, one may infer, prepares to resume the following night, prosopopoeic communion is deferred by means of the very instance of control under which the scene displays itself, namely the spotlight. *Lumpérica* announces a religious communion rhetorically organized through prosopopoeia and dissolves this ceremony within the cynical atheism of the eternal return.

The restitutive gesture in Eltit hovers over an abyss represented by the accomplishment of restitution, i.e. the perfect ventriloquism between the protagonist and the collective voice. This drives her work to face two border zones delimited by redemption and by silence. *Lumpérica* takes place in the interval between the two, deferring both the climactic moment of bodily communion with the destitute and the inevitable moment of silencing when lights are turned off in the morning. *Lumpérica* presents itself, indeed, as a *theater* of what ensues in such interval, a drama relating the failure of prosopopoeic coincidence between L. Iluminada and the beggars. This failure is finally emblemized in the protagonist's chopping off her hair in the empty square, an act of "humiliation, contrition, mourn-

ing, excommunication and social exclusion" (Kadir 191), which separates L. Iluminada's body and voice from a square in which "the totality [of cars] belongs to patrols watching over [*vigilan*] the city" (*Lumpérica* 198).

Eugenia Brito makes the crucial point that *Lumpérica* brought back to Chilean fiction the possibility of narrating the city (12). Eltit answered the question as to what language—beyond *costumbrismo*, local color, or symbolic fables or epics where "the individual" is neatly folded into the collective—could narrate the city. *Lumpérica* opened the path for a corporeal insertion into the fabric of the polis; it announced, in cryptic, hidden, clandestine form, the image of the liberated city reconquered for storytelling and for experience. No traces of celebration, however, subsist in this rather melancholy novel. The reconquest should not be mistaken for a celebration of some advent of freedom: the posteriority that characterizes *Lumpérica's* imaginary *vis-à-vis* the dictatorship, i.e. its post-dictatorial nature as a novel (even though it was written at the height of the Pinochet regime), stems not from some carnivalesque reversal but from its acceptance of mourning. The reconquest of the city that it stages is thus the beginning of the confrontation with the imperative to narrate, to rescue past experience, to reactivate storytelling.

Lumpérica houses two rather different dimensions of the written: at one end, "escritura" and "escribir" appear as *scenes*, moments of illumination where the body is always actively involved: "This lumpen, imaginary, write and erase, share the words, the fragments of letters, erase their supposed mistakes, rehearse their handwriting, unload their wrists, accede to print" (116). On the other hand, literature appears as the sphere of institutions, names, records, poses, i.e. the realm of representation in all senses. The opposition between the two is thus between a collective experience of inscription and its belated, inadequate depiction. The utopian moment of *Lumpérica* is to glimpse into a residue of experience—the fleeting moment when writing is collectively shared—not captured by the representational apparatus named as literature in the text: "No literature has depicted them in all their incommensurability, so as everyday labor they hold on to their forms and each gesture when they touch leads to climax" (107). The thrust of the novel is, then, to highlight that residue of collective labor not containable by any literary mechanism. Hence *Lumpérica's* resistance to being literature, most definitely expressed in its resistance to being a novel,

and its insistence on a certain inscriptive, experiential dimension—let us call it *poetic*—which the texts sees as *irreducible* to literature's representational machinery.

Eltit's *Los vigilantes* (1994) lends itself to be read in counterpoint with the questions raised above because *Los vigilantes* is, quite consciously, a post-dictatorial novel. It obsessively speaks of mourning, linking this mourning with the "end of anguishing times." But in this post-Pinochet novel the national allegory is not as transparent as it might seem. In the first instance, the collective realm appears at the background of a domestic scene: love between mother and son in the shadow of an absent father complicitous with the political order. The absent father is the addressee of a sequence of letters by the mother, her gesture of writing being the major obstacle in her relation with her starving, freezing son. This is, then, a national allegory unfolding within an Oedipal triangle, while at the same time re-posing the problem of writing. Opening and closing the text, the starving boy stutters along the page as he tries to elude his cold and hunger.

