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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Requiem for a National Wound in Three Dictatorship Novels Underscoring
Sovereignty of the Self by Chile's Fernando Alegría

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Spanish

By

William Alexander Yankes

Dissertation Committee
Associate Professor Horacio Legrás, Chair
Distinguished Professor Gonzalo Navajas
Associate Professor Santiago Morales-Rivera
Emeritus-Professor Francisco Asencio Lomelí, UCSB

2018

DEDICATION

My intellectual mentors across the years are many. Perhaps more significantly haunting are the gestures, the glances, the fragments of words from people whose paths I crossed if ever fleetingly, sometimes manifested in a hopeful gaze darting at me expectations from this traveler with a passport to see worlds they couldn't, while I bear their circumstance as a burden in that inclination of mine to write about their plight. In authoring this doctoral dissertation I aim to bring together --if only on the page-- people with the power to create social change in contact with those who are mired in merely yearning. I penned this work with their flashback inhabiting me, including the shantytown children I saw from the train in that dusty Chilean village. May their futures harbor hope for lives fulfilled.

Born in Brazil to Chilean parents and raised in Chile, I recall President Salvador Allende personally and directly. Enrolled in the all-boys Naval Academy, I was part of the inaugural formation that stood firm while he smiled down upon us benevolently. President Allende walked slowly by as my fellow-cadets and I offered a symbolic salute. Alegría, on the other hand, was an Allende confidant, friend and ideological ally who represented the Allende government in the United States as a diplomatic envoy. After moving with my parents to the United States during the Allende regime, I felt the need to understand the processes that transpired in the country of my upbringing, realizing that I had become a voluntary exile myself, thus bringing personal closure to the diaspora of my family of four members. My study of Alegría's dictatorship novels helped me to understand not only Chile better, but the social processes and the literature that has emerged from them across Latin America, a region I have traveled widely meeting people of all walks of life with the aim of producing inspiring creative works to help elevate a socio-political conscience across the social strata.

“The governments of the people are better than those of princes”
The Discourses, Book I, Chapter LVIII
--- Machiavelli

“Democracy is a question of human dignity”
--- Sweden’s Olof Palme

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I attempted in vain to break away from chaotic Latin America, but its people, its culture and literatures seduced and ensnared me.

After many horseback treks across mountains and valleys, I canoed and rafted on rivers, hopped on old buses, hitched rides, took plains and trains as a sojourner throughout Latin America across the long years. I stayed at hamlets, met deep country folk, listened to their vernacular, and shared meals with them by the *fogón*. The stream of time gave me the longest ride until I found safe harbor at the University of California, Irvine, where my PhD committee professors welcomed my thesis concept: sovereignty of the self -- the right of each person to live unscathed even under the oppression of violent dictatorships.

Chile is deeply etched in my personal history, prompting me to explore Chilean author Fernando Alegría's work on a humanity rendered vulnerable to a violent military dictatorship. Alegría's prolific contribution to the region's literature and to literary theory inspired me to pay him homage for his groundbreaking theoretical vision.

Looking for a kindred spirit in academia rather than a mere institution that would accept my application, I was invited to pursue a master's degree in Latin American literature at the University of California, Santa Barbara, when I met with Prof. Francisco Ascencio Lomelí, who encouraged him to write a master's thesis on the Chilean colonial-era chronicle *Cautiverio feliz*, which shows that the indigenous of Chile, the Mapuche, had a more advanced social structure and relationship with nature than the Spanish colonists. That chronicle identifies the psychological and cultural origins of Latin American dictatorships with the military Conquests in the 15th and 16th centuries. Furthermore, Dr. Lomelí knew the Chilean author Fernando Alegría

well. On that basis, he agreed to participate in my PhD committee for my work on Alegría's dictatorship novels, focusing on the thesis of *sovereignty of the self* pitted mostly against Pinochet's military dictatorship. This work became my doctoral dissertation in Latin American literature at the University of California, Irvine, where professors Horacio Legrás, Santiago Morales and Gonzalo Navajas for their individual guidance and their patience with me during my doctoral studies struggles at the University of California, Irvine's Department of Spanish and Portuguese. They have played crucial roles in the theoretical studies I've incorporated into this PhD Dissertation.

Consistent with her master thesis work on "Emotional Architecture," Katherine Vallin is an uncompromising aesthete. She has applied her intuition and scholarship as a production designer of feature films that have enjoyed international recognition. Gregarious and proudly politically incorrect on matters of crucial social relevance, she possesses a rare talent for soulful rhetorical spontaneity emanating from her humanistic sensibility. To her creative initiative I owe the title of my dissertation.

I would not want to omit my friendship with J. B. Kennedy, and his mentorship. He is an American poet, heir to the lyricism of Robertson Jeffers, but then J.B. became a zealous owner of his own mastery of the poetic language. He is a stalwart warrior for human justice through his published poems of rage against dictators. He is possessed by a yearning to live in a United States where humanitarian social democracy is the culture of the land. J.B. steered me during my critical beginnings when he ran his second-hand bookstore and I would pour into the books he selected for me during the years I lived on my sailboat --with barely the space for a bunk bed and a typewriter-- at King Harbor Marina in Redondo Beach, California.

This work is especially dedicated to my brother Max, the first “doctor” in the family. By becoming an internal medicine specialist after conquering medical school in Chile while undergoing great hardship, then at a medical school impaired by a dearth of proper didactic instruments, but for a teaching faculty that was gifted with keen clinical instincts in the highlands of Ecuador, he then pursued his specialty at a precarious teaching hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Now a valued doctor in Visalia, California, he showed me across the years what level of soldiering is required toward the attainment of a worthy purpose. He is tenacious, loyal and supportive. Even though he is my younger brother, on many aspects of life I look up to him.

To my beloved parents, now in heaven, I owe fortitude and artistic sensibility. Theirs is the admonition not to ever forget that art represents a fragile humanity. Their European/*criollo* eyes through which they viewed the Latin America of their and my birth led me to travel and explore the continent I would later re-visit in its literature.

I owe a special and profound gratitude to Samuella Delora Lee—Samuelita, Sami. Across the decades and the many years of shared laughter and essential conversations, she has encouraged me to “plant acorns”—veritable seeds that may eventually grow and bear fruits. Through her companionship and love, Sami instilled in me her view of life as a spiritual lesson, and scholarship as a route for service to others.

CURRICULUM VITAE

William Alexander Yankes

- 1981-84 Research assistant and interviewer of diplomats for the think- tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in its Latin American Division while a student at Georgetown University
- 1984 B.S.F.S. Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service,
Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service
- 1990 Georgetown University Magazine article reporting from the Berlin Wall. Awarded the German Academic Exchange Commission grant, a German government's invitation to report from Berlin and Bonn upon the opening of the Berlin Wall.
- 2004 M.A. in Professional Writing,
University of Southern California
- 2012 M.A. in Latin American and Iberian Studies,
University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2015 Film Studies at UCLA's MFA Film Program through the Inter-Campus Exchange Program with the University of California, Irvine
- 2017 After writing, producing and directing the documentary feature film in progress, *The People Chile Forgot*, and the short film comedy, *He Did What?!* Both student films screened at Los Angeles City College Cinema Department
- 2018 Ph.D. in Spanish -- Latin American literature,
University of California, Irvine

FIELD OF STUDY

Latin American dictatorship literature, specifically Chilean dictatorship literature.

CONFERENCES

Viña del Mar, Chile: "La soberanía individual en la narrativa de la dictadura de Fernando Alegría", Instituto Literario y Cultural Hispánico. October 14, 2017.

Special guest lecturer with a paper titled, “El derecho de ser” (The Right to Be) for the Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales and the Instituto de Comunicaciones at the Universidad del Mar, Huatulco, Oaxaca, Mexico. August 20, 2015.

41st Symposium of Hispanic Literature: The Influence of Cervantes on the Humanities
Cal State Dominguez Hills. The paper was titled, “*Don Miguel: lirismo y humor en la obra cervantina.*” April 17, 2015.

PUBLICATIONS

2-first author articles in *Alba de América*:

2015 “La melancolía en la Segunda Residencia en la tierra” by Pablo Neruda

2017 on “El lirismo y humor de Don Miguel” about Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Requiem for a National Wound in Three Dictatorship Novels Underscoring
Sovereignty of the Self by Chile's Fernando Alegría

by

William Alexander Yankes

Doctor of Philosophy in Latin American Literature

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Associate Professor Horacio Legrás, Chair

Fernando Alegría's trio of Chile's dictatorship novels are blistering amalgams of literary imaginative prose, memoir and political history, unprecedented in Latin American fiction.

The tragic and untimely death of Salvador Allende during a Sept. 11th, 1973 military strike intended to end his presidency weighed heavily on Alegría, stimulating my inquiry into his dictatorship novels to understand their ontological, cultural, political and theoretical significance in relation to our basic human rights.

In *Una especie de memoria*, *El paso de los gansos*, and *Coral de guerra*, Alegría speaks for Chile's less fortunate, insisting on addressing the tortured and the aggrieved, the victims of political persecution and the "disappeared" at the hands of the dictatorship personified by General Augusto Pinochet. Inviting these Chileans to center stage, Alegría ensured the downtrodden and dismissed—those who had pinned all their hopes for a more just society on Allende—would not be relegated to invisibility merely because they had been born poor and had idealistically come to believe change could be made at the ballot box.

The legal and philosophical notion of sovereignty, as well as its literary theoretical dimension needs renewal. Alegría's three novels provide a key to creating a safe resistance through a revolutionary recalibration of insilio or "internal exile" of the individual, who—under Pinochet—becomes an object of contempt, of rejection and violent reprisal. Consequently, this study includes perspectives on power, sovereignty and human rights by a number of thinkers from antiquity to the present.

The meaning of "sovereignty" has evolved under their watch. Individual worth diminished when dissident colonists wrote "We the People..." thus galvanizing the power of military and civilian dictatorships, reason enough to re-articulate and renew our belief in sovereignty of the self as the fundamental basis for all social contracts. Would that governments and corporate entities be sublimated to the concept of sovereignty in its purest state; the truest expression of sovereignty burnished into the *Zeitgeist* as an expression of literary theory. Fernando Alegría's fictional truth has been midwifed and all ontologies, tautologies, languages and relationships can finally be unshackled.

Key terms: sovereignty, rights, violence, literature.

INTRODUCTION

Fernando Alegría's novels of coup d'état in Chile, dictatorship and exile constitute a body of work where creative fiction and the personal memory of authoritarian, violent political history meld into ensnaring, lyrical prose. Dictatorship is a millennial experience. It goes back 2,500 years to Roman law. Sovereignty, on the other hand, emerges with modernity in the Renaissance. Both terms will be discussed in Chapter 1 Alegría's Precursor Novels. They will be followed by his dictatorship novels proper in Chapter 2 *Una especie de memoria*, Chapter 3 *El paso de los gansos* and Chapter 4 *Coral de guerra*. In all these chapters we can observe how dictatorship leaches at the democratic institutions with slow relentlessness across the decades, but we will also feel the pulse and witness from the reader's bleachers how the Chilean character resists this erosion with a spirit and a behavior of discontent, manifesting dissent and rebellion, thus highlighting a disposition for gaining ownership of a *sovereignty of the self*.

In this study we will explore how Alegría pays homage to the world's first democratically-elected socialist, Salvador Allende,¹ who rose to power with a long-brewing vision of social justice after devoting fifty years to public service. He was a medical doctor for the poor, and made house calls. His vision was to liberate his people from forceful financial foreign co-dependence. His aim was to heal an entire nation from the humiliation of neo-feudalism. His aim was to shroud each person with rights, imbuing not just each voter, but each human life with the opportunity of a thriving life with dignity regardless of gender or racial background. More than a politician, Allende was a humanist. A political party was the vehicle he employed as a means to liberate his society from entrapment. Alegría observed that maverick Allende and chronicled his journey by documenting his experience with each person who deposited in him, the candidate,

¹ This statistic is true for 1970.

and then the president, his or her yearnings. His political plank was as lofty as it was brief, thus stifling his followers' hopes. Beginning with his personal experience of the violent destruction of Allende's socialist government in September 11, 1973 by a military coup d'état, Alegría documents the seventeen years of authoritarianism Chile suffered under Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) through novels that take the pulse of a wounded humanity whose individual integrity was egregiously violated.

A chronology of works and historical events causes the unfolding of Alegría's cultural and socio-political consciousness, which he transferred to his philosophical and theoretically innovative thesis of *individual sovereignty* in solidarity with other fellow-citizens, which he imbued into his fiction works. The fulcrum event that defined the direction of his writing career was Chile's exceedingly narrow presidential election in 1938. This shift in the political climate made room for the emergence of the workers' union leader, Luis Emilio Recabarren. He was instrumental in the creation of a workers' movement as a sign of a major shift in politics. Hordes of urban labor migrants were drawn to industry becoming a political force with which to reckon. Albeit, the working class sector encountered great resistance manifesting as political confrontations and physical violence by the military and the police. However, such a trend could not be stymied, soon rendering agricultural tycoons obsolete. Up to then, the stodgy agricultural oligarchy had reigned uncontested since the earliest colonial centuries. Within a handful of decades they witnessed their own undoing. As a result of these radical changes, writers penned works reflecting the social conditions of the poor, their political demands, as well as the fall from grace of the old aristocrats as the new oligarchy seized their estates and their place in the political structure. Alerted by these events, Alegría navigated turbulent waters in urban politics

and negotiated its shoals, his creative persona evolving into a politically aware writer. Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938-1941) became the first left of center Chilean president in the 20th century.

Alegría, still a teenager, became a budding activist with the publication of his successful *Recabarren* (1938), named after the popular workers' union leader making headlines in those years. This biographic novel examined how one man fought for the rights of individual workers, one man at a time, building a coalition of supporters until a union gathered power and legal standing. Fanned by Aguirre Cerda's ground-breaking election, this biographical novel earned Alegría inclusion into Generación 38, the respected elite group of authors. This is also the year of a military massacre of some sixty fascist university students plotting a coup d'état, a subject he would mine for a later work of fiction. Alegría first became interested in literature as an aesthetic endeavor. 1938 symbolizes the threshold of an era for this socially aware and politically irreverent writer. He soon learned that there was a genealogy of authors reacting to a sequel of international events that had prepared the ground for him.

Alegría launched his career officially in 1938. The last dictatorship novel he pens is published in 1989. Between these two dates, he writes several critical works, as well as what will become his precursor novels, five of them, which will be examined in this study in tandem with his philosophical postulation of *individual sovereignty* as a composite narrative strategy that will inform his later stage and mature works, his dictatorship novels.

With his fictional dictatorship narrative, *Coral de guerra*, he unhinges language as character, as body, releasing by its voice a moral force situating the historically marginalized at the center of a society in turmoil. The notion of *individual sovereignty* emanates from his text. The human face, the private individual's plight is hoisted as a banner symbolizing the struggle of a long-forgotten section of society. In such environment with a groundswell of social resistance

and pressure in a nation politically split in half, Alegría is compelled, by dint of his own social class, to reckon with the inherent power of the vulnerable. The intervening writing years, with well more than forty titles to his name, transform him into the literary master he became elevating the traditional social pariahs in his dictatorship trilogy of novels.

Latin America's political history had been parceled out as projects of expansionism by foreign powers throughout the 20th century and as an extension of the United States since 1823 with the Monroe Doctrine, barring Europe from control of Latin America. Clearly, this policy rose to the level of a first initiative of dictatorial intentions toward an entire continent at once. This geopolitical backyard that Latin America represented to the United States became metaphoric barbed-wired corrals of divide and conquer for its economic control and financial usury. Inevitably, a literature emerged that absorbed and analyzed the impact of those forces not only on Chile but on each affected Latin American country's socio-cultural matrix. The continent's earliest dictatorship novels that enjoyed greatest impact were written by two Argentinians, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* (1845) and José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851). Both novels criticized the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-1852). Alegría takes note of the birth and evolution of the genre. President Theodore Roosevelt's 1900's global show of economic and military power by sending his navy fleet to circle the globe flexing its muscles, managed to dwarf the rest of the world into fear and forced acquiescence. It was around that event that non-Latin American observers, such as Joseph Conrad and Ramón del Valle-Inclán made a pioneering mark in the field of Latin American dictatorship literature.

Alegría was versed in European and Anglo-American literature (currents, styles, techniques) and philosophy (neorealism, surrealism) well before he began to explore works

written about Latin American dictatorships. This will become apparent when each of his dictatorship novels is analyzed. As the 20th century was ushered in, so did Latin America's literature in this particular subgenre. Joseph Conrad, a Pole writing in English, someone who never set foot in Latin America, inaugurated the 20th century with his *Nostramo* (1904), a keenly insightful yet fictionalized tale of rot and violence in the imaginary Latin American country of Costaguana. It shows how the mechanisms of corruption in the absence of democratic institutions sink into a sinister anarchy of power. Then came Spain's Ramón Valle Inclán, and his visit to Mexico during the 1910 Mexican Revolution. There, he penned *Tirano Banderas* (1926), where the author shows ill-distributed economic resources and *caudillo* politics culminating in dictatorship. The name Tirano is a thinly veiled euphemism for tyrant, while Banderas, in the plural, represents the countries' flags, suggesting that tyrants may crop up anywhere and in many places within the region, as the subsequent decades of the century proved it would happen. Neither of these two works narrates the suffering of the peasant trod on by callous tyrant bosses. Alegría took note of the myriad of small injustices spilled across the pages of these two works as well as those of a select group of Latin American writers that wrote dictatorship narratives from living models as the century moved forward.

Between the First World War, the Great Depression and the Second World War, there were enormous dislocations that rippled from Europe and from the United States onto Latin America that urgently needed to be repaired --or was available to be mined-- for the benefit of a few, which the literature of the era recorded. Alegría absorbed all of this as he traveled the continent observing social gaps and the forgotten, working man, enslaved, mistreated, nameless. As the United States penetrated Latin America commercially during the 1940s, not without political prodding, and Chile was no exception, as politics churned in disarray, so did dissent.

Latin American native authors wrote seminal works drawn from a lifetime of personal experience and exposure to despotic heads of state, most of them either picked by the United States or approved by the northern power. Not one Latin American political figure could be elected to the highest office of the land without sanction or approval by the United States, a crucial dependency that is not always perceived within each country's social life. The first major mid-century work frontally critical of misuses of power against a national integrity rising against a Latin American dictatorship was Guatemala's Miguel Angel Asturias with two of his works: first, *Hombres de maíz* (1949), alluding to the high percentage of the indigenous population of his country. It was written earlier but kept unpublished until after *El Señor Presidente*, (1946). This work was based on the presidency of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898–1920) and earned Asturias Latin America's first Nobel Prize in literature in 1946. From Asturias, Alegría learned the technique of revealing truths camouflaged in story to avoid censorship, or worse, and learned strategies of fleshing out characters and context among the social classes while developing a plot. A pithy short novella suddenly intruded into conversations across the continent. It was Juan Rulfo's *Llano en llamas* (1953) and *Pedro Páramo* (1955). The first one is a collection of short stories of pain, survival, religion and doom. The second one is a philosophical fantasy about the impact of dictatorial power. It is a symbolic story of pain and strain, and of death, the permanent ingredients in the dusty existence of the very poor of Mexico told from their perspective. For his courage for innovation, astuteness, narrative strategy and surrealist imagination, one must include Julio Cortázar, even though the Argentine's poignant oniric tales come closest to Edgar Allan Poe than to Alegría, subconsciousness is palpable in Alegría's subtext; more than that, it is from the atmosphere of storytelling, that the Chilean author draws craftsmanship from the models of these two great Latin American prose artists.

In subsequent years, Alegría penned other works of literary criticism and many works of poetry and fiction, all of them placing a marginalized humanity at the center of each story. Alegría underwent a personal and intellectual transformation after his long-time friend Salvador Allende was elevated to the presidency of Chile. The nation altered its course as a result. The world tilted by its impact. The United States became alarmed, again, after Cuba 1959, believing that a Marxist Chile would open the gates wide open for Communism to spread in the region, thus threatening the hemisphere beyond the control of the White House. The years 1970-1973, the period of Allende's presidency, were uniquely influential for Alegría, whose proclivity for a literature of aesthetics had also absorbed a political sensibility, layered and nuanced by local mythologies (some of which he debunked) and social struggles. These were years when Chilean documentary filmmaking (Miguel Littín and Patricio Guzmán) and feature filmmaking (Raúl Ruiz, Alejandro Jodorowsky) established the first narrative documents of political fulcrum that would serve as visual models for Alegría, the visually-suggestive prose narrator. The years of military dictatorship under general Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) was a time when Alegría's tone, language and novelistic techniques grew in rhetorical stature to reflect the crippling ontology of a nation. He wrote with candor and diplomacy fathoming an artistry that allowed him to dodge censorship and persecution as he emulated the examples of colonial-era chronicles and their self-censorship guarding against Crown and Church inquisitional politics as the region's earlier forms of dictatorship.

It took the violent coup d'état of 1973 for this aesthete turned diplomat to shift gears and use his rhetorical talents to grapple with the clash pitting a military government's despotic methods with a dignified humanity that manifested its dissent, or against a sector of the population that preferred to remain in the shadows paralyzed by repression and fear. Alegría

writes about characters fending off gratuitous military violence by performing acts self-marginalization at a time of national crisis. He also reveals acts of contrasting behavior: courage and defiance by those with nothing to lose. This happens in five novels that will be this author's precursor works to his three dictatorship novels. In all these works, individual dignity constitutes the idiosyncratic undercurrent of those kept from thriving in their citizenship. It is timely to mention that July 1973 is also the date of publication of Carlos Droguett's *El hombre que trasladaba las ciudades*, a work published in Spain, which soon after the coup a mere two months later, would be barred in Chile. It is a fictionalized chronicle of the making of a dictator, who was a historical figure during the Spanish Conquest when Chilean territory included regions that today belong to Argentina. This particular Droguett title evidences the fact that there is a traceable genealogy between the Conquest as the seed for the evolution of a culture and a national psyche that still today endorses authoritarian governments. This novel implies that Latin American societies have been dragged across the generations through bloodletting, exploitation, and abuses of power – layers of historical truths that history books and the news media have omitted. As it was with Droguett, Alegría and other regional literati seized the moral scepter and filled the historic vacuum, the dearth of telling, with their intimate histories. As Chile's palace of government exploded in flames and the nation was about to be ruled by the traitor-tyrant Pinochet, Droguett's novel serves as a mirror of historic reality. Indeed, it gives the impression that history is imitating art. Alegría, aligned with Droguett's humanistic tenets, takes note of this accomplishment for his own three upcoming novels of political corruption.

Those thirty-five years between 1938 and 1973 deeply marked Alegría. One senses the national bruises in his works, which increasingly address the pathos of the individual cornered in misery and peril, overwhelmed by oppressive powers. In this context, one can glean two starkly

different periods in Alegría's development as a writer of creative works. The years 1938-1970 establish his direction and the political grooming for the author-student-professor-critic-novelist. It is during these three decades that Alegría wrote the five creative works that serve as precursors to his dictatorship trilogy of novels.

Chile had known democracy for thirty years prior to the forces that colluded culminating in the political tsunami of 1973. The swirl of international events triggered by the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, leading to the toppling of Allende's Marxist but Constitutional government, caused another wave of major political plate tectonics shift across the continent that was vulnerable to the United States. Chile's model Marxist democracy quickly transformed into a dictatorship. The new military regime claimed national sovereignty as its self-determination moat. It proclaimed impermeable integrity, shielding his regime from international inquiry into Pinochet's violent governance. The United States hovers over Chile and the region. And does so to install or topple any regime that deviates from its realpolitik strategic vision. The United States functions as two separate nationalities: one for domestic cultural consumption, and another conveys an altered international image. While Chile, long after the Conquest by Spain, Chile became a country much like the United States in its domestic alchemy: a country at peace, with no experience of foreign invaders and violence threatening to cripple its governance; it is an experimental society whose people live in blissful isolationism, where oceanic distance and political craftiness by those in power contribute to the fact that the population is sedated from an international consciousness, whereby their own government acts with haughty corporate condescension toward its people. Here's where the parallels diverge. The United States, on the other hand, exercises hubris and invasive violence toward the world's vulnerable nations in order

to foster and maintain its global hegemony for the purpose of maintaining its superpower status. Alegría is well aware of these undercurrents and countercurrents, which he filters into his works.

Far south of Asturias' Guatemala and his venerated work, *El Señor Presidente*, but written mirroring comparable political circumstances, a dictatorship chronicle-novel that capitalizes on a view of power from the gaze and entrails of the person of the dictator, is Paraguay's Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo, El Supremo* (1974). This is the most daring account of political hubris to-date, observing the behavior of an historic figure and an incumbent dictator's inner psyche, personal insecurities and facial blemishes. Then, taking the opposite extreme, we have Colombia's Gabriel García Márquez, 1982 Nobel laureate in literature, whose *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) is a tale of tropical putrefaction alluding to political corruption and tyrannical abuse, but also about the people's loyalty to the dictator they never met, never saw, but felt hovering over their entire lives omnisciently. García Márquez (Gabo) called it "a poem on the solitude of power," a generic but eternal dictator lingering, a continuous dictatorship spanning from the Spanish Conquest to American imperialism, foreign models of interventionism that rust in a tropics where even power rots and festers quickly as manifested by the oppressive presence of the American private enterprise, The United Fruit Company. García Márquez was a great influence on Alegría, mostly in terms of structure novelty, as illustrated by his *El otoño del patriarca* (1975). The Colombian author wrote several novels of dictatorship based on a series of military governments buffeting Colombia and neighboring Venezuela. Best known dictatorship narratives are *Cien años de soledad* (1967) and *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (1961), a tale of martial law. In all of these works, we get closer and closer to the vortex of power, but ever more removed from the lower strata that suffers most as a result of recurrent manifestations of the arrogance of political power, something that Alegría remedies. Coinciding with García

Márquez's dictatorship novels, Alegría published his first documentary-novel of Chile's coup d'état led by a military despot while the author/narrator/main character is both its eye-witness and an observer of events from exile. This work is *El paso de los gansos* (1975), a title that captures the 19th-century Prussian army's goose-stepping marching style that causes the ground to thunder under, symbolizes the power of the military over a civilian society. The army uniform and marching style were adopted by the Chilean military and continues in practice even during democratic regimes. This is a literary work where many voices across the social spectrum speak and cry and whimper and protest alerting the reader with their testimony of that one day of indelible national drama, which was the day of the coup d'état, September 11, 1973. This literary work congeals the population's emotional memory caught off guard. The work's prose conveys the visual memories that remain etched with scenes and sounds of the aerial bombing and the raging flames set ablaze of their country's colonial house of government.

The Caribbean is a part of the Americas, but often forgotten as such. We mustn't exclude one of Latin America's most original perceptions of regional cultural history, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier, whose *El reino de este mundo* (1949) gives a story of racial majority of blacks quashed by the foreign-imposed French monarchy in Haiti during the Napoleonic era. Blacks revolt but their leader ends up burned at the stake, yet before dying he liberates a culture-rich word, predicting his people's and his culture's survival despite tragic oppression.

Asturias, Carpentier, García Márquez and Roa Bastos gave us dictatorship novels written in four geographic nerve centers spanning the continent. In each of their decades, their tales showed the world that the region boiled with an alarming epidemic of authoritarianism; it also shook the international scene with news from Latin America that its intellectuals were taking notice. The emergence of authoritarian governments that use violence against their own people

as a method to harness their legitimacy is a strategy bent not only on eradicating all trace of social justice ideologies, but on ushering in the seeds that one day were to transform into a neoliberal economic philosophy as the new international paradigm. This is precisely conforming to what Walter Benjamin denominated *Angelus Novus*, the angel of progress by destruction. Rather than opting for avoiding a repetition of dictatorship as manifested in 20th century European history under Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler and Franco, the swath of Latin American countries --under the aegis of the United States— have chosen to emulate the Europeans' bankrupt notions of leadership by genocide. It has become increasingly clear that oligarchical/corporate interests have superseded civic and human rights, social services, infrastructure, public health and education, etc., the very concerns that define nations. Dictators have emerged as the corporation's bodyguards with the military and police forces as the institutional moats supposedly to protect these financial interests from an unarmed citizenship. Rather than utilizing their status as independent republics, these countries have chosen, instead, to allow their societies to be manipulated and pounced, thus brutally suspending all democratic institutions and outlawing Constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. As a result, the Latin American military, the judicial system, and the police have had their way abusing people, knowing their behavior is condoned by those at the helm of the private sector and government, which are often constituted of the same family members or political relations.

Artists and writers have observed these events recur cyclically and chronicled them. There are a number of other authors removed from the limelight of runaway marketing sales, who, without the same lofty pedigree, nonetheless wrote works of dictatorship that are as meritorious, or perhaps even superior relative to the Nobel laureates' more celebrated works. A critical literature emerged analyzing and interpreting their veiled criticisms of socio-political chaos.

Three titles enable us to understand their socio-political, psychological and symbolic alchemy that irrigates Alegría's novels fitting this subgenre: Carlos Pacheco's *Narrativa de la dictadura y crítica literaria* (1987), Adriana Sandoval's *Los dictadores y la dictadura en la novela hispanoamericana 1851-1978* (1989) and Giuseppe Bellini *El tema de la dictadura en la narrativa del mundo hispánico, Siglo XX* (2000). These works differ among themselves in the authors and works they select, but coincide in the fact that they all discuss the dictatorship literature that blossomed as a result of Pinochet's era of violence.

Alegría published critical essays between the publications of fictional narratives. While all of them reveal the idiosyncrasy of Chileans with expository descriptions of the capital city of Santiago, the personalities and the culture from the stance of folksy voices and manners, he also penned volumes honed by increasing social consciousness. As the decades unfolded, the country's politics were becoming more despotic. Alegría's crucial historical fictions memorialize the politics, the conversations, and the sense of nation: they are *Recabarren* (1938), *Lautaro* (1943), *Camaleón* (1950) and *Mañana los guerreros* (1964) and *Allende: mi vecino el presidente* (1983).

In his later dictatorship novels what soars from Alegría's prose is the unwavering humanism embracing the broken and the dejected, the shamed and the impoverished---a kaleidoscope of social outcasts have a space in his rescue net in light of a social calamity intensified by trauma, chaos, catastrophe and loss. His works aim to chisel dignity for those who contrast in physical appearance (with the indigenous) and those who disagree with the dominant political views of that era. The notion of *sovereignty of the self* rumbles across their respective subtexts. It is a quiet Leviathan that at least suggests itself yearning; at its most impactful, alarmed, it screams out its demands announcing itself as the only institution, the live human

being, from which all other institutions should derive. Another of Alegría's contemporaries, José Donoso, returned to Chile from exile during the Pinochet years and had the courage to author *El obscuro pájaro de la noche* (1970), *Casa de campo* (1978) and *La desesperanza* (1986), where the common themes are Chile's highly stratified society. In that milieu, the condescension of the higher class is pitted against the resentful service stratum. Both sectors lose their respective gravitas when panic-stricken under the constant throb of martial law. Alegría refers to this in *El paso de los gansos*, as well as in *Una especie de memoria*, and most especially, in *Coral de guerra*.

Another Chilean, also a contemporary of Alegría, is Carlos Droguett. His work *El hombre que trasladaba las ciudades* is a significant model for Alegría's dictatorship novels. Droguett explores the ancestry of Latin American dictatorships since the Conquest and colonial centuries, and shows *how* the dictator is created.² It also demonstrates that there is a direct and evolving line of dictatorial tendencies employing military violence from the Spanish Conquest all the way to late-20th century despotic regimes. Droguett and Donoso are two of several Chilean authors who become Alegría's indispensable palimpsest of works that articulate the issues that gripped Chileans most urgently during those frantic and disconcerting years of martial law, curfew, sudden detentions, unexplained disappearances, mid-day street executions in crowded places... Alegría, as Droguett, also inquires into how the average man has fared under such a regime expected to steer the nation to higher planes of civility while, instead, is buffeted by the authorities despite the fact that he remains guiltless and blameless in the eyes of a tainted legal system. Both Alegría and Droguett shift the urban lights of their humanistic gazes to the city's outlying and impoverished areas, where in the underbelly people claw their way each day to

² Francisco A. Lomelí, *La novelística de Carlos Droguett* (1983).

make it to the next. Alegría meanders in outlying neighborhoods of his native city to get closer to the unmasked pulse of a fragile humanity.

After the Chilean military toppled the socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973, which could not have happened without the economic pressure of the United States, came the exile years for Alegría and others of his ilk, and with them the sprouting of a literature that jolts us—from first-person detention camp testimonies, pugnacious protest-song lyrics, courageous stage plays, to documentary and feature films -- and novels with bite. The emotion that describes this second period of Alegría's narrative (1973-1990) coincides with Pinochet's tenure and it comes into existence because of it. It could be said that this latter body of Alegría's work evokes the physicality of barbwire cutting into flesh. Jagged edges are felt deep in the bowels of Alegría's prose while sojourning in shantytowns, an hour from the center of town on overcrowded rickety old buses. Sidewalks are cracked. Walls are left unpainted. People walk with a slump as if underwater, with time pressing against them. The author returns to the streets of his birthplace and youth. It is on these sojourns where we meet those other Chileans, manual laborers and maids, exhausted but resilient, whose roughened palms scrape one's hand in a handshake, leaving their mark, creating memories.

At sundown each night during the long Pinochet years, martial law entered into effect. While people hastened to be indoors (*El paso de los gansos*), the military came out toting weapons loaded with intentions to fire at running shadows. The proverbial bang on the door at midnight was heard, terrifying those inside... This is Alegría at his best. The reader encounters a most visceral form of language. The reader is sequestered to feel the specter of violence, the emotional shock, the suspicion, the state of constant horror and uncertainty poisoning existence. By holding any of Alegría's works in one's hands one becomes vulnerable to empathy. The

historical matrix is the terrain where Alegría dips his pen to author his dictatorship novels, which break new ground within the subgenre for his emphasis not on the mechanisms of power [*El Señor Presidente; Yo, el Supremo; El otoño del patriarca*; Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000) where a Peruvian author examines the barbaric years endured in the Dominican Republic under Leonidas Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961)], but on its impact on society's most destitute of protections. Through his active language, we can't avoid imagining, nearly experiencing the assault of insulting language, the deafening blow of a rifle butt, raw power mutilating *sovereignty of the self*. Alegría's writings are a veritable requiem for the wrongs done to thousands of individuals tethered to others with bonds of affection, the historically poor yearning for their dreams to come true ---yet it is they who during the Pinochet regime had their lives ended with one shot. Such ineffable wrongs, injustice made grotesque, can only find a catharsis in reading privately as though it were a ritual, a ceremony where we break bread with the author, ponder his words, and allow them and the images they evoke to disturb our complacency in hopes of improving our frayed ethical responsibility for the Other, exhorting us to go out on a limb in solidarity with another person's *individual sovereignty*, and by doing so help repair the imperfect mettle of which we are all constructed. There is, seemingly, no particular writer who seems to have obviously left a crumb trail of influence leading back to Alegría. Casting a mere glance at the enormity of Alegría's body of work, steeped in humanist meaning, is enough to dispel any doubt that this is a prolific author whose every work lays down an anchor made heavy with social purpose; a muscular writer who confronted the contingency of the times in which he lived.

The novels *El paso de los gansos* (1975), *Coral de guerra* (1979) and *Una especie de memoria* (1983) do what official history is incapable of recording: they chronicle the indelible

sounds of aerial bombs destroying the government palace, tanks shooting at colonial era walls behind which historically irreplaceable documents are pulverized. These stories represent a conscientious gaze. They create indelible emotions and unforgettable images in the history of a particular assault on a unique brand of Constitutionally-respectful socialist democracy. For the reader who has never set foot in Chile, these works constitute a compelling vicarious journey to that country with the lanky shape and the stymied hunger for justice of a Quijote. This trilogy of works intrigue the unwitting visitor into their pages to inquire into what are the historical elements that chisel such national fortitude, such character, resorting to black humor in hard times, a nationality eking out a proud existence when their country has metamorphosed into a concentration camp, a veritable shooting range; into a sovereignty used for impunity to exterminate those staunch on recovering democracy. That national character Alegría depicts is a mixture of defiance and irony, laughter and rage... a distinctive nationality grafting Anglo-Saxon tenacity with Arabic-Iberian scheming; indigenous ferocity and Spanish bravado, irreverence and humility. This is a culture of mixed heritage where the national character is intensely alive. Alegría comes from this stock. It is therefore natural for him to paint a self (and collective) portrait of his people's response to a heightened sense of daily crises prompted by the *state of exception* the Pinochet dictatorship thrust into their lives.

All dictatorship literature is perforce tethered to the political history that compelled it. Carlos Pacheco makes this very point in his *Narrativa de la dictadura y crítica literaria* (1987), a thematic system covering works modeled after thirty-two dictators: "Esta investigación se trazó como objetivo el describir e interpretar la tradición temática del dictador y la dictadura en la narrativa latinoamericana –particularmente en el ámbito de la novela contemporánea-- así como

la respuesta crítico-literaria que ha intentado explicarla.”³ Writers and critics, such as Alegría, have observed the direct impact of dictatorship on Constitutions, law, and peoples. As a professional man of letters within Chilean literary circles and American academia, the name of Alegría is highly respected and recognized. Anthologies by Helmy Giacomani in *Homenaje a Fernando Alegría; variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra* (1972) and by Juan Armando Epple in *Para una Fundación Imaginaria de Chile: La obra literaria de Fernando Alegría* (1987) pay him homage with a series of essays highlighting his contribution. However, precious few scholarly articles exist about this author’s corpus of novels. Among those, a handful of articles by writers with solid careers behind them have become available, where they analyze the three of Alegría’s narrative texts involved in my selection. Following an exhaustive documentation, no PhD-level work has yet been devoted exclusively to a selection of Alegría’s political novels, least of all his dictatorship narratives. After reading this author’s elegant prose, it beckoned me to write the first monographic study toward a doctoral dissertation on this author’s narratives of dictatorship in three works of his that are at once complementary and dialectical.

Unquestionable talent and an enormously prolific body of work lauded by critics were obviously not enough for the judges of the Premio Nacional de Literatura Chilena to award the prize to Fernando Alegría. Even after a plethora of obituaries in some of the United States’ loftiest newspapers, he is remembered posthumously as a highly respected critic and writer, and yet, also as a most elusive figure in the world of Chilean and Latin American literature.

Even though Alegría’s uses of diverse genres for each of his creative works fuse into convergences (the essay, lyrical narratives, historical documents, the chronicle), the theory he applies to his creative narrative works is more specific. Even though most critics (Epple and

³ Carlos Pacheco, *Narrativa de la dictadura y crítica literaria* (1987), 7.

Giacoman, Jara, Ruiz) pigeonhole Alegría as a neorealist writer, it could safely be said that he paints a broader stroke. The iconoclastic Alegría composes prose⁴ into which he weaves a composite of literary theory and movements: at the very least, he merges his theory of philosophical aesthetics; that is, his conviction that the average individual should enjoy freedom of movement and decision-making, where the average person constitutes a living institution deserving of legal protections. He complements this view in an era when the literary realist movement is foundational for a neorealism that includes elements of existentialism. Even the antidictatorship neobaroque --the Latin American nonlinear and idiosyncratic, even postmodern⁵ version of the European baroque-- is Alegría's melancholic (and at times palpably angry) response to Chile's regime of martial law. In Argentina (1976-1983), it was a dirty war that left that nation in a mournful state. Elsewhere in the dictator-ruled continent the torment of life under dictatorship manifested in protracted civil wars and U.S.-trained and funded counterinsurgencies. This Latin American neobaroque plays a role in Alegría's Chilean narrative tapestry—as it did in José Lezama Lima (*La expresión Americana*, 1957) and (*Paradiso*, 1966), Reinaldo Arenas (*El mundo alucinante*, 1969), Alejo Carpentier (*Concierto barroco*, 1974), and Carlos Fuentes (*Terra Nostra*, 1975), among others, all depicting the region's collapse of institutions and rebuffed Constitutions across a continent of frayed and torn societies clumsily abandoned after the ravages of slash-and-burn economic and military interventions, where people were left to heal their open sores during a post-colonialist era. The various convergences of the literary movements mentioned (neorealism, postmodern, neobaroque and a late existentialism) flooded

⁴ Alegría's aestheticism extends to the musically melodious prose, the lyrical, prose poetics, and to the visual composition of man in the urban space; but also to the aesthetics of emotions triggered by language in the context of man in a city in turmoil.

⁵ Monika Kaup, *Neobaroque in the Americas: Alternative Modernities in Literature, Visual Art, and Film* (2012), 122.

Alegría's oeuvre into the 1990s. Alegría responded narratively to the volatility of historic events transmogrifying his native country.

What seems that the military regime forgot, or intentionally dismissed, is the original purpose of the state. This becomes flagrant. It occurs even when the notion of state was initially to be a constantly transforming organism in symbiosis with its people. In his *Philosophy of Right* (1820), Hegel understood the state to be a political concept responding to the demands of modern individuality and freedom; that is, society performed its functions with *each individual as the state*⁶ in a conduct of reciprocity in order to thwart totalitarianism⁷ by promoting will, freedom, and the right to individual well-being.⁸

Taking these two interrelated strands, the common folk and state affairs, Alegría weaves theoretically nuanced and eclectic narratives. He writes about that which he lives and observes. In so doing, he modifies prosaic realism by making its phrases sing with the aesthetic of the romantic without harkening back to romanticism. Each of Alegría's sentences and paragraphs seem deceptively light and fluid. Its interior architecture connotes a complex algorithm of syntheses distilled from eclectic sources. Hegel's objectivism butts against Lezama's neobaroque perceptions of an irrepressible subjectivism across a continental culture that is as operatic as it is serene, where tumultuous forces in contrast with each other vie for equilibrium. Alegría etches this tension in the solidary individualism of his citizen-characters straining to thrive under political duress. Eurocentrism has transformed into a *criollocentrism* without discarding identifiable traits revealing their European institutional ancestry. These historical proclivities, thesis clashing with antithesis, produce an American synthesis. Alegría experiments with both

⁶ Eric Goodfield, "The Sovereignty of the Metaphysical in Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 62.4 (June, 2009), 861.

⁷ Ibid., 865.

⁸ Ibid., 864.

proven and new narrative techniques and approaches to enhance the condition of the citizen amidst the convulsive transformations lived in a dictatorship.

He employs the interior monologue to give a sense of the oniric in the dizzying circumstance of disaster in *El paso de los gansos*. He combines the colonial era-flavored chronicle merging genres, such as realism, with a first-person narrator that feels omniscient and rather unreliable, as if the third person omniscient carried the story in *Una especie de memoria* while often thresholding into the first-person narrative. Alegría steps out of traditional techniques in *Coral de guerra*, where an absent voice becomes the anchoring moral center by its ghostly presence, thus pitting force against reason,⁹ military hubris against the integrity of a humanity that offers no self-defense and shields itself purely by its integrity. The offensive and moral lacerations against humanity that transpired during the Second World War marked Alegría. He applied the historic insight to the here and now of Chile in distress. Authoritarianism in Hitler's Germany served Benjamin material for analysis: "The 'fragile human body' that emerged from the trenches was mute, unable to narrate the 'forcefield of destructive torrents and explosions' that had engulfed it. Communicability was unsettled,"¹⁰ a passage that dovetails with Alegría's female central character, who vowed to uphold silence during her torture in *Coral de guerra*, a fictional work mirroring Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship. Alegría writes, "El novelista... más que estilos literarios crea estilos de vida y la novela es una gran forma de vivir."¹¹ In the final analysis, his late-stage creative works are truly *sui generis*.

As shown, Alegría supports his literary edifice with a rich critical and fictional meta-literature. Much like Raymond Williams before him, Alegría has tried to grapple with the critical

⁹ Chile's motto is "Por la Razón o la Fuerza" written on a shield pillared by the figures of a condor (force) and a huemul or deer (reason).

¹⁰ John Berger, "Introduction" in *Walter Benjamin: The Storyteller -- Short Stories* (2016), xi.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

heritage of previous writers and critics,¹² and to anticipate emerging trends with potential to become dominant. Scholars agree that the neorealist movement is which best profiles him as a novelist underscoring the fact that the Chilean critic/writer remains profoundly attentive to the impact of the various spokes of power on average folk, something traditionalist realists tend to disregard.¹³ Realism is concerned with economic and political matters. In contrast, neorealism is more attuned to the decline of realism's hegemony, which threatens the integrity of the community¹⁴ manifested as imperialism¹⁵ repudiating ethical restraints,¹⁶ something Alegría fought against as a diplomat. If realism thrived during the Cold War, neorealism emphasizes the era of international political economy.¹⁷ Neorealism is state-centered and produces the socio-political space where sovereignty can flourish.¹⁸ For neorealists, “the individual is not the economic man, but the individual state.”¹⁹ Taking these theoretical notions into account along with their empirical relevance in people's lives, Alegría's narrative plots focus on the integrity of the individual within a statist structure designed for the individual citizen to thrive.

Since Alegría wrote forty years ago as an act of dissent against the incumbent Pinochet dictatorship, taking serious personal risks as he gathered material for his narratives from the flashpoints of turmoil, he seduces us to grasp the invigorating notion that despite his own vulnerability, and especially that of those individuals he approached to elicit their views, who, unlike him, lacked political capital or a passport out of the country, it becomes clear that

¹² Anne H. Stevens, *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Introduction* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2015), 27.

¹³ M. S. John, “Realism, Neorealism and Critical Theory: A General Essay” in *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 54.1 (Jan. - March. 1993), 140.

¹⁴ Steven Forde, “International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism” in *International Studies Quarterly*, 39.2 (June, 1995), 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 156.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 158.

¹⁷ Gary Saul Morson, “Socialist realism and Literary Theory” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 38.2 (Winter, 1979), 137.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 142.

¹⁹ *Ibi.* 140.

sovereignty lies with the suffering citizen.²⁰ In each of the three chapters where the novels will be analyzed and interpreted in further detail, the names of the philosopher-critics Benjamin, Levinas and Butler will suffuse the study, thus illuminating the core thesis notion of *sovereignty of the self*, which essentially means the responsibility of the self toward itself, toward civil society, and toward the state in an environment of reciprocal respect and loyalty. A synergy of reciprocal reinforcement of constructivism would maintain a sense of equilibrium among these sovereignties. From the past, Alegría inherited the notion that the individual must respect the law. His way to shroud his characters with respectability, giving them a voice, seems to suggest as he looks beyond the immediate contingency of life-threatening dictatorship, that he now anticipates the theory that the law must respect the individual, who is the source and purpose for its existence, thus answering the question: is man at the service of the law? Or is law is at the service of man? This change in mentality could only happen, of course, after the culture has, for some time, exercised the attitude of placing institutions, and government, at the service of the individual citizen. The narrative arts, along with other forms of art, are the last remaining mechanisms capable of unleashing such initiative.

This study, and Alegría's novels, debunk the myth that power arises from the apex and flourishes there to stay. Arguably the most polemical student of power, Machiavelli tells us in his *Discourses on Livy* (1531), and in its excerpt, *The Prince* (1532), how he so vehemently affirms that even when political power is entrusted to the prince (or seized by him), it ultimately sits with, hinges on, and rises from, the people (Grimm, Galeano, Chomsky and other respected thinkers agree about this term's relevance for our time). This does not preclude the viability of the realist agenda, where those at the helm attempt to cling to a power that was never theirs,

²⁰ There is a long lineage of political history where this claim successfully emerged creating institutions –such as Parliament-- for the protection of the citizen's power base. This was evidenced following England's Civil War (1642-1651) and the French Revolution (1789).

something Alegría witnessed in Pinochet's Chile as pivotally historic yet fleeting events unfolded dramatically before his very eyes.

In writing his “pentagonía”²¹ in his *Recabarren, Lautaro, Camaleón, Mañana los guerreros* and *Allende, mi vecino el presidente*, Alegría clearly shows the country's proclivity toward dictatorship. These works introduce the reader to how the political atmosphere advances from a bruised and therefore exhausted democracy toward a mentality of government by despotism and how the offended left rises in dissent only to be brutally quashed. These novels are essentially sketches of a nation. Even when Roa Bastos writes in 1972, before Pinochet's dictatorship, Alegría's narrative technique challenges those who attempt to classify it. “Por su manera libre y suelta de narrar, por sus procedimientos de introversión y extroversión, de ambigüedad y transparencia, su literatura no es fácilmente clasificable, sin embargo constituye una obra de rasgos originales que ha crecido lenta y segura de sí misma a lo largo de dos décadas.”²²

Burnished into his prose is a subtle homage to various literary traditions and movements. If Alegría's narrative plots ever slept, the giant clearly awoke from his subtext disturbing the complacency of the urban landscape by his dictatorship works. He sympathized with the anguish of the New World's Conquest chroniclers. Early 17th century works by *adelantados* (earliest envoys by the Spanish Crown) and their descendants were contemporaries of Cervantes, whose playful rhetorical techniques are deeply etched in the Chilean writer's prose. In his sweeping autobiographical depiction of the Santiago of his era, *Una especie de memoria* pits his country's official political history (rooted in the distant depths of the colonial era still casting the long arm

²¹ A word Cuba's Reinaldo Arenas coined to refer to his five novels of personal agony and pain.

²² Celia Correas de Zapata, “Una especie de memoria: ‘Aufzeichnungen’ o ‘Libro de horas’ by Fernando Alegría” in Juan Armando Epple, Editor, *Para una Fundación Imaginaria de Chile: La obra literaria de Fernando Alegría* (1987), 152.

of a tenuous shadow) with his own selective memory style and methodology of the 17th century chronicle-novel *Cautiverio feliz, y razón de las guerras dilatadas de Chile* [1673 (1863)].²³ This is a work that documents the ancestral roots of modern-day military dictatorships in Latin America.²⁴ With *Cautiverio feliz*, written more than a century after the Conquest of Chile, that country's social divisions, hinging on land ownership, became only more intransigent as the centuries unfurled and gigantic landed estates in the coveted central valley became scarcer. The colonial era's Church policy of Inquisition, or *Santo Oficio*, endorsed by the Crown of Spain, was a modus operandi that parts the waters and divides the eras pertinent to the development of literature. Once the Church softened its ardency, the novel as a genre, free of subterfuge, began to blossom. The year 1845 dates the first major dictatorship novel of the continent, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo: civilización o barbarie*. Sarmiento encouraged neither the assimilation nor the accommodation of the Argentine gaucho into the colonial civilization, but their fusion, and endorsed the gradual disappearance of their ancestral culture. Alegría stands in vehement opposition to such a stance of cultural genocide.

As a genealogy, the 19th century was dotted with dates of Independence across the continent. Independence proved to be a euphemism for power changing hands among oligarchs. Sarmiento opposed José Manuel Rosas, who ruled Buenos Aires with dictatorial powers (1835-1852). He wrote this now-classic work while in exile from the Rosas regime in Chile, but once Sarmiento became Argentina's president, he took Rosas' side against the inclusion of the indigenous into Argentina as a burgeoning Euro-Latin society. Sarmiento's chronicle-essay more

²³ Francisco Núñez de Pineda y Bascañán, author of *Cautiverio feliz, y razón individual de las guerras dilatadas del Reino de Chile*, though Chilean-born by at least two generations, was an army captain under the Crown of Spain. In the mid-17th century, Chile was a province of Spain until Independence in 1820.

²⁴ The roots of Spanish policy of violence during the Conquest of the New World had its precedent in the bloody expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula coinciding with the Conquest in 1492. The DNA of a proclivity toward dictatorship violence precedes the Conquest, and as it is with genetics, it is passed on.

than a novel, served as a litmus test of national values. It became a primer for the nascent independent countries. It is the one work of literature that has emblazoned psyches across nearly two centuries with socially-exclusionary values fomenting social clashes surrounding social attitudes, both pro and con, as countries grapple with civilian and military dictatorships bent on eliminating a dissent that seeks peace and social justice.

More than a century later, Alegría incorporates Sarmiento's work into his own critical studies as he assertively supports the underdog of any and all stripes while exposing state terrorism. Alegría has conducted an exhaustive study of the region's literary history from his committed populist perspective. Nearly every Latin American novel spawned since *Facundo* displays some level of political activism or social criticism, including wide ideological pendulum swings, given the recycling nature of authoritarian governments in the region. They've foreshadowed the emergence of the subgenre, the dictatorship novel, coined with such name by the Venezuelan critic Carlos Pacheco in his work titled *Narrativa de la dictadura y crítica literaria* (1987). Despite appearances, such as Costa Rica, in reality no country in the vast region of Latin America, including the Caribbean and Brazil, has been impermeable to dictatorships or manipulations of the domestic alchemy of power. Through his oeuvre, Alegría observes that nothing has essentially changed in terms of political and economic intentions in five centuries of imperialist expansionism and adventurism on the international level and various forms of hubris within each Latin American country, including Chile, except for the increasing sophistication of the instruments of power.

Alegría has viewed political processes unfolding across Latin America from within the region as well as from a distance. He clearly benefitted from his years-long residence in the United States when the coup d'état in Chile forced him into exile. Even then, he demonstrated

the fortitude to criticize his harboring country through creative non-fiction in works such as *Amerika, Amerikka, Amerikkka* (1970),²⁵ via his contribution with an essay to *Literatura y Praxis en America Latina* (1974), as well as co-editor with Jorge Ruffinelli of *Paradise Lost or Gained?: The Literature of Hispanic Exile* (1990). Alegría comments: “El exilio de los exiliados es su propia tierra... me fui llenando p’adentro.”²⁶ Even though Alegría settled in California, his spirit never really left Chile. The small and slender country at the end of the world loomed large and near to him as he harnessed his energies to solidify his writer’s legacy.

Alegría was first a poet, then a critic and lastly a novelist-memoirist. Each of these approaches imbue his narrative works. Alegría’s lyrical writing connotes a composite of painting and music, of folksy ballads, long known to be the poetry of the poor, a coherent proclivity since he himself came from the poor but wrote in a manner that ensnared readers from any social stratum. Alegría ushers us into a level of Chilean idiosyncrasy within his social struggling sector that is at once revealing and intimate. He opens up and refrains from disclosing details where anguish festers. He carefully works the subtext to insinuate deeper layers of psychic and emotional reality without sacrificing dignity. Williams alludes to this dimension of narrative²⁷ by reminding us that any moment in historic time, as it is with any passage of literature, bears complexity.

Alegría’s creative writing is characterized by a smooth and entertaining development of plot... the narrator successfully portrays ... range of humanity and emotion... interior

²⁵ The repetitive “k” on the title is a subtle homage to Franz Kafka’s critical commentary on oppressive governments. At the time of this work’s publication, America was deeply mired in South East Asia by invading it, which transformed into the Vietnam War.

²⁶ Alfonso Calderón, “Las vueltas de la vida” in Juan Armando Epple, Editor, *Para una fundación imaginaria de Chile: La obra literaria de Fernando Alegría* (1987), 215.

²⁷ Anne H. Stevens, *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Introduction* (2015), 27.

monologues as Alegría moves with ease between the first and the third person... giving the novel a documentary tone.²⁸

Alegría possessed a strong command of American and English literatures. In this sense, the politically conscientious writer that he was resonates with Shelly, the politically astute poet, and with Tennyson, the musically inclined epic poet of politics and war. Both Anglo writers appear to have a strong influence on the Chilean master. In allowing the sound of Alegría's prose works to steer us emotionally when read aloud in their original in his native Spanish, one detects a proclivity for poetic orality, harkening more to Anglo Saxon sources for their stress rather than meter, than to Latin American works! And here's why: Latin American writings denote a historically attuned religious self-restraint, while the British religious opens up to the natural universe. It smacks as untethered. Their religiosity is camouflaged with paeans to nature. Rather than confronting the nakedly ecclesiastical struggles of Catholicism, Anglicanism or Presbyterianism which were political raw issues at one time --much as the Inquisition played a significant role in Latin America's political and literary history-- 19th century British prose and poetry placed man in the natural and tangible universe. Even though he is distinctly Chilean and Latin American in his emotional leanings, in intellectual terms Alegría is veritably a man not without a country, but a man with many—thus signaling the mark of the enduring humanist.

To further fan the flames that drive him, Alegría has a clear penchant for independence of thought; he is clearly a maverick, maybe also an iconoclast even while writing from within the institutions of government and academia. While pliant and compliant within both institutions where he served brilliantly, Alegría transcends the institutional attitude. He is keenly perceptive of the political demands of both bodies inherent in national life, but he is not supine to them. Just as his prose is light and nimble, he appears as a coiled spring that knows when to leap from the

²⁸ Raymond Leslie Williams, *The Columbia Guide to the Latin American Novel Since 1945* (2007), 91.

fray with elegant dissent, or how to negotiate impasses without appearing to go his own way. He leaves the impression to have excelled as the politician on the page and as the social poet in the hallways of power.

Alegría wrote at a time when romanticism, naturalism, *modernismo*, not to be confused with Anglo-American modernism understood in Latin America as the avant-garde, surrealism, realism, all long obsolete, had already irrigated the soil of his prose and been subliminally adopted into his writing psyche. It was in his anthology, *Novelistas contemporáneos hispanoamericanos* (1964), where he announces that *regionalismo* had fallen into decadence during the 1930s and 1950s. It is in the Introduction to that work where he declares that neorealism and poetry²⁹ are categories in vogue. This trend gave him the opportunity to reshape their convergence into his own style of imaginative lyricism and fictionalized remembrance. Much of the critical scholarship (Giacoman 1972, Epple 1987) agrees that Alegría is a neorealist. Luis Leal takes a closer view. He observes that while being clearly a neorealist, Alegría also experiments with the fantastic (Giacoman 1972:191) as he does in his Kafkaesque first work of short stories, *El poeta que se volvió gusano y otras historias verídicas* (1956), which, Leal tells us, is tantamount to a satirical criticism of the worst manifestations of culture in the United States.³⁰ However, it is this writer's position that Alegría best fits the binational profile. He is a quintessential Chilean in his self-identity and emotive inclinations. But he also appears to be a U. S. writer, specifically Anglo-Saxon in the attentive but emotionally un-mired carpentry of his craft. There is also evidence of self-restraint when delving into matters and events that would otherwise unleash a partiality of sentiments and loyalties. That he embraced neorealism in the

²⁹ Fernando Alegría, *Novelistas contemporáneos hispanoamericanos* (Boston, D.C.: Heath and Company, 1964), 6.

³⁰ Luis Leal, "Entre la fantasía y el compromiso: los cuentos de Fernando Alegría" in Helmy F. Giacoman, *Homenaje a Fernando Alegría: variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra* (1979), 191-192.

mid-20th century leaves no doubt. It derives from a cultural environment where life, politics and social intermingling entwine, and we see it in the way Alegría's prose weaves a tale.

Aside from critical works already mentioned, his criticism titles include *La poesía chilena. Orígenes y desarrollo del siglo XVI al XIX* (1954), *Literatura chilena del siglo XX* (1962), *Literatura y revolución* (1970), *Historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (1959, 1965, 1966, 1974),³¹ *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamerica* (1954), *Las fronteras del realismo* (1962), *Chilean Writers in Exile: Eight Short Novels* edited by Fernando Alegría (1982), and *Nueva historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (1986). His essays are valued among the most important sources of literary research for the study of Latin American³² literature in the 20th century. Stemming from these critical works and perceptible in the texture of his prose are residues of the poetic, as is the case with his softened revolutionary predisposition to fathom a society where no one is cast to the shadows of political intercourse and decision-making. At a time of dictatorship in Chile, these critical works, as well as his dictatorship novels, have received notoriety abroad for the two principles denied in Alegría's Chile under authoritarianism: the right to create and the right to critique. There's an indelible nexus between his novels and his critical essays. A brief commentary about his scholarly research is in order.

In *Literatura y revolución* (1970), he raises the issue that to make a socio-historical difference through literature, the writer must possess a revolutionary concept of the world. Alegría would agree that the diversity of geographic boundaries and conditions in Latin America have cultivated a diversity of temperaments and they, consequently, gestated different politics resulting in differing theories of literature, such as a modernizing realism with moralistic or a

³¹ Juan Armando Epple, "Prólogo: resolución de medio siglo" in Juan Armando Epple, Editor, *Para una Fundación Imaginaria de Chile: La obra literaria de Fernando Alegría* (1987), 9.

³² Alegría is said to have preferred the term Hispanic rather than Latin. Many authors of non-Latin origin were born and raised, wrote and published in and about the land that shaped their experience. That is, then, Hispanic America.

revolutionary slant, or proletarian, Indigenist or Indianist, and a plethora of other perspective offshoots.³³ The literary buffet is vast and enjoys a diversity of original identities beyond, and deeper than the colonizing influences. As a literary critic, there is a great aura of respect for Alegría. Yet, it is a blurred aura, a checkered reception. He is a celebrated critic within the relatively small constellation of Spanish departments across universities in the United States, while there is also a veiled admiration; it is a veiled and whispered and hushed admiration given the rather synthetic style of his palimpsest-based but solipsistic approach to his own prose. It remains somewhat of a riddle to note that the Chilean writer's critical works have received their due criticism. They have been celebrated for their charm and skillful architecture. Their weaknesses, on the other hand, have also been clearly identified by respected analysts. Limiting as well as limited as his scope in works of literary criticism may have been, they nonetheless place Alegría in the Who's Who of Latin American literary critics. There is an inevitable overlap between the two categories of critical and fictional works when both are produced by the same writer. Consequently, for a study of Alegría's novels, lyrically prone in their inner alchemy, one must also delve into his critical work *La poesía chilena. Orígenes y desarrollo del siglo XVI al XIX*. It sheds insights into his artistic persona. This work was developed from Alegría's doctoral thesis at UC Berkeley. In it, we discover the substratum for Alegría's inclination to evaluate poetic works that evolve across the colonial era and culminate in the last years of the 1880s, signaling the birth of the Chilean romantic movement in poetry. From earlier eras and hovering over all these centuries, Alegría distills a Chilean essence: a national poetic temperament spills into this writer's prose works, into his literary activism and socio-political conscience.

³³ Fernando Alegría, "Un índice crítico de la literatura hispanoamericana; la narrativa" in *La venganza del general* (1969), 155-156.

In his *Breve historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (1959), Alegría makes his introduction as a historian and critic of the Latin American novel with a work that, in addition to somewhat overlapping Enrique Anderson Imbert's broader historic scope encompassing all literary genres nearly a decade later,³⁴ Alegría's reach is clearly more specialized. Anderson Imbert is perhaps Alegría's most severe critic, when he says that Alegría omitted names that would have illuminated his section on *modernista* novelists, such as Días Rodríguez, Reyles, Larreta, Arévalo, Martínez, D'Halmar, Pedro Prado. Anderson Imbert makes a snide remark about Alegría's inclusions and omissions: "Cuando los historiadores de la literatura hispanoamericana estudian el modernismo se desvían de la novela, y cuando estudian la novela se desvían del modernismo."³⁵ A study of the Latin American novel, while vast in authors and countries, cannot compare in volume to the wider swath of a study of all literary genres, as is Anderson's case. Nonetheless, Alegría's analysis of authors and their contributions earned the Chilean novelist due respect as a debuting critic. It frustrates the curious reader who hopes that the term "historia" in the title, will at last delve into the much-dismissed research concerning the evolution of the novel in the colonial period, which in Alegría's work is, again, scant. The brevity of the chapter "Orígenes" obstructs any effective endeavor to judge the genre's development, even though the causes for its stifled progress are well known, such as Latin America's limited investigative resources. On a more positive note, a scholar has observed that Alegría's *Breve historia* performs a lucid task in scrutinizing the Indianist novel as well as works that belong to the niche of realism and naturalism.³⁶ The same observation can be extended to the novels of the Mexican revolution and the broader category of regionalism.

³⁴ Enrique Anderson Imbert, *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* (1967).

³⁵ Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, "Breve historia de la novela hispanoamericana by Fernando Alegría" in *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 14.1/2 (Jan. - Jun., 1960), 143.

³⁶ Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, "Breve historia de la novela hispanoamericana by Fernando Alegría," pp. 141- 144.

Alegría absorbs the dictatorial atmosphere suffered in Mexico in both categories, the regionalist and the revolutionary novel. He draws from them a perceptible slant. The Chilean author's proclivity to side with the underdog, akin to the Mexican novel genre of that period, becomes clearly unapologetic in his works of a Chile under dictatorship. As an aside, it is as ironic as it is inevitable that while leftist intellectuals, such as Alegría, mince no words criticizing the imperialist spread of colonialism, both ancient and contemporary, they seem open to be colonized intellectually,³⁷ and to pass on the torch.

Alegría's *Novelistas contemporáneos hispanoamericanos* (1964) displays the collective tone of social protest, accurately descriptive of the era of its publication. This critical work of literary history and critical analysis is a reminder of Alegría's *Historia* published thirty years earlier. *Novelistas* is new in the sense that it ushers audiences to a lucid understanding of Latin American trends in the novel's evolution while also discussing authors and works thought to endure the test of time to become regional classics [i.e., Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949), *El recurso del método* (1974); Augusto Roa Bastos *Yo, El Supremo* (1974)]. It is to his credit that Alegría readapts distinctive strategies from these canonical Latin American classics for his own creative works. One can trace the influences from his novels of dictatorship back to these tales of despotic governance. *Breve historia de la novela hispanoamericana* has enjoyed great respectability and diffusion. It is an ambitious volume and it reflects at least the first half of the 20th century's cutting-edge authors who've enjoyed international influence. Alegría's other works include *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (1954), which originated as a college paper, *Las fronteras del realismo* (1962), *Historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (1965), *Literatura y revolución* (1965) and *Nueva historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (1986). This

³⁷ Intellectual colonialism is potentially as delicate as it often is inevitable. A form of it is a staunch nationalism, which can be as blindsided and toxic as foreign impositions that don't quite square with the domestic cultural alchemy. Also to be discerned is the aspect that not all colonialism nor all nationalism is to be deemed as negative.

body of work is now valued among the most important study sources of Latin American literature for the 20th century, as it stands among other giants of literary criticism,³⁸ such as Angel Rama's *La ciudad letrada* (1984), Julio Ortega's *The Poetics of Change* (1984), Emir Rodríguez Monegal's introduction to *Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature* (1977), Roberto González Echevarría's *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature* (1985), and Jean Franco's *The Modern Culture of Latin America* (1967).