The shadow of an epidemic of uncontrollable grief lurks behind the scene of writing in *Los vigilantes*. It binds the gigantic task of mourning faced by the polis to writing and to a great physical effort: "you will know then that writing you represents to me a super-human exercise" (35); "I must keep writing you, even though by doing it I jeopardize the fragile structure in which this morning found my body" (103). Writing thus appears as the dimly envisioned possibility of an outside. By making the mother the only subject of writing—with the special exception of the two puzzling pieces that open and close the novel, uttered by the son—*Los vigilantes* truly installs the father as *absent*. That is to say, the mother writes when the father is absent.

This Oedipal triangle, however, does not remain confined within the boundaries of familialism, opening itself up, rather, to a topography of the bodies that populate the city.¹³ The most nefarious image of the outside, hovering as a specter throughout her letters, is the "neighbors," those who watch over—one sense of *vigilantes*—the stability of the political transition. Neighbors are thus the guardians of the wretched pact in which she refuses to participate:

Voices are heard in the streets, noise, movements which confirm that the climate is changing. The anguishing times are over. . . .

The neighbors resolutely fight to impose new civic laws which will end up forming another tight circle. (63-64)

The relationship to the outside has been reduced to hearing. Beyond the frontier separating the outside from the scene of writing, the neighbors watch and protect the reproduction of a self-satisfied, post-dictatorial consensus. The mother writes *to* this outside, attempting to write herself out of the confinement and hunger to which she has been condemned. In this scene, however, another centripetal force must be taken into account: the cold touches and piercing laughter of her young *infans*—etymologically, the mute one—who opens and closes the text *in pure speech*:

Mama writes. Mama is the only one who writes (13).

I stick my fingers in my mouth to drag out the word that ponders among the few teeth I have. In some little hole I'll leave mama's leg when I get the word I still can't say. Mama's skin is salty. I don't like the sweet stuff, it makes you fat. Makes you fat. I throw up what's sweet, the salty stuff is rich. Now mama is bent over, mama begins to fuse with the page. (16)

In its initial section, before the mother's letters take over for the bulk of the book, *Los vigilantes* is a theater, *in speech*, of the *infans's* hopeless attempts to speak. Eltit, aware of the paradox, submits her Spanish to a tortuous, repetitive, broken syntax, an imaginary replica of the syntax expected from a speechless son existing in specular relationship with the mother. By endowing the son with the word, the novel dreams that it is taking place at the level of pure speech, that is to say, that the *infans's* impossible talk is a pure *logos* not mediated by the inscription of the written trace.

The *infans* opens the text by speaking of his inability to speak—"Oh, if only I spoke. Just look how it would be if only I spoke" (14)—as he sees the mother "fusing with the page." Her writing introduces law by placing a barrier between her and his desire: "I take her fingers and twist them to make her forget the pages that separate and invent us. . . . But my silly head will begin to freeze if mama takes refuge among her pages" (19). In a scene where the father is absent, writing is the barrier reminding the son of the interdiction that separates him from the mother. Writing is here the *Nom-du-Père* that shields the mother's body from the speechless son. Hence the precarious existence of the son's short opening piece (13-22), perma-

nently hanging over the abyss of non-language. The text sustains itself over this abyss by postulating a residue of affect—the son's desire of fusion with the mother—not exhausted by writing: "when he [*the Father, the Other*] writes to mama my heart steals his words. He writes trash to her . . . I read the words he thinks and doesn't write" (14). The *infans* can thus unveil the father's writing; there is a reserve of affect not translated into the written trace. In *Lumpérica*, the writing of L. Iluminada and the lumpen was coextensive with the novel's affectivity—it was the very form of this affect, hence the primacy of a baroque aesthetic in *Lumpérica*, for in a sense, this is the baroque: the dissolution of all interiority into the exteriority of language. *Los vigilantes*, on the other hand, appears as a *Romantic* text, insofar as it postulates a reserve of affect not exhausted by writing—a reserve which the speechless son comes to embody.

Two major vectors operate to frame the mother's letters: the *infans's* desire and the father's absence. The father is the link with the outside, dominated by "neighbors" who find it "indispensable to guard the West's fate" (65). Concerning the scene of writing, then, one important observation has to be made on the difference between *Lumpérica* and *Los vigilantes*: whereas in the former the contact with the collective is one of communion, announcing a fleeting utopia at the square, in the latter the space of writing has been violently confined to a terror-stricken *inside*. The public space utopically reconquered in *Lumpérica* has been, as the protagonist of *Los vigilantes* finds out, "only for one night." The square where L. Iluminada staged her camera-mediated prosopopeia with the destitute has now been taken over by an "orgiastic arrogance of satisfaction" (111), a byproduct of the "will to fuse with the West" (110), while the protagonist barely manages to "prepare to face the misery that encircles the borders of the West" (107). In 1983, it was still possible, accepted, in fact predicted by the text, to read Eltit in the stereotypical Bakhtinian celebration of carnivalesque inversion. No traces of that possibility persist in the post-dictatorial atmosphere of *Los vigilantes*.

Whereas *Lumpérica* was an orgiastic affirmation in the Chile of Pinochet's dictatorship, *Los vigilantes* faces the post-dictatorial void, with nothing to affirm and no one to affirm it against (except the amorphous and generalized lethargy, which does not exactly qualify as a targetable enemy). *Lumpérica* was an affirmative allegory, a true allegory of affirmation—for this is one of the definitions of

allegory: *a mimetic relation with the impossible*.¹⁴ Hence *Lumpérica*'s overcodification: since it opted to affirm only what was radically outside the codifiable by dictatorial and anti-dictatorial doxa, it could only dwell on the impossible. The condition of possibility of such impossible affirmation was its submission to the cycle of the eternal return of the same. Only by framing its affirmation within the logic of the eternal return—night, dawn, noon, sunset, the suggestion of a repeat the next night—could Eltit's first text affirm at all. It definitively installed its object as a *lost* object, the text's cryptic nature being a byproduct of its simultaneous option for affirmation and acknowledgment of the object of such affirmation as a lost, impossible one.

Concerning allegory, then, the difference between *Lumpérica* and *Los vigilantes* is not that one is allegorical and the other is not, but rather that the latter elevates allegory to a second degree where the possibility of affirmation has been dissolved. Despite the fact that it remains the bridge to the outside, writing in *Los vigilantes* is privatized, confined to the closed space of a room and the melancholy loneliness of a subject. The corporeal dimensions of writing are taken out of *Lumpérica*'s public square and brought to a suffocating regime of restrained space—"to become urban has constituted for me a painful apprenticeship" (83). The mother's confinement emblemizes her separation from the collective, in a time when the guardians of order are the only organized collective, and accounts for the novel's resistance to any affirmative statement. *Lumpérica*'s prosopopoeic moment of communion with the collective has been eliminated. Both the writer-protagonist of *Los vigilantes* and her son have been reduced to embracing a strategy of sheer survival: "My whole body howls, guessing the form that my condemnation will take. Your son, moving by my side, only plays defense now, terrified by the danger closing in on our heads" (99). There is no longer any room for the "pleasure of gazing" (33, 210) ubiquitous in *Lumpérica*, for the gaze has now been reduced to a looking down or away, most frequently by a being *watched over*. When the protagonist of *Los vigilantes* hides the destitute in her house, violating the city's rigid norms, she no longer affirms anything (such possibility is not given to her in the lethargic, forgetful post-dictatorial order), but rather puts forth a desperate negation as her last gesture of resistance: "the house is now our only margin" (116). The difference between *Lumpérica* and *Los vigilantes*, a sig-

nificant one in the context of the Latin American post-transitions, is thus between an affirmation of the impossible—an allegory—and a reflection on such affirmation *qua impossibility*—that is to say, an allegory to the second degree, an allegory of allegory, as it were, if we keep in mind that allegories are by definition representations of an impossibility.

Several recurrent phrases in the protagonist's letters lend themselves to be read in allegorical key: the nightmarish crisis, the wretched pact (recalling all the odious transitional "democratic pacts"), the regulated normality, the guardians of consensus, etc., all of which evoke Chile's highly controlled, slow-paced, and oblivion-dominated return to liberal democracy. The major kernel here is the imperturbable forgetting that makes possible the reproduction of post-tyrannical banality. The neighbors follow the complacent pact that promises a horizon where "the West can be within the reach of your hand" (110). These two irreducible, irreconcilable loci are represented by the two meanings of the word *vigilantes*: those who watch over (*vigilar*) and those who remain in vigil (*guardar vigilia*). On the one hand, there are all those who have chosen the sensible administration of the possible and have been led implacably to police the streets for any signs of unrest; on the other hand, there is the protagonist, victimized and bearing her mourning almost alone, "with [her] pernicious inclination for rituals that today all want to forget" (111). The protagonist's victimization brings the text back to self-sacrifice: "You will make of me the perfect victim because mine will be a judgment outside history" (100).¹⁵