The coup d'état found Alegría in internal exile (*insilio*) and quickly enough forced him to go into exile. While back in the United States, where he spent much of his professional career as a university professor, he launched a literary magazine of exiles, *Literatura Chilena en el Exilio* (1977-1985), meant for all Chileans. It was an effort for him and his readers to feel as though he, they, had never left Chile. With David Valjalo as co-editor, they gave a voice their fellow-countrymen at a time of great difficulty to preserve the right of expression. After a first stage of their mission was deemed completed three years after its inception, they changed the magazine name to *Literatura Chilena: Creación y Crítica* (1981-1994)³⁹ with a mindset to broaden the scope of Chilean literature both because of and despite exile. This sense of patriotic responsibility exercised abroad became a part of Alegría's preoccupation as a creative writer. His themes and voices will be profoundly affected by the shudder his nation underwent, altering his psyche as a novelist, as a critic, and as one can gather from those who knew him, as a private citizen.

There is a parallel geometry of tone between Alegría's critical works and his own fictions. While Epple and Giacomán state that there was no Alegría the critic watching over the

³⁸ The order of their names corresponds to the relative stature of their reputations, arguable as this distribution may be to some scholars, and not to the dates their works were published.

³⁹ The overlap of dates for the magazine name change is observed. A clarification appears unavailable.

shoulder of Alegría the creative writer, one must stop and question this assumption. Such a claim cannot constitute an absolute. It is only reasonable that a critic who writes creatively will view and review his own work with a critical eye, subjective and deprived of objective distance as such a criticism can only be. Nonetheless, the pruning of the text is accomplished by both Alegría the author/editor and the same man wearing the hat of the critic. As we read the end result of the one man and his three hats approach, we can only appreciate the nimbleness of the prose, the lightness of the reader's journey and the deceptively simple undercurrents of theory and meta-bibliographies enjoining the subtext. As we read Alegría's creative works once having studied his critical works of other authors' narratives, we ourselves experience the critical perspective. The imaginative prism enables us to appreciate the rigor of the academician for whom literary theory is inherent, even in his creative prose. The three roles, critic, academician and creative author are played simultaneously and the reader is the first beneficiary. Even when isolating himself to enter his fictional world as a creative writer, Alegría makes it clear that the critic in him never left his side. To this, another dimension of Alegría structural innovation must be acknowledged. Since every one of his dictatorship novels constitutes a fictionalized memoir, at least on some level, the audience he envisions is the fusion between the reader and himself as his own audience. Consequently, it is assumed that the Spanish "tú" is implied as a reflexive mechanism of inquiry, revelation and challenge where citizen and nation are entwined. By dispelling the fog of political complication we can ascertain that the presence of an inherent *sovereignty of the self* has always been there under the indelible ink of his ethical concerns and his aesthetic constructions.

Biography of Fernando Alegría

Offspring of two low-middle class parents of deep Spanish ancestry with a probable drop or two of indigenous blood judging by his features, he was the oldest of four siblings. Fernando Alegría was born in Santiago, Chile, September 26, 1918. A modest home and a comparable social enclave shaped his childhood. But his precocious mind would set him on a more promising path. Much like Alegría himself (reputed to have been the oracle of any gathering), the gregarious poor of Santiago are to be found on their own turf, such as in the Recoleta neighborhood. These neighbors are resourceful within a poverty of means. They are marginalized, much as his progenitors themselves were. This is Alegría's side of the tracks during his formative years and the site of the emotional memories most deeply etched in him, which he collects and flaunts as a badge of honor in identity in *Una especie de memoria*, a work that encompasses nearly fifty years of his life.

During his studies at Instituto Pedagógico to become a teacher, two of his most memorable instructors were the famed short-story writer Mariano Latorre (Spanish and Latin American literature) and the literary critic Ricardo Latcham (Chilean literary *criollismo*), who is esteemed for having co-pioneered the term *neorealismo*.⁴⁰ That year, 1938, is remembered as a pivotal time in Chilean political history and, as a result of it, in its literature. A left-of-center politician attains the presidency. Coinciding with this event, a surge of social restructuring sends tremors through stultified Chilean society. The new entrepreneurial class redrafts the social class blueprint, inserting the oligarchs, or *nouveau riche*, replacing Chilean aristocrats as the country's power base. This creates a noticeable shift in outlook, coupled with a decline in manners and

⁴⁰ René Ruiz, *Fernando Alegría: vida y obra* (1979), 23.

tastes. On the other extreme are the large masses of the poor, who are the working class.⁴¹ The union leader Luis Emilio Recabarren emerges demanding workers' rights but clashes ensue. While still an adolescent arising from a modest social stratum, workers' rights concern his family directly. Alegría published *Recabarren* (1938). This memoir launched him into a class of its own. He joins the intellectual elite of Chile. He makes a mark. Works that resonate with and were perhaps inspired by *Recabarren* for its social consciousness of the marginalized include Carlos Droguett's *Patas de perro* (1965), Juan Godoy's proletarian experience in *Angurrientos* (1940) and Nicomedes Guzmán's *Los hombres oscuros* (1939) and *La sangre y la esperanza* (1943). These are notable and beloved authors in Chile's pantheon of 20th century literature. As this sampling demonstrates, Alegría does create a wake of followers, only that his critics do not underscore the likely probability of his influence. The impact *Recabarren* produces elevates Alegría to Chile's cultural elite, becoming a named member of Generación 38, a group of writers who sought to move away from their own region's *criollista* realism in an effort to give credence to their class-based notion of national identity from a deeper and vastly more meaningful source than the official political history proselytizes. Besides Droguett and Guzmán, other members of Generación are Nicanor Parra and Volodia Teitelboim.

While all this brewed, poetry infiltrated prose. More than a dozen literary groups emerge throughout Chile documenting and articulating this social reshuffle. These writers aimed to articulate the essence of *chilenidad*, that unique cultural identity that grows from within the idiosyncrasy and transcends political explanations defining the country merely by its national boundaries and foreign influences. Another tenet was an aspiration to elevate Chilean literature across the genre gamut and bring it into line with international literary movements, primarily

⁴¹ In today's standards, "poor" and "working" class, on its face sounds like an oxymoron, but that is sadly not the case. Even though the working class toiled in arduous conditions, they were (and continue to be) stuck in poverty.

surrealism, so much in vogue in Europe in that decade. The significance of Generation 38 is, in part, the bond Chileans maintained with Spaniards, especially as many of them became victims of the horrors of the Spanish Civil War⁴² when the Western world was deciding whether it would follow the fascist route or opt for democracy—an alternative that became available to Chileans. By then the most famous Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, had been a Consul in Spain, a position that enabled him to arrange with President Aguirre Cerda to invite a ship full of Spanish refugees from the Spanish Civil War to start a new life in Chile. They came aboard the *Winnipeg*, a name by now associated with the isolated Chilean policy that welcomed refugees from fascism. The ship docked in Chile's main port of Valparaíso, where the harbor-master welcomed them to Chilean soil. The harbor-master was Salvador Allende. In time, Neruda and Alegría became close friends and mutual admirers of each other's work. The condition of the populace during this political and militarized vise grip that dragged the Spanish population to misery and suffering became a central concern for Alegría. From his first published work, Alegría establishes the imprimatur of a writer with a moral voice whose biography, when evaluated in hindsight, shows that his life's work possesses an internal meta-literature, a mutually referential body of work where each of his publications feeds into the next illuminating his oeuvre with dialectical potentialities.

Additionally, 1938 stirred a timid *boom* for the sale of works of literature in Chile after original ideas had emerged in Chilean literature. These ideas imposed a political conscience among writers. Alegría left at this time for graduate school to the United States in 1940. This Chilean writer studied for his master's degree in American literature at Bowling Green University, Ohio, under the world renown expert on Walt Whitman, professor Gary Wilson

⁴² Ruiz, *Fernando Alegría: vida y obra*, p. 39.

Allen, who conducted a seminar on literary criticism, in which Alegría participated. That course inspired him to write about “La influencia de Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica.” From Whitman he draws out the notion of social equality merging with the suffering of the “other,” the marginalized and society’s pariahs, which will become evident in his dictatorship novels. To earn his master’s degree, he wrote a thesis titled “Critical interpretation of certain themes in Thomas Mann’s Novel *The Magic Mountain*.” Some of the themes are time, nature, eroticism, disease, mystery, humanism and materialism. It is at this threshold where his Chileanness broadens to a cosmopolitanism. At this juncture, the history of Western literature swirls with new trends for Alegría. Virginia Woolf leaves a strong imprint in him. Her protective and activist valuation of womanhood is something Alegría embraces. There are precious few writers during the 1930s and 1940s who, like Woolf and Alegría, actually capture not only a woman’s sentiment, but the female outlook and voice, and decant these onto their prose. The aesthetic predisposition to amalgamate British sensibilities, German thought, and American dialogical aesthetics work themselves out in Alegría’s poetic mastery of language toward a harmony with multiculturalism. These additions to his bag of literary tricks could be viewed as an extension of nature, a pantheism of sorts, with touches of early Celtic paganism that color his Latin American Catholic matrix while he spends his years in the United States. Russian novelists Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev and Maxim Gorki appeal to Alegría for their artistic search endeavoring to attain a pure sense of social responsibility in harmony with nature. Between Milton and Joyce, as well as Woolf, a bridge across five centuries, Alegría draws out a wellspring of various mythologies –pagan, Christian or aborigin. These are woven with the American indigenous vintage, and it is to be suffused with current urban dramas, private tragedies circulating among us in plain daylight.

Along this timeline one sees the effect of causality on the palimpsest.⁴³ These hidden Latin American pockets of culture, each of Latin America's countries are paradisiacal nuggets even within suffocating poverty, where geographic obstacles determine and accentuate cultural differences. Each brings us a fulcrum where Alegría shares an outlook with Walter Benjamin,⁴⁴ the fragment visionary, a perspective Alegría includes in an essay to *Coloquio*:⁴⁵ “la belleza escondida en las cosas communes, pequeñas.”⁴⁶ His master's thesis director was professor Gary Wilson Allen. Alegría received a master's in English literature from Bowling Green University, Ohio, in 1941. After securing a teacher assistantship at the University of California at Berkeley, he went there to study his doctorate in general literature with a focus on Latin American literature. He studied under the eminences Arturo Torres Rioseco, S. G. Morley, Charles Kenny and the Cervantes expert, Rudolph Shevill. In 1943, Alegría published *Lautaro, joven libertador de Arauco*, written in two weeks, and won the first prize of the “Concurso Latinamericano de Literatura,” which Ciro Alegría of Perú had won the previous year with his now classic work, *El mundo es ancho y ajeno*. In 1943, Alegría marries a Salvadoran woman he met at Berkeley. Lacking a specialist on a Latin American subject at Berkeley,⁴⁷ Alegría opted for examining the impact of a German author on Latin American literature. He then completes his doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley in 1947, with a thesis on Thomas Mann which was later published in El Salvador under the title *Ensayo sobre cinco temas de Thomas Mann* (Editorial Funes, 1949). He later published his doctoral thesis at the University of California at Berkeley,

⁴³ Schulman, Ivan, et al., “Estilos de novelar, estilos de vivir” in *Coloquio sobre la novela hispanoamericana* (1967), 143.

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin's posthumous fame is augmenting as time passes. His most renown works include *The Task of the Translator* (1923), *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) and *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* (1940), *Illuminations* (1955).

⁴⁵ Diana George, “The City in Endless Ruins: Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*” in *Books, The Stranger* (Feb 10, 2000., the stranger.com.)

⁴⁶ Fernando Alegría, “Estilos de novelar o estilos de vivir” in *Coloquio sobre la novela hispanoamericana* (1967), 146.

⁴⁷ René Ruiz, *Fernando Alegría: vida y obra* (1979), 26.

La poesía chilena: orígenes y desarrollo desde el siglo XVI hasta el XIX (Berkeley University Press and Mexico: Fondo de Cultura, 1954). His thesis earned him a Guggenheim scholarship, which enabled him to publish *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (Mexico, 1954). This work is seminal as well as a threshold for Alegría. With his book on Walt Whitman completed a year after he completes his PhD degree, he is offered and he accepts a position at Berkeley to teach Latin American literature. He rose to the level of full professor by 1964, teaching Spanish and Portuguese literatures. He served there until 1967. Beginning that year, he began teaching Latin American literature at Stanford, a position he maintained for 27 years until his retirement in 1988. He subsequently bequeathed his papers and letters from his correspondence with Latin America's literati to Stanford University.

Alegría, the professor, wrote a series of academic works of literary criticism. But he had it in him to take the novel genre onto uncharted waters. He reduced his time teaching and dedicated his private time to writing fiction. Alegría published *Camaleón* (1950) in Mexico. This is a novel that was prohibited in Chile, given that it constitutes an attack on the despotic government of Gabriel González Videla. The critic Gerald E. Wade from the University of Tennessee writes a less than laudatory review, saying that after winning a prize in 1943 for his novel *Lautaro*, "One might expect from his pen a superior novel; *Camaleón* does not quite achieve that category. His novel is too wordy and suffers occasionally from incoherence...."⁴⁸ Wade provides specifics where this latter novel falls short of expectations. However, his next novel, *Caballo de copas* (1957), unravels into a great editorial success. In 1958, the poet Gonzalo Rojas organized the first conference of Latin American writers in Concepción, Chile, and invited Alegría to participate in it a few months after his novel's publication. There, he wins the "Premio

⁴⁸ Gerald E. Wade, "Camaleón by Fernando Alegría." in *Books Abroad*, 26.1 (Winter, 1952), 66.

Municipal” and “Atenea” and is translated into nearly all modern languages. Alegría then published *Breve historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (1959).

During the 1960s, Alegría organized a series of literary conferences bringing the elite among the continent’s writers to the Universidad de Concepción in southern Chile. He founded his country’s first writers’ workshop at the time he directed the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Stanford University. He also taught literature at Columbia University in New York. He became a member of the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua. His *Lautaro, joven libertador de Arauco* (1943) earned him New York’s Farrar and Rinehart prize for the best juvenile novel of courage and death by betrayal.⁴⁹ He collaborated with several magazines in the United States. While teaching at Berkeley and at Stanford, he continued to publish works of literary criticism and novels.

As the respected author he had become, President Allende invited him to serve Chile as a cultural attaché to Washington, D.C. He served in that capacity during President Allende’s entire but truncated tenure (1970-1973). Even though the United States orchestrated the coup d’état in Chile causing the demise of Allende’s government and his murder/suicide, officially, the United States denied having had any involvement in the coup. Contradicting such denial, unclassified documents⁵⁰ prove the contrary. As Pinochet’s regime threatened Alegría’s life due to his political association with the martyred socialist president, he found safe harbor in the United States, where he still held a years-long academic position. Finding refuge as a private citizen in the country that was at war with his own, especially serving it in an official capacity, does present an element of political oddity and moral irony.

⁴⁹ Calvert J. Winter, “Lautaro, joven libertador de Arauco by Fernando Alegría” in *Books Abroad*. 18.3 (Summer, 1944), 274.

⁵⁰ Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (2003).

By now one can appreciate that Chile's political history determined Alegría's career as a fiction writer. Long before the coup of 1973, Alegría's writing emerges from observations of his surroundings and the author's strong reactions to them. Social manifestations of political culture fuel his ethical aesthetics. He becomes a sort of cultural anthropologist. Chile is the first theater, which Alegría broadens to examine models across oceans. He gathers input from literary movements out of the distant past. He refurbishes timelines making it feasible to be affected by the gimmick of the past's permanent contemporaneity, especially England's romantic period. He stirs it and dilutes it. He mixes it with more contemporary movements and trends producing imaginative works. The coup d'état of 1973 sends shivers through his literary corpus and his sensitive persona. He decides to write from his own observations of oppression as well as from the surrounding and suffocating violence his countrymen endure.

The coup d'état of 1973 parts the waters of his writing career. The mild-mannered critic becomes a clawing writer. The critical power of Alegría's analysis, his candor and insightfulness, transforms him into a pugnacious author. His language is overhauled. As live theater is making a strong impact in Chile, daring and defiant, much as the protest singers/songwriters Violeta Parra and Victor Jara did in their time. Filmmakers demonstrate great valor filming both openly and surreptitiously. Patricio Guzmán becomes a renown figure for his documentaries of the Allende presidency, the coup d'état and how Chileans remember both Allende and the coup in his film on memory. Miguel Littín enters Chile from exile and films the Pinochet government surreptitiously. This documentary leads to a chronicle by Gabriel García Márquez (*La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile*, 1986). Exponents of critical theater include Egon Wolff, Luis Alberto Heiremans and Alejandro Sieveking. In their different genres, these Chilean playwrights came the closest to the burning ambers of Pinochet's dictatorship. In reading

Alegría's dictatorship novels one risks getting singled by its proximity to the political cauldron. One senses the liveliness of the stories, as if each exchange, scene or vignette were a play, even when a scene is located on a busy Santiago thoroughfare. There is a level of intimacy in the narration that blocks out the hustle and bustle, or includes it when rifles fire at people, or a black car screeches its tires as it drives off after men in suits jumped out and suddenly detained and hooded a person off the street. Alegría's dictatorship novels carry a high level of tension in a rare mix of lyricism, philosophy, political overtones and haunting prose.

It can be said that essential contemporary novelists, fellow Chileans who were key authors spilling their talents, techniques and their humanism on Alegría were first Pablo de Rokha (*Los gemidos*, 1922) and Manuel Rojas (*Lanchas en la bahía*, 1932), two life-hardened writers who drew raw material for their works from their own scathing experiences. Then came Poli Délano (*Como si no muriera nadie*, 1987), José Donoso (*La desesperanza*, 1986) and Diamela Eltit (*Los vigilantes*, 1994). All these writers lived, wrote and published their dictatorship novels in Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship at great risk to themselves. In this vein, by writing, Alegría acts as an unapologetic and observant critic of the political environment. His novels of dictatorship are the result of trauma following the demise of Allende and a nation's hope to redress social wrongs deeply etched into Chilean society's idiosyncrasy where everyone must grapple with a predominant culture of conflicting ethics---a moral philosophy burdened by religion at odds with an expeditious ethics of convenience and survival.

Alegría writes both from exile (domestic and foreign) and about exile. He breaks with his descriptive approach to historical events but also sheds a smugness in the realm of imaginative compositions. His poetic memory is birthed anew. The Chile of which he writes is a changed country. Yesteryear's innocence has become a broken scab. The native land is still recognizable,

but, insidiously, it has also become disappointingly foreign, or worse, warped and misshapen. The local and authentic, fleetingly palpable, soon evanesces under the imprint of foreign imports, ideas, fashion, and a nativist proclivity to imitate the international and the cosmopolitan. At times, there's a wistful tone to his writing. There's an observable masked melancholy; a moral nausea that he transmits to us because of these changes with which he grapples. They lead him to discern and de-encrypt as he reflects his era's self-consciousness with newly-minted literary standards.

In an essay titled "Estilos de novelar, estilos de vivir," which he wrote for *Coloquio sobre la novela hispanoamericana* (1967), Alegría speaks of one home country and of the Pan-American soil in its multitudinous variants: "cada pueblo va dejando en sus novelas ciertas claves que, en conjunto, pudieran definir un estilo de vida."⁵¹ But it is imprecise and perhaps even mistaken to read Alegría as searching for the exclusivity of a regionalist novel, a Chilean or an Ecuadorian or a Bolivian novel acknowledging mountains and rivers as the barriers to cosmopolitanism. The Independence that all Latin American countries now possess constitutes a mere administrative marker, and a deceptive one at that; not necessarily a cultural one, or one profiling a distinct identity. National identity on the cultural level, Alegría tells us, plumbs more deeply. He writes in *Coloquio*: "Como novelistas nos independizamos intelectualmente en la medida en que confrontamos una auténtica realidad interior a los conflictos sociales que nuestros antepasados describieron sólo en la superficie de una realidad circunstancial. Si para esa realidad interior encontramos una forma estética, entonces hemos creado nuestro estilo."⁵²

The coup d'état sent dizzying tremors across his native country. Alegría sought out the national voice, but he found more overlaps across the continent than distinct identities at a time

⁵¹ Schulman, Ivan; et al., "Estilos de novelar, estilos de vivir" in *Coloquio sobre la novela hispanoamericana*. (1967), 139.

⁵² Schulman, Ivan; et al., "Estilos de novelar, estilos de vivir," p. 139.

in the 1970s and 1980s when Latin American dictators were the norm in the region's form of government. To better grasp the political uncertainties leaving havoc in Chile, Alegría's dictatorship novels provide a sobering but clear sense of the neoliberal, transnational and pan-corporate forces eroding the Chilean nationality. He seems to have settled for the patriotism of a Pan-Latin American sense of homeland. In all of Alegría's works, we take stock of inherent vulnerabilities in the human condition. In some of them, the higher the level of vulnerability, the stronger the valor, the loyalty, the fortitude of its people.

He witnessed the coup d'état in Chile as the aerial bombing of the presidential palace was taking place, a most dramatic fulcrum in his native country's history. It was a place in time when history bifurcated and civility beckoned each citizen, and especially intellectuals and artists, to make heart-wrenching moral choices regarding their role in Chilean political history. Alegría stood at this fulcrum, at the very flashpoint where the terrifying and shocking site of La Moneda bursting in fire left a wound in him. Alegría told an interviewer that after a visit to Isla Negra, where he had spent time with Pablo Neruda, Alegría traveled to Santiago in the early morning of September 11, 1973 but the sudden coup d'état caused him to miss a lunch date with president Allende at the presidential palace. The long smoldering ambers and a socialist vision shattered seared him. Something primal transformed him, compelling him to chisel his own sense of self and overhaul his language as a creative writer. The erupting military dictatorship quickly became notorious for its excesses of violence and impunity. But also, it was a significant event in that it generated a drastically new paradigm in socio-political and economic structure. Most significantly, it seized and gripped writers forcing them to cross the threshold of history they were living and shed the comparatively passive literary tradition. Seeing, hearing, listening, thinking and writing demanded sharper levels of perception and discernment. They were

violently thrust into a demanding urgency to transform the literary scene into a new paradigm. Language became a frontal weapon to debunk myths, to dissent, to criticize impunity and injustice. Rather than pamphleteering, authors had to sharpen their thesis and their approaches to telling truths with nuanced courage—lest they would become cannon fodder themselves,⁵³ tragedies that befell some of them. In the absence of reliable muckraking journalism, it was left to the arts to save the soul of the people with a hope of telling an untainted history through stories. Otherwise, there truly was no purpose to writing at all. As an exile, Alegría followed the dictatorship’s abuses of power from his perch in the United States while gazing at political history’s course of developments in a Chile that was quickly becoming deformed by violence and neoliberal economic policies.

Alegría died in California October 29, 2005. Looking back at his creative life, one can appreciate the fact that he produced a body of literature with a strong record of positive critical reception; albeit, with a few scathing critics peppering the writer’s record. The persona of Alegría one can perceive through his works seemed to have been one who was profoundly concerned with humanity, bypassing citizenship differences. The cultural dissonances he encountered in the United States, notwithstanding, fueled his creative longings in his mother tongue. *El Faro del Fin del Mundo*, states:

El Premio Nacional de Literatura. Sin embargo, falleció a los 87 años -el 29 de octubre de 2005- en la ciudad de Walnut Creek, al norte de California, sin obtener este reconocimiento... Es una lástima, puesto que su obra, maciza, contundente,

⁵³ One is reminded of Jacobo Timmermann’s *Chile: Death in the South*. See Michel Levitas, “Writer and Dictators” in Archive, *The New York Times*, 1988. One is also reminded of Allende’s mister Sergio Bitar’s *Isla 10* telling of the concentration camp for Allende’s cabinet in Chile’s frigid south, and of Patricia Politzer’s *Fear in Chile* (1985).

variada y vasta, le otorgan a Fernando Alegría méritos esenciales para lograr el correspondiente sitio de honor que se da en nuestro país a los grandes escritores.⁵⁴

As a scholar, I would be remiss, however, if I were to omit not a literary dimension to Alegría's biography, but a moral concern that appears suspect. Barred as he was from Chile during the Pinochet regime, he chose to live out his days benefitting from the coddling of American citizenship, but also paying the personal price of moral qualms in self-imposed exile in the aggressor nation that had been instrumental in the death of Socialist visionary president Salvador Allende --his erstwhile neighbor and friend-- and the destruction of the government Alegría himself represented as an official envoy.

He may have held numerous interior monologues with himself about this moral dilemma, about which I do not believe he ever wrote. It appears that while ashes of the bombed Chilean palace of government were still smoldering, he switched loyalties to the enemy country, becoming a U.S. citizen, while stating that he remained psychologically, emotionally and culturally tethered to his native soil. While his works rivet readers with life and a breezy prose that belies a deep well of historic complexity, he himself remains, curiously, a personal enigma. As in a plot of his own making, one does sense contradictions, character imperfections germane to humanity. He stepped outside Chilean history, which he claimed coursed through his veins. He made, instead, the personal choice of clinging to advantage and safety, to comfort, which could be weighed with political alternatives that are essentially moral options.

Rather than judging the man, his time and circumstance, it is the purpose of this study to simply acknowledge the apparent, as in a painting, or a novel, or a memoir one revisits in hopes of finding hard-to-bear but necessary truths. The United States, Alegría's chosen place of refuge and exile, was clearly the power behind the toppling of the socialist regime. There is a great

⁵⁴ Editor, *El Faro del Fin del Mundo*, "Fernando Alegría y 'el pago de Chile.'" (November 18, 2008).

number of documents and unclassified files in the public domain attesting to this historical fact. The Chilean oligarchy and the military were simple catalysts, which could not have made such a move without the US's prompting, pressures, funding, espionage, political threats and masterminding the death of many uniformed yet dissenting officers, intellectuals, artists and civilians. Europe, on the other hand, has historically welcomed Latin Americans dislodged by dictatorships. Couldn't that have been a politically and a morally judicious option? Much like a theatrical play imitating life, the beginning and the end of a personal story often belong outside the parameters of the curtain opening and closing.

Keenly assessing conflicts at all levels of society, painting broad rhetorical strokes of oligarchs and the impoverished, he was able to write about social dislocations that hurt the poor in their belly, and the wealthy in their sense of morality, if one is to be found. More deeply, however, the darker side of Alegría, the private man, demonstrated with courage in *Una especie de memoria* that the most disturbing aspect of a personal memoir, attributing the notion to Virginia Woolf, is to have the courage to write truthfully about oneself.⁵⁵

Aware of such a challenge, it appears that Alegría, while serving as a valiant knight for Allende abroad, and as a writer composing nations, he felt short of facing –and surviving—this very private moral conundrum he may have chosen not to disclose to his own mirror, and least of all let an editor force his way into his clenched fist, prying his fingers open to release his moral pang for the world to judge. But that is another story and not a part of this dialectical dialogue with Alegría's Chile. Alegría may have attempted to cleanse personal wounds by succeeding in constructing literary edifices that provide the opportunity for atonement for large numbers of people. If it is true that a creative writer archeologizes, digs into the self, then the question may

⁵⁵ Fernando Alegría, *Una especie de memoria* (1983), 31.

crop up whether Alegria wrote of dictatorship as personal catharsis, as over-compensation, reconciliation or redemption remains for the reader to discern.

CHAPTER 1

FIVE PRECURSOR NOVELS

AND *SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SELF*: FENDING OFF DICTATORSHIPS

“Make Peace... with each act of living”

— from the poem *Make Peace* by Denise Levertov

Preliminary Observations

The five novels Fernando Alegría wrote that are precursors to his three dictatorship novels give in themselves evolving glimmers of dictatorship emerging and galvanizing across the 20th century. As mentioned previously, they are *Recabarren*, *Lautaro*, *Camaleón*, *Mañana los guerreros*, and *Allende: mi vecino el presidente*. These works show social resistance as the innate reaction of the marginalized sectors of this society to the government’s threats against the people’s liberties. Each of these novels reveals the insidious and often glaring approach to private profiteering through public governance, where the oligarchy keeps a grip on the branches of government, as well as on the news media, and partners with the military and the Catholic Church displaying a shared attitude and a culture of privilege firmly rooted in the history of the Republic of Chile, thus dismissing great sectors of the population on whose backs the nation’s wealth is built. These five novels are foundational to his three dictatorship novels, *Una especie de memoria*, (1983) *El paso de los gansos* (1975) and *Coral de guerra* (1979) -- which are explored in a revised order to the dates of their publication as I narrow the lens from the societal to the personal and intimate, successively. This reordering of titles facilitates the

linearity of chronology for the reader. More importantly, we observe the process from a latent authoritarianism unfolding sometimes gradually, even placidly, ever peacefully; other times in fits and jolts until full-blown totalitarianism bursts into the scene warping a democratic tradition beyond recognition while transforming the socio-political scene, the emotional and psychological state of the nation and individuals, much as it occurred in the political history these novels/quasi-memoirs attempt to allegorize. These works constitute the core of this study of *sovereignty of the self* pitted against a violent military dictatorship's self-unmasking, becoming deliberate, openly criminal, and gloating the fact that it has enjoyed impunity, historically protected by a notion of sovereignty that had up to the Pinochet regime long been supported by international law. Utilizing the notion of self-determination through national sovereignty, Pinochet felt entitled to turn his country's democracy into a military dictatorship unencumbered by international inquiry. Little could Pinochet have predicted that Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón would order his arrest indicting him to appear before a magistrate for genocidal acts committed while a head of state. History-loving Pinochet forgot that sovereignty has always been a hold on power rulers seized or were bequeathed by the people; that it fundamentally originates from the people, and that it is to be used with self-vigilance at the service of the people. In the way he appropriated this privilege, the power granted by sovereignty, in the Garzón-Pinochet incident, Pinochet would oh-so-very-nearly remind us of the relationship between 17th century England's Oliver Cromwell and the despotic, absolutist ruler, Charles I.

As Republics large and small transform themselves into corporate dictatorships, the average person—lacking significant resources or powerful benefactors—may be set adrift,

becoming vulnerable to abuse. Poor and often forcibly cast out, unwelcome in the sanitized, updated environment, what essential and immutable protection can this individual have?

Does traditional sovereignty continue to hold sway? Is it still primarily the prerogative of kings and heads of state? The notion of sovereignty, as understood today, can be traced to a series of peace treaties signed in the mid-17th Century that became the basis for the principles underlying international law with respect to relationships between independent nation-states. Codified formally in 1945 by the United Nations Charter, the basic tenet of “state sovereignty” holds that “nothing should authorize intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state” because every state has an equal right to sovereignty.

Dieter Grimm, in his groundbreaking *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept* suggests that our understanding of “sovereignty” was actually first formulated by French legal theorist, writer and philosopher Jean Bodin, who mulled over the concept of “absolute sovereignty” almost a century before Westphalia. “The concept of sovereignty is associated with the emergence of the modern state.”⁵⁶ Sovereignty had *no* “final source of authority and jurisdiction,”⁵⁷ furthermore, “sovereignty did not refer to unlimited power.”⁵⁸ Yet, in the 20th century, preceding and coinciding with the Nazi regime, Carl Schmitt writes in *Dictatorship*: “Dictatorship is the exercise of state power freed from any legal restriction, for the purpose of resolving an abnormal situation – in particular, a situation of war and rebellion.” For Schmitt, “Sovereign is the one who decides on the state of exception.... Sovereignty is essentially inseparable from the state of emergency.”⁵⁹ While State and

⁵⁶ Dieter Grimm, *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept* (2015), Series Editor Foreword, ix.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ Carl Schmitt, Translator’s Introduction in *Dictatorship* (2014), xxiii.

sovereignty were medieval concepts, Grimm writes, this revised notion of sovereignty was new.⁶⁰

In a further challenge to what we now regard as the legitimacy and inviolability of sovereignty and the sovereign state, Stephen D. Krasner, author of *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, writes that “the Westphalian model... is historically inaccurate” because it “has been violated...” repeatedly when “more powerful states have coerced their weaker counterparts into altering their domestic institutional arrangements.”⁶¹ According to Krasner, “Westphalian and international legal sovereignty... are examples of organized hypocrisy... [because the] rules have been compromised.”⁶² He adds, Emer de Vattel and Christian Freiherr von Wolff “introduced the principle of nonintervention... explicitly”⁶³ in the 1760s.

Fast forward four centuries from Westphalia and it so happens that the late Kofi Annan, renowned former secretary general of the United Nations, was also deeply concerned with the limits of “sovereignty” as it has been generally understood because he recognized some aspects of its implementation as obstacles to the exercise of basic human rights. In an effort to underscore his concerns, Annan coined the term *individual sovereignty* to localize protection against abuses by the “state” against the average human being by raising the individual to a loftier place in the realm of legal entitlements that institutions, states and nations purport to possess *a priori*. Annan understood that the presumption of the state as the source of “sovereignty” privileged its authority to the extent that it could and often granted itself immunity against charges of abuse or mistreatment from the individual or average person whose protection the state is, ironically, ultimately responsible for.

⁶⁰ Grimm, *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept* (2015), 14.

⁶¹ Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (1999), 20.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 21.

Emerging from Annan's *theory of individual sovereignty* and aligned with it, the present study singles out the individual lost within his shared humanity and attempts to rescue him from the soul-crushing societal notion of conglomerate sovereignty. To underscore the urgency of this rescue when it comes to the most humble and vulnerable among us, I've articulated the notion of *sovereignty of the self* as it pertains to any and all individual persons' right to be. Because Annan elaborated on the alterative concept he christened "individual sovereignty" in he *The Economist* magazine (Sept. 1995), a publication intended for corporate functionaries and intellectual elites, there has been considerably more debate on the matter. Because it is a term that inherently threatens an entrenched belief system which has always worked to the advantage of traditional hierarchies, however, the concept of "self-sovereignty" has been ignored and perhaps even intentionally censored on social media platforms, where one would have expected it to go viral years ago.

While *sovereignty of the self* signifies a shift in focus to underscore the human being's uniqueness, it may contain inner aporias. Even then, the intention shines a light on the meaning. In a sense, *sovereignty of the self* honors "reverence for life," a phrase made famous by the Swiss theologian and Africa explorer, Albert Schweitzer. Consequently, *sovereignty of the self* is self-serving while also insisting on the universal right to reciprocal reverence. I once posed the question: What is the purpose of life? To which I provided my own answer: to be. Simply. This birthright evolves into a philosophical alchemy, a gesture, a way of living communally. From living it and seeing it in others, a clean spiritual aura emanates in the form of a perceptibly positive energy that invigorates the experience of living, thus nurturing it with purpose (recognizing the *individual sovereignty* of every person, by acknowledging a humbling oracle in every human being) in a world of economic, military and political powers encroaching upon the

vulnerable individual—be he a Mediterranean Sea migrant, a Syrian refugee, a starved Yemeni, a fleeing Venezuelan diaspora or a Uyghur Chinese minority deprived of ancestral cultural rights, or a Central American riding a soon-to-be-ambushed caravan to the American border. To exercise *individual sovereignty* to mean *a sovereignty of the self*, is to be protected by a metaphorical “do-not-trespass” aura congruent and harmonic with a simultaneous respect toward the sovereignty of the Republic and a preservation of the health of Nature (that most fragile of sovereignties) which sustains us all.

Sovereignty of the self is to be conceived and practiced as a reciprocal balance of eco-political systems. It signals the convergence of acute transnational societal crisis and human despair with non-negotiable optimism.

“Sovereignty cannot claim a timeless meaning,”⁶⁴ writes Grimm in *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political Concept*. He affirms: “Sovereignty... (is) currently undergoing a process of change.”⁶⁵ Refurbishing the vague, forgotten and oft-misused notion of sovereignty, not yet globally re-articulated as *sovereignty of the self*, comes as a result of a confluence of forces—mostly accelerated by political dystopia—that have not come together in isolation. There is a synergy of global ideas within our generation, a confluence of energy-ideas have caused coincidences, or alignments, across a range of creative arenas. Not all become trends and many are simply dismissed.

The contemporary resurgence of discourse on sovereignty deserves a brief recap. It required a leading contemporary figure with sufficient stature—Annan in this case—to utter the phrase and broach the concept, for the world to take notice and commit the phrase to its memory bank for future reference. If and when the two-word meme proved significant enough to gain

⁶⁴ Grimm, *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political Concept* (2015), 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

traction, it could then easily be retrieved from the collective unconscious. Fortunately, it was buttressed by the sterling reputation of the internationally recognized peacemaker. Annan had earned validation from one of the planet's most respected institutions and that gave his mention of sovereignty the weight and gravitas it warranted. But even then, the phrase itself has not had the ripple effect across the media and the social culture its inherent potential commands. Annan first introduced the concept-phrase in a magazine article titled, "Two Concepts of Sovereignty" he wrote for *The Economist* (Sept., 1999). In it, *individual sovereignty* rings at once with stateliness and urgency.

Fernando Alegría himself alluded to the idea of sovereignty frequently, if indirectly, throughout several of his novels and published literary criticism. A principal organizer of a 1983 Mexico City conference on "Common Tasks," Alegría actually addressed the notion of *sovereignty* articulating the notion of "soberanía personal" as it pertains to the average man's relationship with the State. This occurred a full decade before Annan made the term public on the world stage. In the three Alegría novels selected for this monograph, he makes direct and indirect contribution to the prevailing literary theory using subtly coded mnemonics to burying the "pearl" of *fundamental human rights* inside the "shell" of the subtext, the personal signature of his *voice*, a term he chooses for his readers to hear; a term toward which Alegría challenges his readers to turn and imbue with the vitality, vision and the moral stature its precursor, Kofi Annan, enjoyed, of whom it has been stated,⁶⁶ "He wields only moral force."

We enter the Alegriana universe by climbing and crossing several thresholds of consciousness. They are the literary equivalent of rising shakras in Hindu lore. It is a Sisyphean ontology where the narrator sojourns with the reader on difficult terrain, a veritable minefield where the Self struggles to survive in a political environment riddled with concealed

⁶⁶ Stanley Meisler, *Kofi Annan: A Man of Peace in a World of War* (2007), 235.

traps and the military is ready to swipe (as in the Spanish *zarpazo*)⁶⁷ at the average person's *sovereignty of the self*. Consequently, the higher the shakra, the higher the level of consciousness and the higher the station where our conversation unfolds.

Sovereignty, as understood by Eurocentrist political philosophy, has its genesis in the history of Western thought. This ignores indigenous belief systems, which have been historically unhampered by power concerns and have encouraged a harmonious coexistence with nature. In our excruciating era of power imbalances, the hubris of leaders has often converged with the complacency of individual persons and conglomerates of society and has led to the destruction of both, to the disintegration of rights, for both humanity and nature. It is therefore crucial as well as urgent that we understand this notion of sovereignty and how it could be revamped to secure humanity's survival in an era of world crisis, political and simultaneously environmental.

While Fernando Alegría did not embrace the indigenous cause head-on in his work, and only alluded to it in passing, and neither did he utter an express concern for the ecology, a term that was becoming mainstream during the last days of his life, nonetheless, Alegría's sensibilities coincided with a reverence for life, for all approaches to constructive creations, and for life's regenerative forces. In that spirit, it behooves me to add a few concepts that I believe harmonize with Alegría's intentions, even when his works omit it. His sense of respect extended to people and to nature. In coherence with his stance on life, he would not have felt discord with the ancient American original people's *Weltanschauung*, which took root in the Americas long before the arrival of Europeans. Their ideas of sovereignty and respect for ecological values as an extension of *sovereignty of the self* to include the land as a non-proprietary possession to be

⁶⁷ See Patricia Verdugo, *Los zarpazos del puma* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones CESOC, 1989). This is a non-fiction work that chronicles and documents one incident in Pinochet's regime. *El puma* was the name of a helicopter that unloaded armed soldiers in Chile's northern desert region and lined up the workers in a mine and executed them all perceived to be conspirators with leftist politics.

protected and utilized for survival, decried the bankruptcy of colonial sovereignty as a form of imperialism. Alegría criticizes pre-colonial sovereignty with its ideas of unbridled extractive capitalism. Alegría is aligned with the author of “Diné Sovereign Action: Rejecting Colonial Sovereignty and Invoking Diné Peacemaking,” where Larry W. Emerson reminds us that sovereignty’s origins are “rooted in imperialism, conquest, control, power, and wealth, and therefore is detrimental to indigenous ways of knowing, being, and becoming”⁶⁸ --- but it could apply to anyone, especially those re-emerging from a country in dictatorship. The term “sovereignty,” Emerson affirms, also has origins in Eurocentric notions of royalty, hierarchy, church and state.⁶⁹ He adds “the concept is used to legitimize, marginalize, or extinguish Indigenous self-governance,”⁷⁰ natural resources, and activism itself, democracy and all matters of social justice.

Alegría’s dictatorship novels omit, admittedly, one of the remaining sources of vastly imperiled wealth: its topographical nature. As it is exposed to depletion and destruction by the same forces that assault a humanity with a perceived difference of ideological views and actions consistent with that difference perspective on how to live the democratic life, nature has been set to drift in abandonment, unprotected as a national priority. It is therefore pertinent in the arena of omissions, to bring into the fold of this narrative the very source that sustains humanity and the notion of sovereignty—be it as the prerogative of the head of state or the natural right of the individual.

⁶⁸ Larry W. Emerson, “Diné Sovereign Action: Rejecting Colonial Sovereignty and Invoking Diné Peacemaking” in *Understandings and Visions of the Diné People* (2017), 161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

The State confronts the citizen into an unwanted dictatorship, when through hubris dictatorship becomes the state of exception that has become the norm. To this diatribe, citing Noam Chomsky and other scholars, Derrida offers:

the most perverse, violent, and destructive of *rogue states* would thus be, first, the United States and occasionally its allies. Insofar as this nuclear state stands arrogantly above and disregards international law and treaties, often in the name of a supremacist nation-state sovereignty, this hegemon simultaneously relies on and yet undermines the concept of sovereignty.⁷¹

Sovereignty is a term that continues to be widely used in public discourse while harboring its meaning as an aporia—the realm of the incandescently present but ineffable. The incandescence of the term swells Alegría’s stories of individuals living in a Chile undergoing political changes which remain hidden from public view but whose impact on society are felt viscerally among the public. Leitch reminds us that “sovereignty among nation-states dates from the time of the Peace of Westphalia (1648), when interference in other states’ governing prerogatives became unacceptable”⁷² and adds that in practice, “sovereignty remains connected with the use of force and the principle that might is right.”⁷³ Alegría reverts this value priority. He shows us that the converse is true. Throughout his precursor novels and his dictatorship novels, he underscores the notion that actually *right is might!* Alegría ennobles the individual, the very person who is stripped of power and bonds of political advantage in a society where social connections are strong currency. It emerges from this analysis that sovereignty has built-in contradictions, where force is a State prerogative and *sovereignty of the self* conflicts with that

⁷¹ Vincent B. Leitch, “The Politics of Sovereignty” in *Critical Inquiry*, 33.2 (2007), 233. The other scholars he cites are Noam Chomsky’s *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs* (2000), Robert Litwak’s *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy* (2000), and William Blum’s *The Rogue State* (2001).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 234.

prerogative. The goal to be struck, however, is one of a reverence toward all forms of life permitting a reciprocal harmony to preserve a balance among these sovereignties, making life an edifying ontology. Leitch cites Derrida: “Human rights pose and presuppose the human being as sovereign (equal, free, self-determined)... one cannot simply jettison the sovereign self, its liberty, equality, responsibility, and power any more than the sovereign nation-state.”⁷⁴

It seems clear that opposition and resistance exist toward the notion of *sovereignty of the self*, given the weight of history that has endorsed the exclusivity of sovereignty as adjudicated to the nation-state. Nonetheless, Alegría is a keen observer of the fact that politics is a world of change and that it is the field of the possible. To support the notion of *sovereignty of the self* Derrida offers: “sovereignty—and its scope remains unknown.”⁷⁵ Positioned as activism, *sovereignty of the self* or *individual sovereignty*, demands peace from a State that invests capital for the unbridled expansion of the neoliberal market with its sequels in the destruction of nature, climate distress, the spawning of terrorism and weapons proliferation. *Sovereignty of the self* stands to stem the State’s proclivity for authoritarianism from becoming totalitarian. Derrida affirms that the nature of State sovereignty is to seek supremacy and use force: “As soon as there is sovereignty, there is abuse of power and *rogue State*. . . . Thus there are only *rogue States*. Potentially or actually. The State is roguish.”⁷⁶ Unlike Derrida’s suggestion of a “*roguocracy*” to transgress nation-state power,⁷⁷ across his many novels, Alegría proposes no transgressions, but the edification of a bond of harmony among the three identified sovereignties in the stable equilateral triangle of man, state and nature.

⁷⁴ Leitch, “The Politics of Sovereignty” in *Critical Inquiry*, 33.2 (2007), 235.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

Even though Alegría never referred to the UN Charter of Human Rights to endorse his claims of social justice within his creative narratives, it is clear that as an observer of international affairs astutely observing political developments in his native Chile, Alegría would not have dismissed a scholar's theoretical analysis of a notion that floods Alegría's own proto-literary concerns that overlap with the realms of political philosophy and literary theory. In discussing *sovereignty of the self*, Antonio Cassese states:

For the first time, the international community agreed that certain values – peace, the dignity of the human person (hence respect for fundamental human rights, and the ban on slavery, and genocide)... had to be championed, even at the expense of competing national interests. The doctrine of self-determination, combined with the new emphasis on individual human rights and the international prohibition of aggression, was largely responsible for this new outlook.⁷⁸

Since the creation of the International Criminal Court, itself born out of the excessive abuses of power, and of sovereignty, of some heads of state who ended up held to answer at this institution designed to stem criminal impunity at the highest levels of government, “Sovereignty... has been increasingly relativized: the respect for sovereignty in this sense depends on the capacity and will of the state to protect humanity,” writes Ruti Teitel in “Sovereignty Humanized.”⁷⁹

Kofi Annan wrote: “... individual sovereignty—by which I mean the fundamental freedom of each individual, enshrined in the charter of the UN and subsequent international treaties—has been enhanced by a renewed and spreading consciousness of individual rights. When we read the charter today, we are more than ever conscious that its aim is to protect

⁷⁸ Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal* (1996), 170.

⁷⁹ Ruti Teitel, “Sovereignty Humanized” in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)*, 103, *International Law as Law* (2009), 417.

individual human beings, not to protect those who abuse them.”⁸⁰ Six years after Kofi Annan coined the phrase “individual sovereignty” in *The Economist* magazine in 1999, stemming from his interpretation of the UN Charter, Teitel devotes a section of this work on sovereignty by clarifying the Annan Doctrine:

Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his opening address to the 55th Central Assembly called for a new principle of humanitarian intervention, which would become known as the Annan Doctrine. In his landmark report on humanitarian crises, Annan observed that human rights abuses such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and threats of genocide constitute legitimate justification for Security Council intervention under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (July 12, 2005). In *Prosecutor v. Tadic*, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (“ICTY”) declared that the “state sovereignty approach” to the law of war was to be “supplanted” by “a human-being approach.”⁸¹

There’s synergy of thought and values between the realm of international politics and domestic literature arising from political events, such as is the case with Alegría’s novels hinging on libertinage at the helm of national political discourse. Consequently, Alegría has presented us with a dramatic staging in his narrative works of dictatorship, where the main character exudes the stuff of political activism displaying gestures arising from a humanist’s conviction to stand for the vulnerable, the forgotten, the rejected, the social pariah. If we allow our memory of the historic event of the coup d’etat of 1973 from TV scenes, documentary films, and other genres evoking the historic fulcrum for Chile, we can rather easily imagine it as a staging. The mind

⁸⁰ Kofi Annan, “Two Concepts of Sovereignty” in *The Economist*, September 16, 1999.

⁸¹ *Prosecutor v. Tadic*, Case No. IT-94-1, *Decision on Defence Motion For Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction*, 97 (Oct. 2, 1995).

needs a visualization to disentangle the knot of events, people, intentions, consequences, etc. In this particular sense of theater-like stage awareness, Alegría as the novelist-memoirist doubles as a playwright. Scenes are introduced ushering in a problematic peopled by characters. The narrator's commentary aids in exposition and assists in the advancement of the plot. Between Alegría the poet and Alegría the novelist, we experience Alegría the theater impresario between the lines. Except for street scenes, a great number of his dialogues occur in enclosed spaces rather adaptable to the conditions of the stage. We experience this in the five novels I have called precursor works, antecedents to his dictatorship novels. The notion of *sovereignty of the self* is latently inscribed in each of these works.

Five Precursor Novels

Experiencing a barrage of heterogeneous forces, 17-year-old Alegría grapples with the novelty of sexual adventurism and with the place he is to occupy in Chilean cultural affairs as the worker class is the brunt of enormous bourgeois pressures but also undergoes an awakening with the opportunity to bring about historic changes. Alegría embarks upon a poetic and fictionalized biography of the workers' union leader Luis Emilio Recabarren, and his eponymous *Recabarren* (1938) is published as a lucid work that breaks new path in both literature and social politics. Publication of this populist work coincides with the election of the pro-workers' union presidential candidate, Pedro Aguirre Cerda, also in 1938. In his novel-biography, *Recabarren*, Alegría dispenses with the traditional Eurocentrist view of society to mean exclusively the bourgeoisie, where the masses below the line, the unseen ones, throb in their silence. *Recabarren*

tells their story. It speaks to their social struggles and daily misery in their strenuous effort to survive. As it was with Recabarren who lifted each obscure worker to a place of social dignity, so does Alegría, who preserves this fundamental tenet. At about the same time that Recabarren was struggling on behalf of Chile's new urban poor to gain a solid footing in their society, it is opportune to cite from another humanitarian who struggled similarly in Europe. Albert Camus acknowledges the pioneering ideas of Simone Weil regarding workers' rights. He gives her credit for influencing his own ideas on social justice, which he embraces in his own literary works. Camus tells us she set the theoretical tone by elevating the worker's dignity. Alegría shares a kinship with such a view, and incorporates it into all the novels he pens, particularly for their subtext underscoring *sovereignty of the self*. Camus writes about Weil: "... the factory worker must be read in order to realize to what degree of moral exhaustion and silent despair the rationalisation of labour can lead. Simone Weil is right in saying that the worker's condition is doubly inhumane in that he is first deprived of money and then of dignity."⁸²

Five years after *Recabarren*, Alegría penned his work of national resistance and pride of difference. This was his *Lautaro, joven libertador de Arauco*, (1943). It celebrates the young indigenous hero of the Conquest era who stood up against the Spanish intruder in the mid-1500s. His heroic feat singles him out as he risks his own life claiming a kind of early sovereignty for each individual among his people. That it was published as the United States intruded into Chile four centuries later, served as an allegorical act of rebellion on two levels: as a deterrent against intrusion by any foreign power, and as an effort to bridge age-old racial divisions and a festering bad blood within Chile between the indigenous and the white descendants of the conquerors. This was an era when Alegría encountered domestic and foreign political pressures exacerbating

⁸² Fred Rosen, "Marxism, Mysticism, and Liberty: The Influence of Simone Weil on Albert Camus" in *Political Theory* 7.3 (Aug. 1979), p. 303.

national life. As the Second World War took a toll on racial minorities as fascist Europe exterminated Jews and gypsies, a consciousness of racial intolerance poisoned Latin America. Jews and the indigenous became the subject of enhanced racial prejudice in Chile. There emerged, furthermore, a prejudice against self, against native ideas and products and people, germinating the belief that if it's foreign, it's better. This cultural attitude construed a mentality that brought business opportunities for the United States encountering a region supine to its approaches, thus further enriching the Chilean oligarchy, with its uniformed branch in the military high command, and widening the economic gap among the social classes.

Alegría wrote his next novel *Camaleón* (1950), rich in exposition and dialogue, in distinctive voices. It is a nimble tale of domestic revolution while the United States manipulates the local government with foreign spies under the guise of international commerce in a fictional Latin American country called Island, a pseudonym for Chile. Martin Littleford, its main character, is the transient visitor for whom Chileans are merely faces he engages liberating himself from story conflicts leading to his objective. Alegría is most poignantly concerned with the impact of dictatorship politics on the humanity it tramples on with violence and obtuse laws; that is to say, he dabbles in a closed reading's contextual parameters, while the various centers of unseen power lord over the population. In *Camaleón* the author doubles as the narrator; furthermore, the author is a character whose voice and perspective rises from the innards of the city in all its political entanglement as a corralled, supine and subservient little country pressured by the superpower to relinquish its resources for cheap. The authorial voice blends in with those faceless individuals who people the text without making a personal appearance, where they nonetheless exert their presence. We feel the energy of their existence. We pick up clues here and there of their individual and collective function in the national flow of events. We hear

individual steps crisscrossing the urban space. We hear voices, live with snippets of commentary, indiscernible voices inhabiting urban geometries. Alegría makes it clear that the collective is a singular term made of singular individuals who toil and make a nation. Nearly every page in *Camaleón* is a description of the atmosphere, the social mood, how the national train advances on rails put in place by the labor of individuals. “Los isleños se afanaban a lo largo del país para poder subsistir y subsistían extrayendo la riqueza del subsuelo y entregándosela a los Estados Unidos.”⁸³ Next, Alegría weaves the individual and the collective: “La nación sin mañana, decía Rael, sin pasado. La nación que se rompe las entrañas para descubrir el centavo con qué comprar el día siguiente.”⁸⁴ The average man’s *individual sovereignty* is protected when the citizen enjoys his inviolability. The “country” of his self-determination has a clear boundary: the individual person’s own body. This concept takes on highest value for Alegría when inviolability and self-determination turn out to actually be false reproductions. Truth and reality become indiscernible from propaganda and spin. Official decisions affecting national life become imitations of a non-existent reality. Credible reality is embedded within the contours of fiction. This core notion, this indispensable principle of a humanistic, which Alegría incorporates into this story of foreign intrusion in national affairs is the essential subtext of this author’s contribution to literary theory, evolving into the trademark of his uniqueness among critics and authors of the dictatorship subgenre. Across Alegría’s prolific body of work he underscores the integrity of the self while espousing the notion that the center of the self is the Other. The idea of social responsibility arises as his imprimatur in the best spirit of Emmanuel Levinas.⁸⁵

Fifteen years elapsed between *Camaleón* and the next novel, which was a look back at 1938. While the stories differed, the socio-political conditions in Chile were an evolving

⁸³ Fernando Alegría, *Camaleón* (1950), 185.

⁸⁴ Alegría, *Camaleón*, 186.

⁸⁵ See Paul Marcus, *Being for the Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis* (2008), 34.

continuum. The slaughter of pro-Nazi university students in the stairwell of the workers' union building, *El Seguro Obrero*, in 1938, provided Alegría with material for his novel *Mañana los guerreros* (1964). This work is another historical fiction. It reconstructs the stages of a foiled coup d'état, but this story drags on for too long without action. Alegría allots a mere handful of pages to narrating the incident of the student slaughter that gives the novel its name. However, as we read the novel suspense and danger rise as citizens' nerves fray. This work is a prequel foreshadowing his dictatorship works written a decade later during the tumultuous Pinochet regime.

Mañana los guerreros (1964) is a work that looks back thirty years at a moment of political turbulence whose ripples helped transform Chile from a whispered fascist country to one expressly proud of its prejudices. The novel's spark is the politically intense year when the populace, mostly recent migrants from distant and longitudinal Chile, people evicted from bankrupting agricultural estates when mining began furiously to replace agriculture as the country's primary industry, these impoverished migrants entered full-bodied into competitive politics. A left-leaning president was elected, which permitted the rise of the workers' union leader, Recabarren. All of this construed a tumultuous epoch, plus a search of national definition led to a group of writers, a young Alegría among them, to inaugurate Generation '38, which confronted the issues that caused Spain to bleed as a result of the Spanish Civil War, exacerbated by the Nazi European advance, with Communism and capitalism competing for adherents. There's a love story in the middle of the fray, where a couple produce an illegitimate child, a metaphor for the politics shrouding their era. The work culminates with the slaughter of university students in Santiago's headquarters for the Seguro Obrero (workers' insurance). It is ironic, something Alegría omits, that sixty fascist students would be killed at the offices of those

toiling on behalf of the cause of Chile's social rejects—the workers (*obreros*), a social base that has long been obstructed from aspiring to possessing any power, a faceless humanity that has recurrently been the brunt of fascist pejoratives.

The author dedicates all too few pages to a failed student Nazi revolt that gives the work its name, “*guerreros*,” that culminates in the military massacre of weaponized young coup plotters. In this work, Alegría employs “*técnicas innovadoras como el monólogo interior, el racconto, el comentario poético y filosófico... la ampliación de la realidad, el humor, la ironía... predomina la búsqueda de temas ... universales y una conciencia artística más refinada.*”⁸⁶

Below the water line, in the wide and fertile fields of subtext, however, is the notion that Chile's proclivity to dictatorial, authoritarian and violent governments were practicing in the late 1930s for a time that would later be kicking doors boorishly, stumping on law, scoffing at any vestige of a democratic heritage. It is opportune to note that the group slaughtered was not of the lower classes. These were youths who, among them, were those with contacts in high places but could not avert meeting their death when the presidency was deemed to be in peril. Chile showed that institutional political power was held at a higher value than human life, than civil protections, even than existing laws created just for such events where tribunals would examine the activities of these alleged coup plotters. It was well stipulated in the law that they could have been corralled by the military, imprisoned and then prosecuted -- even if they were to face summary execution, but not without at least a semblance of due process of law.

Alegría only recounts events as they transpired. Neither author nor narrator, nor a loose canon character, comments on this other legal option that could have been at least contemplated in a country that distinguished itself in Latin America for its humanistic Constitution and its

⁸⁶ Tamara Holzapfel, “Relación entre política y literatura en ‘*Mañana los guerreros*’” in Helmy F Giacomani, *Homenaje a Fernando Alegría: variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra* (1972), pp. 87-88.

leadership in continental systems of education. None of it was to be considered. Alegría does create a narrative visual alluding to the crowds that had gathered in the street to witness how these brown shirts, many of them blond Chileans with non-Spanish surnames of upper-middle-class families, had been ushered into the building, and believed to have been ignited into Chilean fascism and persuaded to carry out a murderous coup plot against the sitting president, Arturo Alessandri, an authoritarian leader himself, but slightly left of a fascist ideology himself, whose position in power became threatened by a challenging presidential candidate, a high-ranking military man, Carlos Ibáñez, pro-Nazi himself and a future military dictator. The coup plot was foiled and the security forces executed the university students in the building where they were entrenched. The bloodied corpses of these 66 youths were dragged out in front of the same crowd who saw them march into the building. Their bodies were removed and dumped in a common grave, reminiscent of the Nazi holocaust unfolding in Poland and Germany. Shortly after that incident, and outside the parameters of *Mañana los guerreros*, Ibáñez dropped out of the presidential race, only to be elected to power years later, helped by the moral reputation of his friend, the communist poet Pablo Neruda.

Upon Ibáñez's election to power, he ordered Neruda arrested, but he fled the country on horseback with the manuscript of his magnum opus, Latin America's first epic poem in four centuries, *El canto general*. Neruda reappeared in France, during a much-publicized visit to his host, Pablo Picasso.

Allende, mi vecino el presidente (1990) honors Allende's lifetime devoted to social service. He is portrayed as a Mio Cid, as Don Quijote, Robin Hood and a secular Francis of Assisi. It was written after the last of the dictatorship narratives. But, contrary to Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, this elegiac biography of Allende is a nostalgic view to a statesman's vision

sadly shattered by the profit motive. In each of these fictionalized essays the marginalized individual evolves into full citizenship. Alegría creates scenes of a utopian Chile that never quite existed in the nation's treatment of the disenfranchised, whose access to a thriving existence is simply blocked. While these works are not dictatorship novels per se, they document decades when the socio-political forces prepared the ground for despotic regimes, one by a military man, but the majority have been civilian precursors that paved the way with oligarchical proclivities establishing solid foundations for neoliberal-like precursors, six-year termers, sharing the intransigence of capitalist thirst with the previous military dictatorship and behaved as ferociously resistant to social change. The oligarchy can be felt always menacing in the backdrop. These five works, this "pentagonía,"⁸⁷ foreshadow the clawing novels that broached the sensitive and shaming subject matter of torture, disappearances, executions and exile that Alegría has given us.

Each of these five novels by Alegría portrays a nation of vibrant people, Chile's lower social and economic strata, but each of these works also depicts their suffering and long-stewing frustrations with a body politic that has excluded them. Yet, it is they, the poor, who fuel the engine of state with its dynamism and perseverance. While they provide the upper classes with their wealth, they stay impoverished. More than sixty years after the union leader Recabarren harnessed the workers' energy, longings, and vision, there is still no satisfying mechanism to guarantee worker protection, respectability, appreciation, health care, nurseries, care for the elderly, or the resources for a dignified retirement. Taken together, these antecedent novels draw the biographical silhouette of a nation, a people's energy, which an authoritarian regime will

⁸⁷ *Pentagonía* is a name I choose as an indirect salute to the Cuban novelist, Reynaldo Arenas, a social pariah in Cuba due to his homosexual proclivities and his critical views of the dictatorship of the left under Fidel Castro. Arenas was internationally recognized as a novelist of the first rank, even before he managed to escape Cuba on the Mariel. Arenas called his body of work, five novel-memoirs, works telling of anguish, by this name.

squander. In these narrative tales Alegría gathers all the structural and critical elements he will employ to design the architecture of his dictatorship novels. These are the literary foundations for an edifice, a body of prolific and careful work from which a national identity can be surmised.

These are the bookends of a writing life. Alegría's trilogy of assertion works --his dictatorship novels proper-- insert a new value to the historic novel. A wide gamut of society, or cast of characters previously excluded, now seizes center stage. They debunk official history, demythifying it, while they do irony to the present, thus creating if not a new historicism, certainly an intra-history, a historic novel that gazes toward the national past from "la cotidianeidad anónima y doméstica de los seres comunes y Corrientes,"⁸⁸ as well as a renewed sense of history. They do not trust historiography or what's historic. Instead, they deconstruct the nation's age-old historic certainties. The new novels act as a people's weapon, constituting a sling shot at power. According to Carlos Pacheco, the new novels focus on "lo íntimo, local, marginal, fragmentario"⁸⁹ tending to transgress the norms set and imposed by traditional history while making space for "la representación metaficcional de los procesos de investigación."⁹⁰ A model for this approach germinated in Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949), warping the literary canon with tales debunking the conqueror's social history, refathoming history's protagonists into more accurately silhouetted historico-fictional folk characters. This model is taken up by Alegría's own works, his precursor novels and then applied to his dictatorship novels, where violence is stripped and its absurdity is exposed. Hegelian history of the endurance of institutions suffers a fall of credibility but it is recovered in the historicism retold in fiction.

⁸⁸ Andrea Pagni, "Memorias de la nación y memorias de la represión en América Latina" in *Nueva época*, 5.20 (Diciembre, 2005), 179.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledge insurrecting is most apposite to this trend. The phrase "power is that which represses" is attributed to him as we see it most poignantly in Alegría's trilogy of dictatorship works.

There is a maturation process in Alegría's "*pentagonía*," his five precursor works. *Recabarren* is a romantic swashbuckler of social rights, an icon, a standard bearer for the underdog's demands for fairness and justice. Its pages reflect the mood of a nation, nervous yet hopeful. A sector of the population that is contributing to the advancement of the country harnessing its energies to raise the country's standard of living must also reserve energies for a political fight against those who benefit from their labor in the factories. Each man toils for both family and country. With dirt under his nails and old clothes, in this sole example nonetheless, the individual is nobler than a prince, much as Machiavelli conceived it. But that this worker has to battle on two fronts is counter productive. It is not rational, but it was the reality of Chile in the late 1930s. This thematic precept evolves in *Lautaro*. Here's another individual that leads a race of people, the indigenous. As a Mapuche Indian, he is a martyred hero, fighting for the integrity of his ancestral folk. His struggle is no different from Luis Emilio Recabarren's, who fought against larger political forces to secure the rights of his country's most vulnerable workers. Already perceptible is a nascent trend of social justice. Both novels are told in the third person omniscient, but with each novel, we get closer to the protagonist, to the methods of leadership, the strategies, the tenor of the environment and we understand the passion that drove those two men, Lautaro and Recabarren.

Fernando Alegría's "*soberanía personal*" as Theory of Sovereignty of the Self

Before discussing the plight of the citizen under dictatorship, there's a political history to weigh into the stream of novels that emerged across Latin America beginning in the 19th century. This political history hovers over Latin America as it precedes it.