Self-commiseration has also been privatized in *Los vigilantes*. *Lumpérica's* very frame as a novel reconnected L. Iluminada's (or Eltit's persona's) self-inflicted cuts with a whole complex of corporeal marks through which an experience of collective writing took place. For the protagonist of *Los vigilantes* writing has become a *personal* ritual of expiation for a *collective* guilt from which she is exempt, while the *infans* remains outside language, unnamed, most often referred to indirectly, Oedipally, as "your child." In *Lumpérica*, L. Iluminada and the beggars at the square were co-authors, and their writing presupposed no addressee, since it simultaneously affirmed and canceled itself. In *Los vigilantes*, the Oedipal frame structures language around a phatic axis, making the protagonist's discourse revolve around the absent father, which justifies the epistolary format. Unlike *Lumpérica* (which bewilders the reader to such

an extent that all transparency of addressing is suspended), *Los vigilantes* demands an empathizing position, both for the mother's mourning and for the child's hungry and cold rambling.

Although entrapped in a cycle of eternal return similar to *Lumpérica* (as the letters also follow a dawn-noon-dusk pattern), *Los vigilantes*, more than any other text in Eltit's production, embraces the apocalyptic as its fundamental mode of relationship with time. The text cannot bear another return, since Eltit makes her protagonist the *last* survivor, the last carrier of the word: "I no longer know who you are, I believe I never met you. Your mother is not a living figure either, the neighbors are only characters in the war. Only your son and myself are real" (112). Allusions to the multitude of dispossessed are now reduced to testifying to the narrator's philanthropy, as in her feeding, sheltering, and, in a climax of the Christian motif, washing their bodies in her house (96-97). If in *Lumpérica* the protagonist was constituted as subject only in her being one with the collective, in *Los vigilantes* the multitude, "shattered by panic, pain, and blood, barely bringing suffering as a memory of the blows" (102), has been made *extrinsic* to her, separated from her at the level of *experience*, and therefore only reachable through charity and compensatory expiation—hence the book's apocalyptic tone, its insistence on a war (involving North, South, West, and East), where "the great emblem auguring victory is the desperation of hunger which marks off borders" (112). Survival thus surpasses resistance or utopia as the protagonist's motivation to write.

It is certain that apocalypse is announced through a collective defeat shared by the protagonist, but now the constitution of the subject takes place not in the experience shared—for what is being shared is solidarity, not experience—but in the lonely gesture through which the protagonist addresses the Other, the absent one. The addressed "you" is the center of these letters, as can be noted in their profuse use of verbs in the second person, commands, or interrogatives. In this sense *Los vigilantes* is a love letter—that letter which makes of the addressee's absence its object and nucleus of desire—and thus demands to be read as symptom of this love. This predicament becomes visible in the tone of the mother's letters: repetitive, obsessive, self-torturing, displaying a resistance to reading which is due no longer to morpho-syntactic fragmentation and discontinuity (as in *Lumpérica*), but rather to the circular, dizzying display of symptoms. Like all love letters, they contemplate their

own disappearance and silencing, they are obsessed with end and death. *Los vigilantes* is an apocalyptic-eschatological chronicle of defeat. When the protagonist concludes her letters, before the word returns to the boy's delirious, broken speech, a mortuary scene appears as a post-dictatorial image of mourning: "an age-old pile of bones deprived of memory, freed up from the burden produced by the desire that shakes and consumes life. Bones that keep their pulverization to make room for other bones coming into this unrealizable tomb, surrendering to so much darkness" (114). The circle of control around the post-dictatorial city tightens, and writing is progressively equated with the sheer possibility of remaining alive. The protagonist commits to a "written, desperate, and aesthetic survival" (115) which pushes her to a corner of isolation and silence.

The *infans*, who opens the novel by experiencing his mother's writing as the pain of separation, closes it in the same atmosphere of hunger and cold that dominates the text. Now, however, the son sees the word return to him at the price of surrendering his desire to that of the mother, entering writing and accepting it as law: "Now I write. I write with mama grabbing my back . . ." (126). This final surrender—more a conclusive defeat than a successful pedagogical experience—is expressed in the change in the boy's language, which syntactically and lexically becomes indistinguishable from his mother's: "we go toward the bonfire through the unyielding night to conclude this story that looks interminable" (126). The only desire left is the mother's written desire, while the boy has submitted to the Oedipal order, closing what had been the only space untouched by the grid of language, which is always, as psychoanalysis has taught us, the grid of Law.