The Magna Carta, 1215, established the principle that everyone is subject to the law, even the king, and guarantees the rights of individuals, the right to justice and the right to a fair trial. On that premise came the evolution of Parliament and constitutionalism, whereby Parliamentarians, led by Oliver Cromwell through the declaration of Lords and Commons, took power away from the king in what was considered a revolution, however, based on historical precedent and lawful authority during the Cromwell regime in England that seized the scepter of power from the king to Parliament. In 1654, when he became Lord Protector of England, he expressed: "sovereigns have their duties, that when they sacrifice the people to their caprices, the people have a right to demand an account and set a term to their violence."⁹¹ He was a moderate reformer who absolutely rejected the notion of granting the right of suffrage to the landless. With a groundswell of popular sovereignty claiming a voice, Cromwell had King Charles I executed for his entrenched and abusive absolutism. Yet, what fired up Cromwell was the cause of tyranny on one side and the cause of liberty on the other. He is purported to have said: "I do not understand the cant of warped humanity, which sheds a tear for the royal martyr, and has, nevertheless, dry eyes for the scores of thousands, whom the royal murderer pushed to death and ruin by his crime, his folly, or his impotence."⁹² With his role in history, the seed was planted for the increasing autonomy of the average citizen in society, a seed that fertilized following eras and cultures.

⁹¹ Barbara Silberdick Feinberg, "The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative?" in *Social Research*, 35.3 (Autumn, 1968), pp. 445-465. P. 454.

⁹² Charles Bradlaugh, "Cromwell and Washington: a contrast" in *Cowen Tracts* (1877), 15.

Carrying this torch into the future while fast-forwarding to American time, we have U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer's *Active Liberty: Interpreting Our Democratic Constitution*, whose opening line is "The United States is a nation built upon principles of liberty."⁹³ Referring to Jefferson and Adams, he writes: "They had invoked an idea of freedom as old as antiquity, the freedom of the individual citizen to participate in government and thereby to share with others the right to make or to control the nation's public acts."⁹⁴

Some states were more successful than others in suppressing public criticism, but driving criticism underground did not mean that it ceased to exist. Over the long run, belief in the sanctity of monarchy and the authority of the small ruling group was impaired. Loyalty and cooperation diminished and the structure of the state was weakened. It became evident that a new kind of leadership was needed, a leadership based more on appeals to common interests (especially nationalism), and less on hereditary right, a leadership which actively sought support (at least from key men and powerful groups) rather than commanded obedience. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were widespread attempts to shift to this new basis of leadership. The transition was difficult but when it succeeded, the state --based on nationalism and the active participation of most of its citizens-- became more powerful and closely knit than ever before.

On the other hand, there were many failures. To strengthen the state by the general consent of its subjects required consensus on general principles and adherence to a rather unusual set of rules of political behavior. Such a consensus and such adherence often depended more on good luck than good management. Even when they were obtained, they did not guarantee adequate leadership in times of stress. Thus where the consensus was imperfect, as in Latin

⁹³ Stephen Breyer, *Active Liberty: Interpreting Our Democratic Constitution* (2005), 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

America, or where the leadership proved weak, as in France, there was a tendency to try the short cut of dictatorship. Dictatorship theoretically combined the most effective aspects of divine-right monarchy (charisma and personal loyalty) with the most effective aspects of the nation-state (nationalism and appeals to the public interest). Most dictators began their rule with these advantages, but they also usually began with the great disadvantage of depending primarily on military support. If the dictator kept the army happy he gradually alienated civilians, and vice versa. Moreover, no dictator solved the problem of succession. As he aged, military factions began to vie for his inheritance, or else the army began to lose its grip and suppressed popular forces began to emerge. Some dictatorships have lasted for more than one generation.⁹⁵ Even in Latin America, where it has proven endemic, there were interludes of democracy or bloody factional fights between the departure of one dictator and the consolidation of the power of the next. Down to 1914 the apparent short-cut of dictatorship proved to be a blind alley. Dictatorship weakened rather than strengthened the state.

Sovereignty of the Self, this thesis' core pertinent to Alegría's body of work, and particularly with respect to his trilogy of dictatorship novels, is located in the area of overlap of the Venn diagram between the late 1930s and the early 1970s. Each of these bookend eras represents the assertive cultural intention and political activism of their respective decades. The 1930s prepared the ground and packed the enhanced dissenting energy accumulated for decades. By the time politics realigned and the popular sector broadened and strengthened its base, Chile's popular sector was by far better prepared to employ the weapon of its conviction to resist, maintain a resilience and even confront regimes of violence. Alegría documents the citizenship's strength in numbers. Pinochet was not about to unleash the terror of snipers and

⁹⁵ In Portugal, Dr. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar's dictatorship lasted for 40 years (1928-1968) with tremors radiating beyond.

tanks on the thousands of protesting marchers. And yet, it took notice of who marched, of who dissented and they eventually disappeared. In time, the historically unparalleled government oppression haunted dissenting individuals with impunity.

Coral de guerra, nearly a theater piece in that it entails a diabolical conversation within a small office, reveals a street culture of persecutions, random kidnappings, summary executions, torture, expulsions and censorship... disclosing a clash of values within a society that had relied on the often-claimed Christian values and moral principles for their resilience. In a narrative that draws its schematics from the unfolding political history beginning with the coup d'état, imperceptibly but quickly becoming a state of emergency or a state of exception; that is, a dictatorship, Alegría did on the page what few Chileans could actually attempt in the street: to live normally, exercising all civil rights, despite a government's policy obstructing those rights and punishing people for daring.

As a result, Alegría selected a handful of narrative characters depicting those members of society most closely aligned with the national dilemma of individuals caught in the vise grip of a humanity that lives out its days as if no government were curtailing their rights ---which it was-- and how it was that prevailing institutions suffocated citizenship. In his first novel of dictatorship⁹⁶ during Pinochet, *El paso de los gansos* (Goosestep), Alegría elevated the role of dissent and defiance within the margins of the historically possible in a society where tanks rolled on the pavement in densely populated urban centers and armed soldiers pointed their loaded rifles at people at random, thus unleashing a climate of tension and panic. In such an environment where life and death share the same garment, where as in Sophocles' *Antigone*, a man is fully alive and brimming with defiance of the despot one moment, then lies lifeless in the

⁹⁶ Alegría published *Camaleón* (1950). It is a novel that indicts authoritarianism referencing the despotic presidency of Chile's Gabriel González Videla (1946-1952).

next, un-coffined, punished without atonement, as it occurred in Pinochet's era Santiago streets. Alegría brings the marginalized into a space of dignity which only literature can fathom in such a politically charged period of unceasing horror.

Much like Benjamin, Alegría reflects on what *is* and communes with the belief that there is no neutral ground for art. It may even be said that for Alegría, as it was with Benjamin, a foremost theoretical critic of violence as allegorized in literature within the scope of law and justice, a clear political commitment constitutes the basis for the development of a literature.⁹⁷ As I read Alegría's subtext from his 1983 pronouncement of "soberanía personal" as an exhortation propounding a notion stemming from political philosophy as he transforms it, inducting his own concept into realm of literary theory. I, in turn, adopt it along with Annan's "individual sovereignty" to fashion my own thesis of *sovereignty of the self* as a theoretical anchoring notion to serve the field of literature, where the citizen's character emerges with his/her unique voice representing the identity and the yearning of the character buffeted on the page. This subtextual concept, identifying aural print inherent in a literary or a flesh-and-blood character rises as a stark demand for civic rights in the context of a military dictatorship when all democratic institutions have been suspended. This cause, at once civic and humanitarian, of nurturing the principle awakened by the Annan Doctrine, *individual sovereignty*, becomes a non-negotiable pursuit, especially through literature, when at stake are the fundamental rights of man. In the Chilean context of the Pinochet atrocities-based cleansing of leftist ideology, we observe Alegría recognizing Benjamin's theory of violence when the German thinker writes "lawmaking

⁹⁷ Uwe Steiner, "The Task of the Critic" in *Walter Benjamin: An Introduction to His Work and Thought* (2004), 96.

is power making” and that law is manifested as “legal violence” most visibly witnessed when the police or the military acts revealing the law’s impotence.⁹⁸

The text of this dissertation will be illuminated with citations on an imperiled humanity from various theoretical thinkers for our era. While Hegel, Benjamin, Arendt, Sartre, Foucault, Agamben, Ricoeur, Cassese, Castoriadis, Genette, Valdés, Žižek, Habermas, Butler, Grimm, Chomsky will be cited, Benjamin and Butler and Annan figure most prominently. Their analytical remarks attempt to exhume intolerable truths while informing this study of a literature of dictatorship with tools of political philosophy.

There is a synergy of global ideas within a generation which cause coincidences, or alignments, in different arenas of creativity, such as it seems to be the case with Annan’s 1999 article, introducing the notion of *individual sovereignty*, and Fernando Alegría where he seems to suggest it, or allude to it, in his novels of dictatorship, and during his talk on “Tareas Comunes” (Common Tasks) in Mexico City in 1983, where the word *soberanía personal* was heard from his lips as it pertains to the average man’s relation to the State. The status of vulnerability that the average man lives, or suffers, since Alegría penned his works has only worsened.

There are two averages of humanity that Alegría recognizes. One is the man who ekes out a living. He carves out a small niche in his small existence and nothing happens to him, which is partly his burden and his sorrow. Then there is that man not unlike the first, who does what he must, endures a modest existence but he becomes the unwitting victim of a dictatorship’s violence. Both extreme experiences sweep the average man toward his unpredictable fate. Therefore, the cathartic experience for which Alegría writes applies to both men. Since the 1970s dictatorship, political violence against society’s most vulnerable has not abated in some corners

⁹⁸ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (no date) pp. 287, 293, 295.

of the world. It has only taken more insidious forms. As a result, catharsis appears to be needed more than ever. Sometimes political reality and fiction mirror each other. Other times, they show a gaping contrast between the two. Alegría concocts an eerie approximation to the lived reality, the tangible, the prosaic reality. Alegría's prose meets us there, at the point of impact.

As epilogue to this Introduction, I would like to say that Alegría's dictatorship narratives suggest a potential for his novels to be performed on stage and on film, especially the one-room story, *Coral de guerra*. This work ought to be the flagship novel in any Alegriana course of studies. But the fact is that no serious critic has emerged to recognize Alegría as a leading voice in the Pinochet-era dictatorship novel. In this minimalist space, *Coral de guerra*, the work's edges become jagged, and as such ineffably suspenseful and ubiquitously subversive in its commentary on Pinochet's rule in political history. *Coral de guerra* deserves to be examined through the prism of Judith Butler's work on the theme of Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the vulnerable stands up to power. Butler pioneered the landscape of recent scholarship on the subject matter. Based on this premise, even though Keri Walsh states that Antigone's defiance hurled at the king implicates her in the violence she supposedly opposes,⁹⁹ I postulate that in a most rabid pagan fashion, she rather usurps her dead brother's spirit, his masculinity complementing and imbibing the long-repressed power of the feminine hovering, seeking resolution while risking her own death, to stand against a vengeful king whose ego soars above principle. Antigone wields not her brother's sword, but her own near bi-gendered *legal standing*, (as does the unnamed woman in Alegría's *Coral de guerra*,) to reclaim the *individual sovereignty* owed to her shunted brother while alive. She re-instates it back to the corpse of his persona where it always belonged, whose body, alive then, now dead, continues in death to

⁹⁹ Keri Walsh, "Antigone Now" in *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41. 3, a special issue: Antigone (September 2008), p. 11.

perform an act of defensive intolerance by its defiant presence. Alegría's female victim evokes that Antigone whose silence, transformed into a rhetorical theory and a political strategy, makes room for a choral of voices demanding the right to live in honorable peace for both man *and* woman. That Chilean Antigone of the novel is joined by society shedding its cloak of fear, especially the morally-ensnared reader, in a chorus of protestation against the despot's hubris.

Even though Alegría's work on memory in *Una especie de memoria* brings us the past through his first-person narrator, what he does is he brings the past for us to experience it as if it were unfolding as we read it. The past is transformed into a dramatic illusion of a present context. In "*The Synergy Hypothesis: Thirty Years Later*," Peter Corning writes: "The synergy [combined functional effect(s)] produced by the whole provides the functional benefits that may differentially favor the survival and reproduction of the parts."¹⁰⁰ It penetrates all territories and sovereignties. It cannot be controlled by will or by politics. It therefore alerts us to our individual responsibility within the shared universe. In *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* ([1986] 1993), Cornelius Castoriadis gives a bifocal view of synergy, thus enriching the function of sovereignty, particularly that of *sovereignty of the self*. Surprisingly enough, he begins by telling us that Merlo-Ponty "renders the individual unthinkable" (Castoriadis, 1993:290). Castoriadis cites Merlo-Ponty: "what I see passes into him." Castoriadis expands on this Merlo-Ponty citation: "It is not I who sees, not he who sees.' If seeing... is something other than a tale of retinas... then it is in effect the entire seer that is an issue in vision, and not only the seer's corporeal synergies but his or her entire history, thought, language, sex, world – in brief, his or her 'personal institution.'"¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Peter A. Corning, "*The Synergy Hypothesis: Thirty Years Later*" in *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 30.1 (Spring 2011), 63.

¹⁰¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (1993), 290.

But then, Castoriadis employs Merlo-Ponty's thinking to support the individual's value theory: "personal institutions" using the French thinker's term, writes Castoriadis, "highly dependent on their socio-historical institution which makes them each exist as individual."¹⁰²

Nearly eight generations of colonial and post-Independence-era Chileans laid their gaze on the La Moneda palace. It is the crucible, the physical locus and literary trope referential of Alegría's dictatorship novels, which depict urban settings, but where nature is, at best, merely evoked. Across his fictional narratives, Alegría discusses the fluvial nature of life, its process, more than the details of what has actually occurred or who figures most prominently. We feel swept by the specifically strategic technique of stream of consciousness, very much in the Joycean mold,¹⁰³ where the reader gains an insight into the author's thinking more precisely than the author himself. We don't know how the author is organizing his mind leading to the text we're reading, but we catch up with his motivations through the substance of the language chosen, the motions conveyed and the atmosphere, the alchemy of the prose. Form the objective advantage of judging the literary creation, the life imagined on the page, we can have a better grasp of the mentality, the state of mind, the political nuance that prompts the author to write. We grasp these subtleties above the construction blueprint the author has devised. In these city dictatorship precursor novels and dictatorship narratives, the city is a text. We read the open book of the urban sprawl in its web of complexity in its becoming, the cyclical undoing of itself, twisting, stretching and returning, boiling and cracking... The city breathes and pulsates much like the throng that inhabits it and Alegría's language guides us into its nooks and crannies, its open buoyancy and its secrets.

¹⁰² Castoriadis, 290.

¹⁰³ The Alegría reader is nudged into harkening to structures and scenes in Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914). The city is the story's primary character, as it is with Alegría's every novel cited here is a face of Santiago, Chile, including *Lautaro* because even this pre-urban story applies conceptually to the modern urban struggles facing foreign intrusions.

In all these novels, Alegría utilizes the emotion of nostalgia as if by it he means a sort of inner exile at a time when the political crisis of his country renders his social sentiments, his political alignment with causes relegated to the margins of the mainstream discourse. His prose becomes an allegory for social struggle. It is a vehicle to voice the collective yearning while also an obstruction, just as it is with individuals who get themselves in trouble for speaking out. His narrative shadows and echoes social distress. Alegría's prose is multivalent. It thrusts us as close to the physical experience as it can be imagined, tugging us into the fray of city voices and tumults and chaos and traffic noise and neon lights and shoes shuffling, metal, glass, leather functioning through the aural dimension of his prose cracked by the sudden lash of laughter or a door squealing in its hinges. The text is alive. It is a hybrid between a film screening in a dark room and chamber music adding dimension. It is also an atonal compendium of stories with unfinished sentences, or photographs that interrupt the full view of an image. It is life. It is messy as the best of structured lives. There are no right angles in this compositional novels, there are swerves and dips, soaring thoughts and placid glides. The camera lens of his written orality—as it were—pulls back slowly along contours, animating the inanimate, anthropomorphizing surfaces; or conversely, naturizing man, insinuating that a tree, the clouds, the sky and the river—oh, that Mapocho River that crosses Santiago rushing with the turbulent gossip of centuries, and the fresher memory of floating dead human bodies—imply mood and are as alive as man; that man is as vibrantly stagnating as a swaying tree branch. Nature and man reflect each other, there's an exchange of language, communicative energy, in the breeze that stirs us. Even though he has a penchant for the urban setting, Alegría has not forgotten the ancient soil underneath the asphalt. We live the lines of narrative as if we were one individual, or another, shifting view points, walking those city streets in the body of a woman, or a man, or a child with

child's eyes and emotions, experiencing the same setting from our distinct internal structures, feeling the bumps, waiting for the light to cross the street, running late, but arriving early to the appointment that no one had the courtesy to call to cancel. We are shown how the “we” in all of us had to suffer the stress of the political circumstance without complaint as we hurried across streets and throngs of humanity shoved us to unpredictable options. As we let ourselves go in the Alegriana prose, we hang from a thread of uncertainty, just as we begin and end each day in our daily lives—and more intensely so during curfew hours.

His novels end abruptly, but we perceive the classic scaffolding of the three act play we just lived through submerged in these narratives only when we look back over our shoulder and discern how it is that we experienced the particular historic periods, how has culture re-directed us; what it has done to us. Alegría's precursor novels whisper to us. They admonish us. They lash at us for our individually insufficient role in setting the course of events.

It's an odd terrain, this memoir, whereby Chile, a fractured nation, topographically and socio-politically, this archipelago of a country becomes a haven for refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War and persecution in the 1930s only to come to a land undergoing turbulence of its own, a corner of the world which within a few decades will itself have become a land to escape for exile elsewhere—when the *sovereignty of the self* of even those who felt secure by dint of their aristocratic heritage feel as homeless in their mansions as the man dodging the night cold does by crouching against the church door. What has happened to the individual's integrity? What has occurred to the legal protections of the “country” of the self? *Habeas corpus*¹⁰⁴ (to possess the body), means not only to bring the imprisoned person's body before a judge to appeal for liberty, but it also means the right to live peacefully within one's own body.

¹⁰⁴ *The Oxford Guide to The Supreme Court of the United States* (2005): “the right of personal freedom from illegal restraint never lapses,” p. 415.

Fernando Alegría gives us a unique kind of new prose that is mixed, *sui generis* in its impulse because he is trying to get the reader to see beyond the surface, to interrogate what happened, how it happened and especially why. Alegría wants to make the reader more curious, inquisitive, questioning, seeking answers that probably no one can find, but at least he has sublimely laid out some underpinnings of concerns, ambiguities, contradictions in a country that has had such a rich legacy of democracy and how such a country fell prey to dictatorship tendencies and personalities. These works by Alegría are not the ‘fire’ that Vargas Llosa used to refer to in Latin American literature in the 1960s and 1970s because they are not ‘overly’ committed, but they are part of the smoke that smoulders, burning into the core of Latin America. Alegría expects the reader to become more active in the process of reading to connect dots of concerns, thereby provoking a consciousness that can better decipher and decode elements of oppression that are unleashed upon an unsuspecting people through conniving methods and eventually murderous results.

A number of thinkers included in this study offer foundational theories that give credence to Alegría’s subtext whispering the notion of *sovereignty of the self*, more than just sovereignty for the state or by the conglomerate of humanity. In 1868, U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase deemed *habeas corpus* “the most important human right in the Constitution” and “the best and only sufficient defense of personal freedom.”¹⁰⁵ Chief Justice Chase’s view underscoring *individual sovereignty*, has long since been replaced by “We-the-People.” When that happened as a political calculation, we, collectively, left the value of the individual and his/her sovereignty to the dustbin of history. In the *Dred Scott v Sanford* decision, Chief Justice

¹⁰⁵ The Oxford Guide to *The Supreme Court of the United States*, p. 415.

Taney wrote: “what we familiarly call the ‘sovereign people,’ and every citizen is one of these people.”¹⁰⁶

This question of *individual sovereignty* or *sovereignty of the self* clearly applies to the author’s voice as distinguished from the narrator’s or the main character’s, as does the Jamesian distinction between telling and showing. Furthermore, voice, Gérard Genette mentions, connects the narrator more directly with the hypothetical reader. In “From James’ Figures to Genette’s ‘Figures’: Point of View and Narratology,” Sonja Bāsić asks “What is the relation between voice and point of view?”¹⁰⁷ With Fernando Alegria we move from mimesis to diegesis (from imitation to explanation), where the novel, the memoir, the stage-play and the film fuse into one, four-dimensional impact: we have language manifested as orality and sound through the printed form unfolding in the mind, we have visualization of events acquiring kinetic dimension as in film, we have the psychological transformative impact of all these in the reader’s mind, thus dispensing with the need to have reality before us in order to process the emotional and enduring significance of the event “experienced” in the novel. *Sovereignty of the self* works as the reader reads since we’re constantly assessing the situation in the story and what would have been “my” role, reaction, decision and act were “I” living the event narrated.

¹⁰⁶ Stanley I. Kutler, Editor, *The Supreme Court and the Constitution: Readings in American Constitutional History* (1977), 151. The section adds “people” and “citizens” are “synonymous terms, and mean the same thing. They both describe the political body who, according to our republican institutions, form the sovereignty, and who hold the power and conduct the government through their representatives.” This language retains the plural meaning of people. The individual person, be it black or white, is never addressed as constituting a sovereign. This section refers to Negroes as citizens, and questions whether “this people are constituent members of this sovereignty?”

¹⁰⁷ Sonja BĀSIĆ, “From James’s Figures to Genette’s ‘Figures’: Point of View and Narratology” in *Revue française d’études américaines*, 17, Écrivains Américains, 1870-1914 / American Writing in the Age of Realism (Mai 1983), p. 205.

CHAPTER 2

DICTATORSHIP NOVELS

Una especie de memoria: A Country Unfurls in Six Decades

“Your threats do not intimidate me”

--- “Vientos del pueblo” by Victor Jara

Preliminary Observations

“Self-determination is sacred,” the former-president of Brazil, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), said in regards to the United States’ recurrent invasiveness of Latin America, where individuals and countries have had this crucial right usurped.¹⁰⁸ This is perhaps the interior premise and most salient concept that can be drawn from the Alegriana school of thought concerning the dictatorship novel. The “Lulist” idea of self-determination here should be understood in the context of this work by Alegría to be a man in full possession and exercise of his essential and inalienable right, a natural human right which towers above all others:

sovereignty of the self.

¹⁰⁸ On March 19, 2018, Amy Goodman broadcast an exclusive interview with Brazil’s former president Luis Ignácio Lula da Silva on her daily TV news program, Democracy Now! Her special feature piece was titled, “Brazil’s Former President Lula on U.S. Intervention in Latin America & 15th Anniversary of Iraq Invasion.” On this program, Lula spoke of Brazilian corruption and that his successor, Dilma Rousseff, was deposed in 2016 by a legislative and judiciary coup d’etat in order to install the current civilian regime presided over by president Michel Temer. Shortly after this interview, polls show that he was by far the front-runner in the presidential campaign. Because of this standing in the polls, which threatened those who deposed Rousseff, Lula was sentenced to a 12-year imprisonment on allegedly made-up corruption charges, thus clearing the way for an ultra right-wing candidate to be elected to the presidency of Brazil.

Una especie de memoria (A Type of Memoir), at the very least, merits analysis because it parallels Chile's slow and inevitable transformation from a bucolic agricultural country governed by authoritarian forces to an explicit and arrogant dictatorship. In it, Fernando Alegría guides us patiently through pages of democratic living until suddenly pulling the curtain back on the dictatorial struts and underpinnings girding his native Chile. What is, and what seems, naturally, do not always agree. Not only is the socially divided country Alegría shows us via his memory, it is also—a point upon which he does not elaborate as a memoirist—a place where geographic, cultural, class and racial divisions have defined the dynamics of national identity since the nation's birth in the mid-16th century, a country where tension between whites and the indigenous has remained a constant from the beginning.

Land holdings, or *latifundios*, lands seized from the indigenous galvanized a Chilean society deeply rooted in Conquest.¹⁰⁹ Land was the currency of wealth and social status. The ancient dwellers of the land, the indigenous, became lackeys on the land, near-slaves, and then evicted altogether. Of course, the *self-sovereignty* of the despoiled indigenous was not a concept in the colonial imagination whatsoever—nor does Alegría take it up in his commentary. Then war with northern neighboring countries broke out in the late 19th century just before civil war would unleash in Chile. President José Manuel Balmaceda elected by the oligarchy, shifted his politics to support the agriculturally impoverished servitude, an entire class of humanity. He believed in their basic dignity above the economic interests of the already accommodated class. The oligarchy turned against him, employing the military, terrorizing the country. Rather than surrendering his loyalty to the poor over to the oligarchy, he committed suicide. This model of political commitment in an attempt to transform Chile into an egalitarian society, transforming

¹⁰⁹ Alvaro Jara, *Guerra y sociedad en Chile* (1981), 133.

the notion of sovereignty into a humanistic concept available to everyone, would nurture the vision of Salvador Allende a century later.

Political turbulence domestically in the early 1870s overlapped with a shift in world market demands from agriculture to mining. This culture of plundering and warring to seize territories had become a well-established trend for Chileans. The conflict with Bolivia and Peru was, however, altogether different. After breaking a tax treaty with Chile, Bolivia declared war on Chile and secretly asked Peru to become an ally. Agreeing, Peru then declared war on Chile. After about four years of sea battles, Chile won the war. The long seacoast had been used not for fishing, but for fighting when Chile strategically maneuvered its navy during the protracted war on its northern neighbors and eventually gained access to their inland ore resources appropriating lands previously claimed by both Peru (northern desert nitrate-rich mines) and Bolivia (blocking its access to the sea, thus rendering it a landlocked country). This stretch of time beginning a full generation before the dawn of the 20th century revamped national pride upon winning the war with neighbors. It constitutes a paradigmatic transition for the small nation of Chile tucked away along the South American Pacific coast. Unsurprisingly, the contested territories enlarged Chile's territory now rich in gold, silver and nitrate ore deposits.

This stretch of time beginning a full generation before the dawn of the 20th century revamped national pride upon winning the war with neighbors. The traditional agricultural aristocracy of the large landed estates,¹¹⁰ the *latifundios*, was being replaced by a non-aristocratic oligarchy that was seizing political power through its monopoly on mining and industry with

¹¹⁰ The *latifundios* had been the *encomiendas* during the colonial era. Each *encomienda*, land granted by the King of Spain, had dozens of Indians, natives to the land that had been theirs until the Spanish appropriated them. These indigenous became slave hands on the land where their ancestors lie buried. These Indians were later expelled from those lands to become indentured servants and worse, marginalized unemployed on the perimeter of the capital city, comprising the bulk of an entirely new class of disenfranchised, socially scorned, unwanted but needed for cheap labor.

factories mushrooming on the perimeters of the city of Santiago. A rising mercantile oligarchy parlayed a monopoly on mining and industry into direct political power. The large landed estates were not returned to the indigenous peoples from whom they had been stripped--as many hoped.

Land holdings galvanized a Chilean society deeply rooted in Conquest.¹¹¹ Nearly three centuries later, it was mostly replaced by a rising mercantile oligarchy that parlayed a monopoly on mining and industry into direct political power. Alegría's memoir also omits this crucial chapter of Chile's national memory, Yet, Chile's role in the war had a great impact on the national psyche, stimulating its national self-esteem but also fanning its arrogant bellicosity believing that resolving issues with a fight was symbolic of patriotism and masculinity. The 1929 Great Depression in the United States unleashed its punishing impact on the world, causing the next economic shift in Chile by aggravating an already precarious economy further straining social changes.

The working-class, comprised of ex-agricultural laborers, swelled the outlying slums of the capital city. Its political base exploded as did their numbers under the leadership of union leader Luís Emilio Recabarren. This is where Alegría's *Una especie de memoria* begins. The nascent blue-collar political faction, strongly resisted by the civilian oligarchy and the Catholic Church—historically allied with the rich—surged forward nonetheless, leading to the election of populist president Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938-1941). From that point on, Chile could not dismiss the labor force or its political demands.

Una especie de memoria reveals itself as a memoir of a man looking back over his younger years omitting national history before his time while simultaneously reminiscing how his life was intimately woven with his country's socio-political and cultural history spanning the 1920s-1980s. The author assumes the reader is familiar with Chilean history and with the

¹¹¹ Alvaro Jara, *Guerra y sociedad en Chile* (1981), 133.

contextual gaps in his “memoir.” To address that vacuum and properly frame an analysis, the significant socio-political reshaping of Chile must first be acknowledged.

Alegría recounts meeting a railroad worker with whom he shares a drink as the train takes them across the Andes into Argentina. Alegría communes with the very poor. Ever gradually, the notion of individual dignity begins to shape the young man with a proclivity to observe and elucidate what he lives through writing. Returning to Chile, he follows the trajectory of his idol Recabarren, stepping himself in the legendary working-class leader’s beliefs and retracing his footsteps.¹¹² Deeply impacted by the ideas Recabarren espoused before his tragic suicide, our character sets his course.

This work on *memoria*, which in Spanish means both memory and memoir, must address the double entendre.¹¹³ We enter this memoir to experience memory afresh. While Alegría intends to re-visit his past, it is through his narrator that we enter the author’s world of memory, which both the narrator-protagonist and the reader experience for the first time. For us to know Alegría’s past, even when nuanced by imaginative fiction, we must experience that which the author has lived. To create empathy in the reader, empathy based on first-hand knowledge of what the author relates, the reader either must “have lived” comparable memories or “live” the narration in the experience of the text.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant writes: “all our knowledge begins with experience.”¹¹⁴ Kant and Emmanuel Levinas overlap in the notion that the gap between “I,” “he” or “we” and “they” can be bridged as we view the transcendental nature of their subjects, where there is no essential difference between I and the others; where these subjects are correlative

¹¹² *Una especie de memoria* indicates that Recabarren committed suicide following the suicide of his son and frustration with entrenched elitist political forces that opposed his social justice crusade.

¹¹³ Double entendre is a French bastardization. It means that a phrase has a double connotation. Its equivalent in French is *double sense* or *doble sentido* (Spanish).

¹¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [(1781) 2007], 37.

given their shared humanity. In an imagined universe such as the one proscribed by the fictionalized memoir, as is the case with *Una especie de memoria*, parameters and dimensions are more malleable, less linear and free of obligatory historical referentiality precisely because the primary genre is fiction—to which we attach re-touched or embroidered historical events and facts.

Across this memoir, the narrator plays various roles. The first-person (limited omniscience and naïve narrator) blurs into you/tú (second-person narrator thrusting the reader into the story) and they (editorial omniscient) and we (first-person plural narrator). In addition, Alegría creates his role of *unreliable author* when deferring to the narrator at crucial junctures to stay the course, especially when this *kind of* memoir risks veering off course.

By entering the experience of one man, as readers we're also embodying plurality. We are at once one man and all of society by virtue of our capacity to identify with those who populate the text. Subjectivity and objectivity fuse into a sort of something else, into *Una especie de memoria* that comes close to Emmanuel Levinas's idea of "I responsible for the Other,"¹¹⁵ where this "I" is both first- and third-person, anyone of us, any of them. There's no narrative difference between the artifice of me and you, me and they. In "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Ethics* and the Ethos of Society," Eugene E. Ryan tells us that according to Aristotle, "We get to know the ethos of a society in the same way we get to know the ethos of the individual, through its deliberative acts of choice." These choices, which *Una especie de memoria* bring us, are rooted in the history of memory, the memory of one individual born into and thus a product of a specific society during a particular period in history. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur states that "memory is the present of the past."¹¹⁶ He also writes: "the presence of a past that continues to

¹¹⁵ Paul Marcus, *Being for the Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis* (2008), 20.

¹¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), 101.

haunt the present.”¹¹⁷ In the same work, he cites Augustine’s *Confessions*, where the medieval writer points out that one can remember joy or sorrow without feeling either joy or sorrow.¹¹⁸ We see this in the detached language *Una especie de memoria*’s narrator employs in particular passages. The cool aloofness is a narrative device meant to distance the protagonist from the author and hints at the guarded emotions Alegría, by proxy, holds closely to himself.

Two national personalities, celebrated heroes among many Chileans, play significant roles in *Una especie de memoria*: Recabarren (1876-1924) awakened a young Alegría’s political conscience and triggered his passion for a social literature. Much later a physician named Salvador Allende (1908-1973) inspired Alegría as the long shot presidential candidate elected to lead the nation on a platform of social and economic reform based on justice and equality. Each man, representing separate generations devoted his life to lifting the poor and the marginalized from their plight. Each had a vision to instill even the humblest among men with a sense of dignity, integrity, and yes, with *sovereignty of the self*, understood as the essential freedom, the human right that Antonio Cassese¹¹⁹ and Kofi Annan¹²⁰ tell us the state is structured to protect. Essentially, Recabarren and Allende frame the memoir’s bookends. While this work conveys a veneer of factuality, it is a deeply personal diary, where the omissions, which are allegedly many and strongly detected, lead the reader to believe this memoir was written for the author himself

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 390.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁹ Antonio Cassese, *The Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal* (1995), 45-46. Cassese states that principles of sovereignty and self-determination in their external dimensions amount to the right to exist as a State with the right to sovereign equality and non-intervention. Third World countries approach to self-determination is less carefully developed and means a fight against colonialism and racism, the struggle against the domination of any oppressor illegally occupying the territory, the struggle against all manifestations of neocolonialism—ethnic and tribal conflicts being rife have ignored or explicitly denied the rights of minorities or nationalities living within sovereign States. The Third World has mostly championed external, not internal self-determination.

¹²⁰ Kofi Annan, *Interventions: A Life in War and Peace* (2012): “Sovereignty has always implied not just power, but responsibility” (118) and “We have challenged the argument that the lives and rights of individuals are an internal affair of state that is of no concern to outsiders. We have also told the dictators that sovereignty is no longer a shield behind which gross violations of human rights can be committed. You are responsible and you are accountable” (133.)

as a personal catharsis, a form of atoning emotionally, even when it is a most emotionally minimalist work.

Alegría published his fictionalized memoir of the union leader with the eponymous title, *Recabarren* in 1938, more than a decade after Recabarren's suicide, when he came to terms with the fact that his lifetime efforts bore no tangible fruit, despite the fact that he inspired thousands to bring about major changes that would take years to become apparent and rattle the power structure. As a result of Recabarren's demise, the alchemy of political power in Chile was shaken by a convulsion from below. In a radical shift none could have predicted, the working-class and peasant-laborers overwhelmed the next presidential election, elevating the populist candidate Pedro Aguirre Cerda to a single term as president.¹²¹ Alegría's *Recabarren*, his first published book in a highly prolific body of work, coincided with Aguirre Cerda's historic election and augured Alegría's meteoric rise within Chile's illustrious literary community. The political leader Recabarren remained a templet for Alegría's subsequent work as a socially-conscious writer, establishing his reputation as a celebrated author and elevated him to "wunderkind" status as a member of the elite group of Chilean writers from that era known as "Generación 38." The name Recabarren had once electrified society: "ésos del 38.... Fue una noche de barrios tan de ultramuros que se salió de la historia de nuestro país."¹²²

Like with Chinese boxes, we find literary works within other works, and subsequent titles within *Una especie de memoria*, all by the same author. It is astonishing, yet not disturbingly so, then, to discover that *Una especie de memoria* is at once inclusionist and opinionated. It casts judgment, as a memoir should, on authors and politicians from only the narrator's perspective. But it's also exclusionary of historical facts, such as the explosive birth of Chile's film industry

¹²¹ President Aguirre Cerda, increasingly popular, died of natural causes while in office in 1941, a mere three years into his then-six-year term.

¹²² Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 151.

in that era,¹²³ did much to lift the national mood from the economic depression, the cultural imperialism filtering in from abroad, and the political authoritarianism brewing in Chile. Chilean filmmaking with universal stories and an all-Chilean cast with markedly Anglo-European archetypes established in no uncertain terms what would become an enduring dimension of *chilenidad*. Such is the atmosphere Alegría creates in this work by brandishing broad strokes of the national experience.

Alegría's memoir is made up of odd-numbered five chapters. Each has a separate storyline, although Alegría cleverly incorporates overlapping moments as strategic markers to establish continuity. According to J. E. Cirlot in his *Dictionary of Symbols* this work suggests an inherent allegorical or symbolic structure. The five chapters correspond to the body's four limbs and the head. The human body is portrayed as vulnerable and its humanity is led, conned, exposed, buffeted by events arising from sources that shroud him/her but which cannot be harnessed and re-directed. It is these essentially political forces that are the behemoth constituting the matrix and the vessel transporting a humanity across national history.

These idiosyncratic chapters are disjointed, somewhat mirroring the chaotic century, but as a whole they tell one man's story as he remembers his youth, his romances and his intellectual development, as well as those parts of his adult life in Chile during those tumultuous decades in its history. They follow a rather nonlinear chronology as the author's impulses get the best of his intended organization. We're taken on detours that nearly smack of disarray, or worse, of a dislocated outline, but so was Alegría's life; the seemingly illogical thread that connects them

¹²³ One classic and pioneering feature film of the era, produced in Chile with an all-Chilean cast and crew, rediscovered at a flea market and digitized under the care of the University of Chile's film school in cooperation with sound studios in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is now available online. It contains an audio that alternates between spoken English (undubbed) and Spanish with no subtitles. It is "Hollywood es Así" (1944), featuring Guillermo Yanquez, playing the blond gringo, in the starring role of an American Hollywood film studio executive.

serves as a reminder of an untidy photo album. But, as well, it tends to abide by the seemingly illogical nature of memory.

The last chapter of the novel-memoir was written mostly from exile/residency in the United States, and posits a decided shift in tone. It borders on the emotional and brings the memoir to a close as the reader senses the author is finally lowering his guard. While this is a fictionalized memoir, hybridizing the narrator's role, the narrator adopts a blurred identity floating somewhere between the author and the story's central character, presumably the author's alter ego. It is the narrator's nameless identity that steers the memoir. Whether it is factual, imagined, flawed recall, half-forgotten historicity or whispered revelations, it falls on the reader to judge.

In terms of structure and formal craftsmanship, *Una especie de memoria* resembles a theatrical production where the stage is located in the reader's mind, a dimension where the text approximates a dramatic work. In reading the work we experience an exuberant and multidimensional universe, restless, with disturbing sounds and discordant silences that have been molded into a mellifluous text on paper. There, we're transfixed, transported to a place of contingency, of crisis one moment, and catharsis the next, in a half-real, half-imagined country where cliff-hangers are syncopated by apprehension and sorrow abounds. It is a zone also characterized by terror given the imminence of disintegration of one man's ultimate tether during an unfolding *state of exception* as the contours of dictatorship are delineated and its first victim is identified as the average citizen's *sovereignty of the self*.

After more than 40 titles, between novels and critical works, the publisher of *Una especie de memoria* (Editorial Nueva Imagen) issued only one edition in 1983. This was an era of dictatorships in Chile and across Latin America. That may explain the fact that this rich story had

only one staging in an era when critical literature suffered from censorship and budget constraints in the cultural fields. Alegría's narrative technique in *Una especie de memoria* is evocative more of a proclivity toward Cubism than Impressionism. It is relevant to point out that Alegría's work in his narrative anthropology of memory contains characteristics of both painting and film. His visual prose brims with qualities that alternate between the static and the kinetic. It is more than mere plausibility, given the vast spectrum of his creative interests and a consistent urge to experiment with various literary forms and genre variances with a strong visual perspective. In the arena of film, it sympathizes more with Raúl Ruiz's surrealism than with Patricio Guzmán's disciplined historicity among the handful of notable Chilean filmmakers. It could perhaps be said that *Una especie de memoria*'s neorealist narrative style enhanced by a psychologically rich matrix, reminds us of Andrés Wood's lyrical films as well as of Alejandro Jodorowsky's politically intoned body of historico-surrealist work. Whether intentional or perhaps a playful bit of metaphorical formalism on his part, the first four chapters can each be said to represent the four limbs a human being possesses. The fifth and final chapter is readily likened to the cranium or an individual mind—the human head—the pinnacle of thought, intellectual development, reasoning and thus the true center of autonomy or *sovereignty of the self*.

Una especie de memoria, endeavors to preserve the look and sound and customs of an epoch, and the mindset of a society populating a corner of the world far removed from the European theater (*emigrados desde lejos para siempre*).¹²⁴ Across the memoir, Alegría applies

¹²⁴ Borrowing from another memoir by a Chilean-born Yugoslavian descendant, Nicolás Mihovilovic, born in the lands bordering on the Strait of Magellan, Chile's southernmost habitable region. His 1960s work was titled, *Desde lejos para siempre*.

the strategy of discrepancy, here bowing tenuously to Wolfgang Kayser¹²⁵ and his *Interpretación y análisis de la obra literaria* (1981) when evaluating the narrator's limited perspective on both the depth and the complexity of the events, persons and things of which he writes. In regards to the role of the prose narrator, this is what Kayser states: "el narrador nunca abarca directamente la figura real de éste ni nos dice nada sobre su manera de ser; lo único que determina es la actitud en que se propuso narrar esta su obra."¹²⁶ This memoir tells us that our main character was also stimulated by the brilliant oratory (which Alegría emulates) of law student and writer, later a Communist Party Senator, Chile's Volodia Teitelboim.¹²⁷ Alegría's narrator bears similarities to works by Fyodor Dostoievsky,¹²⁸ Federico García Lorca,¹²⁹ George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, and yes, Chile's own Pablo de Rokha,¹³⁰ and the ensnaring baritone of the radio journalist and analyst of international affairs, Tito Mundt,¹³¹ whose on-air delivery of Chile's collective political conscience and oratorical fluidity would have an impact on Alegría's own.¹³² Allende's social contribution to his people, among whom he campaigned for president for fifty years, pursuing the highest office four times, nurtured our main character with a moral calling to place his own writings at the service of his fellow-countrymen. Upon Allende's death, coinciding with his sabotaged presidency, Alegría's two heroes, Recabarren and Allende, demarcate the beginning and the end of the memoir, respectively.

¹²⁵ Wolfgang Kayser, *Interpretación y análisis de la obra literaria* Trans. María D. Mouton y V. García Yebra (1981), 265.

¹²⁶ Kayser, p. 402.

¹²⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, 105.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 105.

In reminiscing, our story usher and narrator, the “I” of the narrative voice, reveals the psychic impact the years being restored through that voice have had on him and on the society of his time. The mysterious nature of the speaker’s identity seeks to blend the individual with the collective in the narration to the point where *individual sovereignty* is made tangible in the exercise of that fusion; itself an extension of self shared by the narrator’s fellow Chileans. In this memoir, narrative voice becomes psychic orality. We can almost hear people speak when we read them—or about them—in these pages; we can nearly hear the male sound, the female inflection, the Chilean accent with its varying pronunciation nuances and fragmentation of prepositions and verbs, such as “Pa’ donde vai, cabrito” and “te digo, huevón,”¹³³ usages which resonate across the social spectrum.

This work is a *sui generis* rendition of the memoir genre. It’s a hybrid of various structures and approaches to the personal diary and the national history, both old (the chronicle and the essay) and new (the novel, the play, the filmic narrative). For all these reasons, it doesn’t quite square precisely in any one category. In *The Architext* (1979), Gérard Genette debunks the myth of purity and easy classification across the literary genres. A study on Genette’s work deems the field to be in a “primitive state of genre-theory,” where Genette claims genres to be “aesthetic categories, and thus eminently historical... evolving systems of classification... there can be no inherent pattern to the interrelation or evolution of genres and families of genres.”¹³⁴ Consequently, debunking precision or clear frontiers among genres, it is safe to say that “una especie de memoria” corresponds to *a type of* memoir. This choice of imprecision, as suggested by the title of the work, constitutes a hypothesis of sorts, one that can be demonstrated through its self-curated narrative and which argues that in the re-constituted territory of this memoir,

¹³³ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 17.

¹³⁴ David Gorman, “*The Architext*: An Introduction to Gérard Genette and Jane E. Lewin” in *Style*, 28.2 (Summer 1994), pp. 273-274.

Alegría examines Chile's proclivity toward authoritarian governments across the political spectrum. Resonating with Allende's political vows to his nation, Alegría's fictionalized histories, *Especie* among them, required a clear vision, a perennial vigilance against the threat of despotism—a despotism that fired up the engine of violence manifested by a staccato of military outbursts up until and beyond *Una especie de memoria*'s last pages, leaving the work vibrating in the reader's hand with the memory of the 1973 coup which bled its stain euphemistically into its pages, but mostly omitting its occurrence. Between declarations and lacunae, Alegría's narrator leaves major passages of political history to be perceived as subtext as he treads lightly across that politically fragile Allende-Pinochet period in order to then grapple—ever subtly, nearly censoring the dictatorship's stealthful seizure of power out of history-- with the dictatorship's gravelly rumbles in *Una especie de memoria*'s final pages.

Alegría is well aware that one of the crucial insights for the reader who lacks knowledge of Chilean political history is that Allende conducted government with a militancy consistent within the Constitutional constraints of the law. In proceeding thus, Allende demonstrated an unwavering, fair yet firm hand, employing what could be viewed as an authoritarian steeliness in his staunch rebuke of the perpetuation of institutional abuse that had been committed against the poor and the indigenous for centuries. Such populist efforts clashed with oligarchical opposition, which one perceives in the careful towing of the political line through Alegría's ever-tactful narration in describing the polemical 20th century, throughout which opposing political flanks made the population feel the vise grip on their existence in the microcosm of individual lives. Alegría enables us to breathe this political atmosphere in *Especie* as he explores humanism, perhaps writing in foreign exile, or hiding in *insilio*. This circumstance might explain why his memoir stops short of the Allende era, even when writing this memoir during its boiling political

cauldron; why Alegría's narrator would entirely omit any mention of Allende's regime and his own diplomatic service to this president; and omit, as well, Allende's own unflinching aims as he resisted and tussled with the forces that operated a dictatorship in-the-making, political sword crossings and currents running in deep rivers, perceptibly burnished deep into the memoir's matrix, where Alegría's narrator tapped power at its source within what to lower-ranking diplomatic officers constituted inaccessible corridors of power, long before Pinochet burst into the scene in 1973.

In order to create a world in print, Alegría had to assess his country and the politics that determined what transpired within the republic's sovereignty. He had to *unring* the bell of political consciousness and take us to a distinctly dated era of the 20th century. In order to be an effective author, he had to first feel the heat of politics singe him personally and directly. He had to be a character in his own plot before becoming the author-god of a universe of his own creation. Within the narrative, Alegría disappears from the story. His alter ego, the narrator, stands out as the maverick critic who unfurls memories into stories, slices of recall, moments, scenes, the great majority of which seem disconnected from each other—just as dreams and memories recur. There is no consistent cause and effect to perceive this work as a traditional character-driven novel. The narrator does, however, underscore the value of the individual, who stands at the epicenter of his concerns. Removed from narrating the memoir himself, Alegría seems to insinuate through his narrator that the average individual without a surname or political contacts to give him a social advantage has been historically abused by: “Quienes no llegaron a la meta colgaron sus laureles más que satisfechos porque desde sus gobernaduras, intendencias, alcaldías, cocinaron una succulenta olla de ingresos, rentas y jubilaciones. Por ejemplo,

aprendieron el arte de despojar de sus tierras a los mapuches.”¹³⁵ Each chapter intones an intent to communicate with an audience as if each vignette were an epistolary essay, or even more plainly, a letter written to one reader at a time. The tone of the narrative comes across at times as intimate. At others, as a lecture to an audience on a topic that is personally meaningful to the speaker. One can easily imagine professor Alegría, addressing a group from a university podium, making eye contact with each person in the audience, or Fernando Alegría, the gregarious Chilean, reminiscing during an informal *sobremesa*.

These chapters convey a populist ideology, underscoring the all-too-forgotten value of the individual person; reminding us that sovereignty is a humanistic value more than a notion of political prerogative as a political purpose. This literary sojourn is the recalling of a life while also expressing a yearning for social justice without ever deviating from their essential role of storytelling. The architecture of Alegría’s phrases leaves room for semantic analysis. Built into the narrative subtext is the expectation that among those who read this work there are those willing to contribute to bring about gradual social changes by simply commenting about the work and the injustices depicted in them, thus casting seeds of political conscience to the winds, spawning notions for further reflection.

Aside from being an atypical memoir, this work is neither fully a novel, nor fully a chronicle. It is clearly multivalent. However, it does bear uncanny resemblance to a diary or journal. It is all of these things. But Alegría (or his editor) called it a memoir. Almost, which in this context translates as “una especie.” By not telling the full truth, Alegría avoids telling an outright lie. Alegría’s alleged memoir is nonetheless an echo chamber of live moments celebrating his main character’s individuality, and that of his fellow Chileans, defying the looming and omniscient powers that accost them. This memoir is a veritable triptych of the

¹³⁵ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 81.

narrator's own conscience unfolding as he becomes a participatory member of his society. These chapters document his journey from curious but self-engrossed youth to a political activist whose ego ends up wounded after being spurned by a woman (reversing the traditional trend) and abandoned by the leader at the helm of the nation. Being both spurned and abandoned, he suffered the loss of two different loyalties, but these amputations sobered him politically and hastened his humanistic development.

The narrator of *Una especie de memoria* embraces a glimmer of feminism or cutting-edge humanism—one exhumes the inclination from the subtext—by endorsing the notion that *sovereignty of the self* is everyone's natural right, a notion that cannot necessarily be pinned down in any given citation, but which undeniably breathes through its prose. The narrator has no name. He jumps into the story mis-en-scene. The first chapter restates the work's title. It thrashes about for a North, for a course yet to be set: "seguiré esforzándome por descifrar... todo el sol acumulado en un balde vacío,"¹³⁶ much as it is during one's youth as the narrator takes us back to the main character's earliest memories of his self shaping its own sovereignty. It's allegedly the narrator's voice that tells this "road" story, sojourning along a path toward a higher socio-political consciousness, toward an ever-sharper political sense of self—and from it, manifesting a keener sense of humanity. This voice that ensnares and guides us plays the role of a human chrysalis, never quite developing into a winged butterfly, into a full persona, self-aware and respectful of the galaxy of humanity and of nature surrounding him—yet the novel shows us a glimmer of such awakening as the novel closes, leaving us with a sense of hope.

An explanation of the structural framework of "Novela I," the second chapter, is in order to illuminate the effectiveness of the narrative. Alegría employs a limited narrator in two ways. The narrator keeps the reader at arm's length from having an insight into the main character's

¹³⁶ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 13.

inner being, his feelings and his emotion-driven decisions. Early in the story, the narrator complains about living within suffocating walls: the home, the father's store, the school, the *tranvía* or cable car. The narrator admits having chosen a path: "La decisión de no entregarse es, en cuanto a mí s refiere, una voluntad inconsciente de usar a los demás"¹³⁷ at the expense of other choices not pursued, such as marrying one or the other of his Maruri street girlfriends, both of whom ended up spurned and hurt. The mechanism of the telling is often in the implied first-person of verbs. The narrator looks back at the teenager the author was as he, the teenager, we assume inhabits the mind of the author, who, by the time he pens this work is well into his sixties. The reader adopts Alegría's nationalistic fervor for his *terruño* when sharing the hearth in domestic scenes or collegial encounters with the part of him that narrates, which could be the Freudian Id. Later in the memoir, the Id is replaced by the author's superego, by his moral conscience.

Consistent with the literary criticism of Gérard Genette, Alegría has employed the technique of "transtextuality," which Genette defines as "todo lo que pone al texto en relación, manifiesta o secreta, con otros textos."¹³⁸ In his narratological studies, Sonja Bāsić tells us that Genette "builds systems on the basis of linguistic analogies."¹³⁹ But Genette also postulates: "no narrative can show or imitate the story it tells... narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating – mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words."¹⁴⁰ Among those other texts not cited specifically in the memoir figures Neruda's autobiography, *Confieso que he vivido*, as well as a panoply of works, biographies, memoirs, novels and plays

¹³⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 35.

¹³⁸ Gérard Genette (1930-2018). Influenced by narratology, Genette "revolucionó la crítica literaria" (*Le Nouvel Observateur*). http://www.milenio.com/cultura/gerard_genette-muerte-narratologia-critica_literaria_0_1173482882.html.

¹³⁹ Sonja Bāsić, "From James' Figures to Genette's 'Figures': Point of View and Narratology" in *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines*, 17, Écrivains Américains, 1870-1914, *American Writing in the Age of Realism* (May 1983), p. 207.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 207. It harkens to Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (163-4).

penned by writers Alegría acknowledges as sources of inspiration. The transtextuality Genette posits is vast; it is intuitive. In *The Art of Memoir*, Mary Karr writes: “voice is the narrator... natural expressions of character.”¹⁴¹ She also writes of “truthiness”¹⁴² as a factor in contemporary societal discourse. In concert with her ideas, Alegría addressed directly through his narrator the historical reality of a Chilean real-politik, which favored a stable oligarchy and supported swift, forceful reprisals against social uprisings. In a like-minded take on the genre, Patricia Foster writes in *Stripping the Memoir*: “Contradiction is at the heart of confession.”¹⁴³ Another work, Ben Yagoda’s *Memoir: A History*, attributes to the 21st century memoir an expected: “leeway or looseness with facts.” In the same work, Yagoda quotes Gore Vidal: “A memoir is how one remembers one’s life.”¹⁴⁴ Clearly, Alegría’s work has elements of the above thinkers of the genre, but he also contributes his own stylistic innovations.

Especie de memoria, nevertheless, is an unquestionably elusive memoir. The echo of his love affair with Leonor hovers over his recall with a poignancy from which he seems to never have quite recovered. She should be lauded, albeit posthumously, for enabling him to look back at his journey and, in the process, meet her once more, if only in this novel.

This novel offers narrative instances when the notion of authoritarianism, while not explicit, makes itself felt. In his “memoirized” autobiographical exercise, the overwhelming power of the state swells at different times, in different places, seizing our citizen-narrator by surprise. Disconnected life sections are laced together with a seemingly detached tone. The first-person singular narrator appears unfazed throughout the work, as if detached emotionally in

¹⁴¹ Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir* (2015), 36.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴³ Patricia Foster, “Stripping the memoir” in *The Iowa Review*, 35.1 (Spring, 2005), p. 172.

¹⁴⁴ Ben Yagoda, *Memoir: A History* (2009), 2-3.

order to tell the story objectively, while steeped in the political process of his country's highly stratified social history.

Alegría's stand in, a protagonist who also represents the whole of society, the "we" mentioned in the story, is essentially the one person compelled to hurl himself into the tale with the intention of acting as the enormously committed thinker, keen observer and severe critic of the very elements that shaped him. The narrative sections often begins with a Spanish language verb conjugating the first-person plural, "we," only it's often an implied "we" in the usage of a verb in Spanish, suggesting the narrator could also be the author, including the reader, and Chilean society, or anyone entering its universe. This makes it possible to dispense with the pronoun, thus adding to the thrall of ambiguity. Within such a structure obligating the reader to witness events from the ground within the story, as another citizen swept by the roaring river of current history, one feels attuned to the political atmosphere, where the air is thick, where folks hardly self-restrain from their rage, brimming to burst against coalescing dictatorial powers that are manifested by words, condescension, aggression, proclamations, alterations in public services met with public discontent and disturbing apprehension. Less obliquely, scenes include gentle folk that go about their modest lives suddenly juxtaposed with bar brawls, armed guerrilla, and a violent police. In *Una especie de memoria*, it is explicitly and purposely unclear who narrates.¹⁴⁵ Alegría shifts his meanings. By employing "yo" he means "I." But other times this "yo" feels societal, as if the term is a codifier for the collective "we." The same occurs when the narrator addresses this "other" self, the "tú," which is the main character, Alegría's alter ego liberated from the narrative first person voice, where the narrator participates in the action and comments on it. Where "tú," is substituted for the "yo," it refracts the point of view even further. In

¹⁴⁵ In *The Art of Memoir*, Mary Karr writes: "writers' voices make you feel close to—almost inside—their owners" (2015:36).

Especie, the use of *tú* signals a flashback of regret: “Tú no puedes evitar...,”¹⁴⁶ where this “tú” is Leonor addressing young Fernando, but in the decades-long memory of this exchange, a lingering weight of burdened conscience festers, as if this “You cannot” suggested that maybe he could but didn’t do something that perhaps was within his power to avoid--- where Alegría reclaims a sense of guilt by intruding into the narrative bearing an old cross, be it a justified or an outlandish *mea culpa*.

Taking some distance from the text, a reader is made to feel as if both the narrator and the author have stepped outside of their shared space inside the protagonist, and are speaking to him, the reader, as a separate entity who is also a mirror for the common man. The reader is in this highly convoluted and complex manner once again recruited, albeit subversively to act as a stand-in for the principal player and invited to see himself as the “tú” or “you” being spoken of, or to, in the text. Here, the narrator conflates the singular with the plural, the individual with the collective. *Sovereignty of the self* speaks of a national sovereignty embodied in each citizen, whose collective makes up the nation. This collective individual, in direct defiance of its seemingly oxymoronic state of being, stands up against the increasingly totalitarian powers that impinge upon the dignity, the integrity, the self-determination, and the “territory” in the human body of the average person, whose common denominator is none other than his *indivisible* sovereignty. From Niccoló Machiavelli¹⁴⁷ and Jean Bodin,¹⁴⁸ who both signaled in their own

¹⁴⁶ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 187.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty* (2007), 47. “The transformation ... of the regnum into what Machiavelli referred to as the *stato*, the state and states system of emergent modern Europe.” Also, “Was political power... something... that could be acquired and used by secular rulers at their own discretion?” This question anticipates Machiavelli and modern politics. In *Discourses on Levy*, Machiavelli wrote that dictatorship --authorized for a limited amount of time-- may be used to correct State deficiencies that couldn’t be resolved through negotiations; such a dictatorship is an acceptable option for the Republic only if its means and objectives coincide with the common good.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., “The political theory of sovereignty is systematically explored at length and in depth for the first time in Jean Bodin’s *Les six livres de la Republique* (1576).”

right the birth of modernity, to our contemporary Kofi Annan,¹⁴⁹ power in the form of sovereignty had been understood to rise from the people for transfer to those who lead. And it is for the purpose of serving each and every one among *we the people*, the person, the individual, that this power—as fleeting in nature as it is and is meant to be—has been temporarily entrusted to the leader, these thinkers tell us, even during absolutist eras, even when it was *believed* that power was the exclusive property of the monarch.

Una especie de memoria is a meditation and a reckoning. It bridges the years during which the central figure enjoys the innocent bliss of youth not yet aware of the reality his immediate surroundings hide beneath the veneer or sheen of sweet remembrance; most poignantly, the authoritarian and totalitarian forces readying to burst out in the open. He later faces up to those clumsy blunders of perception, delicate interpersonal dialogues left frayed, showing here to regret them. He also shows his insensibility, his immaturity, toward the subtle yet corrosive political underpinnings contaminating the national atmosphere. Eventually, he undergoes the profound transformation that converts him into the “proto” or prime individual who then incites other individuals—cast in the memoir’s supporting roles and lending authenticity to the era being evoked—to embrace and adopt the societal and political dimensions of the narrator’s national concerns.

Chapter One echoes the memoir’s title and visits familial ancestry, the socio-economic environments that accompanied the narrators childhood, and the vague political atmosphere, which we see how our protagonist was reared and socialized, critical to establishing the framework which precipitates his coming of age. In the second chapter, “Novela I,” the young man emancipates himself from the strictures and exigencies of his social class. His stomping

¹⁴⁹ Kofi Annan, “Two Concepts of Sovereignty” in *The Economist*, September 1999. “Individual sovereignty: the fundamental freedom of each individual.”

grounds expand to include the grittier city neighborhoods where the poor and marginalized dwell. Here we begin to appreciate the larger nation and its unfurling political changes that defy a clear grasp combined with the uncertainty of the character's understanding of self and others. The author has unrung the bell of maturity in this peculiar glance toward the past. Chapter three, "Crepúsculo de Maruri," offers us a pristine window into the characteristic idiosyncrasies of Chilean identity and the political complexities around which an erstwhile Alegría—vía his narrator and protagonist—develops an awareness of his status as a member of the lower-middle class and its incumbent confines. Chapter four, "Morir Pollo," takes a decidedly political turn. The public sphere becomes a personal arena and the private is portrayed as largely inseparable from the socio-political. The fifth and final chapter, "Novela II," mines more deeply the realm of the main character's conscience. His ethical and political identity faces numerous challenges at a time when Chile undergoes internal chaos. The main character's *sovereignty of the self* is measured and tested relative to the sovereignty afforded his fellow-citizens,' while a series of governments consolidate power with increasingly more open authoritarian strategies. As a corollary, the military begins to act as if it were simply the most active, organized and beloved political party in Chilean history.

"Una especie de memoria"

This first of the five chapters does more than just reiterate the memoir's title. It establishes the title and the incipient book as a "sort of" or "type of" memoir, overtly defining the opening salvo or chapter as a work that is as yet still in a primordial, unformed state, a project waiting to take definitive shape, a memoir by approximation. It is no accident that the

book was published in 1983 at the height of the most violent military dictatorship in Chilean history. The work was launched as a public contribution to the artistic, social, philosophical and political discourse in Chile, but also as an act of subtextual reckoning, ten years after a treasonous and deceptive maneuver by a high-ranking Chilean army officer, General Augusto Pinochet, led to the 1973 military overthrow of President Allende.

It was as though Alegría intended to intrigue the reader by revealing that underneath the inconclusive fog of authoritarianism spanning much of the 20th century, one could readily discover a Chile rich in cultural humanism and artistic as well as creative freedom. To Alegría, it was crucial for the world to know that prior to 1973, Chile had enjoyed a healthy democratic tradition and enduring peace, albeit, a cautious one given the frayed balance between workers and oligarchs with armed police and military forces often ordered to quash protests and popular upheavals. *Especie* also reveals that despite the fact that the military dictatorship radically altered civic existence, a phrase –military dictatorship-- that has been abstracted from its pages: “Realizan maniobras en un regimiento... . Están llegando Nazis de otras ciudades,”¹⁵⁰ the culture managed nonetheless to survive in clandestine ways. People continued to be who they had always been: gregarious, sociable: “Leonor encendía un cigarillo, me alargaba la tasa de té.”¹⁵¹ The narrator adds: “Entre escalerillas y balastradas de yeso amarillento aparecían los nocturnos policías abrazados a cuerpos inmóviles, entrándoles con aletazos de mantas de castilla, hacienda tintinear sus sables y espolines al ritmo de un jadeo que no acababa nunca. Se oían sirenas lejanas y caía el crepúsculo con aire de inocencia sobre las sombras de una vida tranquila, diariamente enamorada.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 187.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Santiago became politically both more cautious and courageously irreverent than ever in their national history. As we enter farther into the world of *Una especie de memoria*, the clock rewinds and we find ourselves clad with the vetements of the early 1970s, thumbing our noses at the upper classes and at traditionalist authoritarian regimes,¹⁵³ while also drawing political energy from a populist exuberance Alegría is delighted to celebrate and support. The vantage point from which our narrator peers back at the 1930s and 1940s is situated in the 1980s. From there, he tightens in on a period just before the mid-20th century. This plants him firmly in the neorealist school. In this memoir-novel, Alegría shows that he embraces a strong inclination to live by the *sovereignty of the self*, self-reliant but sociable and selective in his choices. He is a political activist wishing for a regime to be instituted that supports civil society. He prefers a national structure where power's hegemony is in decline and the individual rises to fill that gap in partnership with statist structures. He is Althusserian in the sense that while he's aware of social class differences and boundaries, where social classes create the state's structure,¹⁵⁴ Alegría's main character enjoys the dual posture of blending into the social mores but also transgressing social boundaries, thus dashing the strict Althusserian thesis: he makes friends with low-level thieves, with the aristocracy of Chilean intellectuals, and makes a lover out of Leonor, who is another man's wife. These facts are illustrated via passages in this memoir by the portrayal of a collective democratic spirit among the populace, contrasted by the fact that ordinary people still suffered under successive governments, which readily resorted to unimpugned military action taken against them when they dared exercise that democratic spirit too vigorously.

¹⁵³It should be noted that in the case of Chile, the youthful and freedom-loving spirit of cultural renewal that swept the world during the 1960s continued into the 1970s, but ended abruptly with the 1973 coup d'état.

¹⁵⁴M. S. John, "Realism, Neorealism and Critical Theory: A General Essay" in *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 54.1 (Jan-March 1993), p. 138.

While living in exile, Alegría fictionalizes the experience of a returning exile and explores the psychological dissonance upon his homecoming. He does so as an intellectual outsider with neo-colonial tendencies who revisits Santiago, once a frontier outpost, but now an important metropolitan center, bringing ideas and perspectives that are both new and foreign. Alegría adroitly abstains from embellishing the memoir with his presence and instead sets the stage for a passing of the symbolic torch. Through the voice of the narrator, we are guided through an encounter with a past, which is the sole domain of the main character. While devoting space to a few writer friends, our narrator behaves with a restlessness that jolts us, spiking our desire for a resolution to each vignette, which our narrator leaves as he found them, in *media res*.

As the initial leg of an unprecedented literary journey, the first chapter sets a somewhat ambivalent tone. It's underscored by the loosely gathered structural format that reverberates throughout the rest of the memoir. It meanders across a landscape of incidents and experiences that are jarringly different from one another and often ignore traditionally linear storytelling in which causality and continuity are immutable constructs. One passage describes our main character engaged in young love in his neighborhood. Then, without apparent transition, our narrator delves into his family life tangentially. But then, turbulence and confusion surface as devices in the narration to touch on that particular era's competing political forces. There are jolts and narrative inertia probably mirroring national dislocations. Alegría's narrator illustrates how the individual and the collective are intricately intertwined: "era yo una clase especial de sujeto inconsciente, no existía en mí una racional comprensión del peligro... las amenazas carecían de contenido conceptual, ni las sentía ni me las imaginaba."¹⁵⁵ Government-provoked financial hardships mixed with social discontent reached the individual through social intercourse. One of the major events that shook Chile was the Great Depression and the

¹⁵⁵ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 19.

monopolies that pressured the Chilean economy, becoming indicative of financial trouble in the United States' banking system and the effects of political and human drama associated with the Civil War in Spain, both of which spilled their impact on the small but tempestuous South American outpost—not to speak of the domestic crises constantly tugging at people, eroding their survival. So, yes, the bumpy narrative reflects this turmoil.