Los vigilantes is thus exemplary as a post-dictatorial text: what was once the dream of prosopopoeic communion with the destitute at the public plaza has now become an anguished, privatized attempt at survival. What was once the shared experience of affirmation has now been reduced to a unilateral gesture of philanthropic solidarity. From *Lumpérica* to *Los vigilantes* we move from the affirmation of the impossible—the affirmation of an orgiastic polis under dictatorship—to the impossibility of affirmation. As the relationship with the collective has been made *external* to experience, the restitutive gesture is engulfed by Christian redemption and fantasies of victimization or self-commiseration. The beggars that made up the utopian dimension of *Lumpérica* have now deserted the

square, leaving it to the “neighbors” of *Los vigilantes* to see that the entrance into the realm of consumerism takes place unmolested by memory’s troublesome negativity. In this context, Eltit’s wager is that writing, no longer able to affirm any oppositional principle, can at least, by virtue of its mere existence, remain as bearer of an irreducible trace of memory and experience, such trace being, pure and simple, an insight into the wisdom conveyed by the tradition of the vanquished: that things keep going, that they keep reproducing themselves, that everything keeps *working*; *this is the catastrophe.*

Notes

1. I wish to express my gratitude to all of those with whom I have discussed previous versions of this article: Alberto Moreiras, Fredric Jameson, George Yúdice, Teresa Vilarós, Michael Hardt, and Walter Mignolo. I am indebted to several Chilean friends for their hospitality, interlocution, and assistance in this research: Nelly Richard, Willy Thayer, Sérgio Parra, Raquel Olea, Marina Arrate. Diamela Eltit generously took time off her schedule to discuss her work with me.
2. Of special importance in this emerging field is Alberto Moreiras’s pioneering article, “Postdictadura y reforma del pensamiento.”
3. All translations from sources listed in Spanish in the bibliography are mine.
4. On Leppe’s multifaceted and provocative work, see, in addition to Richard’s *Margins and Institutions*, her highly poetic *Cuerpo correccional*. See also Bercht, ed., *Contemporary Art from Chile*, a catalog of an art exhibit in New York in 1991. On the evolution of recent Chilean art, see Oyarzún, “Arte en Chile” and “Parpadeo.”
5. On Dávila’s painting, see Gustavo Buntinx, Carlos Pérez, and Nelly Richard, *El fulgor de lo obsceno*. Of note in Dávila’s recent work is the parodic and transgendered representation of one of Latin America’s macho icons, Simón Bolívar. With makeup and conspicuous traces, making an obscene gesture, Dávila’s portrayal of Bolívar set up a space where Latin American macho imagery was politically queered. The painting provoked a hysterical response from the governments of Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador, as well as an embarrassed apology by the Chilean executive. See the excellent dossier in *Revista de Crítica Cultural* 9 (1994): 25-36, especially the letter signed by several artists and critics manifesting concern over the precedent of censorship opened by the hysterical reactions to Dávila’s work, in and out of Chile (34).

6. See Marchant's *Sobre árboles y madres* for a mapping of the fate of two desires: the possibility, the total feasibility, that a 20-year-old Chilean might utter, "I am a poet"—the fact that this desire may or may not fulfill itself, or to what degree, being another question; but the total impossibility, unfeasibility, on the other hand, that the same Chilean could possibly say, "I am a philosopher." An immediate correction—a translation of one's desire—is demanded by the latter sentence, argues Marchant: "You mean a professor of philosophy." See the entire architecture and the thinking of the scene in *Sobre árboles y madres* for the impossibility of philosophy in Spanish, in Chile, and in Latin America, and the acceptance of the task to "think what is primarily real for us: Spanish, our language, and Latin America; and as Chileans, to think Chilean poetry, conceptual like few, a gift for thinking" (86).