Add to these already far-reaching and broad strokes the internal emotional and psychological dilemmas our young protagonist faced amidst a socially-adverse climate at home in Chile, where such foreign pressures and concerns somehow permeate the private lives of average citizens, where the resulting motley stew can be surmised. The young man we follow, who we assume is the as yet unnamed Fernando. He is described as though he idolizes his father, a decisive man who eschews intellectual pursuits as the final arbitrator and authority in all matters. The narrator omits his mother completely. Oddly, he acknowledges siblings of both genders but says nothing about them and opts instead to describe those who become his surrogate family: schoolmates, colorful neighbors, characters met in a local bar, the store, or on the cable car, all tantalizing archetypes. They often hail from among those near the bottom of the economic and social system in a country where class divisions matter.

The narrator combines orality with prose modalities, an amalgam of various styles and literary currents derived from across the globe, filtered undoubtedly, through this author's critical works. *Alegría*—in the guise of narrator—ushers the reader into the fray of the events and lives he chronicles. The memoirist's voice throughout is distinct and unmistakable. When *Alegría* as author enters the narrative as himself, it is our objective within the scope of this study to examine, contextualize and interpret such anomalies. The narrator is stingy with outbursts meant to convey or elicit great emotion. But the emotional restraint, more than likely a deliberate

authorial decision, does not diminish the left-leaning ideology that pervades the narrative as a whole.

Even as we read explicitly, or surmise, that the military is prepared to initiate aggression following peaceful protests of government crackdowns on non-belligerent dissidents, we are cautiously infected with the Alegrian trust that democracy and human decency will triumph. That this military readiness has been practiced for centuries in ceaseless clashes with Chile's own indigenous populations is something the memoir neglects to mention.¹⁵⁶ This glaring omission sheds light on the Alegriana universe's predominant worldview; that is, on Chilean society's complicity with an inherent bias, long nurtured by historians, themselves children of the oligarchy -- a critical view the narrator sidesteps. *Especie* gives us insights into a panoply of parameters of socialization that inform both the narrator and Alegria.

The narrator is seemingly unaffected—writing from exile—by the economic blight resulting from political shifts, which those of his social class in Chile reeled from.¹⁵⁷ There is obviously a psychological component missing from the memoir, a guideline Alegria intentionally fails to make available to the reader, even as suspicion of its existence hovers over the text. It's as if the author hiding behind the narrator has something he wishes to hide from himself on an emotional level. The narrator seduces us with hints and brief insights and then, cruelly, withholds crucial understanding. Resonating eerily with the nuances of dictatorship, he opens up his hand, but then makes a fist.

¹⁵⁶ Chile's Constitution has established that the military is at the service of the civil government. However, political history has shown that in times of crisis, the military exists to serve the oligarchy, impinging upon civil liberties, thus reversing the Constitutional pledge.

¹⁵⁷ The tone of the memoir's language denotes the fact that Fernando Alegria, author, underwent three changes of social class: low-middle in his early years in Chile, plain middle-class stock as an academic in the United States, and probably upper-middle-class when back in Chile, visiting as an established author, and as a diplomat in the United States at the service of Chile's president Salvador Allende. Linguistically and socially, however, for the Chilean aristocracy, a low-middle class person's origins, regardless of accomplishments, with rare exceptions (ie., Neruda), locks him in the class of his beginnings.

We're swept into Recoleta, our main character's childhood *barrio* on the outskirts of Santiago: "...recuerdo el grupo de pacos bebiendo como ranas su vino voleta, escupiendo o suspirando, veo a mi padre con el cuchillo en la mano rebanando el arrollado, oigo voces, gritos, balazos, carreras de gente proleta por la Avenida de la Paz."¹⁵⁸

Firmly planted there, his family addresses economic challenges and circumstances within the framework of their class and social status. For adults, professional careers, employment and even unskilled jobs are scarce. Patriotism, embraced by all, is akin to compliance with authoritarianism, which many bristle against. The first two decades of the narrator's life are described selectively; a hop scotch across time, emphasizing certain moments, deliberately avoiding others, forming an anthology of incomplete vignettes---as if to suggest that life's imperfections make it complete. At the same time, our protagonist alludes to his own disillusion after learning that his father actively supported an authoritarian hand at the helm of the country's government. While our main character abhorred military and civilian dictators, he subconsciously also admired them.

Alegría's narrator describes urban scenes with adobe structures and ramshackle homes. His home is cast as plebeian, with just enough room to pile sleeping children next to stacked provisions and merchandise for the store Alegría's father owned: "la casa era uno de esos viejos bultos polvorientos."¹⁵⁹ In these cramped quarters, the Alegría clan toiled and dreamed of breathing space, which the body politic was bent on stifling. It is difficult to know whether the narrator ran off with the words in this memoir, or whether Alegría wrote and edited, re-edited and revised it, clearly saddled by self-restraint, while telling truths yet protecting his ego, his pride --each of their self-sovereignties--, his family image to the world, so that it would not be

¹⁵⁸ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 16.

bruised by rhetorical self-flagellation: “Mi padre tuvo un almacén de abarrotes... En ese almacén las noches eran violentas. Tenían el color del vino y el olor inquietante de los gruesos ponchos de castilla... .”¹⁶⁰

Alegría’s narrator paints the *barrio* of his youth as a political powder keg ready to explode. This is a thin sliver of backdrop to the era’s history. The narrator places young Fernando, a symbolic agent of social change propelled by ancient socio-political currents, long-lodged in the collective unconscious, where the past pours its accumulations on the present. His narrator looks back in time to the month of September of a given year. It takes a moment for one to realize he’s not referring to the coup d’etat of September 1973 (while foreshadowing it), but to a previous September during the author’s early youth, long before the coup year could ever be anticipated or, least of all, imagined. He does say that each September, when Spring begins, awful things occur: “Pensándolo bien, con toda la astucia que da el tiempo mal vivido, este año empezó en septiembre y no en enero.”¹⁶¹

Una especie de memoria unfolds as a meeting place where the past is re-encountered and the preterite verbs suggest a re-tooled present tense: “Conmigo hablaba, a los demás les hacía gestos de muda.”¹⁶² A woman still speaks to him from their shared past, her words pertinent to the present. In psychological terms the past gives significance to the present. In imaginative terms, this memoir reinvents the past by replacing the forgotten with a few strokes delineating its silhouette: “Servía el mesón una mujer joven, de ojos muy oscuros y hondos, arratonada y calurosa, anhelante.”¹⁶³ Our narrator is absorbed with the immediate. Alegría’s narrator introduces us to non-military violence as well. He shares the details of a horrific murder as the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 11.

¹⁶² Ibid., 15.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 15.

result of a knife fight. He speaks of violence and of love with equal detachment—as if love were a form of violence, a threat against the freedom of his inner being. The city is deceptively calm. He’s known violence to be the escape valve of the very poor and frustrated. Beyond his neighborhood, the landscape looks placid. Wars are being fought underground in the mansions, in the halls of power, where they go unseen and unheard. But it is clear that things are not what they seem. In his experience, there’s love one moment, violence another: “unos vecinos me llamarían sin voz desde su residencial ametrallada.”¹⁶⁴ The dictatorial hand of a government that had promised benign peace is felt as a tension in people’s lives, an atmosphere that is variously depicted in many scenes.

The overwhelming power of the state swells sporadically, in each of this work’s chapters there are narrative moments, places, allusions when the specter of authoritarianism, while not explicit, nonetheless makes itself felt. Each chapter is a collection of disconnected scenes laced together to give the reader the broad strokes of a rich but tumultuous memoir. The first-person singular narrator appears unfazed throughout, as if unaffected emotionally by the dramatic narrative in order to tell the story objectively, while steeped in the political process of his country’s highly stratified social history.

Each paragraph shift subjects the reader to vertigo. Chilean life is not for the timid. Declarative sentences remind the reader of broken sidewalks and lives held together by wire and string. Phrases connect into sentences and they jump in unrelated ways. Much like memory flashbacks. They’re untidy. Those dreamy recalls pull the reader to a place of insecurity when that life is mired in poverty and mocked by lofty dreams.

In one recollection, uniformed police—public representatives of a repressive institution—help themselves to food and drink being sold by merchants, shouting drunken obscenities in the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

street and, we infer, paying nothing for the meat sandwiches served politely to them. They are thugs, instilling fear on one hand and brandishing the promise of protection with the other: “sargentos y cabos bebían con la lengua afuera y los ojos colorados... qué decían, sé que lo decían a gritos.”¹⁶⁵

The careful reader will also ascertain recurrent literary archetypes interspersed throughout, among them the religious studies imparted to a pre-adolescent protagonist by an Austrian clergyman,¹⁶⁶ dogmas our young narrator must then cast off in order to carve out experiences of his own. Our character seeks “home” at every turn, but dodges any semblance of a romantic or emotional commitment. He affects an affinity for vagabondology, adventure-seeking where there are no restraints on his own mobility. He rails against authoritarianism, and yet assumes dogmatic postures of his own.

Alegría opens up to the reader hesitantly. The traumatic memories he tells about are scarce. The reader senses the narrator’s moods and states of mind. At times, he is shy. At others, he is open and gregarious. He then turns excessively masculine -- bears a machista swagger. He will later withdraw into a diplomatic demeanor. But then, when it comes to conquering nubile hearts and to sexual exploits, he brags and behaves graphically on the page: “humedeciéndome con largos besos ardientes,”¹⁶⁷ flaunting his bravado. But overall, he tends to self-restrain. The dearth of extroversion is perhaps an indication that there is more to story, locked tightly away in the author’s childhood but no less resonant for a writer at the summit of his creative prowess. Alegría’s experiment in genre hybridity itself begs the question. Should an author be true to biographical continuity in order to bolster a belief in his personal identity? Why is Alegría content to write a *sort of* memoir rather than an honest, unfiltered personal one? He offers a

¹⁶⁵ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, 15.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 15.

sweeping array of narrative detail to buttress the memoir and balance its idealistic socio-political pulse. By calling it *a sort of memory*, he leans on the side of honesty when reliable memory fails, or when lingering pain evinces untouchable subject matter. *Una especie de memoria* overlaps with the diarist's narrative of his other fictionalized but also historicist's biography, *Allende: mi vecino el presidente* (1989). Since Allende is omitted from this slim tome, it is worth noting that in *Allende, mi vecino el presidente*, Alegría spills his guts. He does for Allende what he dares not do for himself: face the truth unabashedly.

As much as Alegría rails against fascism and the rise of dictatorship, is the reader not also a symbolic citizen exposed to the impunity of the author's *authoritarianism*? The very question is almost anathema. But among the myriad possible responses lies admission of authorial unreliability. In a more confessional passage, young Fernando is adamant that he fears the love of a woman more than a physical beating from a bully. He relates, as example, an encounter with a highway robber when he was only 16: "Cuando... caminé a través de la Cordillera de los Andes... hube de prestarle mis zapatos a un cogotero argentino. No pudiendo pasar él la frontera... debió desviarse por senderos de contrabandistas. 'Me los prestás... te los devuelvo al otro lado' ... apareció... me devolvió los zapatos."¹⁶⁸

Simultaneously, *Una especie de memoria* acknowledges forgetting as an integral part of remembering, enabling selective chronological recall, a prioritizing of collective histories that the individual and pluralized narrators—as extensions of Alegría—are exclusively empowered to articulate.¹⁶⁹ Alegría enhances the narrative with Chilean vernacular, providing local flavor, conveying the orality of his social class, but it is the narrator who delivers to us the verbal thumbprint of individuals, at once acknowledging persons but also denying the individual

¹⁶⁸ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

sovereignty of their unique voices. He inserts elements from poetry into prose, potentially risking losing aesthetic impact. He places his narrator in the added difficult circumstance for the non-Chilean reader of having to grapple with a geographically ambivalent Spanish. Witness the following metaphor supposedly unfolding in the banks of the river that crosses the capital city of Santiago as the narrator describes childhood tragedy: “Los pelusas que salían de la escarcha del único río verdaderamente nuestro no crecieron porque nadie creía en ellos. Saltaron de piedra en piedra, de unos brazos a otros brazos, perdiendo el aliento cuando se abrían para esfumarse.”¹⁷⁰ He compares abandoned children to morning dew. In time, they will disappear just as water evaporates. The novel’s narrator takes us to adjoining nature and to the city outdoors. Interrupted pathways populate both the narrator’s memory and his nostalgia, where memory bends into fiction: “me veo en la huella de esos sacos y esos tarros, en los aros de hierro que conducíamos con pericia por la calle Maruri, abriendo paso al siglo, presintiendo ya en ese abandono el día en que una cordillera se alejaría de mí para siempre.”¹⁷¹ The narrator takes liberties with speech by employing local slang as well as generic Spanish. As a diarist, his intended audience is the writer himself. Prose thus written, mostly clear and Pan-Hispanic in its reach is at other times hermetic in its local dimension, revealing elements of provincialism, where it mirrors his society. He pens this work with seeming spontaneity, but we also feel the pull of self-censorship. But then, like young Fernando skipping over sidewalk tiles, we encounter audacity reflecting the indomitable spirit of the young liberated Republic. Word choices, common terms not quite slang, nuanced with a brush of mystery pepper the text, which in certain contexts become a form of rebellion,

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 13. “Los pelusas” refers to virtually abandoned children. Literally, specks of dust. In slang, “pelusas” means soil clothes. Its social meaning is that these youths born of worthless low-class people besmirch reputations if the rescuer from a sense of perceived guilt is thought to be their parent. “Pelusas” might be orphans in an era when there were no foster homes to house, clothe, feed and properly raise unwanted children, or the offsprings of misery and dire poverty.

¹⁷¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 13.

alternatively shielding intention and hurling it in the open. Language is occasionally restrained and even muffled, but also liberated to leap from the lips of the disenfranchised against its buttoned European ancestors and fellow-*criollo* bosses through idiomatic insolence. Sometimes the shared native language becomes a nebulous arena, where words are couched as longing: “sonriendo desde la niebla, tratando de decirme algo que no se podrá entender, algo que seguiré esforzándome por descifrar...”¹⁷²

“Novela I”

“Novela I,” a chapter marked by an equally cinematic lyricism, introduces us to a trove of Alegrían images. They are gentle, pastoral, as well as indelible:

Era, entonces, un tanto incongruente ese ambiente de casas de clase media, orgullosas de sus mamparas de vidrio opaco y sus manillas golpeadores de bronce, y esos caballitos escuálidos, peludos, que trotaban su baile de polca arrastrando enormes cargas de hortalizas. Como si el campo reclamara aún esos senderos y los empleados públicos, militares, carabineros y contadores se los negaran... Yo vivía un período de atribulada juventud... me sumergía... en Dostoievski, cuyas *Memorias del subsuelo* leía y releía debatiéndome en mis propios absurdos delirios y remordimientos...¹⁷³

¹⁷² Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 19.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Many of the scenes our main character lived in his Santiago of the 1930s, he recognized in the byroads of Dostoevsky's 19th century narrations. Nearly every line of Alegría's text can be read as a metaphor for the concurrent political climate, whether it is the Russia of the 19th century's social plight, or Chile of the 1930s. The shared humanity is paralleled and interpreted from Alegría's narrator's prism perched in the 1980s. Ponderous circumstances are elucidated: "las luces son sobrias y las sombras recatadas."¹⁷⁴ Abruptly, Alegría describes how the appearance of a knife chases a man out of "el bar El Derby"¹⁷⁵ after which the fugitive is killed with a single stab: "En la esquina de Maruri y le entierra su puñal en la espalda."¹⁷⁶ One man, unknown, silenced, by being robbed of his life he loses his *sovereignty of the self* for all of us. Tethered as we are in the bond of humanity, we all lose a slice of self, Alegría seems to imply. A fog blurring a hill's silhouette evinces more: "veo la calle desierta, empapada, los árboles goteando. El Cerro San Cristóbal ha perdido sus contornos."¹⁷⁷

One senses from the narrator an enigmatic presence in the fog, in the mist, in the drizzle, something brewing deep in the native son's bones where intuition is often a reliable weather vane. The words fit. They are comfortable, familiar garments. Through the possession of words, through how he expresses them, he chisels his own character, the gradual sculpture of his *sovereignty of the self*: "recuerdo una joven, estudiante de cursos avanzados, se enamoró de mí... estuve hablándole largamente de mí y las palabras no tenían un significado inmediato sino algún poder de encantación adolescente, peligroso."¹⁷⁸ This is a text that may well have been written in

¹⁷⁴ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

parts fueled by strong coffee and peppered with the occasional expletive in visceral *criollo*, and lubricated with copious pisco sour.¹⁷⁹

The narrator and the reader sit together around the fire, look to the sky, sunshine illuminating other neighborhoods after a gray rain that accentuates the Chilean divisions: “se abre el cielo... . Otros gozarán de este brillo inesperado, pero será en otros barrios, en casas con mamparas y parqueé... .”¹⁸⁰ But, then, the narrator adds, when discussing the rift among Chile’s social classes, sensing the main character’s bruised inner core telling us: “No hay aquí un lugar preciso para mí.”¹⁸¹

Class and power... *agon*; that is, Greek for the philosophical center of conflict in the drama¹⁸² between the classes. It evokes the aim of equilibrium through justice that Antigone pursued with Creon. In *Una especie de memoria*, Fernando, playing the role of Antigone, pursues it with the Creons of 20th century Chile in the figures of dictators Videla, Ibáñez and Pinochet. Society seizes class advantage when it can, thriving in conflict, while nature retains the only enduring power. One of the rare explicitly emotional moments in *Una especie de memoria* brings us to “la visión es abrupta y me produce angustia,”¹⁸³ which appears in this chapter when the narrator expresses his irritation at the social imbalance, where tension becomes a negative social divider, where the young Alegría feels the humiliation of being less than the upper-class; his anxiety reflects an anxiety toward “my city!” 1930s Santiago.

The Santiago air that our character breathes reeks of moldy pre-Independence colonialism and a complacent post-Independence aristocracy that still wields its social advantage, not by

¹⁷⁹ Colleagues and friends that have survived Fernando Alegría have reminisced about the Chilean author’s inclination for the well-lubricated *tertulia*.

¹⁸⁰ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, 25.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸² Aristotle *Rhetoric*, where he states that *agon* is the center of a philosophical conflict in drama.

¹⁸³ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 25.

making social contributions of their own, but often by a vacuous and callous heritage. It could be said that our narrator invents his own country and re-anchors the center of power, dignifying people of all stripes –or no stripes-- so that we view Chile’s national life through his prism. He has us follow the main character as a witness and as an ideological victim of the political changes shaping and remolding the country as the century advances: “El alemán pelado al rape desapareció hacia la Colonia Dignidad... . Demasiada truculencia... hierros en los tobillos, avanzando en la madrugada hacia el pelotón de torturadores, me da pena.”¹⁸⁴ With Alegría’s narrator, we observe the average man fending for himself in a society where the militarized civilian government, or the military dictatorship, is pressured to protect the oligarchy, leaving the average man to survive by his own wits and on his own scarce resources.

Una especie de memoria pulls the curtain open to a consciousness of *sovereignty of the self* gradually being impinged upon by authoritarian regimes. Rather than protect it, the dictator challenges the individual’s sovereignty¹⁸⁵ in daily and small things, and does so relentlessly. Even love penetrates that personal moat of sovereignty and gets embroiled in a political climate of fear and suspicion, of self-defense and escapism in an innate longing for freedom. Fernando loved and was loved long before he understood its meaning, and less so, its responsibility: “Es posible que una persona jamás llegue a entregarse, que interesada en alguien levante una barrera de inmediato?”¹⁸⁶ There is the second level of sovereignty at stake and it is that the individual’s sovereignty, his personal integrity, is threatened by the powers of a militarized government that makes its encroachment felt with increasing pressure.

¹⁸⁴ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁵ *Sovereignty of the self*, also employing the term, *individual sovereignty*, is understood to mean a man’s personal freedom, physical integrity, as well as his ethic and moral self-determination while reciprocating with a respect for the law (State) and a reverence for all living beings (Nature).

¹⁸⁶ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 30.

For our protagonist, love encountered during his youth was another form of danger, much like police threatening people by their mere presence. Even physical weapons were preferable to the verbal sparring and emotional bouts he was hard-pressed to guard himself against. In retrospect, the narrator agrees that time does indeed make healing possible: “hoy que el tiempo ha cerrado las heridas.”¹⁸⁷

Slender as this memoir is, it has grown hefty with implied emotional weight. One is left emotionally spent. As the breeze from the tree-lined Parque Forestal blows across the romantic benches and pathways, which run parallel to the roaring waters of the Mapocho River, Fernando’s bruised self-esteem confesses: “Un temor que, traído desde la infancia, me acompañara a través de los años y a través de las personas que me quisieron y trataron de entender mi desconfianza... no pudieron.”¹⁸⁸

In one occasion he asks: “No te das cuenta de lo que te ofrezco? Preguntabas tú.”¹⁸⁹ This “tú” is a rarely used technique for the author to hide behind the reader when the question is most private, confessional, reflexive, a hindsight that is all too late to repair. The wound remains and cannot heal. It is said that the reader changes the novel the author meant to write. The unmasked narrator’s face reveals a mask, which conceals the author’s shamed expression, hidden behind the writerly craft. He can’t gaze at his own seeing; he who *dares* penning a memoir but hides from himself. Of all genres, the memoir in particular demands authorial courage. In this brave return to actions taken and decisions made a lifetime ago, courage can still seem to be in short supply.

The language can be translated, but can the innocence of the era find its equivalent among us? Neither Kayser nor Frye, renowned critical literature anatomists, address the point. How

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸⁸ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 35.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 34.

could they? The role is rightfully left to the novelist and the memoirist. Perhaps one of the responsibilities of the critic-author is to identify the elements of culture undergoing transition. In *Una especie de memoria*, one observes women as political activists, dislodging themselves from an inflexible social structure; language shakes off its formalities and the page reflects the candor, even the audacity required to express truths in the spoken native vernacular. This memoir is also the author's belated effort to understand the meaning of love in an increasingly oppressive political environment. Only years later, he confesses, did he come to regret not reciprocating her affection sincerely.

In crafting the memoir, Alegría acknowledges John Dewey, who believed “the tangible rests precariously upon the untouched and the ungrasped,”¹⁹⁰ a perception which befits the concluding words of Alegría's narrator for the chapter where in his first adolescence he addresses our main character's girlfriend Norma at the end of “Novela I,” where he leaves her and strolls off. “Nos iremos en direcciones opuestas. Norma, por absurda indicación mía, en dirección totalmente errada, hacia casas de población de empleados públicos, limpias pero perdidas en el mundo, iguales a todo y a nada, donde viviría con sus hijos.... En cuanto a mí, decidí caminar... fumando y perdiendo el lugar del crimen, alejarme buscando tierra y tiempo.” Oddly enough, that slow walk with the still slower cigarette allegorizes the longer, more laborious journey lying ahead; therein resides the beauty of leaving behind the second chapter in

¹⁹⁰ John Dewey, who saw humanism imbedded in the natural sciences, wrote ideas pertinent to states of exception, the unseen forces at play wrapped in the visible, which I see as the ubiquitous dictatorship, within which man must thrive by defending his *individual sovereignty*. Dewey writes: “The visible is set in the invisible; and in the end what is unseen decides what happens in the seen; the tangible rests precariously upon the untouched and ungrasped. The contrast and potential maladjustment of the immediate, the conspicuous and focal phase of things, with those indirect and hidden factors, which determine the origin and career of what is present, are indestructible features of any and every experience. (1925, p. 40) Nathan Snaza, “Is John Dewey's Thought ‘Humanist’?” journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/viewFile/627/pdf, p. 22.

¹⁹¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 60.

Alegría's memoir, a melancholy exit characterized by an inconclusive, existentialist walk, and the smoke of a cigarette spiraling upward in a cloud of ambiguity.

“Crepúsculo de Maruri”

“Crepúsculo de Maruri” opens a series of conflicts¹⁹² by foregrounding the ensuing plot to show that despite the appearance of civility there are undercurrents of unresolved historic issues. Foremost among these, the role of the oligarchy and the government (often the same) stands out in efforts to thwart working class upheavals: “Maruri era una de las arterias del sindicalismo chileno.”¹⁹³ *Una especie de memoria* doesn't give the reader a sociological blueprint before plunging *mis en scene*. Somehow it seems as though it is the superego, the Alegría narrator's moral conscience, which journeys back to his working-class beginnings: “Maruri era calle de cielos abiertos hacia la costa por donde se ponía el sol echándose sobre nuestros techos de tejas rojas ... pasaban carretelas hacia la Vega... una panadería incansable y maestranzas vacías.”¹⁹⁴ As we embark upon the fourth chapter of the work in question we understand, Alegría writes: “tiempos como los que vivimos... éstos del 38, los marcó la violencia.”¹⁹⁵ On Chilean city streets, the political discussions took on a different tone: “En las

¹⁹² Even though it would appear at first glance that nothing ever changed in Chilean society, where Alegría chronicles a yawning stasis, an air of conflict, which never ceased, permeated our organic. A It twt U Qa people's lives.

¹⁹³ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 74.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

reyertas de barrios bravos, no eran los elevados planteamientos ideológicos los que se discutían.... La tarea del rayado nocturno convirtiéndose en guerra armada, brutal.”¹⁹⁶

On hearing about foreign wars in the testimonies of recent European immigrants, the Chilean news media has reacted for that with input and criticism for high culture falling in the hands of the arguably undeserving: the proletarian class. Alone, a critic of Chile’s most powerful and conservative newspaper, *El Mercurio*, writes an oblique reference to well-known writers of humble roots, as well as about both Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda, the two Chilean Nobel laureates in poetry of humble origins, said, according to Alegría’s narrator: “la literatura chilena, propiedad exclusiva de la clase ‘alta’ durante el siglo XIX, se democratizó a principios del XX para terminar en manos de rotos y venidos a menos a partir del año 30, Dice: ‘bohemos sin familia conocida, una maestra de escuela rural, el hijo de un conductor de trenes, de tan humilde procedencia algunos que muchos ignoran su verdadero nombre, aunque todos repiten y aclaman su seudónimo.’”¹⁹⁷ It is obvious that there’s anger and envy in his words mixed together, words that reflect the mindset of a great number of upper-class Chileans, as if to say how dare the “rotos”¹⁹⁸ attain such lofty acclaim, and with those laurels demand *sovereignty of the self* for others of their ilk!

Bridging social issues, Volodia Teitelboim writes: “ayudarse con la fantasía para entender mejor el mundo ... en verdad, extensivo a gran parte de América Latina.”¹⁹⁹ Alegría’s Chile is sewn together by the voices, faces, poems and prose stories by a litany of writers and poets who populate his reminiscence. Many mourned the rising tide of fascism in alcoholic stupor. Rojas

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 114. “Rayado nocturno”: the furtive and furious writing of slogans with paint brushes on street walls in the dead of night while both daring and dodging the police.

¹⁹⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 82.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 82: “Roto” is a Chilean term for the poor wearing *ropa rota* or torn clothes, symbol for the lowest of the low. *Sovereignty of the self*, this study suggests, should be accessible to everyone, without class distinction.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 111.

Jiménez as told in *Una especie de memoria* was a case in point. Broke, he was thrown out of a bar after paying for a night of drinking with his shirt and his overcoat. He lied down outdoors, freezing and feverish, to die his alcoholized unconsciousness. Unnamed friends tossed him into a hole at the cemetery. There goes a beautiful man and his poems, Alegría tells us:

Caminó Rojas Jiménez bajo la lluvia unas cuabras, no resistió más el cansancio de Chile y se tendió en el zaguán de una casa a roncar como sirena de barco perdido en la niebla... sus compañeros... lo secaron y limpiaron, lo envolvieron en una vieja bandera chilena que alguien usaba como frazada, y, viéndolo afiebrado, diéronle una purga. Rojas Jiménez no se repuso de ella, ni de la fiebre, ni de la nostalgia... . Se murió en el sueño y, sin despojarlo de la bandera, lo metieron en su cajón, lo clavaron y lo despacharon al Cementerio General en carroza rápida y barata.²⁰⁰

There is the myth, the myth of unity, the myth of Chileanness showing that pitted against the rest of society that looks down upon iconoclastic bohemians these writers were indeed aligned in the same vision of national dignity, in the same sensibility that envisions the State of Chile acknowledging partnering with the individual's *sovereign of the self*. Instead, within their own society, they are an archipelago, adrift in differing verses and prose poems and visions of a utopia, a national *patria* for which they yearn, for which they long -- to call homeland, but which only exists in the mind, and in their cheaply printed yet lofty writings. Among them, the wealthiest as a result of being the most famous of all these wordsmiths, Neruda "Respetaba el temperamento de sus amigos y los cuidaba mientras bebían y comían... preocupándose de que no les faltara cijo en el brasero ni frazadas, ni erizos, ni vino, y protegíalos del mar bravo, de los perros imprevistos..."²⁰¹ Alegría gathers these shards of yesteryear, loose leaves of country,

²⁰⁰ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, pp. 71-72.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

episodes and diary sketches from a Santiago half a century in the past. Theirs is still an aural culture. Oh, they laugh! They do, and heartily, but Alegría's narrator omits the tempestuous, irreverent, childlike joyous outbursts, which are also a side of Chileanness, and most certainly declamatory of *sovereignty of the self!* Alegría's narrator is more severe. The subtext *feels* heavy with something else that is not uttered. There are rumblings of the specter of heavy-handed political edicts, whispered persecutions, military arrogance, political admonishments spilling onto the streets in seemingly hushed commentary "para desentrañar más a fondo el drama que afecta a su país."²⁰²

Given the author's inclination to be around the world of writers, the memoir's narrator tells us that the culture makers of the era as were Vicente Huidobro and Pablo Neruda, worthy literary opponents of each other, hurling mutual accusations from literary magazines,²⁰³ rise from the blurred imaginative to the documented non-fictional national history fomenting domestic artistic productions and publications, instilling national pride to a population increasingly gobbled up by foreign cultural influences. Neruda, the poet of love, created an association of intellectuals, and the magazine *Claridad*,²⁰⁴ to energize the country's cultural participation at a time when unseen convergences roiled. Neruda, a card-holding member of the Chilean Communist party, perceived increasing political forces positioning themselves in tandem with looming threats and right-wing extremist military pressures simmering within the country. *Una especie de memoria* sets the ground where the United States penetrates Latin America with its right-wing commercial and political ideology, and Spain becomes the battleground for competing ideologies in its Civil War with a model of dictatorship, Fascism, which the Chilean military was entertaining to emulate. *Una especie de memoria* shows us short glimpses of this

²⁰² Fernando Alegría's narrator cites an excerpt by Volodia Teitelboim in *Una especie de memoria*, p. 111.

²⁰³ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 107.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

international context. These imported ideas and ideologies, cultural models for governance in conjunction with the evolving corporate structure converge with Chile, where the economic and political scenario unravel to the exclusion of the voting public. The forces at work outside the influence or control of the general population reshape institutions creating obstructions for the public. These seep into the local phenomena forcing gradual societal readjustments unfurling into what's viewed as national life. These events belie the forces that condition public life. They occur in a questionably linear pattern, yet conform to how our main character witnessed and lived them, thus framing the narrative: “se venían todas las sombras del año encima, como grandes sacos, y en pie quedaban fachadas de edificios misteriosos.”²⁰⁵

The larger societal picture is thoroughly done without, forcing the reader to discern his bearings within *Una especie de memoria* outside its pages. In the rhythm of his word choices, his semiotics, within the bramble of the significations, the narrator's phrases usher us across public and private low-middle class environs. The choice of our main character's ideas, the issues that preoccupy him, his particular window to the Chile of his time and social milieu lead him, intuitively, perhaps even unawares, to focus his lens on societal dimensions through broad-strokes. Within these, we can appreciate some particulars, mostly literary, intellectual and cultural enclaves. This was always this narrator's primary inclination to the dismissal of other dimensions and realities located on the periphery of his gaze that could also define and clarify the same society. The roads not taken point to dimensions which another artist might cause a memoir to alter the narrative axis of what is important to recall, and thereby tell a vastly different story of the same decades. Be that as it may, Alegría's narrator gives us vistas and interactions articulated in paragraphs of varying length. The reader can only draw out restrained flashes of a rather self-engrossed artist's emotional insight: “la guerra interna... guerra interior de un

²⁰⁵ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 74.

artista.”²⁰⁶ Nonetheless, by taking in the breadth of Alegría socio-political consciousness according to this memoir’s design, itself a narrow, local, even provincial view of one man’s life’s sojourn within his rather insular society disclosing airs of cosmopolitanism, one observes a sensibility toward portraiture, oil painting, music, and film: “D’Halmar... Leí sus libros con voracidad Toda su prosa era una sombra de humo en el espejo. Aparecía, pero no se dejaba ver. Se le sentía, nunca se le palpaba. Fantasma sin huellas. Tenía sombra, pero ella no correspondía a su cuerpo.”²⁰⁷

In describing D’Halmar, the narrator acknowledges the author’s influences that go to craft *Una especie de memoria*. Once we’re in the flow of the reminiscence, we immediately realize that there is a sense of wistful caution in the voice that brings us the text: “Vivíamos la guerra española con angustia y pasión. Iban cayendo las ciudades y los pueblos, llenándose de sangre los ríos”²⁰⁸ while the underlying concern was to avoid something similar from happening in Chile. Social tension and ideological encroachment could be felt in the Santiago of our character’s university days. Would Chile go the way of Spain? “Recrudecía el terrorismo de gobierno; en Puerto Montt habían caído acribillados varios pobladores.”²⁰⁹ But then, ancient Inca history draws a relevant contemporary parallel. Alegría’s narrator pays homage to history’s heroes, to those with raw guts to stand for right. There is no loftier cause in Alegría’s choice of historic profiles than social justice by uttering the name of a mestizo historic figure of valor, Tupac Amaru, an ancient model of *sovereignty of the self* who stood up against repressive forces, a man who fought for his people against the Conquering Spanish in 18th century Perú, even though the memoir omits the historical clarification. Alegría’s narrator tells us: “Blanca Luz...

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 111.

²⁰⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 144.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 128.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 76.

desde un inmenso estrado, recitaba a la asamblea de estudiantes sus extraños versos, pronunciando Tupac Amaru con la lengua y las pestañas, dándole vuelta en su boca al murmullo de la quena y mascando consonantes como si fueran hojas de coca.”²¹⁰ By penning *Una especie de memoria*, the author attempted to pay silent homage to historic examples of civility that came across his path, leaving an emotional imprint in his being, but also an indigenous leadership vacuum across the centuries, an absence that appears most striking when authoritarianism is pendularly on the rise—again.

Alegría gives us a rich subtext. This chapter is illustrative of that. If *Una especie de memoria* represents the entrance to the catacombs, the subtext is the intricate maze past the threshold of the page. The narrator states: “... en la Alameda no muy lejos de donde murió Víctor Jara.”²¹¹ That is all that’s said about the murdered artist. The name of Víctor Jara is another iconic figure in the author’s procession of Chilean greats, again, a passing reference assuming the reader’s understanding without explaining his notable contribution. It is essential to clarify that Víctor Jara did not just die, as the narrator chooses to state. He was a singer-songwriter of political protest songs and a supporter of the socialist regime just deposed by force. In his enormously popular lyrics, he hoisted the simple man’s integrity, the historically excoriated Chilean peasant, mestizo and indigenous. Víctor’s features displayed all these bloodlines. He sang to the spirit of his *sovereignty of the self*. Víctor, clearly of indigenous stock himself, was an artistic warrior for justice, and was, as a result, tortured and assassinated by the military dictator Augusto Pinochet’s forces, shortly after the coup d’état that forced the suicide of socialist president Salvador Allende. In the omission of Víctor’s significance in this self-censored work written during the most ferocious era of military violence against civilians in

²¹⁰ Ibid., 106.

²¹¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 77. La Alameda, historically an elm-lined street (*álamos*), today is Santiago’s main and widest bustling boulevard lined by high rises.

Chile's latest non-euphemistic and unapologetic dictatorship, we recognize the *individual sovereignty* of all the nameless peasants Víctor's songs allude to, their struggle, their plight, yes, their sovereignty as it soars implied in the poetic compositions against oppression Víctor Jara sang strumming his guitar originals until his assassination by Pinochet's dictatorship in 1973 in a soccer stadium used as a concentration and murder camp. By the mere mention of his name in this almost-memoir, historic truth gives blurred memory a place of lucid, documentable legitimacy. Víctor's lyrics are clear. Poignant. The singer's gentle voice and his descriptive words tug at the heart. His verses are written in simple Spanish and tell simple stories everyone can understand. These stories come from the common national experience, urban and rural, but *Una especie de memoria* doesn't tell us any of that, nor why he became a national hero, or why the stadium that turned into a concentration camp where he was tortured and murdered now bears his name. *Alegría* doesn't tell us either that Víctor's corpse was found nearly disfigured by bullet holes in a ditch outside the stadium. For those few lines of text this is no longer "una especie de memoria," but a true "memoria." It suddenly becomes an historic and moral account which by including it on these pages constitutes a most courageous narrative act; that of honoring an enemy of the state, executed by it, during the current (1980s) state of exception—a sanitized phrase suggesting an era of government-condoned brutality. As Víctor's name is recognized, the narrator takes a back seat to the author, who confronts the regime by placing himself tacitly in the memory-evoking act.

Elsewhere in the text, the narrator peeks timidly into that bygone era, a world of speech patterns and modes of conversation that are now obsolete. It was a time when direct exchanges included an embroidery of manners and courtesies and worldviews different than ours—this was apparent across the social spectrum, but *Una especie de memoria* gives us at best a slim veneer

of that cultural vestige. Much like an era wine, Alegría's language in this prose recollection is drenched in anthropological intentions. This work, slender and euphemistic as it is, excluding much of the preciously symbolic social texture of the era, allows us the privilege of a gaze. The reader feels thrust into the contingency of cultural shift:

La Guerra Mundial había cambiado las cosas y nuestro gobierno compraba tiempo con papel moneda. Todos se endeudaban, pero mientras nuestros ricachones ganaban moneda dura y pagaban sus deudas con papelitos de colores, nuestra clase obrera sacaba cobre y salitre y, en pago, recibía billetes que pronto se desteñían. Surge ante mí una escena rápida y violenta... siempre la misma zozobra y angustia... . Un balazo sonaba y un vecino se iba de espaldas.²¹²

The narrator, which the reader can intuit emerges as a participating character, never reveals himself beyond the voice that shrouds the universe we're drawn into. This is a technique that lends the text a veil of mystery. It imbues it with ambiguity rippling through the action without committing the author to revealing his position. The narrator describes the events, but in so doing leaves room to gage and sense there's more; there are layers, and lightly dropped clues, semantics, sentence constructions leaving a thesaurus of options slightly ajar. Inevitably, one is left with the premonition that an augmenting political typhoon is churning, but it's done subtly, imperceptibly for those not quite grasping the historical context. One small illustrative episode is apposite. The narrator brings into the discussion one of Chile's foremost proletarian novelists, Nicomedes Guzmán, and is compared to Mexico's Juan Rulfo,²¹³ who sought literary expression to comment on his country's relation between the people and the powers that affect their lives.

The case of Chile resembled Rulfo's Mexico in the same era:

²¹² Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, pp. 75-76.

²¹³ Juan Rulfo belonged to the Mexican landowning class, even though his artistic sensibilities were clearly on the side of the proletariat.

Éste (Juan Rulfo) consiguió la conjunción de hermetismo y revelación sin recurrir a bellezas lingüísticas, sino a través de la constatación de los hechos desnudos por medio de una conciencia crítica. Esta conciencia se vale del único lenguaje que corresponde a la revelación de un mundo donde el personaje ha perdido el poder de cambiar los hechos, las cosas y las gentes. La simplicidad clásica de Rulfo es el producto del balance perfecto entre acción e impotencia.²¹⁴

Una especie de memoria identifies where flashpoints of dissent and constructive rebellion glimmer and burst on the social landscape. Writers, choreographers, playwrights find their niches whence to propagate the value of man artistically within a recurrently fascistic governance. A kindred impotence has riled the self-respect of the Chilean supine class. Other ripples came from various flanks. Artists contribute antidotes: “Pedro de la Barra... creó el teatro chileno contemporáneo.”²¹⁵ Alegría’s narrator adds, “enseñó que el teatro no es patrimonio de elites, sino que, nacido del pueblo en plazas, patios y atrios, debe volver al pueblo para recrearse en él y alimentarse de fuerzas históricas vivas y corrientes ideológicas de combate.”²¹⁶ But then he stays with De la Barra’s story because his artistic militancy is deeply tethered to his playwright’s staged opposition to the military regime of that era. Here’s the narrator seizing for himself the authorial voice:

Sé que después de 1973, mientras sus amigos y compañeros preguntábamos angustiados por él, Pedro encontró a su hijo Alejandro en una calle apartada de Santiago, lo abrazó y lo besó, lo vio alejarse a paso rápido y partió él también. En 1975, navegando rumbo al exilio, Pedro desembarcó en Maracaibo y compró un

²¹⁴ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, pp. 117-118. Juan Rulfo is cited.

²¹⁵ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 125.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

periódico en un quiosco de la plaza... su hijo Alejandro, militante del MIR, había muerto el día antes, baleado en Santiago.²¹⁷

Such lightning, emotionally disemboweling acts of violence against dissenting individuals don't quite bludgeon the population as a whole, but they bruise it. That includes the reader. Unable to show the dark forces at play behind the scenes, the narrator tells us about this murder of the MIR²¹⁸ member as evidence of their existence. Then the military lashes at individuals. No press reports leave a credible trace following these incidents. The narrator ends Parra's story there, a broken heart, hands frozen on the open page of the newspaper, just as it is with the disappeared who simply vanish. Families and neighbors fester in anguish. We don't hear their wails. But the narrator's omissions give us room to imagine. Alegría's narrator acknowledges the omniscient presence of violence but does not allude to the fact that the nation has bled across centuries of violent regimes, up to and including the bloodied years that include the date of publication of this memoir. Each political erosion tends to be more severe than the previous execution, torture or genocidal act—words cleansed from this memoir. It's as if the political class were preparing society for a new normalcy employing the policy of violence: “la jaula no es una falta de libertad, la prisión es la puerta abierta y el desamparo nuestro revoloteo frágil, inútil, por aires y por cielos que ya aprenderemos a odiar y temer.”²¹⁹

This short memoir touches upon a range of surfaces. However, Alegría's narrator gives us a halting account, shards of history that suggest a plethora of subplots where the author hints by way of loosely related vignettes his literary, cultural, spiritual, sexual and political journey within

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

²¹⁸ El Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR). It was a political and armed movement of the far left founded in 1965. It attracted its members from across the student body of various campuses throughout Chile. They had a sound theoretical and philosophical premise of armed guerrilla rebellion against the armed forces with the aim of reinstating democracy. They were Marxist-Leninists driven by a Tesis Insurreccional. They opposed assassinations of individuals.

²¹⁹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 147.

the greater charting of the changes occurring on a national scale. His memoir gives us an outline of an era, but irritates us with glaring omissions.

Local life unfolds for the reader on streets populated by noteworthy literary figures. Chilean writers Benjamín Subercaseaux, Vicente Huidobro, Gabriela Mistral return to Chile after trips to Europe and contribute to the growing resistance against an ever more widespread authoritarian political dynamic. The narrator skips across the decades. Military men, viewed in hindsight, take center stage on the front pages of newspapers (Ibañez, Videla), but Pinochet, whose rise parallels the writing of this memoir, is never mentioned by name. There are political stirrings in response to the military spilling violence across national borders in Latin America's Southern Cone region. Only cultural allusions to the neighboring Argentina point us in the right direction to grasp what we cannot see, and obviously, what cannot be written. *Una especie de memoria* "forgets" that there was much political energy in the 1970s harnessing its resources (news media, intellectuals, artistic *peñas*,²²⁰ police deployments) into what suggests itself as an increasingly repressive and clearly oppressive *state of exception*. The narrator glimpses into the political violence becoming visible in the streets. We enter a period where citizens are barred from living and expressing themselves freely, their personal dignity offended, their freedom of movement obstructed, their *sovereignty of the self* invaded and, instead, must subject themselves to a rigid atmosphere of veritable Orwellian²²¹ control and vigilance: "Ocupaba los días

²²⁰ Peñas were makeshift locales in the 1960s and 1970s, where artists would gather to play and sing protest music, or recite inflammatory verses. These attracted audiences, and among those attending were spies for the regime, which ended up arresting and often murdering the artists. Among the most famous peña artists are singer songwriter and guitarist Violeta Parra, Víctor Jara, and many illustrious others.

²²¹ George Orwell's *1984* constitutes the foundational text to glimpse into a country swallowed up by totalitarianism and the individual's privations in every realm of being. No doubt. Alegría borrowed visions and predictions from this novel-manifesto.

poniendo orden en el tiempo que se vaciaba de golpe ahora, desfondándose silenciosamente. Muchas personas se morían frente a mí, pero no caían.”²²²

Balanced on a political trapeze, this personal memoir overlaps with a critical moment in the country’s collective public memory when its military regime begins speckling the southern edge of Latin America with Operation Condor, an explicit policy developed to carry out transnational assassinations of ideological dissenters: “salía de este siglo y entraba con inocencia a épocas prehistóricas.”²²³ Nonetheless, the narrator has made every effort to avoid admitting that the “emperor” has no clothes. Alegría hides from the national macrovision of political disaster to focus on the micro lives of Santiago dwellers, small lives with honest, lovely, but small visions. Even a cursory reference to Operation Condor is absent in Alegría’s memoir, but explored in depth by Peter Kornbluh in *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier of Atrocity and Accountability*.

“Crepúsculo de Maruri” is the longest chapter in the memoir, but its subject matters are fundamentally two: the main character’s development of his socio-political conscience and his country’s political transformation. We read about famous artists and follow an underlying current of political effervescence thriving behind the scenes, which one must uncover from the subtext. Chileans nurtured themselves with art when political changes became disheartening and the economic reality crippled the great majority of the population. The chapter is a cultural petry dish where the more contested socio-political issues are examined in their natural habitat via the chronicle, the *testimonio*, the memoir, the novel, slants all which compete and contrast with the official history of the period. These pages brim with a lyricism that employs techniques used in novels –where our narrator and his Chile are enlivened and his narrow alleyways widened:

²²² Ibid., 128-129.

²²³ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 159.

Santiago, entre 1930 y 1950 fue llenándose de gente extraña... forasteros de ternos grises, pantalones anchos y bolsudos, que llevaban como una aura húmeda de los inviernos europeos entre dos guerras mundiales; voladoras boinas medioevales, impermeables resecos, como de papiro... estoques cuyas filudas hojas no podían salir ya por el moho o, tal vez, por la sangre seca de siglos de duelos y combates.²²⁴

On one hand, *Una especie de memoria* can be viewed as a story that unspools across many experiences whereby each vignette serves as an allusion to a fully developed potential novel, a fully developed memoir. However, Alegría's protagonist here is fleshed out as a character as naïve as the nation was. As such, he embodies the relationship between a people and the powers that determine their fate. Absent the development of that relational dynamic, the memoir jumps from scene to scene and we have no inkling of how much time has elapsed or whether the order of the telling has been shuffled into chronological disarray for dramatic effect.

A thread emerging from the first chapter onward parallels the boy's development into a man, as well as the trajectory of a people that sojourned from obscurantism to consciousness, then were punished for exercising their *individual sovereignty*. The narrator/character admits to blunders, to having hurt women, and to political naiveté.

The memoir also veils the dark specter of totalitarianism brewing, rumbling, grunting its eventual awakening. This novelized memoir suggests there's more shrouding the culture than what's readily perceptible. This work is its own evidence of political art undergoing self-censorship in the 20th century *criollo* version of the Spanish Inquisition. This work is reminiscent of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893).²²⁵ The indelible image of the

²²⁴ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 82.

²²⁵ Edvard Munch's *The Scream* portrays an intensely evocative treatment of psychological themes built upon some of the main tenets of late 19th-century Symbolism and greatly influenced German Expressionism in the early 20th century. There is clearly no comparable grimace in Fernando Alegría's *Una especie de memoria*. However, the

painting bleeds its urgency into Alegria's prose, which *literarily* shouts out its warnings while posturing serenity. It's no less than a desperate, muffled cry imploring the reader to be attentive to subtle nudges and hints and details that suffuse into the cloth of this epistolary canvas. We sense its clues but this memoir-novel doesn't plainly address them. Through its vignettes and chapters, we observe the rise of a dramatic curve, as in a stage play, we observe the political activism of the main character galvanize into a performative gravitas. We also follow the aesthetic and ethical growth of a man who is as vulnerable as any other Chilean breathing the air of excessive authoritarianism hovering over the shared citizenship. We gradually discover how a nation learns to be self-protective after a series of self-imposing regimes.

While the ruling class fed on and benefitted from an inattentive population, the country's policy oracles pointed the way in a direction opposite the will of the people and the hope of their intellectuals and artists. The memoirist elicits images, connections, from a famous bard: "Mi poesía es río, dice Neruda. Su respiración, nunca jadeante, le sirve para crear unidad entre las piedras de ese río."²²⁶ The river stones, social sectors, conglomerates of individuals struggling to protect and retain their *individual sovereignty*, the integrity of the self, amidst an evolving politics that tends to erode individuality, a man is symbolized by a stone, foundered into immobility, stagnation, flooring for others to advance by stepping on stones, humble men, society's human discards, in this verse by Neruda, where social groups at odds with each other are allegorically shoved to their fate—rather than choosing their own destiny-- by the same national stream. The main character has taken us from the center to the margin, while also utilizing verse lines to dislodge those of a certain class, a people relegated to the margins; but then, the novelist-memoirist takes them to the center of national discourse, much like what has

emotions that compel this work, burnished into the subtext, are no less emotionally and psychologically intense as the painting captures.

²²⁶ Alegria, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 83.

occurred in the unpublished reams of paper comprising the fictionalized memoir young Fernando penned and carried under his arm, a struggle evocative of an illegitimate child --such as Recabarren was to Chile's nodules of power-- looking to be welcomed in the ancestral lair.

Alegría's narrator discloses marginal names in his *memoria*, poets "Pessoa Véliz y, Pedro Antonio González... jóvenes torturados en cárceles de barrio... duros examinadores de los mitos nacionales."²²⁷ These are artists from the working class whose verses and lyrical lines, unlike Neruda's, arise from their own experience. They carry the force of nature working through them, stemming from their own struggle. Poet Pablo De Rokha looked inward for his anarchic, romantic verses. His avant-gardist *Gemidos* (1922) is such a glittering example; it enhances the narrative and gives it ontological gravitas. Many of the artists mentioned in *Especie* wrote from the trenches where they endured both private and political sorrow. Alegría writes of men like "Acevedo Hernandez, tribuno fogoso, escritor de dramones y sainetes, autor de una ponderosa pieza dramática de intención revolucionaria... ." ²²⁸ Our narrator describes their meeting where the house space becomes a character telling a story of *self-sovereignty*:

Caminando a su lado una tarde... penetré en el misterio modesto y triste de su casa.... Esa sala no reflejaba vida, ni de él ni de nadie.... Se trataba de una residencial respetable, y seguramente con mucha historia... una mansión abandonada... quejándose por cañerías y califones... De pronto sentí que ese cuarto sólo tenía tres paredes, que era escenario de teatro... objetos y muebles cansados, rendidos en una época que no los reconocía, sostenidos en una atmósfera dudosa...

²²⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 85.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

y, con su silencio, no admitía que presencias ajenas pervirtieran ese equilibrio antiguo.²²⁹

This house served as a shelter for misunderstood bohemians, individuals, artists devoid of acclaim, stripped of their sovereignty, who sought harbor within its utopian walls to claim back the dignity of the self. As elsewhere in the memoir displaying the art of the subtext, one feels as if this refuge of a home was a hiding place from mediocrity and aggression in all its forms, where life and love and theater were one, upholding thespian pride thriving in this underground, while beyond its curtains society felt the encroachment of authoritarian politics. In the end, our host tells us Chileans forgot about “el viejo” Acevedo Hernández, who “murió pobre como nació, en catre de fierro, en pieza de conventillo”²³⁰ not to forget that even among the readers there are utopian well-wishers, dreamers, cause seekers, Acevedo Hernandezes by other names and other faces. Our host and narrator brings us to the threshold of a farewell from this cabaret-emulating chapter: “ahora comenzaba, sin destino ni fecha: un viaje hacia las cosas y lugares y gentes que llamaban en mí a un escriba aún sin palabras.”²³¹

“Morir Pollo”

“Morir Pollo” is Chilean street slang for keeping mum or choosing not to divulge. Literally, it means to take one’s silence or secrets to the tomb. In a separate connotation, as it

²²⁹ Ibid., 142.

²³⁰ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, 142.

²³¹ Ibid., 148.

pertains to this pithy 12-page chapter, it also means the closing down of national vibrancy. The end of hope.

The spirit of friendships, sudden encounters in Santiago streets, sidewalk cafés, chats without concern for time grace these pages with luminous authenticity. But then it all wilts where the reader senses the rumble of a darker future looming. Authoritarianism is palpably on the crescendo encoded by unfolding events that beckon the activation of instinctive defensive mechanisms. The impoverished average citizen, the idealist artist, is continually dismissed by society's mainstream. Immigrants bring on their faces the somber reality of authoritarianism emasculating civility in other latitudes. The artist's *sovereignty of the self* is imperiled as if the national flag hung limp: "Un sargento de carabineros, sable en mano, agarra a (Juan) Godoy de un ala, chamúsca los pelos.... Lo chicotea con el sable por el lomo y los costados ... le da más duro para ablandarlo.... Godoy ha comprendido la medida del sable y, tendido, reza el rosario de sus noches blancas."²³² Our narrator seems to pose the tacit question, how could that life be otherwise endured?

La ciudad había cambiado, llegaron a sus playas filósofos y sociólogos huyendo de la guerra o, más bien, de las fogatas que siguieron a la guerra. Se instalaban en cocheras de casas de ricos, en pesebreras y bodegas de Peñalolén (city margins) o junto a la pista de velocidad de las Viscachas (now upscale). Sabían mucho más que nuestros maestros y manejaban secretos de estilo que a nosotros nos confundían.²³³

This memoir has behaved as a theater piece. We're immediately thrust into the visualization of scenes. With near simultaneity, we hear the characters penetrate us with their diction and the combined meaning that comes from the fusion of image and oral delivery,

²³² Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 152.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

enabling us to come out of a trance. Which is when we realize we have not been ensnared in a nightmare nor walked those streets; we've been reading a printed text.

In tandem with the previous memory of the home-stage-life scenario, it is appropriate to mention Juan Villegas, the Chilean theater scholar who has called the theater “spectacle and language.” He writes: “En el teatro... antes que oír, vemos.”²³⁴ But then we walk again along the same handful of eternally reiterative Santiago streets. There's a sense of pessimism in our gait that comes from a heavy air that floods the city mood and its atmosphere. This is the section of the memoir that puts its ear to the ground to discern the meaning of the rumbles that sound ever sharper, keening, a blade driving a groove on glass—the political atmosphere to which no one is immune. The narrator has aptly perceived the mentality of Chilean society wedged between a romantic yet obsolete European culture with shades of old feudalism filtered and adapted to the new Republic. In so doing, he points to an historic antecedent that seems deeply ingrained in the collective unconscious, which explains the rather disoriented state of the culture, a context *Una especie de memoria* omits, while the country is imbedded in a western era of convulsion: “los que vivimos donde reina una muerte sin dientes y quienes nacen aceptan de antemano un pecado, no ya original, sino repetido y viciado hasta el cansancio.”²³⁵

Frequently, *Una especie de memoria* reads like an aerial view of Santiago where ideas that collide, thus deviating from the cultural norm, are kept under wraps—except on some darkened corner where a theater stage is quickly slapped together spilling forth: “... sin medir las consecuencias.”²³⁶ The narrative voice speaks for everyone in the universe of the page. There's synaptic dystopia in the social intercourse that follows. Tremors of a deeper reality are felt: “Se

²³⁴ Juan Villegas, *La interpretación de la obra dramática* (1971), 15.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

produjo un desconcierto. Creciente. Grave... . Pablo daba voces, sofrenadas pero duras... . El desconcierto iba en aumento.”²³⁷

While the particular passage details in *Una especie de memoria* seem banal, they penetrate the city streets:

el humo de las fábricas, denso y sucio, volando a dejar su hollín sobre nuestros balcones, depositándose en nuestra piel... autobuses que se venían cerro abajo pitando en la sonajera de sus latas... . Algún libro abierto, nunca terminado de leer y sobre la página llena de marcas la rueda violeta de un vaso... . Carlos de Rokha había perdido sus alas hacía tiempo... iba de un prostíbulo a otro escribiendo en las paredes, discurriendo pesadamente y de madrugada con practicantes cargados de jeringas e inyecciones. Su poesía rozaba abismos sin realidad en su vida... . ‘Vengo ciego de actos mágicos, pero ya no soy el mago. Me han devorado los círculos ocultos y para mí no queda nada.’²³⁸

The question not posed in *Especie* but yearning to be exhumed from the subtext and given voice again, once the *sovereignty of the self* has been dismissed, offended, trampled, discarded is, how many countries can a person immigrate to in one lifetime without being tossed into the loyalty abyss of statelessness? How many times can the heart be uprooted from its nurturing source? The Chile of the page alludes to a national territory created by words, at one time solid and self-secure. Given the abruptly shifting socio-historic context, at other times it’s slippery and ambiguous. Its Iberian Peninsular and Anglo-Saxon immigration has shaped a mindset that is highly prejudiced against non-whites and Jews and Arabs and the indigenous. The social environment of Alegría’s downtown Santiago streets looks placid as we read-stroll arm in

²³⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 158.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

arm with our narrator, but within its cultural layers, within its traditional staunch conservatism, it's unreliable, deceptively charming, conning, cunning, disconcerting, even threatening.

There's a synergy the narrator establishes between the main character and the reader. As Chilean society succumbs to authoritarianism, so does the main character, unintentionally dragging us with him, indefensibly swept by the political winds. To this imbrication between text character and reader, Villegas writes: "La angustia autenticadora se produce porque el espectador ve en esa derrota la anticipación de su propia y natural derrota, a la que está abocado por el simple hecho de existir."²³⁹

The tenor of Chile as imagined in this chapter is one of surrender, succumbing to the forces that have been turning the subsoil for decades. "El día que (Pablo de Rokha, the poet from the margin) perdió a su familia, que la perdió de veras y no pudo recordar si ellos habían vivido o los había conocido muertos."²⁴⁰ Authoritarianism suffuses the institutional nationality, the culture. The electrifying national character in the joy, laughter and spontaneity of its people suddenly dims. Artists manifest skepticism. They fight spiritually against the pressures forcing their defeat. Authorities dictate that minds should be flooded with the mantra of euphemisms: "hablar de 'referentes' para sugerir un estado de hambre y de 'deconstrucción' para insinuarse ante las autoridades municipales... . Se pensó que la obra de arte no debía concebirse como un medio de conocimiento y comunicación, sino a modo de mecanismo para pactar con el diablo." Reading this section of *Una especie de memoria* in 2018 evokes the lingering echo in the words of Walter Benjamin and George Orwell, whose pronouncements and warnings against authoritarianism reverberate throughout this Chile in this memoir; the statesmanship of their prose shrouding their identities feels ghostly, eerily present, contemporary, unspeakably relevant.

²³⁹ Villegas, *La interpretación de la obra dramática*, p. 115.

²⁴⁰ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 161.

Disoriented, impelled either by news media or the rare trusted voice, the unnamed population that fills the streets changes directions en masse, and as quickly, as a school of fish. *Una especie de memoria* is written in a silken prose style that leads the reader to a slight but sometimes pivotal shift in his attention, nudging him to the realization that there are subtle but detectable forces lurching that can't always be pinned down in concrete terms, but that hover and wrap the territorial boundaries. *Sovereignty of the self* is found floundering. No place of asylum is safe any longer out of limits for authoritarianism edging its way onto a totalitarianism with yet a larger reach, guaranteeing that there's no place left for refuge, least of all one's own home.

Moral dilemmas confront political dilemmas becoming ever more constraining of freedom. The whimpers and wails of De Rokha the poet hover over a punishing city, a demanding urbanity. The chapter speaks out despite its silencing title. Its paragraphs become a cobbler's hammer shattering assumptions, opening cracks where the smooth cement belies fissures, necessary truths to be confronted:

De Rokha se adelantó a textos definitivos de nuestro siglo. Sudamérica anticipó a *Finnegan's Wake* de James Joyce.... Rehuía la imagen. Buscaba.... exponer una ideología hegeliana en términos de una grandiosa metáfora.... Hubiese triunfado en otros lugares de la tierra, en épocas agónicas, cataclísmicas, redentoras.... No se mató... con un revólver, se mató con su hijo.... Carlos De Rokha... su poesía rozaba abismos... 'Me han devorado los círculos ocultos y para mí no queda nada....'²⁴¹

Alegría's narrator then describes a sunny fresh morning, the mountain as backdrop from his third-floor apartment, the yellow leaves trembling on the tree, not a soul around. It was a perfect morning. De Rokha's son opened the window, "estiró los brazos y, con un arrullo de

²⁴¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, pp. 160, 161.

pichón, se lanzó y voló pesadamente.”²⁴² The title of the chapter suggests having much to say, but keeping it all within. In the end, we understand without knowing. Without needing to know. As it is with much of Alegría’s prose style, his narrator brings even the moment of a leap to one’s death intensely alive. It reveals without disclosing. Yet, it is effectively not the end of the chapter. The reader, pondering it, continues writing it in his mind, craning over the landscape to understand the ineffable. The Chilean author’s narrator haunts the reader.

“Novela II”

“Novella II” is the memoir’s denouement. After the emotional dip of the previous chapter, this one bears renewed hope, imbued as it is with insistent energy despite the ominous predictions. These previous two chapters document the last gasp of resistance by left-leaning intellectuals, artists and activists as the deeply entrenched forces of authoritarianism gain the self-esteem to show glimpses of their faces boasting their military identity and connections. Their political maneuvering is deciphered from the tortuous language of power and is mostly perceived by intellectuals and by those sensitive and alert enough to tenuous but consistent shifts in the political climate: “Misteriosamente me escogieron y con mayor misterio aún me dejé inoctrinar y pensé que cumplía una misión.”²⁴³ Later in the text, during presidential elections: “están votando hasta los muertos... no importa... nosotros también tenemos finados con derecho a voto... don Tinto (Pedro Aguirre Cerda) había ganado.”²⁴⁴ The street level military and police violence, congruent with increasing authoritarianism in government, happens mostly to the

²⁴² Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 162.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁴⁴ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 195.

powerless and exposed, the perennial pariahs, which Alegría has shown us: una victoria ganada muchas veces y muchas veces perdida, una victoria sin grandes palabras pero con bastantes muertes.”²⁴⁵ The shifting weight of political repositioning is felt as the country opts to broaden the foundations for social justice while pressured by ferocious opponents to careen toward a type of rogue authoritarianism that possesses shades of an irreversible *state of exception* while the people’s screams and howls for freedom of expression are repressively nipped in the bud.

The reader is hard-pressed to find frequent manifestations of repression manifested out in the open since Aguirre Cerda across the decades when presidential regimes came and went displaying wider swings in their ideological identities. The narrator skirted addressing the issues, describing the political environment and least of all, mentioning the names of leading figures in government at a time of acute censorship and violence against dissenters, but the caustic atmosphere is undeniable. There’s one exception in *Especie*, when the narrator says that only one other politician received as much social support as Aguirre Cerda, “a quien apoyamos como sólo apoyaríamos a Allende.”²⁴⁶ Nonetheless, prejudice against the lower classes, the poor, offending the upper classes by their garments and unpolished folksy-speak, shows up when an indigenous musical performance in an elegant theater is interrupted with loud hollers of “Comunista” and “roto”²⁴⁷ hurled at the musical director. The military is mentioned sideways, by allusion, as ready to pounce on the population, to topple their government,²⁴⁸ when it’s not carrying out the wishes of the oligarchy, the true object of the military’s loyalty: “la gente que manda en este país ha

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 195-196.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 97.

²⁴⁷ “Roto” is Chilean slang for low-class person, usually associated with leftist political parties. *Una especie de memoria*, Ibid., 184.

²⁴⁸ The role of the military in Chile as across Latin America, here high-ranking military officers are routinely trained by the United States to topple their own governments could be understood as part and parcel of Latin American traditionalism.

olvidado la ciencia de los golpes, ellos, los duros de otra época se han ablandado, no recuerdan que nuestra sociedad se purificó a golpes y mejoró su economía sufriendo y haciendo sufrir.”²⁴⁹

We alternate from national affairs to the politics of romance, where the rules of one arena are applied to the other. As it was with Thomas Mann’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,²⁵⁰ of an earlier chapter, which Alegría’s narrator alludes to when speaking of his Chilean romances, the narrator tells his own story of love spurned (Norma) and love unrequited (Leonor). Norma appears at the beginning of this work and disappears as soon as Fernando broadens his horizons. Leonor, on the other hand, receives a place of honor. They met when he was approaching twenty and she was in her early thirties. In his memory of her, significant decades later, she is still more mature, more thoughtful, observant, instinctive, expressive, liberal and free than he, in his privileged gender, enjoying his masculinity, could ever be. They spent many nights together in Fernando’s apartment while she left her husband alone in theirs. She expressed her mind, uttered her political opinions. She smoked. She flirted openly. She was the sovereign of self. One day, she disappeared. Fernando fell in love with Leonor *after* he lost her. She groomed him for manhood, for adulthood. They had rich political dialogues, strolls in the park, and a sexually explosive affair.

Logré acercarme a Rolando y Leonor y sentarme a sus pies.... Nos hacíamos el amor en la oscuridad del Teatro Central, ella con su rodilla y yo con mi espalda.... En esos momentos puse mi mano en la pierna de Leonor, la subí en un gesto de arrojo, llegué hasta el corazón de esa mañana turbulenta, bella, puse la palma en toda esa primavera que nacía brillante de ardiente rocío y pétalos húmedos, y así le dije que yo también la quería y deseaba. Ella apretó mi mano allí y no quiso soltarla

²⁴⁹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 165.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

ya jamás en la vida. Pero, se encendieron las luces... . Yo retiré la mano. Rolando, de pié, aplaudía frenéticamente.²⁵¹

The reader is made complicit to the furtive act. The emotion, the feeling of danger considering the probability of getting caught is all a terribly scary and exciting read. But there's a level of conscience in carrying out the act to which the reader is made aware of first, and is ensnared in the drama, as in an epiphany of understanding the Joycean stream of consciousness, before the character Fernando grasps what is happening and weighs the implication of the imminence of his behavior.²⁵² Every action activates an ethical principle. In his "Aristotle's Rhetoric and Ethics and the Ethos of Society," Eugene E. Ryan writes: "We get to know the ethos of a society in the same way we get to know the ethos of the individual, through its deliberative acts of choice."²⁵³ This squarely applies to the social dynamics in *Una especie de memoria*, thus advancing the memoir by explaining the moral ownership of an act, its ethos. Fernando seems to mirror his society, where the present is lived intensely, such as his night-time sloganeering on walls without assessing the legal and military consequences of his acts, while the future in the next ten seconds seems to him far-fetched and inconsequential. Leonor, on the other hand, casts her gaze on the consequences of actions. Should she be an instrument for a failed democracy, or should she support the rising tide toward dictatorship? Her freedom-loving spirit and her sense of social justice led to her exempting herself from this conundrum by disappearing from an environment floundered in an ethico-political impasse.

²⁵¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, pp. 184-185.

²⁵² James Joyce wrote of his inner being, of self-doubt, and of promise, in *The Artist as a Young Man*. In his *Dubliners*, he wrote of misery, hardship, both financial and psychological. In *Ulysses*, meant to be a chapter of *Dubliners*, he gives us shards, incompletions, resembling the bumps of a life for which prodigality lacks emotional release—except in the reader who hopes for it despite the flawed and failed characters. Alegría writes this memoir acknowledging obstructions, as it is with Joyce, as pivotal moments on his journey. The Chilean author's memoir is modeled, in part, on these Joycean works.

²⁵³ Eugene E. Ryan, "Aristotle's Rhetoric and Ethics and the Ethos of Society" in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* (1972), 292.

But there's another level of love that receives center stage. It's a love of a literature of dissent and criticism. This chapter is overpopulated by distinguished authors endeavoring to revive *eros* within a narrowing circle of *thanatos*, such as it was with the likes of Rimbaud and Verlaine. Chilean and pan-Hispanic names rescue this nearly apocalyptic chapter where the creative vitality of César Vallejo and Mariano Latorre flutter their wings but cannot take flight. These and many other Latin American icons in literature are all names who've hoisted the essence of humanity,²⁵⁴ one man at a time, resonating with the still-ineffable premise of *sovereignty of the self*, which is symbolized as the hottest location of the flame that burns in the heart; it is the alpha and the omega of human yearnings. The narrator has Leonor tell us: "Quieren botar a Alessandri²⁵⁵ –decía (ella), desabotóname—se tomarán la Universidad, el Congreso, la Moneda, tienen a su favor varios regimientos. Ibáñez²⁵⁶ está con ellos. De pronto, en una vuelta brusca y enceguedora de la tarde me encontré desnudo y ella desnuda. Sentí sus dos piernas tenzadas sobre mi boca. Ella me poseía con miedo, buscando refugio."²⁵⁷

In the end, his explosive and graphic but unempathetic sexuality with Leonor, more mature and wiser, is treated deferentially five decades later but from a superficial perspective. Leonor wanted youth, energy, idealism, originality near her when her husband was a boor. She was the dame with the white hair, the twirling smoke habit, the political astuteness; the woman who spoke with scandalously refreshing candor for a woman in that era. Her elocutions expressing her opinion were punctuated for meaning by pensive puffs on her cigarette held in long and delicate fingers causing people to withstand equally long, protracted pauses that put people on

²⁵⁴ These are names that rescued societies from depressing political periods, while having their own well-being threatened by conflict and illness.

²⁵⁵ A civilian ruler with authoritarian tendencies.

²⁵⁶ Alessandri's eventual successor, Ibáñez, was a coup plotter, a military general who became a dictator and persecuted the Communist Neruda, thanks to whom he had attained the presidency leading people like influential Neruda to believe that he sought social justice, albeit, with a firm hand.

²⁵⁷ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 187.

edge, a riveting edge, sealing in them the image of her as the intolerably seductive iconoclastic profile. She was too much of a woman for Fernando's immaturity and self-absorption.

Nonetheless she obviously possessed the *sovereignty of the self* he so much coveted for himself.

What Alegría mirrors accurately is that reported reality resembles ambiguity: "Los balazos suenan ahora muy lejanos,"²⁵⁸ as when "En Santiago los carabineros de civil provocaban en las concentraciones; se les reconocía porque, al irse de espaldas, enseñaban sus calcetines verdes. Se gritaban consignas contra el terror de la derecha."²⁵⁹ Reminiscent of the centuries-old genre, the essay, and of the colonial-era chronicle in its alluring ambiguities, this memoir's genre is purposely resistant of a narrow definition. What is allegedly unequivocal historic fact dissolves into relativism before the reader's eyes. One loses referentiality. The historic context of the latter part of this work was written during and *under* Pinochet's dictatorship. It is partially, supposedly, an eyewitness account of the coup d'état of 1973, but it's also narrated from exile in the United States. *Una especie de memoria* comments on the disquieting political life and the resulting societal dizziness people endured in Chile across the century: the violent and public clashes between protesters and the forces of dictators Ibáñez and Videla and Pinochet in their respective epochs.

Una especie de memoria makes the reader relive the fear, the threat, the uncertainty, the imminent disemboweling of this precious gift of political history: *individual sovereignty*. There's a veil of mystery about the era in the prose; much like a woman's flirtation, there's a seductive coquetry in the telling, which when we buy into it, there's a withdrawal, a play, a reneging, a sense of the elusive of the historical commentary of selected moments from an earlier era, thus leaving us wanting when attempting to recover glints of objectivity that come through as one

²⁵⁸ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, p. 187.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

individual's emotional memory of terrifying urban crises. There's an unwritten labyrinth that leads to the dark cave of the author's motivations and intentions, which remain unclear through the read but which endure as afterthought: that a mystery lingers is part of the magic of this story, but it's also its cliffhanging ledge. Voice emerges tenuously, and it grows; it develops a deep gravitas, which is what tethers the reader emotionally to this narration. It is a personal and a national story, intertwined, where love, self-discovery and military aggression spill onto the page—compelling the reader, who's become an uncommitted actor in the story, to take a political and a moral position. The contract *Alegría* establishes with the reader is uncompromising.

Having no choice but to accept Leonor's disappearance, our main character embraces that which she gave him, self-steering capabilities, a certain *individual sovereignty*, to plow forth on his own. In the teeth of increasingly violent force exercised by the police and a collective assertion of sovereignty from the people in response, *Alegría* shows us “how a work of art can determine the interpretation of our individual lives and our era.”²⁶⁰

Ultimately, *Alegría* delivers a blend of the old and the new. While even-numbered chapters are characterized by balance and stability, odd-numbered ones allude to social chaos and a breakdown of the social order. *Una especie de memoria*'s fifth chapter, “Novela II,” as the symbolic representation of a dictatorship assuming its place at the head of the Chilean *corpus*, accordingly, warns readers to expect more fiction than fact, more imagination than verifiable history. *Una especie de memoria* is no longer the memoir of an era, but a treatise on the protagonist's role and responsibility in the world. Recall is replaced by ennui. We are left with too much novel and too little memoir.

²⁶⁰ Rainer Rochlitz, *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin* (1996), 181.

There's a narrative haze throughout the memoir that reflects the political fog, a veiled stress, a tension, a premonition: "Las cosas empezaron a precipitarse. Como había dicho el loro del organillo,"²⁶¹ a threat that has lingered for decades.

²⁶¹ Alegría, *Una especie de memoria*, 194.

CHAPTER 3

El paso de los gansos: Apocalypsis in Chile

"I'm for freedom, and to respect everybody's dignity"

--- Constantin Costa-Gavras, film director of "Missing"

El paso de los gansos opens with an untitled, ten-page introduction that examines Chile in the days just before the country would be forever transformed beneath the growing specter of bloodshed, followed by a two-page "Prefacio." This two-page preface feels like slow motion: "voces salían mezcladas con los estampidos de metrallass, fusiles y cañones."²⁶² The President makes a decision based on the circumstances but one which a lifetime of dreams for a better, more just Chile had made all but inevitable. "Tanques, carros blindados, ambulancias, helicópteros... revoloteaban."²⁶³ Deafening shots were heard. People began to die. He had long been preconditioned to take the decision that he embraced, which led him to alter the course of Chilean history.

Chile is already teetering on the edge of political upheaval when 20-something militant leftist Cristián Montealegre returns from a prolonged self-exile. The leading character, diarist and narrator in Fernando Alegría's *El paso de los gansos* finds a country wracked by political turmoil and cultural currents he wants to understand. A composite alter-ego for Alegría, Montealegre arrives in time to witness the violent overthrow of a democratically elected government, firsthand. Euphemistic idioms were central to political deceptions that culminated

²⁶² Fernando Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, (1975), 19.

²⁶³ *Ibid.* 19.

in the coup d'état. In *El paso de los gansos*, Alegría attempts to decipher the language reconstituted by those for whom the overthrow was orchestrated to conceal and mitigate the increasingly transgressive nature of the state apparatus they empowered. This experimental, hybridized novel is the result of his diary, notes and photographs, the latter an almost forensic visual narrative. Shooting photos guerrilla-style while astride a motorcycle—in a less than subtle nod to Che Guevara—he traverses Santiago, the Chilean capital. His photos and his journal entries reflect a nation roiling in political *media res*.

The novel layers fact and fiction to chronicle a single day in Santiago: September 11, 1973 and provides an exclusive, exceptionally complex report. Alluding to the Chilean armed forces and their jack-booted usurpation of power on that day, the title refers directly to the distinctive 19th century Prussian infantry marching style characterized by a uniform line of soldiers who extended their legs without bending their knees as they press forward. The ceremonial parade step, commonly referred to as the “goose step,” became synonymous with Nazi Germany under Hitler, but was also adopted early on by Russia’s Red Army. Chile was the first non-European nation to formally embrace the goose step—long before events in this novel transpire. George Orwell described the goose step as “... one of the most horrible sights in the world, far more terrifying than a dive-bomber.”²⁶⁴ Like the title—a subtle reference to the roots of fascism in Chile—the narrator’s name is also rife with allusion. On an early, epic motorcycle tour of Latin America, Argentine Ernesto “Che” Guevara was so moved by the poverty, oppression and injustice he saw throughout the region,²⁶⁵ he later joined Fidel Castro’s Cuban Revolution. After the CIA assassination of Che in Bolivia, a photo of the leftist guerrilla fighter elicited widespread comparisons to Christ. To this day, the revolutionary is revered by millions worldwide as a

²⁶⁴ George Orwell, *England Your England: And Other Essays*, (1941).

²⁶⁵ Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2003), 71-72.

martyred saint.²⁶⁶ Montealegre, arguably a Guevara-Alegría composite as well as principal narrator, takes the very real military takeover of Chile as its *raison d'être* and as its literal backdrop, using interviews with ordinary Chileans, diary entries and photos.

These comprise a blow-by-blow record of a day marked by the untimely death of Salvador Allende, the first openly Marxist president elected by a majority of the national electorate in a post-colonial Latin American country. Cornered and under fire in the Palacio de La Moneda—the government palace and seat of the President which also houses the offices of three cabinet ministers—Allende was stripped of executive power by military decrees abolishing the judicial and legislative branches of government, the two deliberative bodies charged with codifying the judgments and laws, the president is sworn to enact, enforce and defend. History has it that Allende committed suicide with a self-inflicted gunshot from an automatic weapon. Alegría, loyal only to his lifelong literary calling, does not formally dispute the historical narrative of Allende's demise.

La Moneda, a ponderous, Italianate neoclassical structure erected in the 18th century endures among nimbler, contemporary government offices. Inside, Allende straddled the past and the future, naively—some say—ignoring the present to which his existence was tied. Having campaigned throughout Chile for 50 years during four presidential bids, he was driven by a profound sense of purpose that transcended his political aspirations. Through Montealegre, Alegría eulogizes him, “Allende ha muerto... con La Moneda, entre los muros de la Patria Vieja luchando por la Patria Nueva.”²⁶⁷ After the jubilation, which accompanied his electoral triumph in 1970, public regard for his government was replaced by anger and frustration in the face of

²⁶⁶ Marcela Iacub, *Le Che, à mort* (2017).

²⁶⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 17.

scarcity and market shortages. For upper-class landowners, the unprecedented “Ley Indígena”²⁶⁸ which restored vast tracts of ancestral Mapuche lands stolen viciously from Chile’s original indigenous inhabitants by Spanish invaders wielding cutlass and gunpowder with unholy avarice.

Although Alegría rarely addresses the military impact on Chileans outside the urban zones or offers more than a passing reference to its native peoples in his extensive literary oeuvre, both history and modern political expediencies exerted severe pressure on the Allende government and its noble initiatives to acknowledge and protect indigenous autonomy based on a promise made to the Mapuche nation during his candidacy. However, violence and legal confrontations against the Mapuche over communal territories and land parcels restored to them by order of the Allende administration were increased by an exponential factor after the military coup.

In *Los mapuche ante la justicia: La criminalización de la protesta indígena en Chile*, Eduardo Mella Seguel documents: “El 4 de noviembre de 1970 Salvador Allende... asume la presidencia de Chile... comprometiéndose éste con las organizaciones mapuche a elaborar y promulgar una nueva Ley Indígena... en 1972, se aprueba en el Congreso... el proyecto de ley indígena... la Ley Indígena 17.729 pone término a la división de las comunidades y a los juzgados de indios.”²⁶⁹ The renowned writer and indigenous rights scholar-activist adds: “recién asumido el gobierno de la Unidad Popular (Allende), se observa un incremento de la movilización mapuche a través de la acción directa... las tomas de fundos²⁷⁰... la política de

²⁶⁸ Eduardo Mella Seguel, *Los mapuche ante la justicia: La criminalización de la protesta indígena en Chile* (2007), 61.

²⁶⁹ Mella Seguel, *Los mapuche ante la justicia: La criminalización de la protesta indígena en Chile*, p. 61.

²⁷⁰ Fundo is either a minifundio or latifundio. It is fundamentally a considerable land estate.

diálogo con las comunidades mapuche fue violentamente interrumpida en noviembre de 1971... por organizaciones paramilitares formadas por propietarios agrícolas.”²⁷¹ Mella continúe:

la política de Reforma Agraria... de la Unidad Popular... superó con amplitud las acciones desarrolladas por gobiernos anteriores... fueron restituidas a las comunidades mapuche un total de 197.761,88 hectáreas.”²⁷² Con el proceso de Contra Reforma Agraria los mapuche... pierden sus pertenencias, tierras y bienes ... sin ... indemnización.... [S]ignificó la pérdida de las tierras recuperadas, así como también que se persiguiera políticamente a quienes habían participado en el proceso... de Reforma Agraria.”²⁷³

For the Mapuche, the return to a historic policy based on the negation of their communal and *self-sovereignty* was amply illustrated in the wee hours of October 8, 1973 when an army and police patrol arrived at the home of 16-year-old farmer (agricultor) Julio Augusto Ñirripil Paillao, a native Mapuche and supporter of Allende’s unprecedented Indigenous Law: “A las 3:00 de la madrugada llegó hasta su domicilio la patrulla mencionada y lo ejecutaron en el patio. Su madre recogió el cuerpo y lo sepultó.”²⁷⁴

The adulation Allende inspired among young non-Mapuche Chilean idealists faded quickly when a radical restructuring of society was not immediately forthcoming. For them, his willingness to compromise with the oligarchy was a betrayal. On the right, his death was cause for celebration among an equally significant segment of Chile’s population that had only contempt for him and the ideas he espoused with regard to social equality and justice. They bristled at his attempts to nationalize private holdings and implement an economic program to

²⁷¹ Mella Seguel, *Los mapuche ante la justicia: La criminalización de la protesta indígena en Chile*, p. 63.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

uplift the economically disenfranchised. Alegría situates *El paso de los gansos* firmly within this context, and through Montealegre, his fictional simulacrum, retells the story of the first 9/11, which occurred precisely 28 years before high-jacked aircrafts were intentionally flown into the gleaming twin towers of the U.S. World Trade Center. Attacks on the U.S. were preceded also by U.S.-piloted jets conducting air attacks on Chile’s iconic architectural monument, the presidential residence, a late-colonial mint headquarters. It was Chile’s earlier version of the U.S.’s Twin Towers symbol of Wall Street.

Montealegre’s notes for September 15 include the observation that “En las poblaciones salen niñitos de 15 años con metralleta a matar soldados.”²⁷⁵ An entry dated Sept. 16 reads: “Cómo han muerto los pacos, colgándolos, cortándoles los testículos.”²⁷⁶ On September 19th: “Nadie se salva, ni los gringos, ni los reporteros, ni las ambulancias a las que les disparan de los dos lados.”²⁷⁷

Alegría flagrantly omits a diary entry for September 18th, the national day of Independence. It is traditionally celebrated with folk music and dance along Chile. In 1973, however, the day of patriotic citizenship was marred by violence when the government unleashed its military might by pouncing on its own vulnerable and shock-struck people. It was clearly not a civil war, as some tout it, but an unprovoked and unjustified act of leadership cowardice as the main character Montealegre lumps that day as insignificantly blending among all the others.

The actual story follows the diary notes, and the still indeterminate speaker who begins saying “Me pareció que todos habíamos perdido el camino.”²⁷⁸ Is it Montealegre, or the author,

²⁷⁵ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 115.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷⁸ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 118.

who is disoriented by the chaos and heartbroken by the mistreatment of a child? “[E]l avión se llenó de niños y no podía levantar el vuelo... . Un niño... elevaba su voz... su canto era revolucionario e hiriente para las fuerzas armadas... los soldados lo sacaron a él y a sus padres... los hicieron desaparecer.”²⁷⁹ Cristián contrasts an idyllic memory from his own past. “Ha llovido... faroles opacos que me han dado un repentino color amarillo entre los hombres y mujeres de luto que pasan junto a mí... Un olor de madera mojada me une por un rato a este banco... mi novia... me dice te adoro... la palabra me parece extraña...”²⁸⁰

His brushes with the military and police are loaded with suspicion and latent violence. Cristián tells us bluntly what he sees in the streets: “hay culatas que rompen caras... a un guitarrista le cortan las manos.”²⁸¹ The reader is initiated, becoming a complicit character in the story; the chronicle, radio report, live TV coverage, and the returned exile’s gaze are all part of Montealegre’s rotating, 360-degree perspective. The chapter unspools, accordingly, as more than a traditional first-person account: “Los pacos [la policía] bajaban por... el río a enganchar al finado-baleado-ahogado... en la otra orilla... unos jóvenes..., y... otro señor de chaqueta tweed y yo, mirábamos fascinados la maniobra.”²⁸²

At 74 pages, “las Diez de Últimas” or “the final ten,” a reference to the ten bonus points awarded the winning hand in a round of a traditional game of chance is the second longest chapter. We return to the era before Allende’s election, “Gallito de la Pasión” continues with allegories graced by a “gallito,” the rooster figure lifted from popular folk tradition. “El paso de los gansos” contextualizes the title in an eight-page treatise, in which the military is expected to

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 121.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 122.

²⁸¹ This is a reference to the torture and murder of renowned singer-songwriter Víctor Jara. A visionary theater artist and poet as well as a major exponent of the popular Chilean New Song musical movement inspired by the struggles of the common man, Jara was the first major artist slain under the military dictatorship which converted a sports arena into a detention center where thousands were secretly tortured and murdered. Jara was executed by members of the Chilean armed forces at Estadio Chile, which was later re-named in his honor. Ibid., 121.

²⁸² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, pp. 138 and 139.

parade its might a mere six days after the coup d'état, on the day usually reserved for the celebration of independence from Spain. "El evangelio según Cristián," a 108-page final chapter, relies on the intentionally heightened tension to underscore the dramatic conclusion to the events of Sept. 11th. In the aforementioned section preceding the Preface, Montealegre attends a pro-Allende rally: "4 de septiembre... 600,000 personas... frente al palacio, culminación de marchas y concentraciones en que la voz de Allende se enronquecía clamando contra el terrorismo de la derecha"...²⁸³ A week after, a private call via intercom to President Allende from within the palace itself offers: "... o renuncia y se va o se va y renuncia o La Moneda será bombardeada, me oye, BOMBARDEADA."²⁸⁴ The message threatens the bombing of La Moneda, foreshadowing Allende's last moments and concluding with the uncertainty exemplified in the "Murió Allende, Allende no murió"²⁸⁵ refrain. Such confusion and terror were exaggerated by the creation of clandestine detainment and torture centers along the length of the nation: "Chile se estira ahora como un cuerpo herido"²⁸⁶ and "torturan en portugués, en inglés y en castellano."²⁸⁷ The section closes with news of another, equally devastating death: "En una casa vecina al San Cristóbal (hill), llamada La Chascona, velan el cadáver de Neruda."²⁸⁸

The narration doesn't let up. It doesn't wait for the roiling tanks' thunderous grinding on pavement to pass, nor does it allow time for the canon blast smoke to dissipate. The life of the text, and its lurching death with Eisensteinian²⁸⁹ style montage, become more crucial, startling, by far more disturbing than the protracted, intermittent, unnervingly long historic reality of that one day that just wouldn't end. *El paso de los gansos* is not all goose-stepping. But the reader

²⁸³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 10.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 11.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 16.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 17.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁸⁹ Sergei Eisenstein was a pioneer Russian filmmaker in the 1920s. He invented montage in editing, suggesting atrocities being committed without filming actual scenes.

does consistently feel the heavy atmosphere, the thud of power hanging over people's lives, the boot pressing on flesh. In its pages, people race for their lives, their faces grimacing reminiscent of gun blasts captured in Van Gogh's "Wheatfield with Crows," Goya's "Third of May 1808, The Execution" scene of murderous war and street *fusilamientos* remind us of the cyclical nature of government hubris confronted by rebellion across history.

We hear Alegría's voice. Or is it the narrator's? "Lo veo frente a mí, a cada momento, mirando un avión o no mirando nada, la metralleta en la mano, mirando el vacío del cielo... tanques pasando y pasando, sin apuro... sin salida, sin sol y sin tiempo."²⁹⁰ In *El paso de los gansos*, Alegría gives us a portrayal of Chile about to live its own. Santiago's presidential building bombed from the air, where thunderous blasts triggered a devouring fire and bursts of smoke billowing, shrouding the destruction of a nearly three-century-old palace. Yes, this was Chile's *Guernica*, where the attack traumatized a generation, much like the Spanish town by the same name that was bombed by the Nazis from the air. The mural that truly depicts Chile would be a canvass wider than Picasso's, with hidden layers of atrocities –tromp d'oeil leaving a trail of multiple previous acts of devastation--and anguish building for generations. General Francisco Franco's rostrum overlaid on General Pinochet's. Spain. Madre patria. Chile. The umbilical cord transmitting a heritage of violence. Spain and Chile's cultural bond and psychological imprint united them since long before Chile's 1973 coup or Franco's Civil War that started in 1936 and would last forty years. It precedes all that destructive searching for self-identity. Their dysfunctional family bond harkens back to the Conquest, and even prior to that, with expulsion and rejection and self-prejudice when the Muslims and Jews were expelled even though Spaniards themselves carry those two bloodlines coursing through their veins.

²⁹⁰ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 32.

The U.S.-designed assault on Chile has been of a different tenor. Unlike the fast and brutal Fascist attack on a little village in Spain, the town of Guernica has now become etched in people's political consciousness as an act of military horror frozen in time, memorialized in Picasso's painting in seeming dialogue with Orwell, who, writing about massacres in Spain from their very trenches,²⁹¹ could as well have had a thing or two to say about the forces behind the coup in Chile. Its history has been handed down from one punishing imperial power to another, making a mockery of the misfiled paperwork we understand as the document asserting Chile's Independence.

The graffiti of horrors that nurtured the cultural foundations across Latin America, where Chile is not excluded from this history, has been painted across centuries on indelible layers. From the ceaselessly ongoing Indian slaughter since the Conquest to the present, when we encounter the humiliation of average Chilean pensioners facing their old age in devastating poverty while abandoned by the law that allegedly secured their retirement, a form of pernicious violence on the elderly, to the brutality of Mapuche faces wearing Prussian and Nazi uniforms assaulting men, women and children indiscriminately as if to say, the military forces are in command; as if to say civic society is at the service of the military, rather than the contrary. That is the "Guernica" that gets a fresh paint remake everyday in Chilean life, of which *El paso de los gansos* is not only the testimony of one day's threshold step into a maddening and Dantesque *Inferno*, but it's the jolting manifestation of a centuries' old rumble, intermittent, languid and violent. Within the 20th century alone, it's been the decades' long *pan de todos los días*, or rather, the people's daily *stale* bread. In reliving the Chile of the coup d'état, the September 11, 1973 that's etched in nightmarish memory, we're reminded of another totalitarian regime's chronicle

²⁹¹ See George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), a first-hand account of war in Spain. Orwell served the people's cause and was able to observe the two political philosophies unravel as Spaniards killed each other.

of an era, Orwell's *1984*. That work glints at us parallels from a different time and place. The Chilean holocaust eerily relives Orwell's first-hand impressions during the Spanish Civil War that fed his fictional imagination, which as time passes one has to admit that his creative work is a close echo of a restaging of history, such as it is with the way repression was installed in Pinochet's Chile, a disturbingly real assault on people's lives and civic rights, unleashing policies endorsing all forms of violence during a regime of repression meant to endure across the decades in ever subtler but burnishing ways.

The Preface briefly addresses a number of coup-related happenstances. An unspecified voice speaks on behalf of the fallen as both witness and victim: "Nosotros los muertos... Muertos y vivos venimos a dejar un testimonio... ." ²⁹² It fuses historical facts with poetic, ghostly echoes, personalizing the impact of the violent assault on a legitimate government's human element and its ideological soul, making the terrorism their nation has just been subjected to tangible for the average citizen.

The first actual chapter, and the longest one by far, "Las Diez de Últimas," begins with a lengthy forensic description of Allende's appearance after a fatal bullet wound. ²⁹³ It proceeds with Montealegre's flight home to Chile: "... me entono en el avión y vuelo mirando incrédulo los macizos cubiertos de nieve, reconozco el mar y los valles... Los aviones silban, aletean un poco, buscan la pradera amplia y de cara al sol, como una plataforma desierta para saltar sobre la ciudad." ²⁹⁴

In a flashback, Allende and Alegría share a drink and speak at length. Allende is upbeat about his plans to help Chile's poor. According to Alegría, their conversation also broaches Allende's impending "viaje a Estados Unidos... [en donde] planteará con vigor su oposición al

²⁹² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 20.

²⁹³ Pedro Espinoza, VEA, *Brigada de Homicidios*, 1.785, 28-IX-1973., *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁹⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 24.

imperialismo.”²⁹⁵ Long paragraphs underscore Allende’s cautious optimism, as he works his way cordially through a crowd, hosts a dinner, and directs the discourse around a table laden with food and wine. Alegría then sheds light on the darker side of politics where, despite having the moral high ground, Allende’s ideology makes him vulnerable among those eager to end his presidential initiatives and his leadership, already weakened by sabotage. “Lo que sí sé es que Allende va y viene, se me acerca y se me aleja, ahora está aquí y ahora más allá.”²⁹⁶

Over the next few days, street conflicts erupt across the capital, among them “una intensa refriega entre los carabineros que guardan el consulado norteamericano y grupos de estudiantes secundarios.”²⁹⁷ In this confrontation outside the U.S. Consulate, Montealegre-as-Alegría-as-Che describes high school students protesting Washington D.C.’s support for the military takeover facing off with rocks against well-armed guards who spray tear gas to deter the protestors. The texts here seem to be guided by the author’s need to expound on the political chess moves that triggered an insurmountable sequence, culminating on the morning Allende decided to go from his residence to La Moneda, a series of events that ended in tragedy. “¿Por qué fue a la Moneda sin vacilar, rápido y duro, con la metralleta en la mano? ...soñando con grandes alamedas transitadas por hombres libres, el mundo frente a tí, a tus espaldas el momento gris de la decepción y la derrota....”²⁹⁸

El paso de los gansos was conceived under the roar of low-flying airplanes bombing La Moneda, the emblematic seat of government. Its destruction occurred before the world. Smoke from fires inside blanketed the sky. Even the original copy of the Constitution was destroyed in the flames. Does the destruction of a building or a document eradicate their significance? It

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 30.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 24.

²⁹⁸ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 29.

stands to reason that such might, just as likely, reinforce their symbolic meanings. More germane queries posed by Alegría in this sharply focused synthesis of fact and literary fiction are: What died with the coup d'état? What was rescued and survived? And, finally, what ascended from the ashes left in its wake?

Alegría opens *El paso de los gansos* by noting the late arrival of spring that September. Ominously, the days and weeks thereafter are not marked by rebirth and renewal. Allende, we learn, retreats to his personal island of utopian idealism. The political opposition closes in: “La flota regresó en la noche de alta mar... Operación Unitas... al amanecer.”²⁹⁹ A faction of military leaders from the various Chilean defense forces conspire with foreign interests to hasten his fall. Yet even hours before the palace bombing, Allende still believes the coup could be averted, and he voices concern for General Augusto Pinochet, the one military leader he trusts and who is suddenly nowhere to be found: “El Presidente se ha puesto un pullover gris, pantalones marengo, en el bolsillo de la chaqueta de tweed un pañuelo de seda rojo.”³⁰⁰ Allende knew instinctively that if he was to die that day, he should face his Maker dressed with the color of his conviction, the Marxist red right next to his heart.

The writing is staccato, evocative of sporadic gunfire, of cliff-hanging political decisions: could he work out a dignified resolution for himself and the people of Chile who voted for him? Or was he about to face the ultimate consequence? Unlike a traditional novel, the book is comprised of brief texts that read like essays or front-page headlines. The mood is uncertain, and the concatenation of these shorter narratives is effective. The narrator is a buoyant storyteller, endowed by the author with a naturally deft mastery of literary devices. The latter are employed to heighten the narrative tension as the day unfolds. Members of Allende’s security detail—

²⁹⁹ Operación Unitas involved joint U.S. and Chilean naval exercises in Chilean waters. *El paso de los gansos*, p. 10.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

loyal, incorruptible military officers—are made to surrender or risk being killed by the former comrades in arms. Pinochet is predictably unmasked as a modern-day Judas Iscariot. Skirmishes break out across the country even as special military operatives are dispatched to assassinate Allende loyalists. When news that La Moneda had been threatened with an airstrike³⁰¹ spread like wildfire across Chile, we know now, a media blackout was engineered to increase fear and anxiety among Chileans who had pinned their hopes to Allende for a less stratified or feudal Chilean society.

The plot that brought down an emergent and uniquely Chilean socialism augured changes that would be vastly more profound than those sought by its conspirators. Not only was the first-ever Chilean socialist movement to achieve success at the ballot box decimated, the relative speed and ease with which it was eradicated led, ironically, to the legitimization—in the minds of the citizenry—of a shadow apparatus that would morph into a horrifically brutal behemoth. Any theoretical analysis of this stylistically innovative chronicle of the coup should first address the disproportionately lamentable consequences this state-sanctioned mainstreaming of sadistic violence and the utter disregard for humanity in which it was gestated, had on decency and law. Alegría's contributions to the development of the dictatorship novel as a critically viable genre and its inexorable relationship to the concept of individual sovereignty cannot be objectively examined otherwise.

Introducing us to Allende and his lower-middle class origins in Valparaíso, Chile's primary port city, Alegría perforce outlines the embattled Chilean President's rise to prominence. The narrative voice is, at various interludes, handed off to Allende himself: "Almorcé en casa de mi mama cuando me eligieron Presidente porque quise volver a una infancia que, realmente, no

³⁰¹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 11.

fue mía... dieron siempre por hecho que yo había inventado las respuestas y los recuerdos.”³⁰² In the first person singular, a tragically doomed Allende confesses, “Cariño es una palabra que entiendo, y ternura. El amor, como nace de la confianza... Se aprende de veras cuando ya casi todo se ha perdido.”³⁰³ But then, shortly after, this *cariño* or “tender,” affectionate expression of “love born of trust” becomes an odd political abstraction: “De pronto, Santiago es como una vasta explanada donde transitan gentes sin cara, como una ciudad de teatro cuyas puertas y ventanas están a medio abrirse, pero nadie entra ni sale.”³⁰⁴ This juxtaposition of poetic contemplation and historic fact is the basis for a quasi-novel, multivalent text, diary, *testimonio* that startles and disorients “como una rueda que empieza a detenerse en el vacío... impedida por engranajes invisibles... y... quieta... da otra y otra vuelta hasta que el movimiento se hace imperceptible.”³⁰⁵

While the book details how one political ideology coldly and cruelly supplanted another, erasing it temporarily from history, it is essentially a study of the psychosis suffered by a generation forced to live through an excruciating, 17-year “moment” that left their nerves permanently frayed. Citizens, or “gente... no supo exactamente cómo proceder; más de alguno salió... y encontró las balas de patrulleros militares o policiales; otros... rezaron y ayudaron a cargar cadáveres.”³⁰⁶

A chronicle that operates as a novel, its pages are frequently filled with official tallies, frugally worded entries and a smattering of news briefs occasionally organized further into sub-chapters with subheadings like a textbook, rather than a work of fiction. Ostensibly descriptive, it also ruminates: “Las colas se estiran, cansadas, silenciosas. ...viejos y viejas abrigados,

³⁰² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 31.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁰⁶ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 19.

humeando, quejándose, porque no las ven, las puertas de acero de la Caja de Empleados Públicos y Fondos de Retiro ... repitiendo que éste mes no... por qué no se van a quejar donde el Compañero Presidente.”³⁰⁷

We eavesdrop on a patient but persistent matriarch. “Pero la cola... ahora... es una asamblea de mujeres que vociferan y dan empellones... ‘a los chiquillos con hambre les llama usted política?’”³⁰⁸ We hear from shaken but still strident Chilean youth. “La joven: ‘Poder popular al ataque, golpear antes que ellos.’”³⁰⁹ Then comes a less hopeful take. “El dentista: ‘No estamos preparados para una confrontación, sería una masacre.’”³¹⁰ A citizen remarks: “Armar al pueblo en estos días es lanzarlo a un suicidio colectivo.”³¹¹ Without paragraph breaks, the discontent with a collapsing socialist government becomes palpable, almost a justification for the impending dictatorship. The narrator reappears and speaks in the first person:

Mientras escucho a estos hablantes pienso que sufren durezas. Si bien comen, gastan, naturalmente, más que de costumbre... El mercado se ennegrecía aceleradamente. La prensa que leían el dentista... y el arquitecto... informaba que las agencias internacionales de crédito se habían cerrado como ostras para Allende y se abrían golosas pa’ las FF.AA.,³¹² que la Anaconda³¹³ iniciaba una guerra pirata contra los cargamentos de cobre chileno, que el gobierno no llegaría jamás a obtener los repuestos para los camioneros, porque USA se los negaba.³¹⁴

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 33.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 33

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 35.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

³¹¹ Ibid., 36.

³¹² FF.AA.: Fuerzas Armadas; the Armed Forces: Navy, Air Force and the Army.

³¹³ Anaconda: one of the largest Chilean copper mining companies controlled by the United States to the detriment of Chile’s financial life.

³¹⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 37.

The novel, albeit briefly, takes form as a non-fiction text, rendering it a paragon of Alegrían hybridity. The narrator engages a nonspecific voice in a dialogue about a mysterious member of the paramilitary group Patria y Libertad nicknamed Houdini who sets and detonates explosives, bringing down towers and news media stations: “Doscientos cincuenta atentados en un mes.”³¹⁵ Often bringing the aircraft he piloted low enough to brush the rooftops of government offices, he appeared and disappeared so frequently, he was likened to a flying witch: “Jamás se dieron pájaros más bombarderos y chunchos³¹⁶ más brujos en la historia de la aviación civil.”³¹⁷ From above the city, Houdini allegedly drops off a cloud of leaflets that feature a survey poll to determine support for, or opposition to Allende. The flyers also report that the U.S. ambassador has left on a two-day trip to Washington and will be back in Chile on September 9th; that the U.S. Navy fleet is advancing toward Chile; and that American pilots are in the country to demonstrate their aerial skills in Santiago. The brewing coup d’état is behind all this activity says another anonymous voice: “Óigalo bien. No es un tancazo. Es *el golpe*.”³¹⁸ For a page and a half of seeming quiet, Alegría is a passenger in the vehicle which takes Allende toward the palace as a war plane roars past not far above. “Quisiera despedirme de Allende,” writes Alegría. “Los Fiats se detienen de golpe. Se abren y se cierran puertas con estrépito. Oigo el ruido seco de las armas que se encañonan. Baja Allende, saluda y entra a La Moneda a paso rápido. Lleva un fusil automático en la mano.... Quisiera haberle dado un abrazo....”³¹⁹

For Alegría, Allende was a leader capable of altering the course of history with the dignity of his presence and a few well-chosen words. After Allende enters La Moneda, we know historically, he will only exit as a corpse. So the narrator of *El paso de los gansos* resorts again to

³¹⁵ Ibid., 38.

³¹⁶ Chuncho: a child’s name for a paper plane, but used by adults in the vernacular when referring to a stealth flight.

³¹⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 38.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 40. Tancazo was a previous attempt at a foiled coup d’état against Allende.

³¹⁹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 40.

the first person to relay what Allende might have said or thought in those final hours: “Quienes me atacan son los gestores y empresarios, los que sienten, porque no piensan, que les he roto su equilibrio histórico en Chile, el equilibrio entre la respetable mediocridad burguesa y la aceptación colectiva de las estafas y las renunciaciones que cometen a diario... .”³²⁰ He adds, “... nuestra... sociedad machista... crea sus anticuerpos. Nuestra mujer del pueblo está empezando a ejercer su poder político.”³²¹

He speaks to his voting base, acknowledging the Chilean woman as a force to reckon with. *Alegría* provides a measure of the public regard for Allende and his devotion, as a civil servant, to his country and its people. Then narrator and author become indistinguishable: “Un miembro del último gabinete de Allende interrogado por mí,³²² dijo con un suspiro: Si nos fallan todos, al menos contamos con el general Pinochet!”³²³ In recounting what went wrong, *Alegría*'s narrator second guesses. In the whirlwind of last minute negotiations with the conservative civilians and the military, which formed a coalition, Allende hoped for a way out of the impasse. He planned to ask the people of Chile for a referendum to be made public on Monday. By waiting an extra day, he ran into the surreptitiously planned coup d'état scheduled for that Tuesday morning. Instead, *Alegría* looks back at that moment of planning limbo and resorts to a fictional outcome. Rather than circling the wagons and speaking to Chile from his presidential balcony, we engage Allende in a hypothetical one-on-one conversation, and what might it have been like: “Es curioso que no busque usted los temas del momento inmediato, pero cumplo con nuestro compromiso y respondo... debiéramos conversar sobre el terrorismo de la derecha, la

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³²² *Ibid.*, 48. This “mí” becomes the author bypassing the narrator, thus creating a text with variable levels of perception.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 48.

ofensiva armada y la defensa del gobierno popular, la definición de nuestra estrategia en términos de revolución o reformismo.”³²⁴

Alegría wants us to grasp Allende’s frustration. In his article “What is a Poem?” Brett Bourbon writes: “we have to keep our lives raw enough to allow words to shape it, to show it as gathered in a meaning we do not fully understand.”³²⁵ These lines apply perfectly to the narrator of *El paso de los gansos* in his attempt to articulate the purity of purpose and struggle Allende personified. Through a fluid, shape-shifting narrator, Alegría strives to bring us his reconnaissance of the country he had left and to which he returned in an effort to make sense of things, to comprehend what Allende meant by the core of his struggle when he vowed to change “Una sociedad injustamente coerciva y discriminatoria.”³²⁶

The martyred president valiantly defends the “mujer-víctima, no a un ser marginado; a una persona a quien se explota y se oculta”³²⁷ because “La mayoría del voto femenino chileno es ... de clase media... defienden la estructura tradicional de nuestra burguesía.” He distinguishes her from the women of more humble origins: “la mujer del pueblo llega a una mentalidad revolucionaria a través de un largo y difícil proceso. Trabaja desde su niñez, trabaja antes de casarse y trabaja el doble después de casada. Conoce en carne propia los males de una sociedad que la aplasta... Se para en las colas, sufre la escasez de todo, la inflación la golpea a ella tanto como a la mujer de clase media.”³²⁸

The narrative voice hops back and forth between Allende and yet another eyewitness, the presidential physician no less: “No fui médico de profesión, sino un profesional de la salud pública. Reformismo... detrás de Allende veo una larga e ingeniosa estrategia política... con la

³²⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 49.

³²⁵ Brett Bourbon, “What is a Poem?” in *Modern Philology*, 105.1 (August, 2007), p. 43.

³²⁶ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 50.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

³²⁸ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 52. Apechuga: buckles up. Also, grins and bears it.

victoria de 1970, reveló una obsesión: tapar los agujeros de Chile, parchar y pintar las grietas, salvar y ayudar, darle una mano al pueblo.”³²⁹ Alegría as a fictionalized version of himself, narrates in first person, from an extended encounter, we are to presume, with Allende, comments: “Chile es un país políticamente maduro que, antes de la revolución con mayúsculas, ensaya una con minúsculas,”³³⁰ words which, we are reminded, Allende expressed often while campaigning by the slogan “la revolución en libertad.”³³¹ In clarifying a dialogue that could have taken place, Alegría creates an exchange with the same unnamed but presumably esteemed political mentor to Allende ascribing the following commentary to a young, idealistic political partisan who forms part of the presidential entourage. This fictional, hindsight dialogue includes a posthumous Allende: “El partido comunista –dijo el joven doctor—es el partido de la esperanza revolucionaria, el fascismo, como movimiento de masas, es, entonces, el partido de la desesperación contra-revolucionaria.”³³² Alegría tells us that to that, Allende replied, “Usted... se refiere a la impotencia de un régimen liberal que ha perdido el apoyo de la clase media y la ha entregado, sin proponérselo, a la retaguardia del capitalismo.”³³³ “No, dijo el otro... . El fascismo es un movimiento de masas que surge con el colapso del reformismo capitalista.”³³⁴ As if a third wheel, Alegría tells us that Allende had an ace card up his sleeve in a rhetorical game of political theory that was far from over. “No,” Alegría tells us again that Allende retorted: “Si llegamos al gobierno fue para probar que la revolución con dólares podía transformarse en una revolución del pueblo contra los dólares... . [L]a UP perdió la masa flotante de la clase media no

³²⁹ Ibid., 58.

³³⁰ Ibid., 60.

³³¹ Ibid., 60.

³³² Ibid., 61.

³³³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 61.

³³⁴ Ibid., 60.

de golpe... sino de a poco, exasperándola, olvidándola, desdeñándola, la empujó en manos del extremismo derechista.”³³⁵

Alegria conflates two conflictive images and sequential events that marked a generation: “Las cacerolas empezaron a sonar con ruido de cadenas y picanas eléctricas. 1973. Demasiado tarde.”³³⁶ Chile’s Minister of the Interior emerges on the page as the voice of authority. It could be said that there’s inherent violence in the shift when such a high-ranking military officer, speaking after the coup, refers euphemistically to the *golpe*, to the coup, as “el pronunciamiento militar del 11 de septiembre.”³³⁷ He adds, “el único lugar donde hay detenidos es el Estadio Nacional... es política de gobierno que los funcionarios de más alta responsabilidad del régimen pasado permanezcan ‘en algún lugar de Chile’ mientras se investigan los cargos en su contra. Son poco más de 30.”³³⁸ Thirty? Is this the number of those detained? Or the number of charges imposed on those who have been detained?

In the subsequent pages, a military captain descends upon a *población callampa*³³⁹ with his troop of armed soldiers. They push their way into a gathering of ramshackle houses held together by flimsy wood boards and tin roofs. The narrator here is an army officer who uses the Chilean vernacular. Among the terms used in the text are: “concha de su madre,” (son of a bitch), “rotos choros,” (cool dudes and gals), “la raja,” (the middle of the buttocks), “el quiltro,” (stray dog) “le paré el carro,” (I didn’t tolerate his attitude), “no me dió pelota.”(didn’t look at or listen to me). The scene unfolds early September 12, 1973, when the soldiers arrive in the village of La

³³⁵ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

³³⁶ Ibid., 62.

³³⁷ Euphemistic phrase to smooth the impact of the term dictatorship. The military is a force that remains quiet. When trouble churns, it, utters its voice, *se pronuncia*.

³³⁸ Alegria, *El paso de los gansos*, 63.

³³⁹ Poblacion callampa: a shanty town.

Legua, a defiant hotbed of leftist activism where a palpable ferocity can be observed in the eyes and posture of its denizens.

In the eyes of Alegría's narrator, the encounters between these *callampas* or indigent hut dwellers and the soldiers are sharply barbed affairs. The hubris of the soldier collides with the poor man or woman's hard looks, their *individual sovereignty* goaded beyond civility and tolerance.

On an overcast day: "Día de sopaipillas³⁴⁰ y vino tinto, y aquí hace frío, no ve que nos pega el viento de frente y todo esto se llueve... no hay cijo y qué carbón va a haber, apenas unas ramas secas y papeles y por eso ve los grupos que ve calentándose los pies."³⁴¹ A boy sees the soldiers and runs home to announce them. The soldiers force themselves in. The child's mother gives them a strong, hard look but steps out of their way, wary of their weapons. The passage is central to the book as a definitive take on the character of the newly installed dictatorship. The soldiers' arrogance following the recent coup, the entrenched defiance of a woman protecting her home, bristling at the soldiers' impunity to transgress her family life. Soldiers will be pitted against a vulnerable citizenship for years to come as the new national alchemy of power displayed with glaring hubris. This vignette constitutes a crucial specific illustration of the new regime's swagger:

El sargento se volvió como para pegarle una cachetada, pero le paré el carro con un gesto. Me alisé los guantes y di orden de retirarnos. Vamos. Y no sé por qué, nunca lo sabré, ya ve lo que son las cosas, se me ocurrió decirle al cabro Ya está, pues cabrito, ya no volvemos más, quizá porque me pareció no sé, ahí parado, muerto de frío, solo, y le puse la mano en la cabeza otra vez. Y, entonces, me habló... dijo

³⁴⁰ Sopaipilla is a doughy pancake-like dish, usually eaten with marmalade and hot tea on cold days. It is ancestrally indigenous but a popular food staple among Chile's poorer classes.

³⁴¹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 66.

Que encontraron al papá en el entretecho? Lo quedé mirando y el cabro no se turbó. Me pareció que sonreía. Observé a los otros. Inmóviles, los huevones, extrañados. Di la vuelta y entramos al rancho otra vez. No di ninguna orden. El sargento golpeaba con el rifle en el techo. Como demorara un poco le dijo: Baja, mierda, o fusilamos a tu mujer! Y saltó el pescado... estaba desarmado. No lo había visto nunca en persona, lo reconocí por los retratos que se publicaron... joven, flacuchento pero fortacho, con barba estilo Guevara... se fijó en la mujer, pero a mí no me dió pelota. El sargento le pegó un empujón por la espalda y lo sacó del rancho. Después el concha de su madre me clavó la vista y dije con rabia, porque me dió rabia que me mirara el huevón, proceda, y el sargento corriendo formó el pelotón, después pusieron al hombre contra la pared del rancho, los demás callados, y sin vacilaciones ni nada y con movimientos bien medidos el sargento levantó el sable, gritó fuego y los soldados dispararon. Se dobló el huevón y medio que quiso afirmarse, pero las piernas no le dieron para más. Cayó fuerte. El sargento esperó. Mi tropa esperaba. El olor a pólvora me picó en la nariz. Avancé de inmediato. Le puse el revólver en la nuca, más o menos, y pam! Le pegué el tiro de gracia. Di unos pasos para atrás porque había sangre ya y barro en las botas. Y me iba cuando vi al cabro. No se había movido. A la mujer ya no la miré. Al niño hubiera querido decirle alguna cosa, así como, oye, tu papá no te oyó nada, ni supo lo que dijiste, Y cómo le iba a decir eso usted a una criatura? Tendrá toda la vida para que se lo digan. O no se lo digan.³⁴²

³⁴² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 67.

Machiavelli pondered: “men commit injuries either through fear or through hate.”³⁴³ The coup d’état is, of course, at the center of this one-day diary where we witness Allende’s death early. But *Alegría* uses flashbacks and forward leaps in time, occasionally reverting to periods preceding the Allende era in order to explain the advent of martial law and state terror, and eventually resurrects Allende in this way. Similar to *Una especie de memoria*, published eight years before, the work is characterized by a chronologically chaotic narrative structure, perhaps a reflection of the confusion and anguish that permeated the nation after September 11th. Jaime Concha describes *El paso de los gansos* as an “inquieta estructura.”³⁴⁴ Antonio Skármeta thought it to possess “abrupta heterogeneidad.”³⁴⁵ Héctor Mario Cavallari views Concha’s analysis of *El paso*’s unifying principle in its “lenguaje de desesperación y denuncia,”³⁴⁶ adding that it represents an “ambiente fragmentario propio de un mundo que se hunde en la diferenciación del caos y la muerte.”³⁴⁷ Meanwhile Skármeta observes the work’s “técnica del zoom,”³⁴⁸ narrating “desde lo externo hasta lo íntimo y privado.”³⁴⁹ Cavallari notes that *Alegría*’s narrative convulsions portray “la intrincada malla... *ideología fascista*.”³⁵⁰ While these intellectuals and best-selling bourgeois authors, many of them writing and critiquing from the smugness of safe exile do, no doubt, enrich the critical anthology with accurate structural analyses of this work, they themselves remain detached from the open sore of the experience of an assaulting coup on the vulnerable citizen who was caught in the heat of the horrifying coup d’état between panic on

³⁴³ Niccoló Machiavelli, “Of New Dominions Acquired by the Power of Others or by Fortune” in Chapter VII, *The Prince And the Discourses* (1950), 30.

³⁴⁴ Héctor Mario Cavallari, “Fernando *Alegría* y la deconstrucción del fascismo” in Juan Armando Epple, Editor, *Para una fundación imaginaria de Chile: la obra literaria de Fernando *Alegría** (1987), 115.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴⁹ Cavallari, “Fernando *Alegría* y la deconstrucción del fascismo” in Juan Armando Epple, Editor, *Para una fundación imaginaria de Chile: la obra literaria de Fernando *Alegría** (1987), 115.

³⁵⁰ Epple, Editor, *Para una fundación imaginaria de Chile: la obra literaria de Fernando *Alegría** (1987), 115.

one side and rage on the other. *Sovereignty of the self* again transgressed, scoffed at and shoved aside as experienced by the shanty dweller wife, is most flagrant of the nature of abusive power toward the ideologically vanquished. Even ideological opposition becomes irrelevant to the aggressive soldier bent on using his weapons. Weaponized inhumanity overrides respect toward a humanity who has invested their lives, their convictions, on making their utopia a reality that has been astonishingly shattered. That these scholars skipped the rawness of this indigent guerrilla family's vulnerability makes me realize that unless a critic rises to scholarship from the very trenches of horrific squalor and political dissent without the ability to escape encroaching opponents, then literary criticism becomes vacuous; it becomes a pale intellectual exercise devoid of contingent humanity when that humanity lays supine, humiliated, left abandoned to their wounds. Yet, these leftist folk stood their ground and showed dignity in their pride, in their mutual cohesion, in their love of family and national idealism.

In the above vignette shared by a fictional military officer, we encounter a direct demonstration of the manner in which *sovereignty of the self* is mocked and brutalized under a dictatorship. A preponderant, if illusory, hubris remains unquestioned, unchallenged. Over the subsequent pages we see the emergence of another genre: the political essay, which wedges itself into the fabric of the novel with an undercurrent of political philosophy and adds another verifiable element to the hybridity of the work. The narrator—here the author as both literature professor and diplomat—summarizes Latin American political history and opines that each of the region's republics possesses painfully few signs of significant independence. With Spain removed as the principal hegemon in a 19th century independence chain reaction, other nations filled the vacuum. Chile could not be an exception. It lacked the resources to oppose an imperialist power armed with First World financial and military might. After the Cuban

Revolution, the Chilean left sought its own. The latter would differ significantly from the former in two significant respects: it would be non-violent and it would respect the Constitution. In retrospect, the honor accorded the Constitution was an unintended but, for all practical purposes, a bow to the oligarchy, more than just to law. Alegría's narrator paraphrases Allende's remarks before the United Nations podium: "Propusimos... que una nación con madurez política y voluntad de emancipación económica podía iniciar el camino hacia una revolución socialista dentro de normas democráticas. Para eso ganamos la Presidencia de Chile. Pero no ganamos el poder. Sólo el gobierno,"³⁵¹ adding "Un triunfo... de la Unidad Popular podía cargar la balanza política contra el imperialismo en toda Latinoamérica... Somos un país en camino de su libertad, tratan de cerrarnos ese camino, al fin y al cabo seremos nosotros... quienes lo mantendremos abierto o lo entregaremos a nuestros enemigos."³⁵²

The following section reads as if lifted directly from front-page banner headlines: "ASÍ MURIO ALLENDE. DRAMÁTICOS FUERON LOS ÚLTIMOS MOMENTOS VIVIDOS EN LA MONEDA." The narrator adds what resembles a newspaper clipping: "... médico personal del ex Mandatario... el doctor Patricio Guijón Klein, quien fue el que escuchó *el disparo* con el que Allende se quitó la vida y fue el mismo médico quien en un intento desesperado trató de socorrer al ex Mandatario."³⁵³ There is a retracing of steps: "El ex Mandatario quedó solo con su médico amigo, el doctor Guijón. Le pidió que saliera. Cuando el médico le dió vuelta la espalda... el seco estampido de *dos balas* lo hizo volverse. Inclinado en un sofá grande estaba el cadáver de Allende con una metralleta que le había regalado el Comandante cubano Fidel Castro."³⁵⁴ A forensic analysis follows: "Ante el ruido de la metralleta, Arturo Girón se devolvió

³⁵¹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 71.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁵³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 74.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

a la sala y observó a Allende con la cabeza destrozada, ya muerto. El profesional se abalanzó sobre él, le sacó la metralleta y trató de auscultarlo para ver si respiraba. Una vez que se percató que Allende se había suicidado, puso sobre sus manos de nuevo el arma y dio a conocer el hecho a los presentes.»³⁵⁵

Alegría emboldens the dying Allende with never before heard words. The following first-person voice strongly suggests Alegría himself knew that Allende had :

Allende quería que concurrieran los Comandantes en Jefe a la Moneda para presentarles la renuncia a ellos... Me contesta: Hagan lo que quieran... Si quieren me asesinan ... A las 13,50 horas del martes 11 de septiembre ... Salvador Allende ofreció rendirse incondicionalmente a las fuerzas militares... Allende se introdujo—con casco y metralleta—a un salón presidencial. Se sentó en un sillón de felpa, tomó entre sus manos una metralleta regalo de Fidel Castro, y se descerrajó de tiros en el maxilar inferior. Esto hizo que la caja craneana del ex Presidente explotara... El oficial Palacios que había llegado hasta La Moneda con otros oficiales para resguardar la vida del Mandatario depuesto... manifestó: ‘Las investigaciones señalan que el cadáver de Salvador Allende—específicamente las manos—tenían gran cantidad de pólvora, lo que indica que el ex Presidente también hizo uso de su metralleta en contra de las Fuerzas Armadas.’³⁵⁶

At the height of his storytelling prowess, Alegría emphasizes the fact that Allende held fast to an AK-47, or some such automatic weapon—a gift from Fidel Castro—during his last moments. Although Alegría defers to textual references which depict the living Allende as

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 75.

³⁵⁶ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 78.

already deposed from power, as the ex-President or “Mandatario depuesto,”³⁵⁷ Allende defends his role as the rightful, duly elected head of state by remaining in office and *at* the government palace until his last breath. Alegría’s narrator tells us: “El ex Presidente fue informado de que La Moneda sería atacada por aire y tierra.”³⁵⁸ Allende’s response, as described herein (and confirmed in photos carried by international news media) is to don a helmet. It is rare for someone bent on suicide to grab a semi-automatic rifle and a helmet, but it is even less possible for one man to defend a country, or himself with those two implements when an entire army wants him dead. At best, it is a last hurrah, an impassioned but quixotic political act.

Alegría’s narrator is clear when he describes Allende as unresponsive to his critically timed advice against defying the Armed Forces. The subtle suggestion is that Allende was not above making pivotal decisions on impulse, egoism or pride, while just moments later cowardly demonstrating a concern for his own skin over that of his legacy with a sudden willingness to surrender. This startling and radical change in behavior contradicts the historic Allende’s character and his inviolable commitment to defend the integrity of his presidency with his life: “Allende aseguró que ‘sólo muerto saldría de la Moneda.’”³⁵⁹ By portraying the Allende of this semi-fictional narrative as an average, complex and contradictory individual who lapses into faithlessness and personal doubt, Alegría meant to either humanize the friend he professed to admire or reiterate that the difference between historic truth and narrative fiction is never quite so vast as we would imagine. Given what Alegría writes first a novel, second a chronicle, and lastly an amalgam of various genres, all these other variants so distant from Allende’s unimpeachable reputation, what Alegría has written in this passage may be viewed as a creative

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 78.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 78.

³⁵⁹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 78.

excess; as license imagining a “what if” Allende had been merely a politician and not the warrior-priest (arguably politically naïve) that history knows him to have been.

We return to Alegría’s creative denouement. Why would Allende be willing to surrender one moment and then commit suicide the next? Is Alegría’s testimony, in novel form, closer to the actual historic truth—or is it simply another layer of fictional conjecture? There is nothing in the press or documented history that indicates Allende lost his resolve to defend his government and its legitimacy even at the cost of his own life. It may be that Alegría extrapolated from discussions he had privately with Allende on separate occasions and interjected his own feeling that suicide was a coward’s way out. Whether fiction or borrowed from actual conversations between the author and the president, who were personal friends, we can never know. The creator of the work has been deceased since 2005, and public records which might verify those utterances have yet to surface.

The narrator of *El paso de los gansos* goes on to describe the sound of automatic weapons everywhere: “ráfagas de metralletas en todos los barrios.”³⁶⁰ With “all the neighborhoods,” Alegría is not likely to have seriously implied that wealthy, upper-class neighborhoods were as exposed to military assaults as the shantytowns, especially when the coup was meant to serve the interests of the upper classes. The narrator’s generalization should be read as a mere form of speech, meaning that gunfire could be heard from “everywhere.”

Another idiosyncrasy that prohibits a traditional reading of the work appears in a section oddly subtitled “La batalla de Santiago.” Under it, pages 83-84 seem almost an editorial oversight. The following texts are repeated from elsewhere: “el 29 de junio, con ocasión del tancazo,”³⁶¹ and “el espíritu chileno, que puede ser incluso marxista, pero una vez que se pone el

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 80.

³⁶¹ Tancazo was an earlier coup d’etat that failed.

uniforme, es y se siente soldado.”³⁶² Unless the repetition was unintended, the purpose escapes this reader. This aside, the text does make an important distinction: “Salvador Allende era un marxista de guante blanco.”³⁶³ He was a gentleman and never lost his poise or dirtied his hands.

The narrator also possesses Allende, becoming him for these pages, raising him from death as the political conscience for a populace, a ghostly figure haunting his opponents and, especially, the traitors in his camp. As a resurrected spirit, he reminds them of his unimpeachable integrity and steadfast commitment to a moral and ethical standard which guided his resolve to implement a social vision. This Allende compares his circumstance to that of Chile’s 19th century president José Manuel Balmaceda, who attempted to disrupt the oligarchy’s grip on the nation’s wealth. In order to open the economic arena to a wider swath of society –prevented from such access by the *latifundio* oligarchy since the earliest colonial times-- and to competition in the marketplace, while investing the nation’s new mining wealth on education and railroads, Balmaceda became dictatorial in his effort to create a parliamentary regime, reform the Constitution allowing for increased presidential powers, and break oligarchical monopolies³⁶⁴ controlling mining. Failing in this venture, civil war unleashed. Rather than subjecting to a brutal shaming by the oligarchy, he sacrificed himself in a successful suicide attempt. The narrator outlines the comparison: “Las coincidencias claro que son sorprendentes, pero las diferencias no son menos importantes.”³⁶⁵ Narrating as Allende, this voice swells the page with the gravitas Allende’s elocution delivered each time he spoke, leaving his audience with a sense of satisfaction, a reassurance that the paternal voice was truly coddling: “Sé ... que la oposición

³⁶² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 84.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁶⁴ Diego Barría Traverso, “La autonomía estatal y clase dominante en el siglo XIX chileno : la guerra civil de 1891,” Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Latin American Studies, Institute for History, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, University of Leiden, 2013-10-02.

³⁶⁵ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 87.

desea crear rápidamente un fantasma balmacedista sobre mis hombros.... No es que critique a Balmaceda por la salida que escogió; no, su suicidio fue un acto de heroísmo y una lección moral, rehusó sencillamente caer en manos de feroces enemigos.... Es una manera de derrotarlos.”³⁶⁶

The narrator, a ventriloquist for the posthumous voice of Allende, demonstrates how the 19th century political climate remained relevant well into the 1970s: “Balmaceda consolidó la base económica del país,”³⁶⁷ going on to qualify Balmaceda’s achievement with, “Pero... lo consiguió con el apoyo directo y básico de la oligarquía chilena.”³⁶⁸ The fictional Allende proceeds with the comparison:

Debo destacar que las conquistas mayores las hemos obtenido con el apoyo de los trabajadores y campesinos, sufriendo el ataque y el boycott implacable de la oligarquía. Lo verdaderamente curioso es que las coincidencias entre Balmaceda y nosotros empiezan en el segundo período de su gobierno, entre 1889 y 1991. Balmaceda da un vuelco lento pero profundo en su política y se transforma en un líder nacionalista y en precursor de los movimientos antiimperialistas de nuestro siglo... fue un liberal acosado por comerciantes y reaccionarios.³⁶⁹

He doesn’t end there: “Qué puede decir un hombre de honor, un patriota sincero, cuando las fuerzas armadas lo traicionan, cuando la burguesía lo sabotea ... y ve caer el pueblo, siempre el pueblo, sacrificado inútilmente, y al país entregado en bandeja otra vez a los mercaderes sin conciencia, los mercenarios sin patria?”³⁷⁰ He closes this section:

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 87.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 87.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 87-88.

³⁶⁹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 88.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 89.

Un humo por otro, mil estampidos por uno, la habitación es la misma, un salón en La Moneda, una plataforma en la Plaza Bulnes, un dormitorio en la calle Amunátegui, 1891 o 1973, ejércitos visibles o invisibles que avanzan, flotas que salen y vuelven a puerto. La soledad también es la misma. Y el cañón? Hacia dónde apunta? A una sien, a una boca? Al asaltante que, por fin, da la cara?³⁷¹

Military force was always embedded in the premise of power in governance. It only became more voluminous and technologically more advanced with the passing of time. Alegría's narrator draws this historic parallel between two idealistic political figures who suffered overwhelming opposition as the consequence for taking the side of Chile's poor. Both Balmaceda and Allende paid the price for acting with nobility of spirit. They chose their own death rather than surrender to a rapacious opposition.

Nearly a century after Balmaceda, Allende met a parallel end, encroached upon by the military, on the nod of the oligarchy, following the dictates of an imperialist power—for him it was the U.S. rather than Great Britain—setting the parameters for the *sovereignty of the self*. We turn to Alegría's diary note of September 11, 1973. It becomes eerily clear that Chile's institutions do not exist for the welfare of the simple citizen: “los francotiradores abrieron fuego sobre la gente en la Alameda. Yo detrás de un quiosco tomaba fotos de la gente corriendo y echándose al suelo... Era increíble el ruido.”³⁷² All that convulsion, confusion, violence, military presence and a government adrift unmoor the average man severing him from his tether to self and to his society, that precious self-sovereignty that he expects his country will recognize as inviolable for he is one of its own. No. On that day no Chilean can feel Chilean. Every citizen becomes stateless because the state is dissolved and darker powers are replacing it bypassing any

³⁷¹ Ibid., 89.