7. For a rigorous analysis of Zurita's trajectory from the standpoint of its culmination in the kitsch monument *La vida nueva*, see Carlos Pérez, "El manifiesto." Pérez retrospectively reads the coherence of the eschatological matrix present in the early collections of poems *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaiso*, as it evolves into the later grandiosity of his epiphanic "sermon of new life" and the pretension of being a "*Canto General*, the general chant of new times" (57). See also the perceptive readings of *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaiso* by Eugenia Brito in *Campos minados* (75-142), where she maps out Zurita's semiotization of a feminine body within the texture of biblical metaphors, as well as Cánovas's analysis (*Lihn* 57-92) of how Zurita composed, in syllogistic form, emblematic images of the national and the continental as in replica of the analytical text.

8. My reading of Eltit is indebted to various essays in which Nelly Richard insightfully tackles Eltit's literature and the larger artistic context of the *escena de avanzada*. On the artistic scene in Chile under Pinochet see her *Margins*; on Eltit's *El padre mío*—a text based on a recording made by Eltit of the convulsive linguistic delirium of a Chilean beggar—as an ironic unsettling of metropolitan desires for testimonial referentiality, see her "Bordes, diseminación, posmodernismo." On *Por la patria*, a novel that I will not touch on here, consult Marina Arrate's elegant and rigorous analysis in "Una novela como radiografía," as well as Rodrigo Cánovas, "Apuntes," and Raquel Olea, "*Por la patria*, una épica." On the whole of Eltit's fiction, see Richard, "Tres funciones de escritura." On *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria*, see Djelal Kadir's excellent *The Other Writing* 177-201. For the most informed analysis of landmarks of post-coup literature in Chile (Eltit, Zurita, Muñoz, Maqueira, Fariña, Juan Luiz Martínez, Berenguer, etc.), see Brito.

9. On the constitution of the subject as product of an interpellation by the law—the external, controlling instance represented in *Lumpérica* by the

lights coming from the signboard—see, of course, Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, elaborated in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

10. Naturally, my translation is only a coarse approximation that loses not only the alliterations and assonances but also several anagrammatic effects (for example, the connection between weaving and hardness in *trama=dura*, the orgiastic and the anal in *vac/a-nal*, etc.) The original reads:

Muge/r/apa y su mano se nutre final-mente el verde des-ata y
maya se erige y vac/a-nal su forma.

Anal'iza la trama=dura de la piel: la mano prende y la fobia
es/garra.

Muge/r'onda corporal Brahms su ma la mano que la denuncia &
brama.

11. Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), Luis de Góngora (1561-1627), and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) are arguably the three major names of one of the most fertile periods of Spanish-language poetry, namely the baroque. Their intricate, anguished poetry has remained a great source of inspiration for Hispanic writers throughout the past centuries, informing especially the so-called Latin American neo-baroque of the twentieth century. Key figures of this modern revival of the baroque in Latin America are Cubans Lezama Lima (1912-1976) and Severo Sarduy (1937-93). The Chilean poets to whom I allude are the iconoclast Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948), responsible for the introduction of avant-garde poetry in Latin America; Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), the Nobel prize winner and author of several intimist yet enigmatic collections of poetry; and Raúl Zurita, a contemporary of Eltit's in the Chilean *avanzada* scene.

12. For Jacques Derrida, the inheritance of the name is not an inheritance among others. It provides the matrix, as it were, for investigation of what it means to inherit and to posit oneself before the task of inheriting the other's legacy. See the collection of essays published in English as *On the Name*, especially "Passions: 'An Oblique Offering'."

13. For a devastating dismantling of familialism which does not exhaust itself in the negativity of critique, but chooses to reconnect with the collective in affirmative fashion—laying the groundwork for a new ethics—see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

14. I do not have space here to elaborate fully on the links between allegory and mourning, and allegory and post-dictatorship, and the ubiquity of the allegorical in post-catastrophe writing. On allegory's roots in mourning, see Benjamin 159-235; on the links between allegory and impossibility, see de Man, *Allegories* and "The Rhetoric," as well as Jameson's seminal "Third

World Literature." On the primacy of the allegorical in post-dictatorial fiction, see my "Cómo respiran los ausentes" and "Alegoría y postdictadura."

15. See also the protagonist's self-mutilation dreams (29) and associations between writing and suffering (35), or the apocalyptic anticipation: "Did you walk thinking of the final instant of my fall? did you laugh? did you enjoy guessing the shape of my bones? Is this coming end fulfilling the exactitude of your desires?" (100).

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