³⁷² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 111.

concern for the integrity of humanity—even a walking oligarch is at that moment in danger of his own convictions. In *El deseo de otro Chile* (2010), Tomás Moulián reminds us that the vulnerable folk both martyred leaders fought for were “los grandes marginados de la política chilena: los campesinos y los pobres urbanos.”³⁷³

The last pages are the narrative “verses” of a Cueca, the Chilean folk dance used here as a metaphor for pride, purpose and courage in a final stand where the proverbial “gallito de la pasión,” a stand-in for the common man as underdog, dances and drinks to gird himself for a fight to the death. The “Gallito” is Allende, whose impassioned political service on behalf of the nation concludes with defiant words and then acquiescence as his “dance” or “popular folk song” comes to an end: “se acabó la cueca de la Moneda.”³⁷⁴

After fifty years devoted to campaigning for substantial change in the structures of power within Chile, Alegría takes up the dream Allende left and converts it into a eulogy, thus imagining the national alchemy were his Allende’s political vision actually become implemented. Here’s where fantasy, the narrative fictional imagination and an ideological utopia converge in the only solid terrain left to be realizable, literature, the fundamental venue to tell a story that couldn’t be lived.

The democratic socialism Allende articulated, a form of peaceful revolution—Alegría writes—bred a collective conscience, a veritable “institution of liberty,”³⁷⁵ that would soon be replaced by the military’s ideological fortress of anti-intellectual repression, the latter consistent with Hannah Arendt’s observations in her chapter “Totalitarianism” in *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding 1953-1975* of European totalitarianism emerging from

³⁷³ Tomás Moulián, *El deseo de otro Chile* (2010), 19-20.

³⁷⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 97.

³⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarianism” in *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding 1953-1975* (2018), 159.

“Imperialism” as “subterranean streams of modern history.”³⁷⁶ The following chapter, or rather, brief five-page hiatus entitled “El paso de los gansos” is analogous to the brief hail of bullets and bombs that comprised the coup itself; with its heartless destruction of historical documents, of once-sacrosanct civic rights, and violation of pregnant women at the mercy of violence-inebriated soldiers. Human life, or rather the lives of suspected political dissidents or those who opposed fascism, no longer seemed to hold much value for Pinochet and his surrogates. In the streets, the police, or in Alegría’s sarcastic naming, “caradevineros,”³⁷⁷ rather than *carabineros*, due to their new arrogance and excesses, freeing them to feel entitled to abuse their social advantage, to mistreat people at random. The reader lunges into the ontology of this moment in history through the technique of “unwriting,” virtually made to experience the immanence of events unraveling past the words that shroud the text. The chapter details raw military violence against civilians, who counter with creative subversion and resilient survival strategies:

tremulos espectadores de este fenómeno único en la historia patria, nos habíamos subido a los últimos eucaliptus, a las postreras palmeras y, colgados, mirábamos el paso implacable de los gansos... . De noche ya la marcha tapó el único mundo que conocíamos, y los árboles precarios donde nos guarnecíamos empezaron a caer y el desplome pronto fue general, torres como bosques, rascacielos como álamos, cordilleras como arena volando en el viento nocturno.³⁷⁸

Unrelenting, “Esta fuerza aérea parecía hecha de esbeltos gansos de aluminio; de mirada dura, picos oscuros y prominentes, claramente amenazadores, alas cortas y patas triangulares. Se fueron en el horizonte y dejaron el eco de un solo graznido ronco y universal.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ Arendt, *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁷⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 102.

³⁷⁸ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 105.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

A distant echo from the 15th century Conquest, this time aggressively invading from the sky: “los vuelos rasantes de la escuadrilla acrobática yanqui, nótese: es necesario proveerlos de un mapa de Sudamérica y advertirles de cuál Santiago se trata. El programa finalizaba un poco a la diabla recomendando el bombardeo general de fondas y cantinas, de rotos borrachos, choros, sublevados.”³⁸⁰ But then, “No son fondas, pues, ni hablamos de cuecas, nos referimos a resistencia armada y extremista. Impasse.”³⁸¹

A military parade was traditionally supposed to follow. It takes place annually on Independence Day, September 18th, but *El paso de los gansos* omits that day from its September chronicle. Clearly, in 1973, there was no parade of symbols. All symbols were activated into the gruesome reality of force and destruction and death that parades imply. Independence Day, which had previously celebrated liberation from colonial Spain, a First World power in its heyday is, at the hands of Pinochet, readily replaced by the United States. Our narrator seems to allude that Pinochet seized the scepter of the country’s power by stealth to abscond with the national resources that would have been sold to England, France and others in support of Allende’s egalitarian utopia. In this wanton display of power, each uniformed regiment, representing various branches of the Chilean armed forces, marches in goose step. Indeed, *El paso de los gansos* virtually echoes with the sound of military boots in triumphant celebration at the dawn of yet another indefatigable dictatorship. By goose-stepping, each branch of the armed forces signaled they were ready to pounce on those whom the dictator would declare as the country’s enemies, even when they were their own civilian, ideologically unsophisticated fellow-citizens.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 102.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 102.

Obviously, there would be darker days ahead: as brief as this chapter is, it nonetheless offers an intense, high-pressure read. And, of course, there is much left out. So it is with Alegría's minimalist novels, which reduce arguments to their barest essences, leaving the reader to infer a deeper analysis. Here, politics, rather than the honed arguments in defense of any particular ideology, fan the passions of average peasants and factory workers, of urban dwellers marginalized by social class and economic disadvantage. They stoically shoulder the shoves and barking orders from police, but, who, just as often, resist and rebel with guerrilla tactics and an innate devil-may-care attitude: "mirábamos el paso implacable de los gansos, robustos, determinados y poderosos, sin poder detenerse ya, marchando ciegamente hacia la historia...."³⁸²

"El Evangelio Según Cristián," the 106-page chapter concluding this work, constitutes a novel in itself. It is structured as both a diary of highlights leading up to the coup d'état, and navigates the calendar beyond it. Pages 109-117 are short entries headed by precise dates between August 30 – September 10, 1973, that survey the diarist's feelings and analysis relative to his own existential experience. In *Essays in Aesthetics*, Gérard Genette states, probably thinking of Roland Barthes's attitude toward diary writing, "keeping a diary... is perhaps a condition for existence... a sort of semi-nostalgic fascination with.... asceticism.... *vita nova*, *new regime*.... To wit, [diary-writing becomes] placing onto the scene the inner image of another."³⁸³ Therefore, by incorporating the structure of diary-writing into a novel-portrait of a day in a society's life precisely at the moment when that life is being destroyed, negating the reality which the diary is capturing, thus transforming the diary into an anti-diary, we're transported into an anachronistic space by reading, by pseudo-experiencing in warped time the grafting of a reality outside of the linearity of the story in which we're presently immersed.

³⁸² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 105.

³⁸³ Gerard Genette, "The Diary, the Anti-Diary" in *Essays in Aesthetics* (1999), 122.

Having to grapple with such inherent contradiction, while acknowledging this intellectual and emotional political inertia, we continue with Alegría/Cristián's diary notations followed by a slender paragraph corresponding to September 11, 1973, the date which is the subject of the novel overall: "El mundo se ha derrumbado alrededor. Guerra civil. Relato los hechos, 10 am. Empieza tiroteo en La Moneda. Yo estaba a dos cuadras. Francotiradores matan y hieren mientras tomo fotos. En mi edificio los soldados me quitan las películas. Y hay francotiradores en todas partes. Vemos el bombardeo de La Moneda."³⁸⁴ Then comes: "HASTA EL 18."³⁸⁵

Combing the city periphery by their neighborhood names, the author notates the hundreds and thousands of murdered citizens that were actually counted. Even soldiers are killed by grenade throws into army transport trucks packed with soldiers. Men, women, children all fall to bullets.³⁸⁶

SEPTIEMBRE 11, 1973.³⁸⁷

... hay balas por todas partes. Pero en La Moneda se libra una batalla campal. Entre tanques, fuego de ametralladoras y armas cortas, a los 20 minutos debe haber quedado la pelería... . No pude ir a la Plaza Italia porque estaba todo rodeado por milicos. Los francotiradores han disparado contra todos estos edificios.... . en la Escuela de Farmacia hubo una gran batalla con bazucas, causando gran destrucción y muertos.³⁸⁸

These diary entries that resemble newspaper headlines, may well be newspaper headlines. Having that be the case, one has to question the political philosophy in Alegría/Cristián's intention in his/their omission of commentary regarding the use of these entries in light of Noam

³⁸⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 110.

³⁸⁵ Alegría capitalizes the phrase HASTA EL 18 as a new diary entry., *El paso de los gansos*, p. 110.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., pages 110 to 117 are riddled with diary entries attesting to the various ways of killing and dying in the days following the coup d'état.

³⁸⁷ On this historic day, Alegría writes the dates in caps, as he does with every other significant date.

³⁸⁸ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, pp. 113-114.

Chomsky's view of the role of the press as an ideological system, which to survive must acquiesce to the norms imposed by the ruling powers. Chomsky writes "the elaborate pretense that the press is a critical dissenting force... when in fact it is almost entirely subservient to the basic principles of the ideological system: ... the right of intervention, the unique right of the United States to serve as global judge and executioner."³⁸⁹

Chomsky then states "It is quite a marvelous system of indoctrination," leaving it ambiguous for the reader to discern whether this indoctrination is meant as the action of the United States' government abroad, or the role of the liberal press anywhere, in which case the news media plays into the hands of "the totalitarian menace of fascism of the left!"³⁹⁰ In terms of the role of language and ideas as purveyed through journalism and political speeches, one can easily ascertain that the jets flying over La Moneda were not among those belonging to the Chilean armed forces' inventory. It is therefore not too difficult to surmise that these were guest flying machines, evidence of the fact that "The resources of imperialist ideology are quite vast." Whether we discuss roaring jets flying over head or headlines screaming their boldness across a newspaper heading, the imperialist ideology "tolerates –indeed, encourages—a variety of forms of opposition, perhaps including Cristián loud biking across town shooting photos, and these tolerant foreign imperialist ideologies do so "to insure that the countries of the world remain open insofar as possible to exploitation by U.S. corporations."³⁹¹ The diary entries continue unabated. Yet, it is difficult to turn the pages without pausing for a breath, to remain unmoved by events that transpired over 40 years ago. An image of imperiled humanity fills a reader's mind with images frozen still from the film of human despair, pain, death, the panicked search for a missing loved one, the wreckage of a new reality in which such unimaginable moments almost

³⁸⁹ Noam Chomsky, *On Language* (1979), 39.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹¹ Chomsky, *On Language*, pp. 40-41.

preclude empathy. Alegría's Montealegre pens a cryptic account primarily informed by what he sees, hears, encounters and narrowly dodges himself. We read that a shantytown has been bombed from the air. We tally the dead. Alegría's narrator doesn't clarify whether he actually saw the bombing, and the dead, or read about this in the local press or heard it on the radio. The sources are unclear. The apocalyptic level of alarm, the din, the terror caused by the sound waves throbbing the nerves after war jets flew low overhead, dropping bombs causing explosions, blazing fires and clouds of smoke traumatizing national life that fateful day of the coup d'état ring loudly and ceaselessly for the survivors, no doubt, but Montealegre's diary does not elaborate.

The diary continues through OCTUBRE 10, 1973, a date that seems chosen at random and merely to provide space for philosophical venting. Beyond these dated, terse entries, the chapter begins with a redux of Cristián Montealegre's return to Chile: "Mi padre nos recibió con alegría."³⁹² The narrative resounds with the impact the coup has had on the memory of Chileans who were alive and of an age to fathom life as a ramification of psychological injuries incurred because of it. Each citizen became, overnight, a living testimony or "testimonio," a highly regarded genre in Latin American letters, for it bears fresh memories, likely to preserve the truths of experience.

SEPTIEMBRE 12, 1973: "Dijeron que Allende se suicidó después de haber pedido escolta para rendirse. Muy sospechoso parece. Es lógico que nuestros dictadores militares lo necesiten muerto para que no hubiera peligro de que volviera.... No saben que en estos días han hecho cientos de mártires, un santo de Allende."³⁹³ He adds: "Ayer se quebró Chile. Lo que desataron los militares nunca lo podrán remediar... Fue dinamita lo que voló dos camiones de

³⁹² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 119.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 112.

soldados... . Me da pena estar entre gente que celebra todo esto y habla con odio incluso de los que murieron.”³⁹⁴ On this same diary date, our narrator admits: “Por primera vez tengo vergüenza de Chile.”³⁹⁵

SEPTIEMBRE 15, 1973: “Dos cabros estaban afuera a las 9 pm. Al ver a los carabineros fueron adonde ellos con las manos arriba. Los carabineros los hicieron cruzar la calle; con las manos en la muralla, de espaldas, les dijeron que los fusilarían y les dispararon mientras los papás miraban desde la ventana.”³⁹⁶ The pair of youths exercised their *individual sovereignty* when they chose to entrust their fates to the armed authorities. By contrast, the military thugs chose to abdicate their own self-sovereignty in the exercise of illusory power. Governments, however lofty as they may be, rise and fall. That is the natural cycle of social history. But human life? How can the “law” kill without moral cause? Our diarist closes the entry detailing the logical result of this cruel and unwarranted state violence: “En las poblaciones salen niñitos de 15 años con metralletas a matar soldados.”³⁹⁷ In the end, violence engulfs, transforms into fever, turns into disease, becomes an epidemic.

SEPTIEMBRE 16, 1973: “...Cómo han muerto pacos, colgándolos, cortándole los testículos.”³⁹⁸

SEPTIEMBRE 19, 1973: “... Nadie se salva, ni los gringos, ni los reporteros, ni las ambulancias a las que les disparan de los dos lados.”³⁹⁹

The narrator takes a reprieve from the dooming reality enveloping Santiago in an apparent attempt to regain a modicum of sanity: “frente al parque amaneciendo... en los espesos

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 113.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 113.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 115.

³⁹⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 115.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 115.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 116.

pimientos y polvosas acacias plateadas, por los senderos amarillos, pegada al muro del río Pío Nono... (a mamá... se le aprieta la garganta”⁴⁰⁰ as well as in less posh but slightly more nostalgic enclaves described as “cajitas de ladrillo en Santa Rosa.”⁴⁰¹ The description narrows the narrator’s identity, disclosing his relationship to the neighborhood vía the social and class status it implies: “Los Montealegres somos vieja burguesía terrateniente, no vinosos (no vineyards), pero entiendo que sí trigueros con algo de hacienda y más de hortaliza.”⁴⁰²

One could say there are three “gansos”⁴⁰³ who leave heavy footprints in the work, but these footprints are not always tied to distinct individuals. These three-voices-in-one could also be interpreted as the author’s unique revolutionary effort: a one-man struggle of resistance in the midst of civil war imposed unilaterally by state sanctioned violence. Thus the novel becomes dissent armed with a cultural shield against an illegal and immoral seizure of government power with unabashed, open violence and a subsequent iron grip on governance maintained vis-a-vis a discreet violence. This lends credence to what Emmanuel Levinas intends when he states that “I” am/is responsible for the “Other.” Even though *El paso de los gansos* is a testimonial chronicling the better part of the 24-hour span with which the coup d’etat is inextricably linked, it also exists in harmony with a simultaneous role as the expression of courageous journalism, and with a safely removed essay written as a flashback. *Alegría* meanders through an entire taxonomy of Chilean sexuality and recalibrated identity “que se quemaba en camas clandestinas... . Ellos

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 127-128.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 133. Santa Rosa used to be a long, two-way artery lined with factories, miserable shops, and dwellings. The farther out from the city center, the more dilapidated the homes became, the more visible the level of poverty, the rougher-looking and aggressive-behaving were those who boarded the half-broken public transportation system. There was no saintliness to this street named incorrectly after the pleasing flower’s scent. Yet, once inside your *cajita de ladrillos*, there was love, and hope, and small as these *cajitas* were there was ample room for dreaming.

⁴⁰² Ibid. Here’s “hacienda” alludes to old landed aristocracy, which the Montealegres clearly are not. By saying “más de hortaliza,” the narrator is playing with levels of language and social stations to mean their ancestral plot of land, if any, has room for barely a few vegetables. In essence, their claimed upper lower class should not attempt to presume.

⁴⁰³ Chilean slang for guys, but also for idiots, depending upon context, mood, emphasis, or slightly connotative sarcasm.

solucionaban un débil problema sexual... como sus padres... la sirvienta doméstica... con asaltos endemoniados al barrio de las putas.”⁴⁰⁴ But then, there is a gentler recollection in which: “se me enredó por el cuerpo como una liana... Y me quiso como se quiere a un árbol... se casó conmigo, tuvimos dos niñitos y se volvió loca.”⁴⁰⁵

But then, the pages of the calendar corresponding to the 20th century fly up as if hit by the turbine blast of Alegría’s topsy-turvy chronology. In a few paragraphs we hop from 1953 back to 1925 to again descend, in seeming slow motion, upon 1973: “El pistolero, hasta hace muy poco, todavía entraba y salía de la cárcel como quien va a un retiro espiritual.”⁴⁰⁶ This offers a certain coherence since within a few more paragraphs we observe a character like him meet his self-forged destiny: “Los pacos bajaban entre las piedras hasta el río a enganchar al finado-baleado-ahogado... en la otra orilla... unas muchachas rubias con chombas doradas y unos jóvenes de polera azul, y uno que otro señor de chaqueta tweed.... Las únicas que tenían miedo eran las sirvientas, todas las chinas supersticiosas del sector Providencia arriba...”⁴⁰⁷ Our narrator reminds us that “la historia de Chile la han hecho los caballeros y los rotos. La clase media la escribe.”⁴⁰⁸

The narrator-chronicler’s voice functions effectively here as it shifts among various points of view by way of the filter created through its distance from the native language, the land, the people and the specifically local social dynamics being written about from an entrenched post in a distant foreign land, where the passing of decades has blurred the image of the homeland even further. Even these literary visits to Chile retain a certain psychological coolness. The opposite riverbank is nearly unreachable. While the narrator author maintained a

⁴⁰⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 134.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁰⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 138.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

close contact with his mother tongue and the mores, tastes and habits particular to his socio-economic class, an adaptation to life in exile keeps him at arms-length from the folksy matrix, which had once been his cultural cradle. In its original Chilean Spanish, the distance is even more pronounced. Indeed, it could even be said to evidence a dual sensibility, an extension of hybridity that affects the writer's lexicon and is derived from living simultaneously in the re-imagined birth country and in the San Francisco Bay-area where Alegría spent the latter part of his life.

Written while he was ensconced in the comfort and safety of the U.S., the pseudo-fictional narrative was intended to approximate both a work of art and a politically mature perspective, and as such it could not, by definition, presume neutrality. Alegría took copious notes during his eyewitness account of the coup, but then—at what we presume to be great personal risk—he left Chile and went into exile, insofar as Chile and most Chileans were concerned. However, the truth is far less tortuous. He merely returned to his normal activities as professor at Stanford University, where he had been working for many years. From that perch, he continued to write *El paso de los gansos* and to follow the increasingly frightening developments in his homeland from afar. On the nature and issue of the exiled writer, Julia Kristeva, herself once a refugee from a dictatorship in Bulgaria, writes from her academic post in France about the exile as an uprooted being: “The intellectual is not indifferent to his exile in language... the lack of being, *manqué a être*, founding us all.”⁴⁰⁹ But Alegría's exile is not typical. In his case, exile was truly a self-compelled severance from the native soil. “Writing,” adds Kristeva, “is the time of exile, and that the language of exile addressed from the edge of the void is often unbearable for humans to contemplate, revealing a landscape of ‘broken forms.’”⁴¹⁰ She later writes: “exile and

⁴⁰⁹ Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (1996), 26.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

estrangement... a desire to displace the mundane world of the everyday, a fascination with death and absence, an insistence on the individual as a subject never in complete control of his speech.”⁴¹¹

Writing about Chileans under martial law, curfews, shots heard by day or night, suddenly missing or disappeared people, cadavers stumbled upon unexpectedly, long food lines, bureaucratic disarray. Alegría must have wondered what his countrymen were really living, experiencing, enduring, feeling. He may have thought of them, and even of himself with the stress of inevitable ambiguity: “I don’t know who I am or even if I am.”⁴¹²

El paso de los gansos, published in 1975, radiates outward from the events of a single day much like spokes from the hub of a wheel into the years that follow. Its main character-narrator tracks two years of a notoriously unapologetic military dictatorship, which we now know were filled with innumerable calamitous human rights abuses and unbridled genocide. These eventually stretched out across the regime’s 17-year tenure, becoming worse as the years wore on. For a Latin American country accustomed to civility, the military dictatorship propped up by arrogant and armed brutes roaming the streets with impunity, a gang of state-blessed terrorists, eventually becoming more feared and dangerous perhaps than even carnivorous predators set loose unleashing terror and death. Regardless of whether people supported the coup or not—and roughly half the country had, in fact, supported Pinochet and his strong-armed, central junta—everyone suffered during its regime, including young, gun-toting soldiers. But there’s more at the root of this chronicle that must be addressed before further comment on the work itself can proceed.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 49.

⁴¹² Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Socialism* (1993), 2.

This coup d'état had a double purpose: the one most often discussed during the years of dictatorship was the eradication of all leftist political sympathy to keep the ideas which begat the Cuban Revolution in 1959 from spreading across the hemisphere. But the second, rarely discussed, was to clear the way for the institution of neoliberalism and its subsequent stranglehold on the region's natural resources as well as its markets, ensuring its hegemony as the new economic model. The lustrous veneer of neoliberalism readily lulled an entire generation into a trance as they dangled the possibility of First World civilization, progress and advancements before gullible, untutored and already psychologically traumatized, thus vulnerable Chileans. The promised access to portable electronics converted throngs of humanity to the religion of consumerism, hastening along the self-fulfilling prophecy that once the average person was free to take possession of the world with a hand held device, they would resist any future revolution against it.

Sensorial absorption of powerful technological gadgets, the new collective addiction, would have the aggregate effect of distracting the millions of people who could otherwise march to protest the loss of their legal rights. That is exactly what the corporation intended and the military dictatorship protected. This was also how the coup differed from previous assaults on leftist regimes and democratically elected socialist governments. This coup d'etat was fueled by economic and political forces that would be much larger than any ever before conceived. The avalanche of a neoliberal economic model, presaged in Alegría's literary works, would not only change Chile forever, but also blanket the world, rendering individual countries culturally indistinct from one another while tethering them to whomever commanded those electronics.

It would also enslave entire societies to these instruments, sundering social bonds and disrupting true person-to-person dialogue and communication. A commercial ideology would

silently elbow out passionate convictions of yester-century. Personal debt and credit cards would replace currencies; machines would displace workers and alter social discourse, making hybrids of people and artifacts. But this clearly planned ulterior agenda was hidden to most frightened citizens treading carefully along Santiago streets behind the fog of debris following the coup d'état's destruction and pandemonium. In this groundswell of an irreversible cultural assault on humanistic impulses, the world—not just Chile—would become one large commercial mall. That was the unspoken vision under the wings of a few aging airplanes sent to drop bombs on a centuries-old building and putting an end to an inconvenient if legitimate government based upon utopian ideals.

Absolutism would be restored, albeit by a kingly power *sans façade* with which to reckon. The despot in military uniform would be the salesman, merely the front man. Corporate boards of directors would be the new heads of state, and the country's presidents would be no more than puppets of world-absorbing corporate interests. Alegría alludes to this unfolding dystopia with keen perception as the war drums sounded with louder and louder reverberations. The Chilean military had a green light to slaughter civilians, first in a gruesomely public display and then with furtive alacrity. This announced to the world that people had become disposable things. Slavery would be re-instituted as neo-feudalism, and we would all march in unison, with earbuds dictating our every move. *El paso de los gansos*, which means exactly that, goose-stepping, performed in lock-step, implies that as the military thunders across the planet, its boot would continue to press ominously upon the rights of civilians. The allegory suggests that the individual submit to the majority; that *individual sovereignty* is an offensive stance, an act of defiance against State sovereignty—when it could be viewed, rather, as a perfect complement, as a reinforcement of the State since its foundations lie in the strength of the people.

But that belies the foundation of a dictatorship. This emerging social paradigm when extended through time becomes a new normal, a *state of exception*. This ancient but newly-refinished and re-tooled monopoly of the public sector sets out to enact permanent martial law where the exception becomes the norm (To quickly acquaint the reader with the panoply of thinkers who illuminate Western civilization across these pages, I draw this summary to highlight Hegel, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Arendt, Foucault, Agamben, Castoriadis, Derrida, Genette, Žižek, Butler, Chomsky. They have all denounced the transformation of authoritarianism into ever more grotesque and humanity-crippling moral crises. By this, I as the author of this study do not at all intend to align myself with every aspect of their thoughts, not even Alegría's, since this is an exploration of their thinking and not a hagiography). Thereafter, after a state of exception (dictatorship has galvanized its trenchant power) there is to be no telling how a country should be ruled. Presidential elections are, with alarming frequency, either eliminated altogether or comfortably manipulated across a swivel door of periodic party replacements designed to carry out the same unchanging neoliberal policies. In a dialectical process of political evolution, the military is merely meant to be the first stage of change. A high-ranking officer assumes the presidency, but the actual holders of political and economic power are elsewhere, and they make the decisions and pull the strings. The French Revolution's ideals (and there were many mini-revolutions in France after 1789 until the revolutionary fire settled for less ambitious social visions) for the rights of man are trodden on in the late-20th century by marching soldiers obeying corporate orders whose real uniforms are manifested as stock options in large accounts sheltered abroad. In a similar vein, Chile's Pinochet (with USA's support) toppled the Allende government to bring on a corporate national identity to supplant an obsolete belief in law, civility and patriotism with unbending pragmatism. The coup d'état that

placed Pinochet at the helm of power in Chile is essentially no different than how the Spanish Conquest seized control of the New World in the late 1400s. The powers behind each enterprise shared the common vision of the profit motive—unbridled, ecologically⁴¹³ dismissive and indefinite. Alegría sets his eyes on that future: “Qué será de Chile? ... en algunos años más... los que salieron a matar con sus revólveres y pistolas,... perderán el sentido de todo su entusiasmo... Se prepararán para los nuevos negocios. Tal como lo conocí, Chile no volverá a existir. Se habrán muerto todos los contrincantes de 1973.”⁴¹⁴ Well, yes and no. There are other “contrincantes” or opponents to be accounted for: Chile’s indigenous. Of this, our narrator comments:

Los chilenos no inventamos a los soldados. Los heredamos... . Nos dicen también que los araucanos pelearon durante tres siglos por su libertad. No nos aclaran que, al final, peleaban contra el ejército chileno, después de defenderse del español... ”⁴¹⁵

Ayer, dos camiones llenos de soldados saltaron hechos pedazos en el aire. Les tiraron cargas de dinamita desde un edificio de departamentos. No lo vi. Escuché las explosiones... . Los soldaditos son en su gran mayoría pelados⁴¹⁶ traídos de provincia o reclutados en barrios pobres de la ciudad. Casi todos tendrán parientes en las callampas (shanty towns)... Se dirá que el país se dividió en mitades iguales, Cómo va a dividirse lo que es indivisible?”⁴¹⁷

A long section takes us away from the ripples of the coup d’etat, from the military invasions of shanty towns searching for hidden guerrillas clutching illegal weapons. The narrator

⁴¹³ The notion of ecology, in the best Rachel Carson sense [*Silent Spring*, (1962), *Under Sea and Wind*, (1941), *The Sea Around Us* (1951), *The Edge of the Sea* (1955)] focuses on nature, of which humanity, she tells us, is not only an inherent constituent, but the primary cause of its endangerment.

⁴¹⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 145.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴¹⁶ *Pelados*: offspring of the historically doomed to poverty.

⁴¹⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 146.

discusses the vicissitudes of family; his wife Luz María has to be taken to a sanatorium, and his children are taken to live with her parents, who despise him. He straddles two realities: the returned Chilean struggling to reclaim his rightful place, and the mentally-exiled Chilean who can never be more than a visitor to the former homeland, since reconstituted, for him, as a foreign country, Alegría's own conundrum. What follows naturally is indirect political commentary from the salons of the upper-class:

tranquilos, burlones... disfrazado de guerrillero... con un vaso de whiskey en la mano... los cabros ... bien informados del parentesco, nacional-clase alta, con recordatorio de Reñaca y Cachagua,⁴¹⁸ Santiago College⁴¹⁹... desteñidos bluejeanes de Las Condes,⁴²⁰ asqueados ante la pobreza auténtica... y declaran que en Chile ha comenzado una revolución... Pero, quien te ha dicho que el chileno es revolucionario? Somos conservadores de nacimiento.⁴²¹

A convergence of the national Zeitgeist mirrors Montealegre's unrelated family chaos. He returns to Chile hoping to repair the cracks in his marriage but learns that it is beyond repair. His father, on the other hand, supports the military take-over. He ventures beyond a comfortable timidity to document the Chilean political crisis which will inevitably be resolved militarily. Meanwhile, his father is unable to sit with his morning paper over a cup of tea: "pedía té con leche, ni hay té ni hay pan."⁴²² Artificial food shortages are devised and blamed on the socialist government: "reinaba la calma en todo el país... en unas horas estaríamos almorzando tranquilamente bajo un gobierno de orden y de fuerza, aplastados bajo la carga de carne, pan,

⁴¹⁸ Reñaca and Cachagua: exclusive ocean-front neighborhoods.

⁴¹⁹ Santiago College: high school for the children of the well-heeled. American English is taught.

⁴²⁰ Las Condes: located at the foot of the Andes, this is a neighborhood of placid old homes, veritably manors, unburdened by urbanity, surrounded by a country feeling of nature, yet close enough to the city center.

⁴²¹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, pp. 159-160.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 163.

aceite, y detergente que nos caería del cielo. Tomé mi máquina fotográfica, me puse al hombro el saco verde y [dándole un beso en la frente] le dije hasta luego al viejo.”⁴²³

Our narrator and city guide takes us to downtown Santiago in the midst of intensifying political drama. Throughout the novel, a vortex-like narrative structure returns us to the same moment in time along several distinct but parallel pathways:

Acercándome a San Antonio [a downtown street] oí un ruido de motores a mi espalda. Empecé a tomar fotos. Era un destacamento de tanques acelerando hacia La Moneda Llegué hasta la esquina de Morandé y la Alameda [corner on the back of the presidential palace, where there is an esplanade. This corner stands halfway between the Ministry of Defense, on Morandé, across the wide Alameda avenue from the palace of government]. Los tanques habían tomado posiciones... Me pararon los milicos apuntándome.... [N]o vi caras sino cascos; sentí que esas metralletas podían disparar solas....⁴²⁴

Our narrator negotiates his motorcycle around tanks and military positions, among civilian crowds. This occurs when citizens are still allowed to walk the streets but will soon be forbidden from occupying the public space where tanks have a clear shot at La Moneda. A fleeting juncture and a testament to *Alegría*'s narrative virtuosity, it is at precisely this moment that it becomes historically feasible for our narrator to be actualized as more than fiction. We sense him doing the possible, the real and the believable.

En el Ministerio de Defensa vi a Orlando Letelier⁴²⁵... rodeado de soldados que le apuntaban con sus fusiles... . aparecieron dos tanques... uno fue a estacionarse frente a la

⁴²³ Ibid., 164.

⁴²⁴ *Alegría*, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 164-165.

⁴²⁵ He was Allende's ambassador to Washington, DC. He would be murdered in a car bomb blast in 1976 while working as a Fellow at the liberal think tank, the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC., under orders

puerta principal de la Moneda, frenando violentamente. El otro se quedó al lado del edificio del Seguro Obrero... tal vez apuntando al despacho del Presidente. Los carabineros de la guardia (government palace security personnel) ... con pañuelos... de rendición, corrían hacia el garage subterráneo de la Intendencia. Una rara cueca,⁴²⁶ o un esquinazo.⁴²⁷

The goose-step of this novel's title is not only a reference to the novel's recurring military coup d'état—like a repeated verse in a national anthem—, it is a deeply rooted cultural relic, a boot print with colonial antecedents. The soldier poet Alonso de Ercilla came to the New World in the 16th century as an emissary of the Spanish crown to dispossess the indigenous populations of their ancestral lands—lands already conquered by them, or at least in their possession for millennia. He also came from an Iberia that had evicted Jews and Muslims. Reversing roles, the Spanish arrived in New Spain as invaders to dislodge those entitled to live where they were. Ercilla joined the Crown's military, wrote Latin America's first epic poem, *La Araucana*, in homage to Chile's Araucanian indigenous for their valor at war, and lauded the Spanish victory with verse: "Ercilla nos llamó 'fértil provincia señalada'... basta sabernos provincianos y señalados para dominar nuestro destino.... Quienes se extrañan de que las Fuerzas Armadas hayan declarado un 'estado de guerra interno' en 1973 y se empeñen en acciones bélicas contra un sector de Chile y de chilenos, olvidan la guerra de la Frontera."⁴²⁸

Violence was, in actuality, always the language of Chilean history, a history in which force spoke with more lasting effect than reason, despite the fact that the national motto reverts

issued by Pinochet. See: Peter Kornbluh's *The Pinochet File: The Unclassified Dossier of Atrocity and Accountability* (2003).

⁴²⁶ *Cueca* is Chile's national folk dance, where the man and woman twirl a handkerchief in the air as they woo each other in the romance of the pursuit. Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 166.

⁴²⁷ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 166. The *esquinazo* is the Chilean equivalent to a Spanish medieval serenade that would happen either at the break of dawn or at sundown.

⁴²⁸ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 168.

the order of these concepts and paints a nationality with a refracted idea of itself, as viewed from within: “Por la razón o la fuerza.” But the reality of the historic process has shown us that it has been through *force* that societies can impose *reason*. If one is to critique *El paso de los gansos* from an epistemological and anthropologically cultural perspective, one must correctly acknowledge that the Conquest, as exemplified by the Spanish-Indian wars, is still being fought. Chileans are still killing Indians and seizing their ever-diminished Mapuche-held territories,⁴²⁹ no doubt. From the perspective of the Chilean government and corporate interests, however, the indigenous tribes have never figured in as valid equals in the national struggle.

Cristián Montealegre ushers us to flashpoints where the fascist military politicians clash with the leftist government elected by a majority of Chilean voters. The Pretorian guard employs emasculating violence with the aim of restoring the oligarchy’s contested privileges with such extraordinary effectiveness that those unjust privileges become irreversible. A larger context clarifies this specific point in the *Alegría* novel: “Nothing important can come from the South,”⁴³⁰ Kissinger expressed to Chilean Foreign Minister Gabriel Valdés at a Chilean Embassy lunch during the Allende presidency. In *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, Seymour M. Hersh writes: “The Valdés incident showed the White House attitude: Like a child, Latin America was to be seen and not heard. Those who defied Nixon, such as Valdés and Eduardo Frei –and, later, Salvador Allende—were to be treated harshly.”⁴³¹ Hersh adds, “Latin America was to be permitted little independence. And the independence that did exist, Kissinger also understood, was to be controlled and manipulated by American intelligence.”⁴³²

⁴²⁹ This is, in essence, the argument of Mapuche senatorial candidate Francisco Huenchumilla during a televised conversation on Chilean TV, October 2017. After this interview, he was elected Senator of the Republic.

⁴³⁰ Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (1983), 263.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 264.

While these meetings occur in Washington, Cristián Montealgre swerves his motorbike, narrowly missing obstacles (not unlike Valdés with Kissinger), swinging his camera up toward his eye like a soldier with a rifle, in another inverse relationship. Rather than focusing his sights on a target to be destroyed, our narrator is preserving life and history on film, which will eventually be used to bring down the lie of the fascist dictatorship and become the first salvo in a battle to restore the *sovereignty of the self*.

Ideological and class battles fought with tanks and Congressional closures, with dictatorship, summarily reject the value of man, of the average man, abruptly dismissing his *individual sovereignty*. The aims of the coup plotters were essentially no different than those of the Conquistadores four centuries before.

El paso de los gansos tells us that Chile's Andalusian and Castillian ancestries,⁴³³ a bloodline tainted by Jewish expulsions, torture and death at the hands of the Inquisition, forced mendacities, religious conversions as ultimatum for survival, reflected 800 years of semi-permanent state of war against the moors. The obscurantist legacy coupled with an inordinate admiration for Prussian military achievement made Chileans well-suited for class warfare, long before Clausewitz came on the scene in the 19th century to discuss ethics in the modern art of war. Pinochet, we are shown, didn't know how it was that one thread could be used to weave a complete piece of cloth, but he was swept up by a slipstream of history in which the military was clad by the oligarchy and fed its ideas of loyalty and patriotism by a landed class, a class that had snapped the land from the indigenous and started destroying its ecological value a few short centuries prior. The circumstances demanded that the current landowner's pride in his identity, his sense of social superiority, avoid any backward glances at the historic truth, in order to honor

⁴³³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 168.

and validate the present, as well as the current complex of identity and values: patriotism is power, and power is land, and land is to be kept.

Alegría's narrator reveals how Chilean political history can be explained through one family's sojourn—in this case that of his own bloodline—at a crucial time in the political evolution of Chile, where nothing essentially changes, where there is no revolution, where after a few lamentable skirmishes (three thousand dead), the traditional ruling class simply recovers its footing.

Los momios⁴³⁴ con plata sabotearon a Allende, no sembraron en sus fundos, compraron dólares, cerraron sus fábricas y sus negocios... se botaron en huelga en los hospitales y en los tribunales y, con la Corte Suprema al frente, protegieron al movimiento terrorista más eficiente que se ha conocido en el mundo, mientras *El Mercurio* los defendía y defendía también a los gringos quienes, a su vez, le cerraron todos los créditos a Allende fuera de Chile.⁴³⁵

As the country was about to come apart at the seams, it was time to leave salon conversations for another opportunity. The bourgeoisie rapidly locked windows and doors. In their best private school French, they seemed to have intoned in unison, *Après moi, le deluge!* “El centro era un campamento rigurosamente armado. Pasaron algunos aviones. Un helicóptero iba y venía a gran velocidad disparando sobre los techos de los Ministerios. Por la Alameda seguía el tráfico de los carros blindados, jeeps y camiones del ejército... . Yo iba tranquilo y tomaba fotos sin que nadie me lo impidiera.”⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Momios; socio-political conservatives. They span the gamut to include right-wingers, proto and confirmed fascists.

⁴³⁵ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 171.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

Chile was a landmine. It was a territory at war. Exiles permeated frontiers. Survival proved itself more urgent than nationality. The first act of patriotism was toward self, to save one's skin from the perception of insurgency. Alegria's narrator shows us his personal world and his citizen's reality. Both suffer crises. Driven by curiosity without fully understanding the nature of events transpiring across the city, Montealegre lunges himself deeply into coup d'état preparations—until he realizes what surrounds him. Then it is too late to prevent his leap into the fray.

La invasión parda, rápida y eficiente, contra el cielo gris, cañones, tanques, bayonetas, movimiento opaco sobre el pavimento húmedo, junto a edificios y casas cerradas, por un país en silencio... . las rejas de bronce de la Biblioteca Nacional colgaban gruesas cadenas y, junto a las puertas macizas, vi en el suelo algunos hombres, las manos en la nuca detenidos en el tiempo bajo los rifles que les apuntaban de cerca... . Las metralletas me apuntaban a mí y no les veía las caras a los soldados, el que me hablaba no tenía dientes y estaba muy pálido y las palabras eran duras, pasa la máquina mierda, y con unos dedos largos gruesos, huesudos, arrancaba la película a tirones... yo con los brazos abiertos pegado a la pared como una gran mosca lista para el insectario tenía miedo y empecé a temblar, entonces me dijeron donde vivís huevón y por que andai hueviando y no te metís en tu casa y no salgai más.... . Balas sin eco, explosiones y tiros invisibles.⁴³⁷

The narrator of *El paso de los gansos* gives us crucial information on three simultaneous levels: the subjective, where he restrains himself from voicing his tension, possibly his panic.

From a collective perspective, it can be said that the loss of precious documentary photography

⁴³⁷ *El paso de los gansos*, pp. 172-173. The “thou” of old English reappears in the slang vernacular of Chileans taunting each other with a tone of violence. The language of the verbs signals a rhetorical but calculated, cautious yet aggressive crossing of verbal swords.

with irrecoverable historic value is a loss to society. There's a humanistic dimension to this scene, where citizens are suddenly placed in the circumstance of being terrified by loaded guns pointed at them. Will they fire? Will they not? The uncertainty kills. If they don't, the experience may certainly reduce one's longevity. At once, the reader straddles all three dimensions and we can *feel* under our own skin our hearts pounding as we read and live the circumstance on the page and imagine the unbearable degree of vulnerability people forced to obey such military orders endured during the coup—and later, during the protracted dictatorship. In these chronicling pages, we witness and nearly inhabit the Levinassian “Other” when finding ourselves at the horrific threshold between life and death, as *El paso de los gansos* places us, the reader, in a moral position to observe others as we read about them, when reading is a form of living, of co-experiencing, as only a memoir that is also a novel and a personal testimony of a humanity under peril can display. These are people lying face down on the ground, their hands behind their heads living through the unspeakable horror of finding themselves under guns pointed at them, a treatment often coupled by the kick of a soldier's boot. And the moment of this reading, this experience, this existential nightmare lingers on, remaining on this side of a fast potential death at the fickle hands of young, envious, frustrated uniformed ignoramuses with loaded weapons and orders to kill. When a military dictatorship leaves it up to the power-inebriated soldier to pull the trigger, such act leaves us morally bankrupt, forced to witness our own --and our collective-- humanity imperiled by the impertinent and abrasive transgression of our shared *individual sovereignty*.

Even though Jacques Derrida has told us that “writing is a dangerous gift because it substitutes mere inscriptions – alien, arbitrary, lifeless signs – for the authentic living presence of

spoken language,”⁴³⁸ he would agree with Alegría given that the French thinker held the belief that it also plays the role of a “cultural advance, since with it mankind can build up a documentary archive, a written ‘memory’ far in excess of any oral tradition.”⁴³⁹ The narrator of *El paso de los gansos* erases the space that separates the story’s action from the reader. He pulls us into the story. It feels as though the narrator has imposed on us a sense of responsibility for the course the story shall take. We read as though we’re riding the motorcycle with Cristián:

De repente, cae de espaldas un joven padre... se queda inmóvil con su balazo en la frente, crece alrededor de su cabeza una pequeña posa de sangre... y los niños que llevaba de la mano se hincan a su lado... ni siquiera lloran porque no pueden saber lo que ha ocurrido... le tiran de los brazos... . La imagen de esta muerte está en la⁴⁴⁰ lente de mi cámara, pero no empieza a decirme nada hasta que esa imagen y mi ojo aparecen juntos por primera vez... somos dos los muertos, él y yo, entonces el estupor se hace angustia y, poco a poco, vergüenza.⁴⁴¹

The narrator leaves a space between the words, like the silence that follows the loud noise of a door after it has slammed shut. That heavy silence, that reverberating space that jostles the nerves makes way for the moral conscience to become clear. This passage sets up the novel’s denouement. It reads pregnant with meaning and foreshadowing when re-read after the pseudo- or even quasi-chronicle-novel’s end.

No quiero, le digo al viejo cuando me sugiere que debo bajar... y hacer guardia con otros hombres. Guardia contra qué, para qué. Nadie debe entrar al edificio, dice, ningún extraño. Extraños?... . Todos somos extraños en estos momentos, no hay

⁴³⁸ Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (1987), 30. It is also a belief Plato tells us that Socrates held.

⁴³⁹ Norris, *Derrida* (1987), 30.

⁴⁴⁰ Traditionally, “lente” is a masculine term. In this citation, the author uses the feminine, perhaps to imitate a certain sector of society’s low-level vernacular.

⁴⁴¹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 172.

edificios cerrados ni puertas ni porteros, estamos a la intemperie. Absurdo, dice, las Torres serán defendidas por las Fuerzas Armadas... . Para qué quieres paz y orden, me grita, si no estás dispuesto a conquistarlos; si te los regalan, no significarán nada para tí, ya que no sacrificaste nada ni hay nada tuyo en ellos.... Ya no se puede vivir, hijo, si no se es un guerrero!... . Las dos palabras me desconciertan: hijo y guerrero... . Quiero paz pero la quiero justa, quiero ejercerla en cuerpo y alma, le digo, que me la reconozcan aquellos que me ponen contra la pared con los brazos extendidos, apuntándome con sus cañones. Hoy viven en razón de lo que destruyen... . Mientras maten, vivirán.⁴⁴²

Alegría's narrator has lined up the series of events as they occurred in the streets of Santiago that ignominious day in September 1973. It is an appropriate moment to make room for a point of era analysis, which George F. Will makes in his work, *Suddenly: The American Idea Abroad and At Home, 1986-1990*, a body of analysis whose pages on Chile square perfectly with the Chilean dictatorship's practices. He writes: "this century," referring to the 20th, "with its most important political innovation, totalitarianism, has posed the danger that new tendencies (bureaucratization, refinements of terror, propaganda and other means of social control) might mean that democracy is an arrangement accessible only to a minority of privileged nations."⁴⁴³

The Chile that Alegría's narrator displays before us conceals a socio-cultural structure that explains the behaviors and the state of their civilization which we observe with the naked eye but yet fail to grasp. We can visualize that urban universe deep in the folds within the text's reality. Only an understanding of the unofficial Chilean history can decode for us the surface sights, the sounds, the words, the social moorings to the institutions to which people cling with

⁴⁴² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, pp. 177-178.

⁴⁴³ George F. Will, *Suddenly: The American Idea Abroad and At Home, 1986-1990* (1991), 128-129.

an entwining of hope and blindness. Cristián runs through town and snaps fast pictures, which he sees later, when he develops them. There, in the grainy enlargements is where the hidden tales reveal themselves: social hierarchy, power, the use of language as a lever to activate power for desired changes, re-accommodations of positions. In this knot of circumstances and body of historic evidence, baroque folds of silences too complex to decipher within a novel as this one is, it nonetheless enables us to grasp the personal concerns Alegría's narrator weaves into the chronicle-novel. As the country collapses into a chaos of laws spurned and civic rights obliterated, a new "law" emerges, the law of military arbitrariness through martial law and the condoning of street violence by the country's uniformed services. Our narrator turns toward us: "la ciudad era... campo abierto de hombres armados y gente aterrada. No puedo olvidar las caras de Santiago en los últimos días de septiembre...."⁴⁴⁴

In the middle of the chapter, the narrator takes a breather to stroll off such memories, and, probably, to allow us to process the inconceivable nature of such existentialism, ineffable, the ontology of such violence lived as a human experience: "íbamos saliendo, llevándola yo por los senderos de arenilla y hojas verdes..."⁴⁴⁵ It is between these paragraphs, that we experience the deceptive peace of the false imprisonment⁴⁴⁶ of rhetorical silence. Some scenes remain inescapably etched in our viscera, such as when Cristián, after having had a close brush with death together with his brother from a soldier's gunpoint pinning their bodies against a wall, they went to the river's bank to calm their nerves and observed the fishermen by the river's edge casting their net:

⁴⁴⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 181.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁴⁶ False imprisonment is the unlawful violation of the personal liberty of another" in *California Penal Code*, Section 236 (2017), 122.

los pescadores bajaban ya y saeaban algo, un bulto pesado, incongruente, y lo arrastraban con esfuerzo tratando de soltarlo de las piedras en que se había enredado... forma de hombre, sin edad, boca abajo, inflado y agujereado, y la operación debía ser rápida, pues otros fusilados venían ya navegando y alguien dijo... la muerte en bote... . Después fuimos al Venecia en Pío Nono y pedimos una botella de vino y bebimos esperando que alguien hablara. Tomamos despacio, sabiendo que ... el sitio ése de la pared era un estado que, de algún modo ya inmediato, nos pertenecía.⁴⁴⁷

What follows is the kind of thinking that best happens when the narrator's fingers run ahead of the self-editing mind. It's a braid entwining confession and interior monologue, where two contrasting rivers collide on that inner mirror that is the self confronting the undodgeable "I." It's astounding to realize that *El paso de los gansos* serves the role of allegory as western history's bouillon cube for civic rights. It's the chronicle of western philosophical and socio-political history unraveling in one day. It's a work evocative of ethical minds such as Machiavelli's when he stated "the governments of the people are better than those of princes"⁴⁴⁸ and Norway's Olof Palme, a protector of Pinochet dissenters welcomed as refugees in Sweden, reacted to Pinochet's governance stating in the 1970s: "democracy is a question of human dignity."⁴⁴⁹

The war, this chronicle of Chile at war, this *El paso de los gansos*, thundered against the heart of every citizen; even against every soldier shooting at a fellow citizen, a neighbor, one of their own; it's a war that was fought in the streets and in the homes. Walls no longer protected

⁴⁴⁷ ASlegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 182.

⁴⁴⁸ Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, Book I, Chapter LVIII, (New York: Random House, 1950), 264.

⁴⁴⁹ Nancy I. Lieber, Institute for Democratic Socialism (U.S.) (1982) *Eurosocialism and America: political economy for the 1980s*. p. 222.

anyone: “A través de las persianas veíamos pasar los camiones de soldados a gran velocidad, apuntando eternamente, con el dedo en el gatillo, sin mirarnos, como si temieran que un encuentro de ojos les descargara involuntariamente el arma.”⁴⁵⁰

The threshold between life and death seems narrower for the poor. Our narrator drops hints of this. The economically advantaged crosses the city by car, picks up the phone –those who have it, as Cristián’s father does-- and resolves matters without having to travel across the city. The rest of humanity wastes away on street corners waiting for the bus (even risking being caught out in the street after the curfew hour) which not always stops for passengers who’ve been waiting for it in often threatening weather conditions: “se aproximaba la hora del toque de queda. Aceleraban los autos hacia el barrio alto... y las personas levantaban con angustia los brazos en los paraderos de micros.”⁴⁵¹ But also: “Pasaban las micros con sus pasajeros colgando”⁴⁵² much like a cluster of grapes.

The poor became the shame of Chile. Salvador Allende reached his hand to pull them out of their misery. *El paso de los gansos* draws a clear silhouette of Chile’s social reality:

Los pobres que esta noche no tenían una embajada donde refugiarse, ni un fundo donde esconderse, ni siquiera un departamento donde fondearse, ni tendrían un avión para partir, pero sí habrían de quedarse a pasar hambre, a pasar furias y vergüenzas, a formar colas otra vez, a llorar callados el saco de huesos que cayó al río o que cayó al hoyo, hasta que alguien se acordara de ellos como se acordó Allende.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 189.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 192. The *micro* is a city bus. In the 1970s they were mostly old machines, broken down, poorly maintained. They traveled their route overloaded with passengers at the rush hour. Many people hung from doors, bumpers and windows to make it home. They risked life and limb by such acts of acrobatics.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 197.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 193.

From his motorcycle riding at high velocity, Cristián views more scenes than he can speed-write about and chronicle: “Toda una nación se fugaba y otra la perseguía, disparándole de cerca... el país es un vecino atropellado, nocturno, desangrándose de bruces en el suelo.”⁴⁵⁴

It is at that point, a man is forced to lie face down on the ground, when most humiliated, or humbled, that his humanity demands its highest value. His *sovereignty of the self* has been trampled, but it is at that moment when the soldier --overpowering one human being by the weapon he holds— is at his lowest moral point, when he knows himself undignified, that his victim becomes the superior being. However, military advantage stripped of just cause mocks both human life and the opponent’s moral high ground. This is what can be inferred from *El paso de los gansos*.

As the page changes, we seem to hear the screeching echo of Crisitán’s motorcycle tires burning rubber. The story leaps to different ideas. The narrator in Cristián’s voice recedes and the author takes over: “Ahora debe hablar el narrador y usar el tiempo que no tuvo Cristián.”⁴⁵⁵ Quite uniquely, the narrator just announced mentions that time slipped away from Allende, from Neruda, from Jara and other national figures who sacrificed their lives by their unwavering defense of democracy. The uniqueness of listing these names is that they are representative of fallen persons, people whose *autonomy of the self* was transgressed, offended, cut short—but whose contribution to humanity defies the passage of time and history’s cyclical hold on power.

There is a scene toward the very end of the work that chills us to the bone in this environment of tragedy and terror where all bearings have been lost and there is no compass. Cristián Montealegre, our guide, is taken away from his father’s apartment never to be seen alive again. His “viejo” recognized Cristián at the morgue. A bullet on his forehead has ended his life.

⁴⁵⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 193.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

In a riveting and telling description, Montealegre's father kisses him on the forehead right next to the bullet hole, whispering, "murió sin haber tenido tiempo de aprender a morir."⁴⁵⁶ The narrator tells us Cristián "murió de adentro hacia afuera... él se tiró contra las balas."⁴⁵⁷ This narrator writes in cinemascope, the wide screen where we see the streets of Santiago as we ourselves ride along with Cristián, atop his motorcycle: "Cristián era un angel en motocicleta atravesando de día y noche las calles de Santiago con una cruz al hombro y recogiendo las instantáneas de la gente que caía o se fugaba o moría, para llevarse el testimonio gráfico a alguna sala de crónica del otro mundo. Como si Dios lo hubiese escogido su corresponsal de guerra."⁴⁵⁸

In *El paso de los gansos*, it is the solid stance of individuality, which, in its collective form invigorates the flowering of democracy, which can only start and endure when giving the individual the fullness of credibility—and legal standing. Only then, Alegría shows us through the slow-flame of his plot development, does the collective gain strength. *El paso de los gansos* opens up to an urban landscape that is not merely city, buildings, streets, movement of vehicles and people, mostly people, thousands of men and women walk in companionable solitude with, past, through, despite, and for each other in a communal ritual of separate beings. They're at once citizenry but also blood stream flowing, transfusing; private identity doubling up as neighbors, bonded from internal organs of nationality connecting across institutions. Man and buildings, individual time and national history, converge. The city is visceral identity linked to political history and culture in the so-called *madre patria*.

Then the earth shook. The Messiah did not come down from the heavens, but rose, grotesquely, from the depths of Hades. Dante came from his *Inferno* and he was Chilean. The macabre scene of devastation and apocalypse only imagined in movies occurred in the streets,

⁴⁵⁶ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 210.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 211.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 212.

thundered across the sky, throbbed its deafening thuds from wall to wall causing deaths by panic, maligning democracy, ushering barb wire, scrape-sounding pronouncements that wounded ears and halted breathing. That is the impact of Alegría's novel of Chilean military coup d'état occurring, ironically, at the height of western civilization's evolution, while the United Nations boasts about its efforts in the treacherous field of international peace. The ghost of George Orwell would seem to stroll amid bomb-induced collapsing walls and bursting machine gun shots in a crumbling Santiago, Chile, suddenly under siege. The blue sky and fresh sunrays of a springtime September morning are aggressively trespassed by flying machines announcing horror. The national hymn's phrase sung by soldiers at parades seems ironic and vicious: "Puro Chile es tu cielo azulado, puras brisas te bañan también... contra la opresión!" They sing it as they *oppress* with planes startling the city and *darkening the sky* with bombs exploding, *bathing* everyone with soot and fear rendering everyone's life unsafe.

Our narrator/author recounts scenes greedily, with a penchant for a quickly evanescent visual attempt to rescue imperiled aesthetics as he focuses on ornate balconies and architectural designs with a high level of wrought iron detail... all fleeting eternities. While a sniper hasn't caught up with him, Alegría captures such details that give structure to the whole of the landscape tormented by the military onslaught. While describing what he sees, the tranquil vestiges of a gentler and thereby obsolete era succumbing to the tumultuousness of looming chaos when jolting change has burst open.

The oligarchy --with several institutional Medusa heads-- never stopped its reign behind the façade of Constitutional rights. Chilean history had long been a string of violent outbursts perpetrated against those faces without rostrum, the poor of always, doomed to the margins of decent society; meanwhile, "la gente bien," the well-heeled, look the other way, lest they be

unfazed by unfortunate injustices. Much like Orwell, Alegría's narrator, Cristián, took snapshots from the trenches of conflict with bullets flying and his motorcycle slaloming around them like a downhill skier on asphalt.

Then the narrator changes tone and tells us somberly that Allende spoke his last words on radio waves: "Yo no voy a renunciar... pagaré con mi vida la lealtad del pueblo."⁴⁵⁹ Alegría writes: "Las tropas de infantería avanzan por Morandé y Teatinos [streets surrounding the palace of government] ataque envolvente y fuego concentrado contra el despacho de Allende..."⁴⁶⁰

The chronicle switches its focus as quickly as shots are rung. Then it slows down as the troops reposition themselves. A tank rolls by. A bazooka shoots at it from the presidential balcony causing the tank to tear up and tilt on its side. Another shot is heard. The palace trembles. A wall explodes. Smoke engulfs the presidential salons and the gallery of historic paintings. Gas cripples both breathing and seeing. Shots continue firing in the dense smoke, our narrator tells with visual language. Pandemonium is unleashed. During silences no one can know who is alive or dead. Political violence slithers on, advances unseen. More shots are heard. More colonial history crumbles to dust. Human lives collapse. The source of the shots remains anonymous. Sharpshooters and corporate executives remain unnamed. It is unclear who of the two leaves more dead in their wake. One asks, Who's behind them?! Time seems suspended as if it were transcendence. Human existence, regardless of ideological affiliation, hangs in the despair of anxious solitude. Meanwhile, the palace of government is set ablaze. "La Moneda ardiendo."⁴⁶¹ The anachronistic question that can only be posed in hindsight is how can a vision of social justice unleash such military violence?! The answer may be that violence was always present in Chile, seething, underneath the semblance of a Constitutional democracy, latently

⁴⁵⁹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 13.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

stirring. Moulián writes: “El aparente liberalismo de las formas de gobierno escondía la inacabada lucha entre democracia y autoritarismo... por el tratamiento represivo al pueblo organizado”⁴⁶² as long as upper-crust condescension continues to confront lower-class contempt.

The “I” of the author describing what he witnessed changes imperceptibly to an existential narrator, a quasi-physical witness that gives three-dimensionality to the surround-sound effect of the assault on Constitutional democratic socialism. This tri-lateral narrative, nearly geometric in the space it creates, as it does with the notion of perspective in drawing, places the reader in the telling, the actual location of language replacing geographical locality. In this sense, Alegría’s contemporaneity approaches a wide span of time. He is Flaubertian in the democracy of his characters, unconcerned with the exclusivity of the upper crust (as it was with the ilk of a Balzac) but we also straddle time. 19th century French architecture alternates with mid-20th century urbanity across iconic Santiago. In describing the maddening sweep of suspects with strong water canons, people huddling, institutional structures collapse in an orgy of destruction. Linearity is deformed. Precious art burns and twists under fire. Ancient structures buckle under flagrant assaults. Universities stop teaching. Trucks don’t deliver supplies. Hospitals are filled beyond capacity. We are made to feel we’ve become the broken faces on a Cubist style narrative by Joyce and a painting by Picasso. Square angles and logic are cast aside.

The malleability of the Spanish language lends itself to suggestive of ambiguity, while also inviting purposeful confusion, playfully, schemingly, as to who is truly speaking by triangulating the work’s optics. “No terminaba nunca de encontrarla por más que la buscara dentro de ella con ojos, labios y manos....”⁴⁶³ Alegría uses language as a vehicle to broaden the array of semantic possibilities as well as physicalize human pathos. Hegel’s reverential attitude toward man and

⁴⁶² Moulián, *El deseo de otro Chile*, p. 14.

⁴⁶³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 185.

the uniqueness of his voice filters into the Chilean author's principled aesthetic: "language, which belongs to consciousness, ... is inherently universal."⁴⁶⁴ As we enter inside the folds of the national ontology, the physical horror of military annihilation seizes the national psyche. The drama and tragedy of the historic event is filtered through the citizen's inner being, his sensorial core is constantly goaded into a state of tension. As readers we cross a threshold and forget our actual bearings. We're swept along into a country that changes by the hour, transporting, shoving us into a psychic state of uncertainty and fear as History pivots. It alters its path. Individual lives are careened off course. A political tsunami drags Chilean humanity beyond anyone's control. The "I" of every citizen caught unawares in the street must bridge the gap between himself and the soldier who sees him as a potential enemy. He must come up with a sense of coherence to survive the heightened stress level. *Alegría* explores the inner life of the random man. Facing a street blocked by tanks and at the same street's opposite end it is filled with a platoon of armed foot soldiers, the citizen expecting to be deemed guilty of something, goes into his inner residence untethered by ideological leanings and draws resources from a space of Proustian memory to recall smells, images, sounds that might give a clue for self-rescue. Cristián Montealegre shows us how his *sovereignty of the self* hangs from a thread. He finds himself as a citizen in his homeland, he voted, he paid his taxes, he sang the national anthem, he did his time in military service, and yet, culturally, institutionally, jurisprudentially, his humanity, his integrity, the fact that he is alive is of no consequence to the gun pointed at him. In that instant before the trigger is pulled, the generations that precede him which gave him his life rush through his mind, but that bullet is about to stifle the trajectory of his lineage and his role toward procreative eternity when his *sovereignty of self* is blown up into dust.

⁴⁶⁴ G.W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), 66.

Here's where Alegría shines as a humanist. He reaches for the frazzled street vendor, for the woman whose face has hung under the weight of waiting for the bus to take her home after a long day of laboring for a *patrón*. Relative to scenes of violence and destruction, Alegría's sense of human aesthetic acknowledges the brimming emotions of his Recoleta district's erstwhile neighbors in outlying Santiago; he draws their profiles on the page, their gestures, their postures spelling resignation. All those *mamitas* and *abuelitas* waiting for the bus that doesn't come, freezing in the cold, when it's the water-spewing armored vehicle that arrives first. In a whirlwind of impunity where soldiers behave like alley thieves, Alegría makes us—and the characters in the drama—view the deployed soldiers as political acts from an ethical dimension, which is a transcendental perspective relative to mere ideology. The extension of himself lodged in the creases of the work elicits testimonies from among the city's proverbial pariahs, whose boiling lava of memory, though blistering, shroud the persecuted, the discarded, those with unconscious resourcefulness.

The Chilean author adopts three levels of witnessing. The author who was present during the bombing retires to the safe shelter of his life in California at Stanford University, where he teaches Latin American literature, including, inescapably, dictatorship narratives. Recurrent nonfictive reminders, be they historic markers, or names like Allende's close military adviser in the person of General Prats' street episode,⁴⁶⁵ and his eventual assassination for being loyal to his president, the socialist Allende, and the mention of the TV priest Hasbún,⁴⁶⁶ whose radio voice flooding the air waves for the urban poor was the constant thorn in the side of the oligarchy, take

⁴⁶⁵ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 184. General Carlos Prats served as Minister of the Interior and as Vice-President under Salvador Allende. Shortly after the coup, while in exile in Argentina, he was assassinated with his wife in a car bomb planted by Pinochet's secret service.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid. Father Hasbún, a Jesuit priest, was a warrior for the poor during the 1960s on many a Chilean TV interview—I remember watching him on Chilean TV in Santiago in the 1960s-- but then Utube and other historical documents provide audio-visual evidence that he became a pliant supporter of the oligarchy during and long after the Pinochet regime. Despite enormous legal files accusing Pinochet of genocide, malfeasance and other manners of corruption, Hasbún continues to speak highly of Pinochet even at present, in 2018.

us out of the fictional magic. Then we have the narrator, who in *El paso de los gansos* behaves in slippery fashion, not making it clear if it's the author in Chile, who speaks and describes, or it's his memory that unspools his images of yesterday, adopting the voice of a "being" crisscrossing streets while bullets fly overhead, and Cristián, the author's alter ego, becomes a flesh-and-blood person in the story. Who is who, precisely, and when can we detect each one's identity is less important than what they tell us is happening to the Chilean homeland. In this allusive sense, where the nightmarish authoritarian state of exception thrusts the reader into an irresistible metamorphosis where we cannot discern if we're reading or living the grip of dictatorship as just another vulnerable citizen exposed to interrogation, being shoved, tortured---tortured by reading hair-raising infamies. These readerly provocations blend into language... our own ontology as readers/victims of impunity recedes in importance and we confront the live wire of living contingency. We feel the pulse of life—ours—becoming tragically vulnerable. Alegría's visceral writing therefore allows us to *absorb* the societal panic, to read on even while in shock. We *bleed* as we hold the book *El paso* describing someone bleeding. We can hear the wrenching plea of a woman *begging, pleading* for her life. This is on-the-ground, a reading of science fiction turned real, but still seeming science fiction. We are thrust onto the site of conflict and military assault on cobbled stone streets stained with human blood. We are made to visualize sundry scenes: spotting a missing woman's high heel shoe, a man's hat lies on the sidewalk, blown off someone's head in a maddening run for cover. *El paso de los gansos* gives us a sense of urgency; it's precipice-edge gasping. Along the unrelenting dramatic curve, conflict tightens. We teeter between a bland, unconvincing pseudo-democracy and a horrifying dictatorship encroaching on *our* own flesh. This work forces us to gain a better appreciation of life's value; of each individual's entitlement to thrive. When life is imperiled, as Alegría shows us, social prejudices

seem wastefully irrelevant. Evoked images of a humanity threatened are pregnant with meaning. This is visual prose; these are testimonial sketches in the heat of sudden onslaught. Language becomes de-centered, voices recoil, and then spring. Alegría retains a Proustian quality, where the meaning of something, of a moment, of a notion in its own inherence and inference within the context of the coup d'état rapidly shifts its hue from serenity to moral chaos from yesterday's Chilean democracy to a state of siege, discernible in the smoke that billows shrouding the palace of government from explosive black mushrooming clouds darkening the palace, to a dusty and incandescent white that blurs the direction in which history is shoving the country. This scene is a most illustrative --and graphic-- way of showing how the ideology of the moment is rapidly altering social consciousness; how, in Levinasian terms, "the meaning of something is in its relation to another thing."⁴⁶⁷

The destruction of the palace, where the head of state remained until his last breathing moment has another relevance: that man, the unit of human life, the habeas corpus of unfounded charges, is the real "edifice;" it is his *sovereignty of the self*. That is what's hereafter most threatened, both by physical violence and by the subtle violence of a refurbished law that accommodates the aims of the oligarchical class. This is the same social group that inspired, supported and condoned the assault on democracy. Arising from a sense of yearning that Cristián instills in us as we follow his search for traces of a utopia-craving political culture violently declared a bygone era, in *El deseo de otro Chile* (2010), Tomás Moulián, a Chilean sociological historian, debunks the myth of a semblance of peace and harmony as having existed among the social classes since Independence:

La historia de Chile desde la estabilización en 1830 de un estado que provee gobernabilidad, ... se enfrentan y luchan las fuerzas de la democracia y de la

⁴⁶⁷ Emmanuel Levinas. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. (1985), 86.

inclusión contra las fuerzas atávicas, nunca totalmente conjuradas, del autoritarismo y de la exclusión. En esta dualidad, en esta lucha persistente... reside lo central de la experiencia histórica de Chile.”⁴⁶⁸ The State of Chile, according to Moulián, “es un compromiso oligárquico.”⁴⁶⁹

The humanity of the individual, that aura of a moat around each person, that indivisible unit of sovereignty around a man, which in the social collective *reboses* the country, that other sovereignty can only attain stability by reciprocal reverence.⁴⁷⁰ Entering the emotional lives of characters as we witness their experiential realism, by crafting a film-like aesthetic *Alegría* shows us how socio-political events become etched in the collective memory. The Chilean novelist blends genres. *El paso de los gansos*, the novel-diary, also gives the impression of being crafted as a *testimonio* written for the stage while dispensing with script lines. However, that other script, the planned outline for the military assault, the bribes, the subsidies paid in US cash dollars, leaving no paper trail, had been carefully designed in advance, elsewhere, and in a different tongue. The earth continues to tremble from the eruption of this political earthquake and its continuing aftershocks. With each gun shot, each falling body, the memory of Allende’s speeches becomes more vital, more meaningful, more urgent. *Alegría* harkens back to a moment where he and the president shared a meal.

Tencha (Allende’s wife) sirve el café... Allende se pone juguetón y me mira desde lejos... atento... me llevo la copa a los labios ... poniéndome su traje de terciopelo granate entre pecho y espalda... Allende no es más que una voz, apenas un brazo,

⁴⁶⁸ Moulián, *El deseo de otro Chile*, pp., 9-10.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁷⁰ These two notions of sovereignty, individual sovereignty and state sovereignty were conceived –if not quite articulated thus—by Machiavelli and Bodin. But it was not until the 1760s when Emer de Vattel introduced, explicitly, the principle of nonintervention (Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, 1999:21). It was then dusted off from oblivion by UN secretary general Kofi Annan.

una cabeza, en un balcón lleno de gente, cielo de antorchas que humean y miles de banderas... Allende ronco, explosivo y alucinante. Compañeros! Pidiendo ... al pueblo que regrese a sus hogares y dé una lección más de democracia... seguros del mañana.⁴⁷¹

Showing without telling us us, Alegría emblazons the page with a profile of Allende unwaveringly protective of his every constituent's *self-sovereignty*. Employing the third person plural, we're unclear whether it's an affectation or grammatical accuracy, nonetheless we're transported into a tale, even into the mazes of mythological legend, more than a story. The personal, the intimate, dovetails and overlaps, even fuses with the public and the historic. As Alegría describes Allende listening, being, breaking bread with family and friends, his gaze is always visibly on another plane. It is not a merely strategic or political thought abstraction. It has another aura. It seems like the man is possessed by a level of mysticism clad in political vision. While observing the president observing, Alegría reveals to the reader that there's something unreachable in Allende, even in a gathering among intimates. That core of being seems profoundly bonded with Chile's most humble. When he shakes a peasant's hand, the distantly set gaze becomes warm, genuine, non-calculating. There it is where Alegría allows us to meet the man in the politician. That Allende, warm and charismatic while reflexive, now stands gazing at the future from a bronze statue across the way from where he gave his last breath of commitment to purpose at the La Moneda palace. From this statue his figure stands perennially guarding over the *sovereignty of the self* of each of his fellow-citizens and, truly, unimpeachably, as their warrior-priest. Alegría writes:

¿Por qué se fue a La Moneda sin vacilar, rápido y duro, con la metralleta en la mano? Es posible sentir piedad, asombro y ternura por tí ahora. Parece que

⁴⁷¹ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, pp. 27-28.

buscabas tenazmente a tu enemigo y creyendo encontrar la bíblica puerta estrecha, caíste, en cambio, soñando con grandes alamedas transitadas por hombres libres, el mundo frente a tí, a tus espaldas el momento gris de la decepción y la derrota... Te fuiste derecho al desenlace, sin cuestionar tu suerte, repentino y celoso celador de tus visiones.⁴⁷²

This memoir soars above the notion of a novel. It's a personal eulogy to the statesman and the man with whom Alegría had the privilege of breaking bread together, and calling his friend. That bond of loyalty and friendship broadens to the people of Chile, especially to the historically humiliated and belittled, to the impoverished, to the socially crippled from rising from his condition, forever-barred from a chance to thrive. Moulián introspects: "Ser pobre es una forma de estar muerto en vida, privado de las posibilidades de una existencia digna."⁴⁷³

Machiavelli left us works by which to live with the safety of stability within the social group and the homogenous culture of the nascent nation-state: "the aim of the people is more honest than that of the nobility, the latter desiring to oppress, and the former merely to avoid oppression."⁴⁷⁴ *El paso de los gansos* draws the reader into a versatile array of viewpoints, thus introducing the reader into a panoply of empathies with varying approximations to the Other's ontology: we experience this assault on a nation from the perspective of a soldier mounted on a tank that points at the country's most sacred emblem, its palace of government. By shooting at it and destroying it, that soldier is instantly becoming a traitor, a victim of a moral act, albeit a hero to those orchestrating the assault and, yet we have come to know, that soldier transformed into a tormented human being thereafter and across the many years of his life. We also experience the event from the person against whom the tank's canon happens to be pointed. Will it fire? Or will

⁴⁷² Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 29.

⁴⁷³ Moulián, *El deseo de otro Chile*, 57.

⁴⁷⁴ Machiavelli, "Of the Civic Principality," Chapter IX in *The Prince And the Discourses* (1950), 36.

the soldier manning the tank and furiously advancing toward one person in a crowd content himself with watching that person collapse from a heart attack? Will the tank driver exult as he crushes the life out of the indefensible citizen? But there was also more than one man who stood before the tank and defied it, just as it occurred in Tiananmen Square, China, 1989,⁴⁷⁵ during the democratic revolt by students voicing their disgust of political repression, only to be corralled and mowed down by tanks. Civilians were also corralled, run over and executed in the streets – and captured in film, as well as in works such as *El paso de los gansos*, which is how the world learned about this notion that the Chilean military held off impermeable sovereignty, understood to mean that by holding power, the military junta, and then Pinochet alone at the summit of government, possessed the right to kill his own citizens under the guise of ideological cleansing.

The Pinochet dictatorship saw it was justified to kill dissenters of the right-wing government, bent as his regime was on eliminating opponents. Legal history would eventually prove them wrong, but that dimension of analysis falls outside the parameters of this study, which limits itself to Pinochet's dictatorship since the coup of 1973 until this work's publication in 1975, a mere two years witnessing unspeakable atrocities against humanity. His form of dictatorship fits squarely within Aristotle's definition of tyranny: "the lawless rule of one man over unwilling subjects."⁴⁷⁶ Within Chile, all that could be seen, perceived and believed to be the new regime whose primary social policy was the point of a gun, the shackle, the soldier's yell--- what was happening directly to the local population. Ideological labels, democracy or dictatorship, can even be conceived as exchangeable labels; when, as a matter of ontology, they can easily become catachreses,⁴⁷⁷ misused concepts, when what matters, Butler tells us --citing from an essay titled, "Peace and Proximity" penned by Emmanuel Levinas-- is the preservation

⁴⁷⁵ Did the Chinese Communist learn from the Chilean Fascist?

⁴⁷⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* (2000), 15.

⁴⁷⁷ Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), p. 133.

of “the humanity of man,”⁴⁷⁸ where the “face” becomes “the wordless vocalization of suffering.”⁴⁷⁹ Alegría writes: “sienta la carga eléctrica elevada a la altura de los testículos y las vaginas... el golpe de los dedos quebrados y las espaldas rotas; el país es un vecino atropellado, nocturno, desangrándose de bruces en el suelo.”⁴⁸⁰

In Alegría’s case it may be surmised that in the pandemonium of a coup d’état, which as it happens may be perceived as a simpler ideology; namely, a political hecatomb, without giving it a precise category until after the smoke dispels. But that is reality. Literature comes closest to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.⁴⁸¹ All we see are shadows and we interpret the wild versions of our imagination. The man shoved against the wall by a soldier pointing a gun at him doesn’t think of renouncing his political convictions, or whether he can argue political philosophy with the soldier in the hope of persuading him to lower his gun, or better yet, to dissuade him from his position and bring him about to his own. As a way of placing survival before politics in the seeming anarchy that was Santiago in the day of the coup, it seems apposite to consider *The Ethics*, where Spinoza writes, according to Butler, “the desire to live the right life requires the desire to live, to persist in one’s own being, suggesting that ethics must always marshal some life drives.”⁴⁸² Alegría takes us to that level of exposure where one cannot reason with an uneducated soldier with a gun, a man who became a soldier as the only way to survive his penury, his social pariah status, his long-held blood in the eye. To him the weapon was his instrument for revenge; pulling the trigger a moment of power. There were incentives in killing at random. Social distress sweeps across civilians, including those in uniform. Alegría writes:

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁸⁰ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 193.

⁴⁸¹ Plato, *Republic*, 514a-520a. It compares the effect of education on our nature. It is presented as a dialogue between Plato’s brother Glaucon and Socrates, who narrates.

⁴⁸² Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), p 140.

“La inestabilidad de nuestras clases populares... es fruto del vértigo que produce al enfrentarse con valentía a una realidad que no se entiende, no se acepta, se critica...”⁴⁸³ but seldom something is done to bring about meaningful and enduring change for the better, for peace, for opportunities, for social harmony. When a Chilean soldier, exulting in hubris and shielded by Pinochet, barks at a citizen with his loaded weapon reiterating his authority, Butler comes to mind: “what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid.”⁴⁸⁴

“Por la razón o la fuerza,” the Chilean national motto, reappears when a soldier faces down a citizen. It rings hypocritical: like a disturbing, incorrectly conceived, haunting, mocking mantra. What ought to prevail? The state of siege or the citizen? This is a recurrent tenet in *El paso de los gansos*. This feud of opposites endures in the subtext, even when a gun is not pointed at a man, but it points subliminally at the reader. At such private moment of memory and associations, the reader will hear the martial sound of a thousand boots thud in unison against the ground with a kind of mystical force that equals only the resilience of the supine man, unarmed, mortally threatened by a trembling trigger, such as the scene in *El paso de los gansos* right outside the National Library, depicting soldiers keeping people face down with rifles pointed at them.⁴⁸⁵ The library, the Orwellian symbol of rationality, was the place the dictatorship soldiers picked to detain people out in the open, the venerable fulcrum where the elevation of the individual spirit is urged, where education contrasts subliminally with imbecility, humanity vs hubris.

Once we’re past the author’s introduction to Chile in two preliminary chapters, we’re formally introduced into the chaos in “Las diez de últimas.” It’s a phrase that’s supported by a

⁴⁸³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 44.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁸⁵ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 172. (Original description was written in Spanish by the author.)

chapter that suggests a Biblical apocalypse. With jets roaring overhead dropping bombs on a densely urban setting of government buildings, it certainly can leave the unwitting citizen believing the end is near. But it also means a game of chance, the ultimate game of chance with lives at stake.

The reader is blamed for the confusion. Referential points have been relativized. Among the gun blasts and the massive military presence everywhere, caustic and invasive, one better not go home, one protects family by keeping away. But that's playing into their strategy of divide and conquer. Love is replaced by compliance. This is truly a scene of Orwellian terror and not just his book, but his words have been spilled onto the streets of Santiago. What to do? Where to turn?!

We may be reading quintessential *Alegría*, but as we do that, we read ecumenically. He reveres intertextuality with the solemnity of a ritual, and his multiplicity of voices pays indirect homage to the many sources from which he syphoned technique, style, as well as models of orality embedded in prose. He tends to be unabashedly Joycean in this manner. *Alegría*, as it was with Joyce, pursued other texts and authors and movements and epochs in a sort of transcultural pilgrimage. Within the dictatorship genre of prose across the ages, we can easily be overwhelmed by an immensely long palimpsest of works taking us back to antiquity. But without veering farther back than the 20th century, *Alegría* draws from many Latin American apposite literary models sourced in social representation. As if with watercolor, *Alegría* insinuates complexity by blurred prose strokes. Tonalities of hubris and genocidal traces spill on the scalding page. The essence of motion, gesture, atmosphere are sufficiently depicted as to tell a minimalist yet complete story of character essences suggesting a political chapter in the national

story plucked from a political ancestry of power misusing sovereignty leaving a wreckage of calamities and bloodletting underscoring unspeakable horror leave the reader spent.

Soldiers march with the gait of geese, goose-stepping, as it was with the Prussian-Nazi army, copied in Chile, produce a symbolic spectacle that stirs the emotions of an audience, which in the Prussian model elevated passions to Wagnerian levels of mythological ecstasy. The closest Chilean emotive equivalent is in the popular ballad, “Si vas para Chile.” It is ironic to recognize that the goose-step, associated originally with Teutonic prowess and identity, could be simply exported to a small country at the edge of the world, where the Song of the Nibelungs (das Nibelungenlied), a tale of mythological violence committed with stoicism against which civilization has no power, belonging exclusively to the German folklore, can as well be sung out by soldiers with indigenous faces when the Chilean military marches. In other words, patriotism loyalty is fungible. Military emblems, as with all emblems, are symbolic of intangible values and ideas. Behind the perfectly lined up rows of soldiers is corporate homogeneity evoking production belts and their awaiting consumers. Capitalism combined with military discipline rule from a kernel of power by both submissive compliance and by fear-instilling gestures. The soldier’s uniform, clothing, is only the outer resemblance between corporate employees in that other uniform: suits, thus obliterating individuality while conducting the will of the corporation operating behind –or in front of-- the military. Oddly enough the weaker sex proves to be the stronger one of the two, and doesn’t need a uniform, nor toting a weapon, to manifest her vintage of strength. Unlike the soldier’s prowess meant to destroy and kill, the woman’s is designed to create and nurture. Perhaps the most vulnerable person –with an undeniable latent strength—that has been exposed to the control of the structure(s) cited so far has been the Chilean woman:

La mujer del pueblo llega a una mentalidad revolucionaria después de un largo y difícil proceso. Trabaja desde su niñez, trabaja antes de casarse y trabaja el doble después de casada. Conoce en carne propia los males de una sociedad que la aplasta. Puede tener una actitud revolucionaria, pero no la oportunidad para formarse una mentalidad revolucionaria y darle expresión en la militancia política.⁴⁸⁶

Arendt writes of “the subterranean streams of modern history.”⁴⁸⁷ So it was with Alegría’s Chile through the prism of his *El paso de los gansos*. The rumbles of political history had installed themselves in the nervous system of Chileans, disturbing their sleep, long before the coup broke out. That grid of gradual disruption, of incessant erosion, vultures jabbing insistently at the still live body of Chilean resources, was a subterranean force,⁴⁸⁸ a current that flowed facing no obstacles through the complacent limbs of the prostate nation. But the body, still alive, emitted a keening wail upsetting the rapacious invader, thus providing the only clear expression of protest against the horrors of totalitarianism that, like the Trojan horse, smuggled itself into the structure of democracy to vanquish it from within.

That rumble of subterranean forces that are felt but not clearly defined and least of all specifically identified bruised and weakened the national fabric and Alegría devotes this long chapter to briefly comment on the nodules of evidence that surface through the idiosyncrasy. On both sides of the barb wired ideological division, each side shows the other canine teeth of

⁴⁸⁶ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 52.

⁴⁸⁷ Arendt, *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding 1953-1975*, (2018), 157. Here, Arendt refers to her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

⁴⁸⁸ A way of expressing the passages of Alegría’s *El paso de los gansos* echoing an arendtian sensibility, when the German philosopher speaks of Imperialism as a “subterranean stream of modern history” in the same volume cited above, *Thinking Without a Banister* (2018), 157.

principled rejection. Alegría transports us to Allende addressing a plenary session at the United Nations:

“[L]a Asamblea de las Naciones Unidas en pleno se levanta y te ovaciona y tu te arreglas los anteojos y el Capitán Araya,⁴⁸⁹ tu Edecán Naval, permanece de pie al fondo del estrado, guardándote las espaldas, él a quien madrugaron los terroristas en Santiago con una ráfaga de balas importadas....”⁴⁹⁰ The author has his narrator feverishly chronicle this day as a darkness at noon, *el día del golpe*, a day of infamy and entropy: “En las piezas oscuras de arrabales santiaguinos y porteños, las gentes se preguntan Qué ha pasado? Se miran unos a otros, guardan silencio. Es posible? Sí, es posible. Pero, Es que perdimos el camino? Dónde? Cuándo?”⁴⁹¹

These continue to be telling signs of political direction; a semiotics of purpose with an appropriate style to craft a message; a certain philosophical inkling inhabits language meant to clarify ideas, even when Ludwig Wittgenstein affirms that “language disguises thought.”⁴⁹² In the particular case of a *state of exception*, Pinochet has shown—as Orwell had previously observed—that language can and often does become another weapon, more so than merely an instrument to disguise, but to effectively mislead. Alegría informs *El paso de los gansos* with apposite selections of intertextuality. It is a multiple-layered palimpsest of works and essences collected from previous regional dictatorships to underscore points of commonality where humankind is increasingly shoved into a despairing dead-end. This daily spectacle of power is coupled with a theatricality of speeches. It also appears in the calligraphy of hand-written documents, a performative demeanor of poignant political nuance when politics is manifested as its most corrosive. The building of the bourse, the stock market, a 1940s structure, is pointed like

⁴⁸⁹ Comandante Arturo Araya Peeters, director of the Naval Academy, took leave of his post to serve President Allende. He was a kind and empathetic leader of young men being groomed to become officers.

⁴⁹⁰ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 73.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1999), pp. 45, 52.

a war ship coursing forth undeterred. The Chilean author chooses allegorical language, instilling history into his exposition, situating the reader in the urban design's panoply of semiotics: architectural style differences symbolizing the leaping decades and cultural eras scream their mumbled speeches at the passerby. Alegría gestures to those voluminous blank pages of untold history. So many pages written, events memorialized, yet remaining unread.

In the continuation of a passage previously cited: "...una metralleta que le había regalado el Comandante cubano Fidel Castro, con una dedicatoria impresa en una placa de oro: 'A mi amigo y compañero de armas, Salvador, Comandante Fidel Castro,'"⁴⁹³ the physician with Allende just before his death describes a textual dedication on the suicide weapon which further imbues Alegría's prose with genre flair. Allende makes an exception to his long-espoused non-violent methodological vision. He crosses over to Fidel and Che's ideological camp, if only symbolically, as if to show the world he's not about to resist a coup against his Administration without a fight, yet he is serenely prepared to meet his fate. Was it fate or was it destiny? The Greeks say one chooses one's destiny. Somehow, it appears that Allende and all of those of us who lived under his presidency were carried by his leadership and were made to struggle as a nation with or under him in the eye of the storm, precisely where fate meets destiny.

Cristián/Alegría narrates historical information (broadly photographed) with language worthy of fictional assertion. Conversely, he creates a fictional plot on the contours of history as if the core drama, historic in essence, were imagined circumstances. He relies on the absurdity of actual history as a basis on which to blend fiction and perhaps fill the void an entire society ached to have filled. Alegría seems to whisper to the reader Who could possibly believe what happened?! He therefore bridges transitional images. In Joycean fashion, he brings psychic dimensions reacting to historical events into credible verisimilitude; consequently, he pits cathartic effects

⁴⁹³ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 75.

with a daunting mirroring of experience as an evolution of the imaginary. Alegría draws a silhouette of the national character: euphoria, hands and eyebrows gesturing, replacing a cascade of words, slumped postures. Lit cigarettes allegorizing stress. Alegría's narrator chisels courage onto the page. He compliments courage, even the heroism of the few with an ad hoc feistiness. This latent mettle is activated in times of crisis and he shows us a core of national character, fortitude, resilience. This Chileanness, indigenous and Iberian, mostly, comes alive and it's energizing across the collective chain of a humanity in duress.

This is Chile's most precious national resource infecting otherwise weakened figures adrift. Catholicism and a version of indigenous paganism combine to strengthen the vulnerable individual. This Chilean character is at its core of a steely disposition: "Les propinamos un golpe rápido y preciso. No contaron con el espíritu chileno, que puede ser incluso marxista, pero una vez que se pone el uniforme, es y se siente soldado. Sabíamos que montaban guardia armada en los edificios y que el mayor problema provendría de los francotiradores."⁴⁹⁴

The much-announced "novel" actually begins in its last chapter, "El evangelio de Cristián." A series of letters the main character pens (Cristián masks the narrator/author's identity), one assumes, voice the author's opinion, which begins with a *stream of consciousness* decision: "Tengo mucho que escribir... No importa donde empiece."⁴⁹⁵ Oddly, though, the author talks about beginning his memoir toward the middle of the quasi-novel-chronicle.

From here on out, it seems that Alegría tossed his commitment to a novel's outline aside and took the place of the narrator, and certainly eliminated Cristián from the scene, at least for a while; or rather, expressed himself through him. But this elimination of the story character is another smoke screen. Oddly enough, Cristián seems to bump Alegría from his insistence on

⁴⁹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 84.

⁴⁹⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 109.

authorship. His reckless daring and social intentions evoke the memory of assassinated revolutionaries, Jesus Christ, Che Guevara and Allende,⁴⁹⁶ all long dead, they nonetheless come back, making themselves present, to burnish Cristián's inner life with theirs, and we see Cristián motoring through forbidden places, open streets available only to a madman, or a naïve creature, as only someone agitated and new to the country—where both returning exile and home country changed—searches in the manner in which he lunges forth.

Here, the critical reader must also notice that his unbridled and reckless revving of his motorcycle and of his irrepressible spirit suggest that the idealism of the three martyrs converge in him. He now acts as though he embodies the torch Jesus, Che and Salvador yearned for and struggled to pass on. It is Cristián's impetuosity, his hunger for re-creating a vision rendered obsolete during martial law, a vision defined for patience, crafted with a teleological purpose, conceived in hardship but steeled in endurance, indeed he had the grit stuff of the *roto chileno* in him, which shouldn't be squandered by a fast and impertinent motorcycle careening along military-infested streets. But there was a distance between this fellow with a foreign passport in his pocket and a motorized galloping horse that he straddled, and average folk without the chance for a foreign visa, stuck and tethered to the bureaucracy in a circuitous existence of dependency. They saw him fly by on his bike, swerving and dodging, swallowing distance faster than a soldier could set his rifle to aim at him. By contrast, the supine citizen cannot escape the soldier spotting him from his long-range rifle viewer. The rhetorical question that gnaws at the reader in later reflection arises as a metaphor, who is destined to move faster politically, the turtle or the hare?

⁴⁹⁶ Exceptionally, to preserve an image of loyalty and dignity before history, Allende committed suicide while under enormous political pressure.

Alegría suggests that the vulnerable individual still has space for universally ethical choices within an authoritarian state; Sisyphus-like as his reality may seem, this eye-witnessing narrator/character affirms, seducing us into believing, that the Antigone⁴⁹⁷ in all of us can and should stand for what's right, even defiantly, before the king—and do so in small rebellions and strategic ways—be he a Creon or a Pinochet.

On a level of integrity-worthiness, man, naked, fragile, vulnerable and supine as he may be, is, in fact—or ought to be viewed as—the first unit of social community. Then we have the “Republic” of *individual sovereignties*, and it is from the collective sovereignties that the nation, and the country, can be deemed to constitute a traditional sovereignty hovering over individual citizens, units of loyal sovereignties, in a mutual balance of reverential reciprocity. Such notion is an ideal. Former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan envisions it, while, admittedly, recognizing that we live in a world where only countries, or nation-states, can claim sovereignty—up to now. It will take another Gandhi, perhaps another Mandela, to conceive of a post-racial society where the humanity of man can be viewed on an equal plane with the ecological crisis needing urgent protection.

A country's self-determination, the moat around it, its aura of vitality and integrity, its *individual sovereignty*, a term coined by Annan,⁴⁹⁸ ought to parallel each of its citizens' sovereignty and recognize it as the basis for all precepts of statehood. There can be no country without a nation and no nation without a society and no society without an individual. Consequently, Alegría seems to imply that patriotism is an empty shell, devoid of meaning if a nation does not acknowledge each of its citizens as fundamental to its existence. National

⁴⁹⁷ Sophocles' play, *Antigone*, represents power's dissenter prompted by her sense of righteous justice while defying and neutralizing the dictator's power, bringing him down, but at the cost of her own life.

⁴⁹⁸ See Kofi Annan's article on *individual sovereignty* in *The Economist*, July 1999.

sovereignty, or collective sovereignty⁴⁹⁹ can only begin with *individual sovereignty*. On the point of a person's legal protections, Annan offers a statement: "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... confirmed - for the first time in history - that human rights and fundamental freedoms are applicable to every person, in every country. It was a common statement of mutual aspirations, a shared vision of a more equitable and just world."⁵⁰⁰

Meanwhile, scoffing at any reverence for life, human and otherwise, this Catholic country's military troops continued under Pinochet's rule to kick open doors of private homes in the middle of the night, dragging the elderly, the infirm, and even children out to their deaths in the dead of night... . There were also rare circumstances when those in uniform refused orders to kill civilians and attempted to exercise their legal right as conscientious objectors. A few survived isolation, imprisonment and torture. The less fortunate became "oficiales fusilados a sangre fría por negarse a participar en el golpe."⁵⁰¹ Poor Chile, it endures across history as a broken up archipelago, a cartography of entrenched political divisions. Allende's last words still ring in the national memory: "Compatriotas... esta será, seguramente, la última oportunidad en que me podré dirigir a ustedes... pagaré con mi vida la lealtad del pueblo... Trabajadores de mi patria... tengo fe en Chile y su destino...."⁵⁰² Shortly after those immortal words, the Chilean resistance, much like noble folk across the world's history of totalitarian regimes, spent their energies: "A salvar gentes entre toque y toque de queda... en patios de escuela, en cerros y cementerios... a sacar gente de closets multifamiliares y enterrarlos en hospitales subterráneos,

⁴⁹⁹ Meant as not limited only to state sovereignty.

⁵⁰⁰ Excerpt from former United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan's acceptance speech on his induction as Chancellor, University of Ghana, August 11, 2008.

⁵⁰¹ Alegria, *El paso de los gansos*, 197; Chilean Army Commander General René Schneider, unflagging supporter of Chile's Constitution, would not join the coup plotters against the newly elected president Salvador Allende. Schneider was assassinated October 25, 1970 in a failed kidnapping plot organized by Chile's political right-wing in also a failed effort to thwart Allende's elevation to the presidency. General Carlos Prats, retired Army Commander and Chile's Vice-President during Allende's regime, was assassinated by Pinochet's secret service on his orders in Buenos Aires on September 28, 1974. Pinochet was Prats' former subaltern and valued friend.

⁵⁰² Alegria, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 12.

tabiques brujos, suelos dobles... las patrullas de la muerte... el país de un vecino atropellado, nocturno, desangrándose de bruces en el suelo.”⁵⁰³

As troops flooded the streets shooting their weapons against vulnerable civilians, the legal guarantees of civil protections vanished by the suspension of the Judiciary. Congress was ordered closed. The news media outlets were either bankrupted or pressured to become mouthpieces for the military at the helm of a Constitution drafted by and for civilians—a document they would soon mangle to protect governing military officers from a bigger brother: an irate international justice.

As we observe Pinochet becoming smug in his uncontested seat of power, ever secure by a bristling aura instilling a sense of awe toward himself on lower-ranking officers, we also observe lower-ranking career officers enthralled and belittled by fear of this modern-day Caligula, whose dark shades worn indoors added an image of temerity when his words lacked the gravitas of the well-founded argument. We witness with Alegría/Cristián the long rug of totalitarianism quickly unfurling. Pinochet’s façade is the new face of the country’s direction. His clenched jaw augurs a storm. A buffeting climate looms, prompted by the quick winds of his changing volubility, when truth is what he says is true, when lies become facts and facts prove to be lies; when there is no reliable point of reference and there is no perceptible moral leadership, an echo of Orwell’s *1984*. It is in such a warped scenario where our Chilean Cristián—shadowing *1984*’s Englishman Winston—reconstructs the optimistic Allende belief perhaps best enunciated by Kristeva: “the Republic has no foundation other than that of the universality of the citizen... what guarantees each citizen... equal access to the law, to all laws.”⁵⁰⁴ Here we have,

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 193.

⁵⁰⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Crisis of the European Subject* (2000), 99.

again, a rudimentary enunciation of Annan's sophisticated summation of *individual sovereignty* in-the-making.

Generalísimo Francisco Franco, the Falangist ruler of Spain for decades, made an acolyte of Pinochet. A seasoned war strategist, Franco and his military record inspired the Chilean military careerist who believed he was somehow a statesman. Augusto Pinochet, it has been said, made no attempts to camouflage his emulation of the Spanish dictator. Unlike his European counterpart, Pinochet rose to power, however, without ever having fired a bullet at an enemy. His bid for unbridled power, which his supporters applauded as a necessary prelude to national stability, resonated with an Orwell saddened by the belief that totalitarianism could spring up anywhere. Alegría, regrettably, fails to mention Orwell or Franco, the latter Pinochet's irrefutable precursor and role model.

Falling short of Franco as a soldier or even as a politician, Pinochet had luck and an unnerving ability to manipulate circumstance in his favor. This is where Alegría takes the helm of the storytelling to show us a Chile where the nightmare curse of fascist dictatorship foretold by the English writer emerges as more than mere speculative fiction. Thousands of soldiers, armed to the teeth, were ordered onto the country's streets, cities and villages where average folk live modestly but with kinship of spirit: "Siempre vivieron así, aprendiendo a adaptarse debajo de la muralla que les cayó encima, apechugando y endureciéndose o reventando en la espera."⁵⁰⁵ Those who had formed pro-Allende groups, individuals and entire neighborhoods known to have supported Allende were in mortal danger. But where to go? "[N]o tenían una embajada donde refugiarse, ni un fundo donde esconderse, ni siquiera un departamento donde fondarse, ni

⁵⁰⁵ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 192.

tendrían un avión para partir, pero sí habrían de quedarse a pasar hambre, a pasar furias y vergüenza... hasta que alguien les tendiera la mano.”⁵⁰⁶

In this work, Alegría remembers the working poor, the common man, forgotten, excluded, dismissed, who still brims with yearning. The subsistence laborer—a figure recalled from Alegría’s earliest memories in his rough and tumble, impoverished barrio—he argues, is equally entitled to seek and nurture his *individual sovereignty*. It is telling that the author of *El paso de los gansos* refers to Cristián as his war correspondent, who dies, as Christ did, so that others might live to see the day when the *sovereignty of the self* is restored to its rightful place at the center of civic and human life.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 193.

CHAPTER 4

Coral de guerra: Sovereignty of the Self Makes a Stand

“Sounds of Silence.”

--- Paul Simon

Coral de Guerra (1979) is Fernando Alegría’s second coup d’etat novel and his third book-length foray into the realm of a literary sub-genre addressed here previously as the novel of the dictatorship.⁵⁰⁷ And while it is a contemporary work, an unadorned narrative structure and an array of thematic elements—among them love and unrequited love. Aside from theme, we have structure, where the setting of the entire story takes place in a one-room space presents it as a prop distinctly within the terrain of ancient Greek theater, where the characters possess complex psychological identities performing in suspenseful stories that undergo modulating crescendos until reaching a climax where the chorus—the audience of the text, *Coral de guerra*—is affected by the plot to the extent that it is compelled to absorb the denouement inviting it to withdraw into a state of reflection. But it’s also Brechtian⁵⁰⁸ in the sense that the fourth wall is opened to the audience, which in this case is the reader, whom the narration ensnares blurring the distance between stage and *read-atorium*. Indeed, the force that propels this narrative project forward evokes oratory, visuals, and the allusion to movement. Each vignette describing an untenable reality is broken down to nearly every paragraph evocative of a stage play scene at a time in

⁵⁰⁷ *Una especie de memoria* (1983) chronicles the rumbles of totalitarianism across the 20th century Chile, the brewing symptoms of states of exception across several political regimes and, finally, un-euphemistic and unapologetic dictatorship.

⁵⁰⁸ Bertolt Brecht, German playwright (1898-1956).

repression-throbbing Chile⁵⁰⁹ when theater plays were most defiantly expressive against the sitting dictator. Each soliloquy, vignette or paragraph in *Coral de guerra* is based on the vindication of lofty principles for which man must struggle valiantly often in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

This work may have a "guise" of being realist, but it seems that its surrealistic aspects rule and dominate. Then we have a stream-of-consciousness narration, this work on the effects of torture—albeit written well into a categorically irreversible exile for the author—is subtly anchored to a profound instance of *insilio*, a term understood in the context of Latin American dictatorships to mean a self-imposed form of internal exile. In this intensely introspective work of literary fiction, a young man and his wife are separated, making her into a *desaparecida*, when the latter is kidnapped and held prisoner by a Chilean military officer who operates with impunity as part of a state sanctioned extra-judicial secret police force, a ruthless extension of the Pinochet dictatorship. While violence and torture invariably trigger the innate human survival instinct, among those subjected to it, in some situations of extreme duress engendered directly by the constant threat of violent persecution from a government and/or its agents, victims may also withdraw from society entirely, walling themselves off internally. Unable to flee or escape the country to live as exiles abroad for any number of reasons, the *insole* instead retreats to the safety and security of a psychological reality created from within,⁵¹⁰ an inner refuge.

⁵⁰⁹ Pinochet ordered books to be burned in 1974. As a reaction to this policy, artists staged street theaters and brothel readings. Poet Nicanor Parra instituted the street theater, "Hojas de Parra." Shantytown playwright Rafael Benavente developed a worldwide theater, "Tres Marías y una Rosa." These defiant plays endured only until censors caught up with them. "Santiago became a feast of alternative ways of being, seeing and becoming" In Marjorie Agosín, "Art Under Dictatorship" in *Agni*, 31/32 (1990), pp. 33-34.

⁵¹⁰ Ivonne Guzmán, "El insilio nace de la ansiedad" in *El Comercio*, April 9, 2017. Interview with psychotherapist Lobsang Espinoza, who studies language and semiotics Retrieved from <https://www.elcomercio.com>

Alegría himself describes an encounter with a fellow Chilean writer on a visit to his homeland which illustrates the unique plight of those forced to endure the gruesome reality of Chile's dictatorship at great emotional cost:

Ustedes van regresando y me alegro, dijo mi compatriota y yo ¿cuándo volveré?
¿De dónde? Quise preguntarle, si no se ha ido nunca. Pero, no hacía falta. Nuestro exilio necesitó el regreso para hacerse realidad. El de este joven seguirá colgando indefinido, irreal, angustioso en noches y días de una persecución que no se entiende... mudo e invisible ...esta forma de exilio se llama alienación. Prefiero llamarla *enajenación*....⁵¹¹

Virtually omitting a narrator, it is a tale told through three characters, soldier, husband and wife, albeit sorely lacking in distinct voices, *Coral de guerra* throbs with a pulse that operates invisibly. Its source, we can infer with confidence, is the sophisticated and polished machinery of torture and death employed with terrifying surgical precision against the individual sovereignty of those whose bodies and lives it required as blood sacrifices in order to perpetuate itself. While ostensibly subtextual, where deeper than torture there's a destruction of the inner being. Since there is no explicit revelation of whose bodies are being tortured how, when, by whom, all the indicators are nonetheless present. As readers, we are left to assess what seethes behind the unnerving psychographic truths delivered poignantly in a 101-page quasi-novel. Quasi? It is and it isn't quite a traditional novel as we understand it in the western canon. Observing how the characters emerge, it almost seems as if characters function and operate as echoes of themselves throughout the text. This work is filled with enigmas, ambiguity and plurivalence, which is almost the opposite of a traditional novel. I later describe it as a play, even

⁵¹¹ Fernando Alegría, "La Novela Chilena del Exilio Interno" in *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, 42 (August, 1993), 13.

as an allegory. This work is perfectly antithetical to the traditional novel. Now, is it experimental? Aren't all novels experimental in their intention to tell a truth through the magic of prose? *Coral de guerra* is a novel by the fact that it is fiction, but it teases the reader for its mocking similarity with historic reality. This mockery of reality comes in a subform: each character's soliloquy is an epistolary statement, a confession to the reader, an autobiography of pain, of desire, of frustrated yearnings; in short, they are mini-essays led not by form, but by restrained emotion, thus novelizing contiguous genres. It could be said that each character's statement constitutes an individual short story, the epic, the novella,⁵¹² an attempt at the genre's self-preservation from a degenerative dystrophy of the novelistic mindset,⁵¹³ woven together by polyphonic voices, disruptive and reciprocal non-empathies, yet unfettered by authorial interventions, as we observe with the trilogy of characters which crafted together becomes the quasi-novel *Coral de guerra*, though, here, we confront a paradox. Our senses are swept; our deepest layers of the psyche are tampered with, molested, awakened, irritated, and what's worse, made to mistrust one's intuitions; in short, we are made to deceive ourselves when stripped of emotional resistance by fictional elements, which by themselves do not exist, yet they resonate with crippling documentable nonfictive facts: people were tortured under Pinochet. People were robbed of their *self-sovereignty*. People were demeaned and stripped of their humanity. People were made to disappear, which is a horrifying euphemism for murdered, burned, chopped, disfigured, lost forever. *Coral de guerra* hints at all these possibilities without needing to list them. Alegría mines exclusive and uncharted narrative terrain, limiting himself to just the three distinct perspectives whose lives intersect in the wake of the dictatorship and upon whom the entirety of the novel is constructed. Here, Alegría, as author, makes each of his three character

⁵¹² Alla Marchenko, "The Quasi-Novel" in *Russian Studies in Literature*, 41,3, Summer 2005, p. 57.

⁵¹³ Marchenko, p. 58.

self-aware—on at least some level—to the extent they understand how the dictatorship defines their existence. At the same time, he also makes it possible for us to imagine the possibility that the novel’s principal *insilio*, the young woman held captive, also represents the triumph of *self-sovereignty* over the dehumanization wrought by the dictatorship. Even with this veneer of nihilism veiled and justified by a language of entropy as the storyline rises and arches, despite the seeming contempt for everything worthy, there’s an inherent, inferred, awe for life and its integrity.

In her steadfast vow of silence we can recognize the semiotic evolution of *insilio* which Alegría offers as a possibility or an alternative to the passivity of internal exile. “Insilio,” from the moment the woman—whose kidnapping, rape and torture are extensions of a cruel and sadistic dictatorship—decides to take a steadfast vow of silence, she can no longer be regarded as simply a coping or survival mechanism rooted in a conscious withdrawal from the everyday world which results in an internal exile. And the realm of the *insilio*, as a consequence, ceases to be the last refuge of those who are unequipped to defy or resist the onslaught of terror and fear Alegría details in this meticulously psychological, while fictional treatise on the often unspoken ravages of cruelty. In a lucid prologue to the novel, Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti acknowledges *Coral de guerra* as one of the most searing indictments of torture as a function of political repression ever published:

[L]a represión está presente en tres vidas: la de una atractiva mujer, presa y torturada; la de su joven marido; la de un torturador sádico y sin embargo vulnerable [L]a sevicia transforma no sólo a la víctima y al verdugo, sino también a un co-partícipe tan pasivo como el marido. . . . [E]l libro de Alegría es. . .

uno de los más duros alegatos contra la tortura que haya producido la literatura latinoamericana....⁵¹⁴

If *El paso de los gansos* is a broad treatment of dictatorship and its Blitzkrieg usurpation of power which negated individual sovereignty and sublimated it to the illegally imposed sovereignty of the state, *Coral de guerra* is a tightly wound ontology, individual and personal, in which it becomes possible to imagine the victory of individual sovereignty through its unlikely reclamation by a victim of state sanctioned torture. The novel thrusts us immediately into a suffocating space, at once physical and allegorical when Alegría creates a space to represent pressure, oppression, fascism. With this work, Alegría argues irrefutably on behalf of the idea that the officer, the young woman and the husband who still searches for her are all equally victimized by dictatorship's penchant for the annihilation of individual autonomy. Each is impacted and damaged by torture greenlit at the highest levels of the ruling military junta. We tune into the characters with thoughts, observations, memories and interpolations of their own experiences and of those they may have shared with one another. We become angry at and pity the soldier simultaneously, we empathize with the husband, and we come to respect and admire the woman, while we finally laud with gusto her unbreakable silence as the embodiment of an *insilio* capable of subverting torture and transforming it into a defeat against the oppression that has necessitated the internal exile to begin with and against the aggressor himself who still resents her for having resisted his impulse to eviscerate her humanity and render her helpless: “—Su mujer va a aparecer—dice el uniformado... que es muy linda? Es muy cruel. Usted dirá que ella no le ha hecho mal a nadie. Pero, claro, usted no sabe lo que me hizo a mí.”⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Alegría, *El paso de los gansos*, p. 11.

⁵¹⁵ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 13.

A servile, almost unctuous response to the soldier from the missing woman's husband reinforces the utter disregard for him the soldier manifests. The husband becomes a subject of contempt in the eyes of the soldier. In this sense, the husband becomes an unequal to the woman he's lost. We glean this attitude from the military officer's pompous monologue on the "relationship" which had developed between himself and the woman he'd raped, imprisoned and tortured for weeks previously. In tandem with her husband, we realize that she is, in all probability, no longer alive. Yet, it is also evident that her imprint on the man responsible for her abduction and torture is atypical and of a magnitude that belies the callous anonymity to which most victims—as Jacobo Timmerman in *Preso sin nombre, Celda sin número* (1981) imprisoned and tortured in neighboring Argentina during the so-called "Dirty Wars," so eloquently reminds us⁵¹⁶—of Latin American dictatorships. In a boastful confession to the man whose wife he may well have sent to her death, he all but admits that her *individual sovereignty* could not be stripped from her like the garments he forced her out of repeatedly to appease a cruel need, a base impulse or reinforce his "god-like" power. Unable to "break" her and make her truly his, to possess and own her completely, he shunts her aside: "Nunca, óigame, nunca me dijo nada. Ni una palabrita de amor, ni una quejita. ¿Sabe por qué se la entregué a los colegas? Por eso. A usted le suena mal, cree que soy un desalmado. No puede usted entender... . Nos ha pagado mal... . A mí me ha descompuesto, mató en mí algunas cosas."⁵¹⁷

Unable to exercise the power he has wielded with the vigor of a man in full, he nonetheless sees himself as a proud praetorian, bolstered by his loyalty to brutal dictatorship that rewards his eagerness to inflict pain upon those deemed enemies or dissidents. Wounded by and ultimately powerless against her self-imposed silence, defeated by her integrity, the mute intractability of

⁵¹⁶ Jacobo Timmerman, *Preso sin nombre, Celda sin número* (1981), 25.

⁵¹⁷ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 18.

her sovereign *insilio*, he is resigned to confiding in the man he denigrates as unequal in stature to the woman who has managed to turn the tables on the structures of power imposed by a fascist dictatorship without uttering a single word. The victimized woman “chooses not to talk as a way of demonstrating her resistance through silence. Not speaking is understood by the officer as a crime that defies his power. The self-imposed silence is a triumph for the victim... her... undefeatable resistance....”⁵¹⁸ This woman’s behavior, courage, strength, clarity of disposition, reminds us of the ancient pagan philosopher, the former slave to a tyrannical former slave, Epictetus believed we cannot control our external conditions. All we can do is be true to our own high ideals. To be a man in full, or a human being in full means to recognize brokenness within us, to endure life with the sorrows it brings us; however, not to lose one’s own inner stature, one’s own gravitas.

Alegría, in this significant shift with regard to narrative tropes and styles as well as subject matter, takes us outwardly to a place devoid of all semblances bespeaking power: an insignificant, barren outpost, a Rulfian *páramo*,⁵¹⁹ a contrast to the richly layered and textured exploration of the deeper, darker pathologies that are a direct result of dictatorship imposed on humanity severed from itself. In Alegría’s case, as it is with Rulfo’s, *Coral* constitutes a dark narrative of power where neither the culprit(s)’ identities seem to matter much nor what acts were committed—as it is with Gabriel García Márquez’s *El otoño del patriarca* (1975), where a centuries-long decay (as an allegory for political hubris) is masked by the dank sweetness of an overgrown tropical jungle. In *Coral* we encounter an overgrown culture of feared hubris. Alegría, similar to García Márquez in many of the Nobel laureate’s literary works, becomes for us in *Coral de guerra*, an emblematic über-conscience prone to introspection and perhaps even a

⁵¹⁸ Marjorie Agosín, Isabel Allende, Diane Russell-Pineda, *Ashes of Revolt: Essays on Human Rights* (1996), 69.

⁵¹⁹ Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (1955).

slight, internalized suspicion that each of us is somehow indirectly complicit in those revolting excesses of violence and brutality.

In “Women Writers in Exile,” Vytautas Kavolis asserts “true exile places a particular existential, even metaphysical burden on four dimensions of human experience—language, community, history, and resistance against erosion of identity.”⁵²⁰ Raped repeatedly while detained, secluded within the realm of her gender, she finds herself in a realm of her own, severed from the familiar and the sense of community derived thereof. Kavolis affirms “(‘She’) imagines community or... experiences its disintegration... . Community becomes an imagined abstraction... a community she... wishes to preserve against the erosion of being...”⁵²¹

To paraphrase poet Gabriela Mistral, who once asked which was stronger, the condor or the huemul (a deer)? Gentleness and an outward fragility constitute non-threatening strengths with which the condor cannot compete. She said we need “menos cóndor y más huemul;” that is, less force and more intelligence. The same applies to a humanity rendered naked to the shielded soldier. In “Sovereignty Beyond the State,” Jüri Lipping writes: “the paradoxical nature of sovereignty... transmutes into a horizon of intelligibility... a borderline concept... that fixes the self-identity and guarantees the consistency of a political community.”⁵²² The woman at the center of *Coral de guerra* is the huemul/deer and, in her quiet fortitude, represents the collective of individual hearts palpitating with that gentle force, insisting with every beat on its right to live, to declare a *sovereignty of the self* that transcends torture and, indeed, even death.

Works that render us more acutely sensitive to the subtleties of political excesses disrupt the safe stasis of bourgeois ideology. Among such works—which can be said to constitute a

⁵²⁰ Vytautas Kavolis, “Women Writers in Exile” in *World Literature Today*, 66.1 (Winter, 1992), 43.

⁵²¹ Kavolis, “Women Writers in Exile,” p. 44.

⁵²² Jüri Lipping, “Sovereignty Beyond the State” in in Kalmo, Hent and Skinner, Quentin *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (2010), 200.

renewed reflectionist aesthetic in response to attacks on self-sovereignty—*El otoño del patriarca* figures prominently. It was published the same year as Alegría's *El paso de los gansos*, a coincidence in timing and talents that established the Chilean writer among the Boom writers. Sparse and nonetheless moving, *Coral de guerra* erupts with a revolutionary poetics in form and language,⁵²³ and refutes the chasm between us and the “Other” because we share an urgent will to survive as well as a common hunger for spiritual fulfillment within the fellowship of our extended communities. With regard to literary form, *Coral de guerra* unveils, ever gradually, an imprisoned dialectic, a centrifugal spiral of consciousness. The woman's silence provides passage to her liberation, the soldier's almost tender fantasy of a mutually amorous bond with his captive and the husband's prostrate deference to the dictatorship as embodied by the officer are all inextricably intertwined in an ontological empathy shared with the reader.

The oppressive, windowless interrogation office, where the officer may have even forced himself on her at some point prior to the bereft husband's arrival belies the bucolic countryside imagined within the context of this novella, inseparable from the flagrant violence of a military dictatorship. On yet another level of paradox, it merits mention that this novel was produced within the same frameworks that reinforce a military-capitalism, amidst the same capitalist means of production that make this novel viable to a public. This also contrasts with “a modern notion of sovereignty,” Martti Koskenniemi writes, “a *ius gentium* that would authorize a ‘free people’ to rule itself independently of any superior.”⁵²⁴

⁵²³ Jean Franco, “From Modernization to Resistance: Latin American Literature 1959-1976” in *Latin American Perspectives*, 5.1, Culture in the Age of Mass Media (Winter, 1978), p. 78.

⁵²⁴ Martti Koskenniemi, “Conclusion: Vocabularies of Sovereignty – Powers of a Paradox” in Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (2010), 223.

Because of this collective lineage of mutual dependency, it can be said that we're all responsible, as Emmanuel Levinas would have it, for the other,⁵²⁵ the individual, and for society. Consequently, there can be no pride of country, no official marching hymns, polished boots or pressed medal-decked uniforms without societal meaning and without humane purpose. In this thin little book by Alegría, we have countless volumes of ancient wisdom as well as advances in contemporary theories hoisting the place of the individual within the notion of sovereignty. But as it was with the library in Alexandria, the ferocity of the story within its pages might cause it to end up burned in the bonfire of the vanities⁵²⁶ as a dangerous, pyrrhic awaker and challenger of consciences. This little work is truly heavy in the hand. It weighs by the tonnage of its message. It reminds us that eloquence as silence can be a devastating act. There's an intrinsic sense of nihilism in *Coral de guerra* as a way of attempting but failing to decipher what wisdom and vision there may be inherent in the political philosophy of the era during a *state of exception* that looks down on humanity ("Quién se la llevó? Pierden su tiempo."⁵²⁷) and up on the narrowest of ideologies, and the brawn of power:

Viendo que no decía nada, quise clavarla⁵²⁸ fuerte... y me fui cortado⁵²⁹... ha visto usted a un hombre maduro, padre de familia, como yo, ... dejar caer su alma blanca y caliente sobre el suelo? Dar aletazos, abrir la boca, gemir igual que un moribundo, torcerse retorcerse jadeando? Y esa mujer lejana soplando con los ojos cerrados... .
Hace dos semanas que no la veo. Usted dice que no la ve desde hace meses.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas claims that "responsibility for the other is prior to freedom" in Paul Marcus, *Being for the Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis* (2008), 42.

⁵²⁶ Referencing the burning of intellectual and artistic works, the vanities, as Savonarola did in Late-Renaissance Florence.

⁵²⁷ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 68.

⁵²⁸ *Clavarla*: penetrate her.

⁵²⁹ *Me fui cortado*: ejaculated.

⁵³⁰ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, pp. 14-15.

As we try to catch our breath without losing our composure along with the husband, we begin to get a sense of our bearings. Such policies of torture and barbarism are said to benefit not the doer(s) of the heinous act(s), but also the absent and unnamed skeletal few who condone these acts from a distance while having others do the dirty work for them. Each one of those anonymous persons holding enormous power constitutes “the other *desaparecido*.” *Coral de guerra* alerts us to this elusive other by inference: the power(s) that move(s) the little soldier/dictator on the chessboard of political maneuvering. In an odd semantic reversal, the little soldier in this miserable outpost could as well be a stand-in or the same one who wears sunglasses indoors to instill fear in the population through the news media. As the husband listens to the man-soldier’s brawn, he observes that from underneath the veneer of the military uniform his boastful declarations emerge as the voice of contrition masquerading for boastfulness, a preverbal self-flagellation. We witness the soldier’s experiential realism eating at his internal organs, even before his soiled conscience connects with his inner being. It’s an ironic contradiction that occurs simultaneously as his uniform appears freshly pressed symbolizing soldierly honor. Despite “... en el catre, o llámele parrilla, enchufada a una picana eléctrica...”⁵³¹ the symbols of physical torture, he was accustomed to employ his arsenal of methods to break down females, and subversive females especially, her silence, aka her sovereignty, remains resolute.

There are clearly two moralities at play. Military morality values death over life when it perceives the threat of being shamed by the living and the upright. There’s another morality that upholds life over ideology. When the soldier expresses he loves the husband’s wife more than life, he tells us he occupies the incompatible space that straddles an unlivable contradiction. The soldier tries unsuccessfully to avoid listening to some truths, staring at life and death in the face,

⁵³¹ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 33.

instead. To survive, he must recoil from life and from any moral discussion. He finds himself in the hell of his own limbo. He speaks while effaced, concealed from himself, when the act he admits boastfully to having committed which he also knows it to be illegal, immoral, shaming from both within and outside the uniform he wears, and the power it confers on him.

As a reader/listener or interlocutor, one inevitably walks in on this moment of censorship, and a silencing of voices; even while there is speaking, one feels the imposition of pressure, the self-control, the self-editing of utterances, self-censorship and cautious truths; but sometimes not. Sometimes honest truths hoping for honest responses fall on a vengeful ear: "... en el catre, o llámele parrilla, enchufada a una picana eléctrica... No se me ocurrió que podía mentir – nos dice ella sin mirarnos—no me dio tiempo de pensarlo."⁵³² This happens especially where there is intolerance toward that silence that is voluntary, that is in opposition to the demand for speaking, and the expectation of a voice saying what's expected of someone deprived of liberty, pressured, under duress.

As Alegría propounds the subtextual thesis of *sovereignty of the self* as a theoretical notion not exclusively for political science or political philosophy, but for literature, for the character buffeted on the page, and as a stark demand in the context of a military dictatorship when all democratic institutions have been suspended—or crassly eliminated. This nurturing of the principle that is *sovereignty of the self* becomes a violent pursuit when it bears on the only rationale that dignifies and justifies a political regime's existence, the embracing of the moral value of protecting life, in all its forms, thus dignifying the subject of the action as well as the recipient of the policy. In the Chilean context of the Pinochet atrocities-based cleansing of leftist ideology, we observe Alegría recognizing Benjamin's theory of violence when the German thinker writes "lawmaking is power making" and that law is manifested as "legal violence" most

⁵³² Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 33.

visibly witnessed when police or military acts reveal the law's impotence.⁵³³ But there's more. Pinochet and Caesar are indistinguishable in Benjamin's analysis of Caesar's ethical condition in the German critic's *The Origin Of German Tragic Drama*: "Caesar loses himself in the ecstasy of power: he falls victim to the disproportion between the unlimited hierarchical dignity, with which he is divinely invested and the humble estate of his humanity."⁵³⁴

This study endeavors to illuminate the thesis of *individual sovereignty, or sovereignty of the self*, in the context of a totalitarian regime, one that aims to attain the complete domination of the individual, and is also a tyrannical, a viciously sadistic dictatorship for the purpose of regaining economic control and the galvanization of power, an objective that seems all too myopic and morally shallow a goal for which to sacrifice human lives. On its face it's a spineless squandering of ethical capital. Given the symbolic identifiers that place the Armed Forces and the emblematic instruments of patriotism and the flag hoisted up high—higher than truth and a nobility of acts—while unleashing the slaughter of humanity to save the face of the collective ego of a protected social class is just too cowardly a policy to hold up to reason.

Judith Butler renders Sophocles' *Antigone*, highly pertinent to the Pinochet-ensued drama in light of Alegría's *Coral de guerra*, where one woman defies her torturer not by a courageous soliloquy, as Antigone stood up to the dictator Creon, but with her vociferous defiance, an eloquent rhetorical act of political rejection of abusive authority at the highest levels of power over others. In *Coral de guerra*, conversely, "She" stands up to power, but given the cacophony of the circumstances surrounding her, "She" opts for silence as her strategy and her weapon, thus representing all Chileans supine to the yoke of dictatorial hubris. The analytical remarks selected from the thinkers inducted to imbue clarity into this novel of dictatorship and dignified despair

⁵³³ Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1986), 287.

⁵³⁴ Benjamin, *The Origin Of German Tragic Drama* (2009), 71.

with tools of political philosophy constitute an attempt to exhume intolerable truths maligned by censorship to the same degree of harshness as yester era's Inquisition, where the defiant party ran the risk of being burned at the stake.

Coral de guerra clearly indicates that torture, the novel's black hole, was habitual and horrifying, but it only leaves us with a hint, with a sublimation of the graphic images, with the broad strokes of unspeakable horror for the reader's mind to fill in the blanks. In the chapter "The Condor System" in his study *The Condor Years*, John Dinges writes plainly about Pinochet's real life violent methods:

torture, methodically and universally applied as it was by DINA⁵³⁵ and the other security forces, converted most human beings into sobbing, broken, and submissive puppets under the control of the interrogator masters. Humiliation was total. Manacles on a metal bed frame, naked and spread-eagled, with electric current delivered to their most intimate and sensitive body parts, victims lost all physical control. Sphincters released, muscles cramped in spasms. The entire body quivered and shook in waves of violent seizures. Hangings, dunkings, asphyxiation, beatings, rapes, and mock executions were variations on the basic routine. Some prisoners were run over with trucks. This was real-life horror with sweat and smells and screams, cracking bones and the gushing of every manner of human effluent. Successful resistance was measured not in silence but in how many hours a person could delay giving information....⁵³⁶

To this we must add *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (1979), where Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman provide historical analysis in a work of shared authorship that was published the same year as *Coral de guerra*. They identify "Argentina,

⁵³⁵ John Dinges, "The Condor System" in *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (2004), 64.

⁵³⁶ Dinges, *The Condor Years*, p. 99.

Brazil, and Chile – these are *our* (U.S.) clients and our banks and major multinationals are pleased with the ‘stability’ brought by the torturers.”⁵³⁷ They affirm “The U. S. role... in the case of Chile before the military coup, the intent was clearly hostile to the new democratic forces and supportive of the anti-democratic military-police establishment.”⁵³⁸ Later in the work, they state: “The United States has actively cooperated in overthrowing reformers and radicals in democratic systems (Brazil, Chile), but it has never quite been able to throw its weight towards democracy and away from subfascist gangsters even when the gangsters have stood alone with their U.S.-trained militias and weapons against a unified population.”⁵³⁹ Finally, “U.S. involvement in the Chile coup, with its murderous and destructive aftermath, is too-well known.”⁵⁴⁰

The status of vulnerability that the average man lives, or suffers, in Alegría’s depiction of reality under the new military regime as depicted in *Coral de guerra* comes at a time in Chilean internal political affairs that is devoid of social rights. While not stated, the novel occupies a *mise en scene* space in Chile’s social reality after democracy was outlawed and martial law instituted shortly following the coup d’etat of 1973. As we experienced acts of impunity flagellate a society in *El paso de los gansos*, we see in this work how the average person was forced to return to a state of nature-like circumstance, a pre-Hobbesian place --carpeted with asphalt-- devoid of all civic protections in this panic-instilling state of unaccountable exception. On October 10, 1998, Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón had Pinochet arrested and indicted and placed under house arrest for human rights violations under the principle of universal jurisdiction for crimes against humanity while the Chilean former head of state visited England. The case was evaluated by the International Court of Justice. Due to claims of ill health, Pinochet was ultimately allowed to

⁵³⁷ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (1979), 23.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

return to Chile. This case served to establish an international legal precedent on the level of the Nürenberg trials of Nazi war criminals. Apposite to this observation, Quentin Skinner has ruefully stated in “The sovereign state: a genealogy” in Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, Editors, *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* that “in our newly globalized world... the concept of (state) sovereignty itself has to some extent become disjointed from... the rights of individual states... and the ideal of humanitarian intervention has yet to be invoked in such a way as to challenge the sovereignty of any major state.”⁵⁴¹

Skinner adds: “priority must be assigned to the rights of individuals over any attempt to promote such inclusive goals as the common good.” He cites from John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* (1971): “Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.”⁵⁴²

As *Coral*’s author planned the blueprint for his archetypes, there are two types of humanity that Alegría recognizes. One is the man who ekes out a living. He carves out a small niche in his small existence and nothing happens to him, which is partly his burden and his sorrow. Then there is that man not unlike the first, who does what he must, endures a modest existence but he becomes the unwitting victim of a dictatorship’s violence. Hannah Arendt in *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975* comments on this impasse: “men who have the impertinence to approve are no better than the disobedient who oppose. And this is of course the quintessential sign of totalitarianism.”⁵⁴³ Both extreme experiences sweep the average man toward his unpredictable fate. Therefore, the cathartic experience for which

⁵⁴¹ Quentin Skinner, “The Sovereign State: A Genealogy” in Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, Editors, *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (2010), 44.

⁵⁴² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), 45.

⁵⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975* (2018), 503.

Alegria writes in *Coral de guerra* applies to both men facing each other off from opposing political contingencies.

The name Pinochet is strategically omitted from the novel. It's not even replaced. We sense, however, the presence of a dark power hovering, much as it happens in *El Señor Presidente* by Miguel Angel Asturias. *Coral de guerra* emerges as a fulcrum between two dimensions, imaginative time and an historic period with clear reciprocal resonances between both filtered as an overlap through the aesthetic memory of works of this ilk. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Pinochet boasted about the degree to which he could stretch his power. He gloated about the fact that he felt immune to all accountability or reach of the law, domestic or international. He demonstrated feeling smug in the belief that he enjoyed immunity, and believed to be free to wield acts of impunity from assault on his sovereignty as a head of state. Even though international criminal law has since punctured the impermeability of a head of state's sovereignty. This radical change in international positions and curtailments on sovereignty is based, as a matter of fact, on the legal precedent Pinochet's case of political corruption, abuse of power, and the trail of evidence he left to history with his violation of human rights through genocide. Long after these works on dictatorship were penned legal history would turn on Pinochet to indict him for his role while in power. Legal oversight has only applied to small and powerless nations and to their vulnerable leaders—never yet to the heads of state of a superpower (the Richard Nixons, the Henry Kissingers that repeat themselves across a history of egregious belligerence) no matter how culpable they may be of similar and even worse crimes. Essentially, the exposure of vulnerable citizens to abuses of power has not abated in some corners of the world. Furthermore, since Pinochet and since *Coral de guerra's* chronicle, such a dire reality as dictatorships becoming the norm is only disintegrating into multiple cases of

totalitarianism condoning the spawning of a multitude of authoritarian regimes, especially in co-dependent countries. The more rampant such governments emerge, the more insidious their forms of government become.

Coral de guerra draws its thespian characteristics from Greek theater. As a result, catharsis appears to be needed more than ever. Sometimes political reality and fiction mirror each other. Other times, they show a gaping contrast between the two. Alegría concocts an eerie approximation to the lived reality, the tangible, the prosaic reality of the native country under siege from within. Alegría's prose meets us there, at the point of impact.

Alegría's dictatorship narratives suggest a potential for his novels to be performed on stage and on film, especially the one-room story, *Coral de guerra*. This work could well be the flagship novel in any Alegriana course of studies. But the fact is that no serious critic has emerged to recognize Alegría as a leading voice in the Pinochet-era dictatorship novel. In this minimalist space, *Coral de guerra*, the work's edges become jagged, and as such ineffably suspenseful and ubiquitously subversive in its commentary on Pinochet's rule in political history. *Coral de guerra* deserves to be examined through the prism of Judith Butler's work on the theme of Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the vulnerable stands up to power. Butler pioneered the landscape of recent scholarship on the subject matter. Based on this premise, even though Keri Walsh in "Antigone Now" states that Antigone's defiance hurled at the king implicates her in the violence she supposedly opposes,⁵⁴⁴ I postulate that in a most rabid pagan fashion, Antigone (the character in the work *Antigone*) rather usurps her dead brother's spirit, his masculinity complementing and imbibing the long-repressed power of the feminine hovering, seeking resolution while risking her own death to stand against a vengeful king whose ego soars above principle. Antigone wields not

⁵⁴⁴ Keri Walsh, "Antigone Now" in *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41. 3, a special issue: *Antigone* (September 2008), p. 11.

her brother's sword, but her own near bi-gendered legal standing (as does the unnamed woman in Alegria's *Coral de guerra*) to reclaim the *individual sovereignty* owed to her shunned brother while alive. *Coral de guerra's* "She" parallels *Antigone's* Antigone. "She" re-instates this *sovereignty of the self* back to the corpse of his persona where it always belonged, whose body, alive or now dead, continues in death to perform an act of defensive intolerance by the defiance of its unburied presence. In *Coral de guerra*, the dead body is this raped woman's. By straddling her defense of the living and the dead, she straddles all humanity transcending gender differences. In *Antigone*, Ismene suspects that her sister Antigone has a dark tale in her intentions. Antigone replies:

as for poor dead Polyneces' body, they say he (King Creon) has proclaimed among our people that none shall hide it in a grave and mourn, but let it lie unwept, unburied, welcome provision for the birds who watch for such-like prey. These are, they say, the orders our good Creon proclaimed for you and me -- yes, even for me! But let one do what he forbids, and death by public stoning shall await him in the city. So it stands now, and you must quickly show if you are rightly born or the base child of noble parents.⁵⁴⁵

Why would Creon not find it ignoble to refuse the burial of a soldier killed in a war against him? Clearly, in psychological terms, the union between Jocasta and Oedipus, producing Antigone, was dysfunctional, and it was replicated in the bond between Pinochet and the Nixon/Kissinger Administration producing a vicious dictatorship. But must a child, such as Antigone, bear the parents' guilt? Must the Chilean people suffer the consequences of an arrangement made at levels of power that bypass the population? Consistently, then, must the Chilean population suffer from the excesses and illicit transactions of its own oligarchy? Unlike

⁵⁴⁵ George Herbert Palmer, Translator, *The Antigone of Sophocles* (1899), 28.

it was with Pinochet, that only after Chile had become a concentration, torture and murder camp, the longest geographical cemetery in human history, we came only then to know that the American White House Administration at the time had masterminded the grievous assault on Chilean democracy, and on the lives of its people. One cannot simply utter the name of Antigone without revealing her identity and thereby better understand the ferocity of her convictions. Unlike the dysfunctional union of her unwitting parents, Antigone represents a dissenting Chile, which, in the early stages of the dictatorship was also unaware of the bond between Pinochet and Nixon/Kissinger.

Antigone was one of four children by Oedipus and Jocasta, Oedipus's mother, a union that occurred without the lovers' awareness of their respective origins. While there are parallels between Pinochet and Creon, heads of state that sacrifice their people to appease personal demons, which in Pinochet's case was a profound lack of self-esteem, Antigone is the offspring of a corrupted bond, much as Chileans were the offspring of the raped Mapuche land, while also the orphaned children of a violent coup d'état and the martial law that was a reflection of the insecurity of the local oligarchy and the apprehension of a foreign power. It was a decision made in back hall whispers between Pinochet and Kissinger/Nixon. Neither *Antigone* nor *Coral de guerra* deal with the peccadilloes of the ancient history that precedes each, but they grapple head-on with the ills of a dictatorship at hand that prevents rightful living and dignified dying.

George Herbert Palmer, the Harvard professor of philosophy and the 1899 translator of *Antigone* work from the Greek, underscores the fact that modern Western tragedy employs "speech, action and scenery."⁵⁴⁶ While he adds that Sophocles and other ancient Greeks also added worship, song and the response from an audience/chorus, it can be said that we, the private reader, constitute the writer's echo chamber, veritably, his oratorio. It must be said that Alegría's

⁵⁴⁶ Palmer, *The Antigone of Sophocles*, Chapter II, "The Chorus," 14.

novel and tragic drama engages the audience in the amphitheater of his novel-play-chronicle of the contemporary era. In the blueprint of *Coral de guerra*, the reader plays a structural role since each time one reads the soliloquies of the two men across the narrow table --which could well suggest the narrowness of the mindset of the era, or the proportions of the country where they attempt to live an existence deserving of their citizenship-- each reading takes us on a different maze of thought and moral quandary. We assess, we reassess, we lose the thread, we're lost in a space of silence, but then, we think we hear a human sound electrifying us with hope, when all we've done is hear ourselves wishing. Indeed, the audience/reader is a vital structural presence for Sophocles as it is for Alegría, as it should be for how responsibly we ourselves hold this profound work to affect us aesthetically as well as in our moral/political actions.

Alegría's female victim evokes that Antigone whose silence makes room for a choral of voices demanding the right to live in honorable peace for both man *and* woman. That Chilean "She," that Antigone of Alegría's novel, is joined by society shedding its cloak of fear in a modern-day chorus of protestation against the despot's hubris.

The universe of *Coral de guerra* ushers us into an era of curfews, public executions and military violence during a time that describes Pinochet's dictatorship without mentioning his name. Past the book's title and printer's details, we quickly enter the realm of dictatorship reality. It's no longer mere reading. We're thrust into the realm of contingency of a nation in crisis, where each day and night constitutes individual toilsome struggles to save one's skin and endure the feat to make it alive to the next day. One could say that as readers we're kidnapped into empathetic witnessing and observing. We learn that a woman doesn't return home at night. Nor the next night. Neither does she come home any of the nights that follow. Distressed, the husband goes off searching for her.

He stops at the local army outpost. The highest-ranking enlisted sub-officer receives him in his small, ramshackle office. In the conversation the husband learns that this soldier detained her. With his uniform unbuttoned, disheveled and slouching in his chair, the officer boasts to the husband's face that it was he who raped her. Out of a sense of hope to find his wife alive, fearing to end up himself murdered if he pounces on this soldier, there's obviously no point going to the police, the husband restrains himself and engages the soldier in dialogue. This "Dinner with André" is vastly more macabre, since it's really a monologue-like dialogue of death lurking, into which the soldier ensnares and goads the husband. The woman-wife, whose name is only referred to as "She" is physically absent, but the conversation swirls around her and the soldier's personal history, which is one of a bird of prey circling over her and the couple's life—until finding her alone and at a distance from her bonds of affection, until he could come intolerably near to her.

The internal contradictions infecting these three characters help the reader to detect the degree of pressure, the implications, the jagged edges and the potentially festering nature of the political nature of language behind the posture of compelled poise maintained throughout every action and every response, while the husband and the wife, each in their own separate experience with this uniformed authority weaves an intimate, ineffable reality. The way each lives irritates each of their inner beings to the edge of bursting to pursue an immediate course of opposite and maddening liberating behavior. But they know better. It would be the end of hope.

Alegria devotes a special place to the role of women in this novel. Even though this particular woman is the subject of abuse and torture, maybe even the victim of murder, she is shown to soar over men in her social role and perspective. In a patriarchal society of men ill-suited to govern where self-important males forget they were born of women, the one woman of

this story represents all women, nature, all of society, men and women, all of life. *Coral de guerra*'s "She" is allegorical of life, of existence, of human ontology, on both a philosophical and a political level. She is both self-respecting and nurturing. She behaves like the earth when despoiled, when wounded. It lies and heals in time. It silences. It interrupts its blossoming until renewed. "She" is earth. "She" is sustenance. In this "She" we have the epiphany of self-rescue from within while undergoing the deformation of self by outside forces. We also have a *mis-en-abyme*,⁵⁴⁷ a text within a text, within yet another text: She resorts to self-protection, deep in the interior within the "text" of her inscrutable persona during torture --a text within a text-- in a story that is allegorical of an historic reality --the other text-- transpiring outside the novella. A deeper level is the state of her soul evoking the lofty spirituality of 16th century Spain's Teresa de Ávila as memorialized in her spiritual diary, *The Inner Castle*. In it, we can recognize the religious sister's steadfast conviction of her *sovereignty of the self*. *Coral de guerra* does not attempt to conceal the inherent tension within the novella between the rhetorical constructions displayed through the internal characteristic of mis-en-abyme and allegory's externality, but just the opposite. It leaves it raw; it leaves it as a stark gash for the reader's viscera to battle between voyeurism and cringing. But much more than merely gender, by preserving self-esteem in that vile space of stench and vulgarity, "She" embodies rectitude. "She" physicalizes a model of ethical standard that "She" converts into a behavioral aesthetic. Consequently, rather than a comparison to an impermanent outside world that compels her to live, to surrender, or to die, *Coral de guerra* enables us to grasp what "She" does, allegorically, as a profoundly motivational ontological decision emerging from her intuition. As she lives a passing out of being as a

⁵⁴⁷ Jacob Emery, "Figures Taken for Signs: Symbol, Allegory, 'Mise en abyme'" in *Comparative Literature*, 64. 4 (Fall 2012), p. 342.

transitoriness in a preamble to mortality, her inner oracle unfolds with an iridescence of clarevoyance warding off the self's responsibility to the surroundings she's shedding as a garment. Allegory transforms perception's signs into a compliance with non-being.⁵⁴⁸ Allegory can then well be identified as the process of conscious transformation where intuition⁵⁴⁹ is relinquished for that ineffable other realm which could be memory, a clarification of the past, a revitalization into present life, or a letting go toward mortality. As her intuitive being performs this process for her, what guides her is the never-relinquished *sovereignty of the self*. In "Walter Benjamin's 'Theory of Allegory,'" Bainard Cowan affirms: "Allegory could not exist if truth were accessible: as a mode of expression it arises in perpetual response to the human condition of being exiled from the truth that it would embrace."⁵⁵⁰ Furthermore, Benjamin believes, Cowan tells us, "Once experience is deconstructed, ... it is imperative that it be brought back into the definition of allegory.... For allegory is experience par excellence: it discloses the truth of the world."⁵⁵¹ Benjamin insists that allegory⁵⁵² "is unapologetically ontological."⁵⁵³ In pondering the matter with near mystical reverence, one comes to realize we have lived allegory ourselves in order to understand it intellectually from an outside source. When we watch ourselves involved in an action, which in its process reveals its future repercussions (in a negative sense) or ramifications (in a positive sense), this semantic unfolding action releases emotion, psychic clarity, or a conviction, or a sense of being preparing us to face the consequences the action implies. This personal ontology of allegory presents us with a problem Benjamin encountered and Alegría grappled with in *Coral de guerra*: the difference between knowledge, which is

⁵⁴⁸ Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's 'Theory of Allegory,'" in *New German Critique*, 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981), 110.

⁵⁴⁹ Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's 'Theory of Allegory,'" p. 110.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁵² Benjamin relies on the first allegorist, Plato. In his work, Benjamin injects new life to some of the ancient theories of truth and ideas as explored in Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Republic. See Cowan, p. 113.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

possessable and representational -- something which is in apparent conflict with truth, which is abstract, unpossessable, and cannot be shown,⁵⁵⁴ and is furthermore circumscribed within the private knowing of personal experience. However, this conundrum is resolved when “She” demonstrates this insight by her performance in *Coral de guerra* permitting us to grasp that allegory reveals meanings by decoding them through experience. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin writes that the allegorical moment “gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque....”⁵⁵⁵ In the same work, Benjamin adds: “In important situations in life, when every moment conceals a future rich in consequences, which holds the soul in suspense, in fateful moments... What is dominant here is the inexpressible”⁵⁵⁶ ... “progression in a series of moments allegory.”⁵⁵⁷

Most men are condemned to the shadows and darkness, to not even realizing that they’re self-doomed to staying within Plato’s Cave, and while there erring in their assumptions as to where they are, and why, or how to escape it. They also mis-hear another man’s complaints about their comparable lot in life. They are wedged in the narrow space between illusion and common sense. The husband and the soldier are each cave dwellers, that little office serves as that precinct, for each are made to believe they’re free when they’re actually being manipulated by the institutions they deify: the husband bows to a civil culture warped by biases that have him convinced he’s free to be a member of his society; while the soldier is self-flagellated into compliance within his hierarchy. Each upholds the trust that they’re free within their own shackles, when, actually the allegory is a reality which is perhaps even more riddled with

⁵⁵⁴ Cowan, p. 113.

⁵⁵⁵ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (2009), 166.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 165.

corruption than theirs in the shadows. “The Cave is an allegory of the human condition”⁵⁵⁸ and so is that little office, which for each man represents the underground, a form of a circumstantial cave.

Alegria’s novella has become a force, more so than fitting within a mere predictable genre. Instead, it radiates dialogical exchanges, allegorizing the reality outside its realm as furtive and elusive. Each monologue suffers from diachreses, from blind spots, logically to be expected within a cave-like environment where two self-centered narcissists talk to themselves while using the other as a sounding board. Within this encroaching coordinates, the two men talk past each other maintaining a precarious equilibrium by their reciprocal pretense of mutual recognition.

Character sublimation in *Coral de guerra*’s two fellows also takes place by their withdrawal, their interiorization, and not only by their lunging themselves rhetorically at the other hoping to cross swords without wounding the soldier but showing him he’s exceeding his boundaries, and the soldier by instilling a sense of irrecoverable jealousy in the husband. There is reciprocal self-restraint. The soldier guards himself from becoming conscious of self-shame. Thus, the husband nurtures hope to recover his wife alive, and bring her home, all the while by saving his own skin from the soldier’s capricious revenge against him after the wife insulted and defeated him even when granting him sexual pleasure. Each utterance by each man takes them to the edge of psychic survival by political daring. The soldier plays his hand at self-wounding. The husband risks getting tortured and killed, more than merely humiliated by his wife’s rapist. There is, consequently, constant tension between the allegory of life rescuing each and the sublime escape into a haven of inner peace (something one must toil toward) through acceptance of the

⁵⁵⁸ Dale Hall, “Interpreting Plato’s Cave as an Allegory of the Human Condition,” in *Apeiron*, A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science, Vol. 14, No. 2 (December 1980), pp. 74-86

facts when there is no space of refuge left for either of them, other than the illusion of a safe haven within themselves.

Each man represents the allegory of hope for the other. In the husband the soldier seeks the impossible reassurance that the wife's silence was not meant as a rejection. For the husband, his plea appeals to the soldier's generosity to return his wife after he used her for his sexual satisfaction without hurting them beyond the physical, which for the husband, jealousy and offense could be healed by the catharsis of his wife's return. The wife, if alive, can only find solace in her own moral integrity. Allegory in this case emerges as a duality of opposite expectations.

Allegory, *Alegria* shows us in a very subtle scheme of his narrative weave, dialogic, monologic, exegetic, that it manifests in layers of meaning – from the literal (first requests and admissions), to the figurative (the actual contortions of rape torture and the loss of the relationship as the husband hears of it) to the ineffable (her silence's rejection of the raping soldier while enabling him to rape her as a mechanism to protect her self-sovereignty). These are the allegorical stages both men endure until they both lose her upon her transcendence when each man realizes she entered the realm beyond allegory, where "She" is in the presence of truth. In "From Hierarchy to Opposition: Allegory and the Sublime," N. A. Halmi writes: "what lies outside the mind is considered merely to awaken recognition of what lies within. It does not eliminate our dependence upon the sensible world itself."⁵⁵⁹ "She" became the soldier's object, the coveted trophy. "She" helped him to recognize himself, and when he did, he was shattered. Conversely, "She" also helped her husband learn that he valued his own skin more than hers, and that love for the other, for her, remained the ineffable notion that his disemboweled self-esteem

⁵⁵⁹ N. A. Halmi, "From Hierarchy to Opposition: Allegory and the Sublime," in *Comparative Literature*, 44.4 (Autumn, 1992), 356.

crippled him from conceiving, even when purporting to search for her and struggle to protect her, and fight to recover his wife, after all! But he made no such demands of the soldier, who simply cleaned his soiled sperm on the wreckage of the husband's dignity. Each man attempts to destroy the other. This is something that Kant rejects when the self-saving purpose hinges on how we treat our opponent. On Kant's position, Halmi writes: "the hopeless role of the other that must be and cannot be suppressed for the integrity of the self to be confirmed."⁵⁶⁰ Understanding the sublime to mean transcendence, then, to dispense with nature in this fashion, adds Helmi, is tantamount to discarding the sublime.

As we read on and plunge deeper into *Coral de guerra* led by the conversation between and bypassing the two men, since they speak mostly in reflexive monologues, we get tangled into a thick web of reciprocal dependence. It's an allegorical latticework of narrative barriers, separating and and reconnecting opposites and complementarities to be overcome. In these exchanges riddled with rhetorical shoals, allegory itself signals a barrier.

Samuel Beckett is known for having said that the world is unnamable and that "allegory is a perilous word." It is this ineffability that makes writing itself allegorical when it attempts to describe something real but not wholly known or accessible, such as it is with the torture and the gang rape to which "She" is subjected in *Coral de guerra*, and how it is that Alegría's narration adds to the irritating mystery, of the unknowability of her fate. While her actual circumstance has become barred to the husband, veritably inaccessible even to his intuition-bruised imagination, the conundrum of her fortitude while relinquishing her strength leaves a strong impact on him as well as on the soldier, self-wounding himself even as he boasts about his deed. In "Samuel Beckett's Allegory of the Uncreating Word," Robert S. Knapp states "Allegory presupposes more than one world and tries to make connections that will reveal one by means of

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 356.

the other; usually the known world implies a lesser known one of moral or spiritual dimensions”⁵⁶¹ coupled with a sense of endlessness as it is with the husband waiting interminably to hear a glimpse of hope from the soldier through his arrogant ranting. Every character in *Coral de guerra* agonizes endlessly in this protracted metaphor for a yearning lived simultaneously with increasingly vacuous hope; the longer words restate a boast, a plea, or an act, they reiterate their robbery of a victim’s integrity, since such repetitions suggest unfreedom. Part of the mystery of the allegorical is that each character is ruled by a force larger than their own in what Beckett calls “an enigmatic master,”⁵⁶² which is the ineffability of which one speaks. Alegría’s *Coral de guerra* resonates with this approach as he effectively projects his characters’ interiority onto an exterior fable,⁵⁶³ a method which renders the writing indelibly allegorical. And as it is with Beckett, who called for a God who never came to rescue fragile souls, where his *via negativa*⁵⁶⁴ ended in silence, still considered as a word, so it is in *Coral de guerra*, leaving the victimized woman to resort to her inner strength, maybe to the God within, when *self-sovereignty* saves her, perhaps not from life, but from letting go her dignity, her last possession imbued with a perplexing resonance of power, her *sovereignty of the self*.

Coral de guerra is also a love story. The husband, worried sick for his wife, searches for her. He then crosses inner thresholds when learning about her demise from the confessing soldier. From restrained aggression he walks across to sorrow, then to hope, then to resignation. These psychological barriers alter the inner world, the sense of self and bring us to grapple with the nature of love. In “Memory, Allegory, and the Romance of Rhetoric,” Jody Enders reminds us that what Alegría has done with *Coral de guerra* is to render current an old structure and

⁵⁶¹ Robert S. Knapp, “Samuel Beckett’s Allegory of the Uncreating Word,” in *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 6.2, Literature and Ideas (Winter, 1973), p. 73.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

narrative strategy of medieval provenance, courtly love. Enders writes about it as “the monologic exploration of a bifurcated psyche and the concept of a nostalgic longing for an absent lady”⁵⁶⁵ is perceptible “complicity between memory and allegory” where characters purporting to engage in dialogue with an interlocutor were actually talking to themselves in pathetic soliloquies, thus reconciling rhetoric with dialectic, as well as memory with allegory as the figural and figurative incarnation of conflicting forces,⁵⁶⁶ thus crafting “human figures as corporeal similitudes of spiritual intentions.”⁵⁶⁷ Alegría’s bag of tricks is multitudinary. He has chiseled himself into a straddling cultural force. He commands Latin American literature, but also Anglo-Saxon, French and medieval works. By twining fantasies, fables, dreams, memories, longings, allegories – all devices, techniques and magic tricks stored in the hidden chamber of the mind, he has brought us himself as a hypnotizing sorcerer on the page!

In all its variants, allegory creating endopsychic images,⁵⁶⁸ interior worlds, has shown us to constitute a thresholding dramatic structure suggesting transcendence. It connects the heavy and often pedestrian tangibility of reality with the light and fleeting ineffable; perception’s deceptively seeming empty space identifying a presence that only resembles absence. When memory is intertwined with allegory, the woman consumed by panic yet discovering that she can cling to her self’s inner core, thus circumventing fear to stay clear of the abyss of awe. This is where allegory opens her inner castle’s window freeing her self-sovereignty even if she dies; the husband and his wife whose being has receded to a recall of her persona; the soldier’s inner

⁵⁶⁵ Jody Enders, “Memory, Allegory, and the Romance of Rhetoric,” in *Yale French Studies*, 95, Rereading Allegory: Essays in Memory of Daniel Poirion (1899), p. 52.

⁵⁶⁶ Enders, “Memory, Allegory, and the Romance of Rhetoric,” in *Yale French Studies*, 95, Rereading Allegory: Essays in Memory of Daniel Poirion (1899), 58. Unlike Baroque allegory that only sees the world from the outside, (See footnote #11, p. 227) Beaudelaire sees it from the inside of a human being. The Baudelarian abyss sees the feminine sex as a continuous metaphor, and therefore that abyss-like meaning is construed as allegorical in nature (Christine Buci-Glucksmann, p. 228).

⁵⁶⁷ Enders, p. 53.

⁵⁶⁸ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern” in *Representations*, 14, The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century (Spring, 1986), p. 227.

world of entropy and decay, of eschatology and dystopia, the perverse flâneur coveting the woman he can't possess nor call his own now that he has even lost himself; we have a return to old origins which serves *Coral de guerra*'s three characters so that they may discover new beginnings.

Allegory can also be incendiary, an extended metaphor signifying destruction. Edmund Burke defined the sublime as a spectacle of extreme and incomprehensible aesthetic emotion where beauty is mixed with danger represented by adversity in art.⁵⁶⁹ The aerial bombing of Chile's government palace continues with smaller assaults lacking the spectacle of fire and smoke billows, but the pain of skin shriveling is no less intense though its is subjective—even though the collective of subjectivities transforms it into an objective mural of *pathos* and *thanatos*, the Chilean Guernica portraying the artistic rendition that “She” suffers viscerally; one man assaulting one woman assaults the entire nation, therein lies the force and the dimension of the allegory of pain radiating societally. “She” is transformed by the “sublime horror into allegory through Alegría's narrative act of rebellion, where *Coral de guerra* is in itself an ekphrasis, a narrative wail, rhetorical art, animated by the power of *self-sovereignty* allegorizing dissent. *Coral de guerra* serves as allegory of infamy, as the protracted metaphor of human corruptibility that began with La Moneda's aerial bombing and rivets out, throbbing, into a woman's wounded sexual viscera and the two clashing men that must suffer their own consequences from their separate relationships with the offended woman and their respective places in the larger society, a dramatic stage also in turmoil.

Yet, one vacuous man in *Coral de guerra*, self-absorbed, myopic, un-empathetic, exercising his exaggerated masculine proclivity, his pathology, to the degree of erasing the

⁵⁶⁹ Elena Cueto Asín, “From the Epic to the Allegorical Sublime: A multilingual Reading of Spanish Civil War Poetry” in *Hispania*, 99.3 (September, 2016), 473.

humanity inherent in womanhood, representing a class of men in uniform who believe that violence presents them as masculine to the world, must face the dignified wrath of one woman. Alegría has narrowed the lens of his reportage. After the wide angle takes of *El paso de los gansos*, in this novella he views the dictatorship experience from the macro lens, approaching in close-ups the individual's plight. We feel the pulse of an entire society in one woman's purposeful decision. She shows us that ethical choices for right living are even more important than one's own life. Julia Kristeva in Alan Riding's "Correcting Her Idea of Politically Correct" in Arts, *The New York Times*, holds her own ideas about humanism, and the humanity of the individual, with particular focus on women: "What interests me is not all women, but each woman in her intimacy.... How is each woman an individual? What can each woman contribute to other women or to humanity?"⁵⁷⁰ As a psychoanalyst, Kristeva can only address individual needs, but it is through such a lens that she observes the drama of contemporary society: "What is important is not to affirm the power and identity of groups, but to increase the freedom of individuals...."⁵⁷¹

Coral de guerra is a work of literature that chronicles national shame. By exploring the wounded inner beings of three archetypal characters striving to survive in a brutal dictatorship, Alegría gives us a societal insight. *Coral* documents the fact that the central national value has shifted from pride of nation to one where force, more so than reason, is the unmasked national emblem—thus reverting the order of the nation's formally expressed values as stated in the national motto: "Por la razón o la fuerza."⁵⁷² "She" demonstrates that reason doesn't need violence to be effective. "She" also evidences with her own experience bearing the remains of her soiled body where force shamed itself before dignity. "She" also shows in that one act to

⁵⁷⁰ Alan Riding, "Correcting Her Idea of Politically Correct" in Arts, *The New York Times*, July 14, 2001.

⁵⁷¹ Riding, Ibid. No page number.

⁵⁷² Words that emblazon Chile's national emblem.

which she surrendered that reason does not preclude force when the purpose of reason is one of imposition or ultimatum, either of which are simply rhetorical substitutes for violence.

Throughout Chilean history, we're shown that it is force that has predominated in conflicts of reason. More that recapitulating a painful memory of Chilean history, where the oligarchy felt it was indispensable to tear at the national socio-political fabric to recover its uncontested control of political power by committing a violent coup d'état. By observing the military committing horrendous acts of violence, people were shocked into forgetting the assault on humanity they witnessed, thus ushering a credo of forgetting to re-vertebrate the national structures, institutions, and sense of identity. In its process, it destroyed democratic cohesion, a considerable amount of cultural history was subjected to public burnings (as well as self-censoring private burnings of intellectual works) of artistic and intellectual works encouraging liberty. Pinochet's regime unleashed a modern-day inquisitorial practice. Also dashed was the ability to chronicle events with as close a bias-free attitude toward truth as humanly possible. *Coral de guerra* is not always explicit. By the same token, this work of Alegría's is neither dismissive of such acts, making room within the untold to surmise, and to vindicate, what the reader suspects happens in the crevices of hidden places and around the bend of the urban pathways.

Alegría's *Coral de guerra* attempts to relive the microcosm of the citizen experience. In it we're made to feel in our own flesh the threat of violence, to empathize with those who truly suffered the perilous nature of daily exposure to armed encirclements. It not only forces the reader to relive its tragic ontology of repression, but the unfolding of its meaning, its paradigmatic implication, its gradual renaming from a colonial-era agricultural aristocracy, to a post-industrialized, high-tech, diffusedly financed oligopoly using the Armed Forces against anyone that obstructs the path toward a galvanization of a retrenching of conservative politics.

The powers who remain unnamed in this novel, Kissinger, the mastermind; Nixon the executioner of schemes, and Pinochet, the yes man to the Americans and the torturer/executioner toward Chileans. They agree to conduct a public shaming of the large mass of the unwitting citizen that potentially leans in favor of rescuing a defeated socialism. *Coral de guerra* views the impact of a dictatorship's violent policies on three people who represent an entire society. It differs from *El paso de los gansos* on many levels. Among them is that the latter work pans across the surface of society, whereby *Coral de guerra* focuses on the inner lives of three Chileans. This novella serves as a platform, as a public exposé of the gruesome impact of the unleashing of military force spilling into the streets and barging into the private homes of regular folk, all of this induced and instigated by white-collar power's grip on those who labor with their life-time, paid by the hour, commuting to the work-place across town. They are the ones at the other end of the aiming rifle. That's where the author places the reader.

“By reason or by force” was already historically devoid of honor long before it was instilled in the culture of national patriotism. It is a bombastic expression that aims to keep analysis at bay. Its mere utterance profiles the speaker as patriotic, as conforming to the patronymic norms long embraced in the citizenry. The coup d'état, viewed domestically was nothing loftier than a class war to retain possession of political and economic power long seized from the indigenous by Conquest. While the issues might not appear to be these in the early 1970s, hidden from sight as they were, they indeed were those, camouflaged by layers of maneuvering, employing sophisticated forms of mendacity re-confected into rhetorical styles and evasive aesthetics in the news media while evolving from a genesis whose footprints take us across the centuries to the Conquest in the 1500s. Chile's 1973 coup d'état was the culmination of a century-long exercise in non-democratic republicanism aimed to stifle a redress of social

injustices. It was the eruption of a political volcano bursting through the cracked territory, sloppily attempting to cover up from sight ancient fault lines where the poor sought justice but, instead, was again victim of the latest and most brutal policy of state repression.

Violence at one's door as *Coral de guerra* narrates it, connects the inner being with a curiously objective dimension of self—that other level of self, often untested and therefore unknown within ourselves, which is the individual's responsibility toward its society, each person at a time, even toward the stranger in distress whom we meet on our path. Alegría provides us a scenario where the collective is suffering the same peril as the individual, the same anguish, the same social disintegration, and the same loss of moral references. He who sets out to rescue his missing wife, ends up seeming to feel pity for the torturer/raping soldier through his listening attitude, a form of rescue of the executioner from himself: “El hombre sentía gran respeto por mi mujer, pero es el respeto que ciertas personas tienen por las inundaciones o las avalanchas. Tal vez les unía un nexo especial, como el aliento... o la dificultad de expresarse.”⁵⁷³ What it means to be a citizen is at the core of this conflagration between the two men. Was the coup d'état a mere effort to recover political power? Those retaining political power, the essence of governance, its lifeline, never lost that power. That's why Allende's term failed. The conservative and oligarchical private sector never relinquished to him the power to govern. It protected the sources of its profits with all its might. Alegría had touched upon this in his other novel, *Allende: mi vecino el presidente* (1989), where he refers to the doings of a previous government. Much as it was with Alegría's first novelized biography, *Recabarren*, so it is with his novel *Allende*, where the socialist politician repeatedly accused Congress: “protege las arcas de la oligarquía a costa de la miseria del pueblo.”⁵⁷⁴ As we saw in the summary section about

⁵⁷³ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 77.

⁵⁷⁴ Alegría, *Allende: mi vecino el presidente* (1989), 52.

this work, Allende blamed conservative governments for Chile's perennial but perfectly remediable social injustices. Was it from impatience to regain economic and political advantage? Was that it? Money and political favor? Social standing? Such a myopic vision? As Tomás Moulián complained in his essay *El deseo de otro Chile*, there was a feverish epidemic craving to *have* rather than to *be*.⁵⁷⁵

Chile has always been at odds within its own family. It has shown itself to be a dysfunctional nationality, where the poor, the mestizo –whom they call *el roto* as a social class-- and the indigenous are doomed pariahs, while it has exported the image of the notion of racial diversity and multicultural tolerance. Its wines for exports give the impression that all Chileans are good friends; that the poor sits with the wealthy to listen to folk guitar music together while they pour first-rate Chilean wine into each other's glass as they listen to Neruda's "communist" poetry recited. A categorical wrong! Neruda's prestige, the Chilean Nobel laureate, who accused the oligarchy of social injustice, is an image of prestige that has been appropriated by oligarchs who refuse to read him. While Neruda doesn't come up in *Coral de guerra*, he is frequently mentioned in Alegría's other two dictatorship narratives. Alegría extols him in *Una especie de memoria* and pays him homage in *El paso de los gansos*, even though Alegría doesn't bring up the fact that Neruda died shortly after the coup (or was murdered by the dictatorship while hospitalized and heavily sedated). Neither does Alegría mention that Neruda and Allende were bosom friends; that Neruda almost ran for president representing the Communist party, but that it had been decided between friends that the poet should continue writing verses and the politician should be the one running for office. Alegría's *Coral* tells us in its long dialogues more than it shows us between the lines that Chile is a socially splintered nation. Rather than commemorating

⁵⁷⁵ Moulián, *El deseo de otro Chile*, p. 55.

the lofty condor navigating air currents among the high Andean peaks, *Coral de guerra* depicts a scavenging black crow bearing heart-breaking connotations.

From the first lines of a political stage that starts *mis en scene*, Alegría's novella offers a certain hybridity: it has elements of the epistolary style, where soliloquies resemble letters addressed to an uncertain audience, possibly the interlocutor, possibly the reader. It has a touch of the political and sociological essay without rigid structure by the fact that each male character's diatribe refers to the times lived, and the restrictions suffered and the libertinage displayed in such a suddenly socially restraining political era. *Coral de guerra* is also theater play. Yes, it has classical Greek elements of fundamental structures, but *Coral* is also a homage to Brechtian initiatives by applying *gestus*, meant to undermine the complacency of the audience relative to the play, actors, author. *Coral* is at once an aesthetic and a political act by rupturing the notion of distanciation of viewer and dramatic action, thus rupturing realist illusions of the expected but shunned deference to authority, of aggressive lording over the vanquished, even an out-of-place and sloppy priggishness on the part of the soldier's cockiness.⁵⁷⁶ A veil of fear inhabited both men. The husband feared violent reprisal. The soldier feared living with his victim's psychic punishment by her rejection of him, by defeating him, even when surrendering to him. *Coral de guerra* reads like a political and sociological quasi-essay. It succinctly reports on a chronology of political events unfolding in a work published during the most violent years of the dictatorship but ten years after the coup d'état. It is also an essay on society responding to coup politics by weaving a tapestry of random commentaries and personal observations of the epic event's unraveling. Within its baroque folds of excessive male extroversions there's lyricism, if not outright poetic prose. It is neo-baroque for its history and style in two ways: the

⁵⁷⁶ Jost Hermand and Marc Silberman, "Introduction: Brecht Today" in *Monatshefte*, 90. 3 (Fall, 1998), 297.

military spreads and extends its radius of infamy and violence into neighborhoods and breaks into private homes without warrant or apologies for their barging intrusion. It is also baroque in that people restrain their rage and intolerance by tolerating militarized hubris against them. *Coral de guerra*'s narrative is drenched with panic-instilling events, where subsequent oral disclosures poke and gash the heart, further alternating with repulsive, repugnant aural discoveries where spoken deliverances replace coveted sightings. If the violence done were mysterious, it would qualify in the Gothic genre for its fictional horror, but the source of peril is glaring, and it's historical, it's eerily real and tangible. Disconcerting winds buffet people's lives from the get-go. With the coup tearing up the ground Chileans stand on, no one can make an appointment for tomorrow because the next hour is a most uncertain abyss.

Coral de guerra could be viewed as a re-reading of a political history of torture, as well as a re-reading of a tortured history. The author, who appears to be in exile seems fictional with respect to the story narrated. He appears to inhabit each of *Coral*'s three characters. Rather than having a narrator, it is the characters who speak for themselves. The text is woven as such through their voices, which are, in fact, rather indistinct from each other. It is in this sense that the reader suspects the narrator's voice speaks for them, or that there is no narrator, or that the author gives the impression of entering the fray and it is he who weaves their voices into a novella's unity, making the author a fictional author doubling as a character impersonating three identities. It is he, the author/character, who, from within the story unmasks the official Chilean history of its latest dictatorship that has continued to torture its society with pamphleteering untruths. While the story that unravels in this brief work is apparently fictional, it takes its essence from documented history that unfurled an international scandal at the apex of power in governance involving corruption and genocide teetering on the very doors of the International

Court of Justice. This narrative tale explores the impact of torture on society's microcosm by focusing on one specific victim, as much as it does on her searching husband who represents a surviving family member, one face in society looking desperately for his *desaparecida*. It also focuses on the one soldier, representative of the military dictatorship, the executioner, who, we learn as the story unravels, is no less of a victim. In ethical terms, the doer of harm is the only victim, as Gandhi was known to have said. The Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti writes the Prologue to this work. He refers to Alegría's imprint as "maestría de narrador."⁵⁷⁷ Benedetti adds "Cada intervención es un monólogo... con interlocutor... la tortura todo lo corrompe, todo lo gangrene,"⁵⁷⁸ where the internal contradictions festering in these three characters help detect the degree of pressure, the implications, the corruption of behaviors when unbridled power is at hand, when the potentially damaging nature of the political has gone awry.

This is the one fictional work by Alegría where he enables us to feel empathy by crossing the threshold separating the grammatical first and third persons. Even the informal use of "you" in Spanish, "tú," is a reflexive "I." The speaker rages at and pleads to this "tú," this Christ in us that lashes morally yet forgives, but even when there's forgiveness there's no atonement. The crime committed is no longer merely moral. It is deeply private, inaccessible by confession. It is sublimely spiritually self-oppressive. The culprit in the scene, the military officer who is the executioner, the rapist of the woman whose husband has arrived to inquire about her, is the actual victim of the officer's own crime against an "other." But he is also authority, law and power. It is ironic that in *Republic*, Plato writes: "justice is serving the interests of the stronger."⁵⁷⁹ Moreover, in "Thrasymachus's Definition of Justice in Plato's *Republic*," George H.

⁵⁷⁷ Mario Benedetti, "Prologue" in Fernando Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 9.

⁵⁷⁸ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 10.

⁵⁷⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 33 8c-34 7e; 714 c-d;

Hourani states “Thrasymachus' intended definition of justice is obedience to law.”⁵⁸⁰ Clearly, law during a dictatorship *is* the dictatorship. Since no one below the soldier’s rank in *Coral de guerra* can punish him, he suffers his own punishment as the conversation and monologues unfurl ever faster and longer, like a sail in a storm, prompted by the wind of inner shame. The soldier finds himself an orphan in the sense that he’d wish to find forgiveness even while boasting of his misdeed. He’d wish he could become a prodigal son but there’s no home, not even the soldiers’ barracks, no safe harbor in his militarized Chile where to rest the bruised heart.

The reader becomes more than an eavesdropping witness of these conversations, but also an accessory to the crimes committed under the badge of authority. We discover in Alegría’s narrative technique a witnessing by characters reacting to political events maiming citizens’ inner beings, how they are living these paradigmatic, disconcerting socio-cultural changes for which there was no advance notice. Alegría allows us to get under people’s skin through experiential realism, a blending of ontology with consciousness, thus converting this one-scene play into a psychological political thriller. Unlike much of the 20th century Latin American novel, where there is no *sovereignty of the self* to speak of, where the individual is mired and silenced by near-religious subjection to corporate and governmental powers from above, welcoming imported ideas rather than resorting to autochthonous initiatives, Alegría inherits a similar legacy, but refurbishes his prose with a touch of novelty. By writing from a proletarian background, since the author himself grew up on the city’s periphery, coming from a modest ilk, he is contributing to restoring literature as art – independent of the encroaching rapacity and often misleading statements spouted by the news and features media and corporate advertisement. Alegría seizes the deeply-layered present, layered by a dictatorship drastically

⁵⁸⁰ George H. Hourani, “Thrasymachus’s Definition of Justice in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *Phronesis*, 7.2 (1962), 110.

altering the plate-tectonics of cultural institutions and social mores by violence tearing through every social more of decency and respectability. Only force counts as the language and the tangibility of power as the self-installing institution, shoutingly declaring that might is right! In such a set of political coordinates, this author expresses the ineffable via minimalist techniques employing allusions, metaphors and allegories to bring the reader viscerally in touch with how a nation is being warped through torture and acts of irreversible transgressions while dispensing with the narrator. In these brief novella pages, every black letter in print is symbolic of a drop of blood shed, of a breath halted through indignity and pain.

Torture is at the center of *Coral de guerra*. The crime committed against a civilian woman by detaining her without reason, or charges, is assumed in the words used to justify her *false imprisonment* (when a person's freedom of movement is denied), which evokes images; images devoid of history. The present is suspended in the unmoored horror of the present, at best, with the passing sigh of dimming hope. By placing the human body and its inherent eroticism at the center of his thesis, and as the propelling energy of his tale, Alegría pays a subtle homage to literary historicism, to much of the European 19th century novel, especially in Émile Zola's working-class novels *The Slums* [1877] and *Germinal* [1885], where social mores and sexuality, the machine, the dirty, the immoral, the promiscuous converge in a culture of rampant eschatology that was an inescapable sight in the nascent days of the Industrial Revolution, rather than to imitative and sanitized 20th century Latin American bourgeois works, such as Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* [1949] and the prurient *Concierto barroco* [1974]. These are two works that tend to sidestep the unrefined by both upholding generalities and blurring specifics.

Alegría also pays tribute to ideological Marxism in viewing *Coral de guerra*'s physical text as a "body," where ragged bodies are displayed and taunted. This work dovetails with Jean Franco's idea where "writing becomes a corporal act."⁵⁸¹ The Chilean author thus provides tangible evidence of totalitarianism as a reiterative crime tacitly condoned by the dearth of critics in his pursuit of social justice. In this plural sense, *Coral de guerra*, and frankly, the body of Alegría's dictatorship novel as a subgenre, is inherently subversive in the best spirit of the exiled Cuban writer, Severo Sarduy: "writing is a force that demythologizes... cracks the foundation of any regime."⁵⁸²

In speaking of technique in *Coral de guerra*, where no one bears a proper name but are differentiated only by their social role, there's the "other," the truly "Other." These are the perennially undesirables, the pariahs: they are the poor (laborers, maids, street vendors, bus drivers, etc.) who are also infirm and many are old—or the young and healthy physically, but socially disenfranchised, homosexuals, the mestizo, the indigenous. Nobody wants them, and yet, they are a part of "us," the collective "I," regardless of social class. They cling to the more fortunate among us for help by begging, conniving, stealing; some express their need for dignified rescue, but we discard them. In the oligarchical economic structure that Chile has always been, the poor enable the upper crust to be and stay rich. It is Chilean Christian capitalism, where the Church makes the poor kneel and pray for their well-being while persuading them to bow to the oligarchy in the name of social and Christian harmony. This is in contravention with so-called Christian revisionist, liberation theologians, who actually rolled their sleeves as dictatorship dissenters themselves and truly helped the poor and the oppressed by their involvement in political and civic affairs of consequence. The most outstanding example

⁵⁸¹ Jean Franco, "From Modernization to Resistance: Latin American Literature 1959-1976" in *Latin American Perspectives*, 5.1, Culture in the Age of Mass Media (Winter, 1978), 90.

⁵⁸² Franco, "From Modernization to Resistance: Latin American Literature 1959-1976," (Winter, 1978), 91.

within Chile was Cardinal Archbishop Raúl Silva Henríquez, who created la Vicaría de la Solidaridad to help Pinochet's persecuted. Of him it was written: "the [Pinochet] Government's oppression of the church is as bad as persecution of the church in the Roman Empire in the early centuries of Christianity... Chile is harassing the church because, almost alone among social institutions, it represents the tortured, the exiled, the unemployed and the poor."⁵⁸³ Another dimension that remains absent from this story, but is inherent to the historical antecedents of the tale, is the rich who owe a gesture of gratitude to the poor for enduring their misery in order to benefit oligarchs who benefit from the powerless class's inability to stifle the unidirectional vectorial velocity of unrelenting capitalism. This, of course, is buried in *Coral de guerra's* subtext. They, the poor, are also who Alegría refers to elsewhere as "my" family, most notably in his *Una especie de memoria*.

What substantive philosophically-enriching nation-state reinforcement (nation first, state second) did the coup d'état, with its ineffable violence, really accomplish that can be viewed today as possessing enduring humanist value? This inquiry arises when considering the countless atrocities committed as viewed through *Coral's* gaze, when it was first published in 1979 at the height of military repression. We trace the human story of those years, not as *lost steps*, as Carpentier would have it, but when looking back, as clear footprints of physical wounding and spiritual evisceration.

Coral de guerra alludes to faceless acts and silences, but not only to the act of violence perpetrated by a person of authority that trespasses the boundary of decency. Journalism has reported on torture in graphic detail. What it has often shunned, however, is the inner life of all those affected by the panoply of torture's possibilities which, like a moral cancer, radiate in all directions, infecting all of those located on the sweep of its radius. This novella's numerous

⁵⁸³ Eric Pace, "Raúl Silva Henríquez, 91, Chile Cardinal, Dies," in Archives, *The New York Times*, April 12, 1999.

interior monologues and dialogues shed light into the characters' inner worlds. *Coral* refers to the boundary crossed by the dignity of silence, impinging upon the expected un-impeachability of the soldier's act not by calling it immoral, but by not calling it. Silence makes it the behavior's own punishment. Silence so manifested does not rise to the level of a character, but its tantamount to intention, strategy, to a method of dissident resistance. This purposeful silence arises from the inner being's core, that private chapel, the grotto where one's private oracle is located, home of the *sovereignty of the self* toward which there is no moat to be transgressed if the individual victimized does not will it to happen. Far from quiet, this silence "speaks" through a behavior of physical acquiescence coupled with an inner rejection of the abuser through non-expressiveness during bodily surrender.

What comes through the soldier every time he utters a statement, an extended soliloquy, is evidence of the national crisis of identity; it's reiterated memory of the corruptibility of the act of violence condoned by the soldier's superior and uncontested sources of authority. This clashing encounter between hubris and resistance opens a new pathway with ethical possibilities. Not just one woman is being violated by a person of authority that has traditionally inspired respect for its nobility, its courage, its selflessness in patriotic gestures. Not here. The nature of the paradigmatic change is that this so-called progress carried out by the military in power by stealth is that a new morality replaces the old. This new morality of a reconceived notion of progress, neoliberal economy-based alteration of a sociocultural renovation, signals a progress, a Benjaminian "Angelus Novus"⁵⁸⁴ category of progress, contemptuous of the consequences it leaves in its wake, where the old morality becomes inconsequential, its old ethical aesthetic turns obsolete, unmarketable, unremarkable, uselessly moralistic, non-pragmatic, fast-turning on its

⁵⁸⁴ Paul Klee's image, "Angelus Novus," 1921, represented the angel of progress, which Walter Benjamin adopted for his philosophical cultural criticism.

heels (even if its military pun feels odd). There's a break in language, a censorship toward memory. Words no longer mean. Words in and of themselves do not convey all the semantic intention that pauses between them reveal, that gestures spill. The soldier's language is essentially communicated through his behavior, thus conveys the meaning of veiled intentions, antonyms of moral purpose, uttered to disorient and misguide, to careen, to de-center aural structures: "Se quemaba conmigo, es cierto, y me ayudaba con su ternura a clavarla por la espalda."⁵⁸⁵ *Coral de guerra* reflects this deviation and by demonstrating it, mocks it, rebels against deception. As the soldier speaks, deliberately admitting to the husband that he lusted after his wife, he is employing verbal violence, psychological torture on the man searching for his wife, much as legal violence functions as a court of law⁵⁸⁶ does toward the innocent it decides to punish, with a placid tone—because it/he can. This notion of calm violence signals the new society, a violence of words, of documents, where violence shifts, forbidding memory, neutralizing it, altering it, warping it, while constructing a new plasticized, sanitized society where there is only a memory of the future, remembering the goal for a society yet to be attained, an imminent utopia.

The impatiently attentive husband ---a presence the reader embodies--- sits there, voluntarily while also compelled, submitting to this mistreatment opening wounds that leave no trace of guilt; wounds that ooze indelible emotional secretions. The soldier speaks his mind as he would shoot a gun, unconcerned for its destructiveness: "Como quería llevármela a vivir conmigo!"⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 45.

⁵⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (2009).- Benjamin writes: "if the tyrant falls, not simply in his own name, as an individual, but as a ruler and in the name of mankind and history, then his fall has the quality of a judgment," p. 72.

⁵⁸⁷ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 19.

The reader/husband finds himself, as with the wider Chilean society, in a state of shock, paralyzed from the usurped freedom to safely wail his despair, enunciate a thought, lodge a complaint, a longing, a pronouncement. There are no signs hinting that he can have a sigh of relief. In the long monologues that bounce off the walls in that tiny room, there is not enough distance from the events of unspeakable damage to articulate a clear-headed judgment. There is no tangible evidence to lodge a claim. There is no visual proof of a broken heart. This crisis becomes its own text, the oral recording in the form of memory, albeit uninflected, written in *Coral de guerra*. This pre-verbal voice of un-uttered thoughts while listening to the soldier, the husband's own muffled voice "written" in memory, the soloist's gagged cry of his muffled wail, the choral of society's solidarity (if they only knew!), and the silence of the violated wife.

This literary work, or therapeutic session in book form, installs itself in the Chilean avant-garde by breaking with the frontiers of language. It crosses thresholds. It trespasses the distance between "you" and "me," between "She" and "I" in a continuous, recurrent, elliptical, dialectic transference of power, through shifts in experience, in point of view, as language sheds power and silence takes it up, constantly re-locating empathy and the seat of experience. This novella places a focal light on the soldier as a moment of literary complicity with the military dictatorship. The meeting place of the husband and the military officer is a catacomb of sorts, a place where no one else hears or witnesses what is confessed during this encounter. While this is an official room for interrogation as a form of torture, it becomes the soldier's confessional, and as such, a space that contradicts the counter-revolutionary aims of the fascist dictatorship of which the soldier's uniform serves as part of allegory in the fullness of its hidden political and moral meaning; it's a place of the underground for the counter-culture, where the soldier reveals himself a blinded policy implementer and sorrow-burdened pilgrim without admitting guilt; or

worse, where he reveals himself as a pathological creature delighting in the pang of his still-unconscious remorse.

There is here a glimpse of a return to a distant era, albeit not a regression, to a time when the State was first conceived, when Independence inaugurated new sets of idealism and utopia, ironically acknowledging that its roots and energy stem from the people. It also takes us back to mid-20th century, when conceptual art was in vogue: the concept preceding the art form was artistic. Its display was a pure performative mechanics. The purpose of torture is constituted as a conceptually artistic form of political aesthetics; the methods of its mechanics and consequences are merely its implementation. This chamber symphony of atonal torture sounds evokes Michel Foucault's assertion of the body as a site of power and discursive struggle.⁵⁸⁸ One may infer that in such a political system the individual is philosophically disemboweled of its humanity and treated as part of a larger social system to be manipulated. A man or a woman in a chair under a light that blinds visibility becomes an artistic installation that beckons activation of "the art of punishing,"⁵⁸⁹ says Punday citing Foucault from *Discipline and Punish*, where he adds that "the body manifests the stigmata of past experience"⁵⁹⁰ from old memories of love to recent rape, where the body processes –despite our conscious and emotional selves-- the lessons from both. It's as if *Coral de guerra* ushers us to a book within a book, to entering the "space" of another's body as a text and as a new ontology while simultaneously experiencing the gender-neutralizing phenomenon of that other person's intimate ontology: two concentric paradigms of political transgression, ethico-cultural adventurism and aesthetic pioneering. Contrary to the controlling state in *Leviathan's* Hobbesian terms to understand the body politic as a human collective of

⁵⁸⁸ Daniel Punday, "Foucault's Body Tropes," in *New Literary History*, 31.3 Philosophical and Rhetorical Inquiries (Summer, 2000), 509-510.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 511.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 514.

individuals, Foucault insists that the State is made up of the conglomerate of individuals, where the singularity of each mustn't be diluted for their plurality. Punday clarifies this: "Foucault argues for a notion of dispersed power functioning through many individuals, a notion that the traditional body politic denies,"⁵⁹¹ which helps explain Foucault's decentered theory⁵⁹² of modern power. But the body is also the site of independence from outside political intervention. Jürgen Habermas⁵⁹³ tells us, agreeing with Foucault, according to Punday, that the body is the site of individual resistance to discourse, indirectly endorsing the notion of *sovereignty of the self*, much as "She," the victim of rape, exemplifies in *Coral de guerra*. "She," undergoing the torture of unwanted sexual rape undeterred by physical resistance makes a statement with her body: Truth is the focus of power. Without uttering one word, "She" realigns power to merge with truth. However, If truth is being eliminated from this non-dialogue, it is as though the book of the husband's truth were being burned in his presence, a modern-day Savonarola's bonfire of the vanities, which Pinochet re-enacted, while a new one, the soldier's, replaces it, thus expanding the boundaries of the story, where the details of the egregious sexual crime are excluded but assumed to fall beyond and outside *Coral de guerra's* brief 101 pages. Drawings or black & white blurred photos of body parts shrouded in mystery interrupt the flow of the story in *Coral de guerra*, but remind us of the tale's roots in historicity. Visual renditions of lives cut short have been burnished into print. Its images seem to be close ups of flesh, of denuded limbs that are indistinguishable. Do they suggest torture? Their context does. Do they nudge us to the moment of the evisceration of being? The threshold where humanity transforms into object? Human body parts whose galactic material returns to a non-descript universe? They are truncated

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 516.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 516.

⁵⁹³ Punday, "Foucault's Body Tropes," p. 521.

pictorials: blurred flesh,⁵⁹⁴ flesh dismembered?⁵⁹⁵ Thorax or abdomen and limb?⁵⁹⁶ Frozen picturalization of feverish motion between bodies creating chaos?⁵⁹⁷ Close up of the sexual act in a surrender to rape?⁵⁹⁸ A masculine leg leaning forward among a multitude of nondescript bodies.⁵⁹⁹ Illusion of dislocated flower petals and body limbs at rest.⁶⁰⁰ Simulacrum of ecstasy or agony or a dying within or a core of spirit symbolized by flesh soaring into space, resuscitation's allegory of the soaring spirit leaving dying flesh?⁶⁰¹ These are sectional portrayals of a humanity diminished into sections of life forms in gray tonalities of visual discourse. Truth is thereby diluted to acquire form and completion only in the viewer's mind. The realistic drawings or blurred copies of black and white photos make us witnesses and accomplices in their voyeurism. The lingering memory of a human being's torture transforms readers into vicarious victims. The reader is subjected to intellectual torture. Blinding lights and dim spaces interrupt the prose. With every page we turn, we learn more. We become informed fellow-victims and politically-compromised informers. We don't know what we're shown, as we can't quite know what we're reading or hearing emanates from nightmarish history or whether we're being manipulated into accepting that we must trust what we want to believe.

The text's narrative and political aesthetic imitating interrogation and torture announces the five-chapter book (a body) that opens to a woman's body opened not only to be used (read) but raped and then left behind but remembered, perhaps even haunted by it. It opens as a territory for a woman's femininity—and feminism—in the full force of its political activism. This text constitutes an urgent locus of power that nudges and leads onto a human ecology way of

⁵⁹⁴ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 19.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁹⁹ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 53.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

conceiving power politics. There's also a renewal of language in silence as a form of language, much like musical silences can be heard, giving sound dimensional connotations. The woman's silence in the protracted abuse of her physical integrity emulates nature's silence, nature's site of conflicting differences within the ecology of a woman's body and psyche, when it is assaulted, wounded, littered and abandoned. Referring to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Punday writes: "the female subject is a site of differences; differences that are not only sexual or only racial, economic or (sub) cultural, but all of these together and often enough at odds with one another."⁶⁰² Nature seeks its own renewal in silence, and silence becomes its own language, its own mooring. This work is a clarion call for a regenerative method toward a social renaissance that rises painfully after a generation of violence as national policy. *Coral de guerra* is grabbing us by the shirt to tell us it's the dictator who raped this citizen! This novella functions as its own international criminal court; its own culprit's shaming of the denuded psychology (the soldier's) and a body stripped naked ("She," the victim wife) and paraded on a boulevard (the prison cell) before an accusatory crowd, as was the practice during the colonial era, where the only punishment is its disclosure, the body, the woman, *Coral de guerra*, by parading it as a published act.

A contradiction emerges between the detained/disappeared, bodies, voices that unlock the door to all of these acts done in the dark, in secrecy (read any page), under the veil of mendacity and blurring paradigms. The shared humanity of the soldier, the husband and the missing wife falls into a vertigo of references where the bonds among those who share the native language as their own drift away from their association to both personal identity and home/land. But we've also moved away from private criminality, *ultrajo* by hierarchical entitlement though done

⁶⁰² Punday, "Foucault's Body Trope," p. 509.

secretly, but also from gang rape, where soldiers ransack the supine woman's body with the approval of the superior officer. Torture and censorship receive equal protection by giving immunity through silence and nondisclosure to the agents of the acts. Like vultures and thieves and looters, they tear off pieces of the woman's *sovereignty of self*.

The woman in the story does not enter in this conversation but does address the reader in a matter-of-fact soliloquy describing herself as the territory trampled and trodden. Several dimensions of the self rescue her inner being beyond her strength to defend her physical territory. The institutions of her identity, to use a term by Levinas, meaning her ancestry, the culture and the ontology of her ancestors, which rush to her (and anyone's) survival in times of crisis, rushes through the bloodstream of her instinctual self. Her Chilean ancestral culture does no less. The indigenous pride of self linked to a land level of self assaulted not by rape but by Conquest transforms into her own skin becoming her "national territory" to be protected, and given up, in order for her inner oracle, her spirit, her sovereignty of the deeper self, deeper than skin and internal organs, may survive with the peace that a fight for self-dignity affords. This moment brings us Jean-Paul Sartre's "To seek Truth is to prefer Being above all else, even in a catastrophic form, simply because it *exists*."⁶⁰³ This woman with no name in the story, this "She," does not support neither does "She" refute the soldier's version of events and his role in them. Yet, her absence is noted as a giant resonance on the stage. The role of woman in national politics acquires enormous relevance. It can be said that the land, a female connotation, was transgressed⁶⁰⁴ by the coup d'état's savage takeover. It's a woman who makes herself be heard

⁶⁰³ Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, "Preface" in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (2007), xiii. The citation harkens to Jean-Paul Sartre's posthumously published *Vérité et existence* [Truth and Existence] (1989).

⁶⁰⁴ An excerpt from the December 10, 2001, Kofi Annan's Nobel Peace Prize Lecture: "What begins with the failure to uphold the dignity of one life, all too often ends with a calamity for entire nations." These words speak to the one act of self-wounding by hurting another, rape. This Lecture appears in Stanley Meisler, *Kofi Annan: A Man of Peace in a World of War* (2007), 323.

from the physicality of her body demarcating the frontiers of the new stage, where national transactions are conducted and crucial decisions are made, especially a woman whose voice is heard within a patriarchal country led by the hubris of a male despot, as was the case of Pinochet, who decided that all life, peoples, cultures, individual sovereignties were proprietary. Just like the narrator in *El Señor Presidente* says about the president-dictator, Pinochet is known to have said *en su tono altanero, soberbio y vulgar*: “En Chile no se mueve una sola hoja sin que yo lo sepa.”⁶⁰⁵

It is the woman victim, not the patriarchal figure of the male, who establishes a different form of force, and legitimacy, through her silence. If the rapist/soldier perceives this silence as a form of violence, it may well be, but only because that is the language he understands, and perhaps while hurting from it, it is the symbolic language he respects. Consequently, in his venting he demonstrates his respect for the language of omission by his own female victim, who, in a psychological sense, becomes his executioner. *Coral de guerra* offers a re-semanticization of protestation’s activism as the human body becomes text, text becomes political environment and silence becomes language, being becomes a political act defying and even rejecting neutrality. In this era of violence and long-lasting violent ripples, this literary work prickles open sores. It shows us it acknowledges the long arm of violence’s implications.

The soldier’s violence, the ritualistic act of conscious invasiveness of another’s sovereign body, falls outside the boundaries of the book itself. It’s not told as it happens but it comes awfully near to spilling the graphic details. The entire story is wrapped around that single incident. Yet her body is a symbol of new territory, yes, a new sovereignty, at once a new conquered possession, much as the metaphoric raping of Mapuche territories by the invading

⁶⁰⁵ Ricardo Espinoza Lolas, *Hegel y las nuevas lógicas del mundo y del estado: cómo se es revolucionario hoy?* (2016), N. p. (Agencia EFE).

Spaniards, and the victimized woman's *sovereignty of the self*, where we empathize with the wounded, the offended, as we should have viewed Chilean history from the Mapuche perspective, but that would have been anti-patriotic; more even, anti-historic if one is to read the tone of the past narrated according to Chile's aristocratic historians (Encina, Amunátegui, Barros Arana, Toribio Medina) who were themselves descendants and heirs to large tracts of once-Mapuche lands. Is it, then, patriotic to share in the gloating of this soldier overpowering a defenseless woman?

It is indisputable that this "She" has a voice in the subject of life. "She" is as much a citizen as the soldier. But perhaps more of a warrior than it has shown us to be. "She" decides on her own to draw from her moral resource and exercise her *sovereignty of self*—"She" has the exclusive power whether to fight off her rapist(s) or to surrender to their inevitable, indefensible assault. If "She" were to cooperate and pleasure the man sexually, "She" would have been just another slut taken in by the uniform. If "She" fought him off, "She" would be a typical female, saying no when he thinks "She" means yes. Instead, "She" remains stoic. "She" exercises her right to remain in silence as a message of rejection of her physical intruder. This new territory, both forbidding and welcoming, woman, historically neglected yet always intuitive, whose undervalued worth hinges on her exclusive capacity to bring men and human life into the world, opens a pathway that offers a grappling challenge, and it is the circumstance that much too often private memory is more fragile than official history, which, without the aid of memory tends to evanesce unless we actively fight to protect it. But memory, memory hangs, memory haunts, memory of what happened to her, this woman/wife without name because who needs to remember a woman's name? A marginal creature? What happened to her beckons focusing on: a man's act. If Pinochet was free, and even encouraged to rape a country, his own country, then the

male soldier of our story seems encouraged by the atmosphere of military privileges to rape the woman he wishes to make his, more than sexually, make her his life's companion, even if it means abandoning his wife his children his wife bore for him as "She," this other woman, expresses herself through her silent protestation while absenting herself. "She" endures uncorporeally, without a narrator, as if "She" were revealing herself in a long soliloquy, addressing a floating conscience in the interrogating room: "Me ahogaba. Yo lo miraba fija para entender que me quería mucho y que iba a dejar a su familia y la institución, pero ya sin sable, se subió los pantalones y había mucha gente ahora al lado del catre."⁶⁰⁶ Alegría explores not only dictatorship and violence, criminality disguised by official military duty, but more profound concepts which, when unattended to properly, flare up into dictatorship and violence and their attendant excuses.

In this little book, there are a subtext and a larger reflection. The subtext is the value of humanity in the single person. The most marginal of beings is the woman, the woman who belongs to the lower classes and lives unremarkably on the fringes of town. Her social salon is the crowded *micro*, the bus that she often travels in standing after a long day working on her feet. That is the yoke of poor women everywhere. That is Alegría's protagonist, a woman, who, like all women undergo quiet suffering, womanly suffering, steely while loving, tolerant, forgiving, patient and nurturing, a most historically consistent portrayal.

The long monologue by the soldier ends, and what begins is a long monologue by the husband telling him the story how he met his wife, where they live, how the neighbor woman in the apartment building peeked into their window and knew exactly the time when they undressed and spied on them. This monologue is also as long as the previous one. What is bothersome and ironic is that both men sound the same. They are supposedly of a class, which, when they speak, they reveal their unsophisticated background, yet they speak as literature-versed people. They

⁶⁰⁶ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 30.

expressed themselves with the politeness and elegant eloquence of the author telling the reader about his fantasy life, or shades of his own autobiography. There is no distinctive personality in their rhetoric, no uniqueness of voice, which is both bothersome and astonishing for a novelist with a significant track record chiseling character identities. Could this observation serve as a sampling of why Alegría is more fondly remembered as a literary critic than as a novelist?

But there's more, more oddity. Despite an effort to re-read a full section, a fusion takes place. The husband is narrating his life when, imperceptibly, the author supplants what could be sensed as a narrator, confounding and conflating the boundaries of the *dramatis personae*. What's written next is this level of language from the voice of a man from the fringes of the cultural hub: "Mi profesor de filosofía y ética...."⁶⁰⁷ From there on, there are several biographical details, such as a mention of "el Pedagógico....,"⁶⁰⁸ which clearly indicates that the reader is diverted to the author's memoir while developing the plot of a novel of torture in a dictatorship pouncing on society's most vulnerable. *Una especie de memoria* and *El paso de los gansos* overlap with *Coral de guerra* in that all three works show author interventions with his own fictionalized diary notes, absent smooth transitions. And then, suddenly, within the same paragraph and without any clue that we're changing characters, one picks up the cue that a woman is speaking about herself. The voice and word choice and gender's difference in speech has not been altered as a telltale that someone else is speaking. This happens in an impoverished setting attempting to provide a cultural life: "Entré... al teatro... a ver una obra... Uno de los actores, sentado en la platea, me hizo conversación... la luz de los reflectors me tocó en la cara... no dije nada ni pude recordar las direcciones y los nombres que me preguntaba después

⁶⁰⁷ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, 25.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

en la pieza.”⁶⁰⁹ Here the author writes, “después en la pieza.”⁶¹⁰ This lends to ambiguity and confusion given that in Spanish “pieza” could be a room or a theater piece, thus lending dramatic quality to the story’s crescendo. Last the reader notices was that “She” was sitting in the theater, but, without changing the setting or displacing anyone to another place, a room is mentioned and we recover context clarity. “She” expressed:

Se empezó a sacar los pantalones. No vi a nadie más. Les oía las voces, eso sí...
Entonces me acostó y pidió que me amarraran los brazos al catre... [M]e decía mijita y me sobaba el vientre donde había puesto su sable ahora y los alambres, la quiero con pasión mijita, decía, y si usted se porta bien... . Al escuchar la orden te pusieron con los brazos y las piernas abiertas contra la pared y uno de ellos te golpeaba con el rifle en las canillas. Pero, entonces el huevón se vino entero... . Me ahogaba... [s]e subió los pantalones y había mucha gente ahora al lado del catre.⁶¹¹

The woman/wife remains nameless throughout *Coral de guerra*. Throughout the entire novella, “She” remains in detention, unless “She” has died from abusive and tormenting sexual assaults, but that lingers in imprecision, ambiguity, an enigma, we can’t know but we suspect that “She,” disappeared, has actually been killed. But that’s an assumption the husband makes the moment “She” doesn’t return home. If one is to understand that government officials are indoctrinated to say the contrary of what they mean, the reader, then, can glean from the novella’s first sentence “—Su mujer va a aparecer—dice el uniformado—no se preocupe”⁶¹² what to expect from the story.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁶¹⁰ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, 28.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., pp. 28-30.

⁶¹² Ibid., 13.

During the course of this encounter at the police or army station, we learn that “She” becomes a thing to provide relief and joy to men. The head soldier can’t help but notice her difference from other women. “She” possesses a steely stature. He acknowledges her silence – her being—as an act of rebellion; perhaps even more than that. “She” seems to adopt a posture of resistance. He doesn’t only acknowledge her. He fears her. Even though “She” is being victimized by an entire platoon of grunting beasts, the chief officer watches by, shyly admiring her dignity. “She” behaves with imposing ethic. It is ethical in the sense that “She” performs a production, as in theater, ensnaring writer and reader hypnotically from her detached protagonism. Even though her presence is only evoked during the monologues between husband and soldier, the myth of her being, her reasons divined, become a mythology, a legend, a tale through which to re-set a course for correct thinking. Alegría’s talent resides in the fact that at any moment in these men’s soliloquies we can stop to ponder her stance, the lesson of her silence, her circumstance, her voluptuous, intimidating presence while absent. Her wounded persona speaks to us from her absent state. Ironically, the presence of her reference is prominent. It is paramount to the degree of diffusing the profiles of the two dialoguists in the room.

Her example leaves us with an Ovidian transference, a rising aura *de ultratumba*, from her disembodied realm. Her body-less persona, which populates the testimonies of the two men, is dramatized in the novel for public gazing, for the reader to observe the spectacle, the implied sexual humiliation to which the soldiers debase themselves and any notion of the patriotic hymns they sang during marches throughout their military careers that might have become ingrained in them. As the *madre patria* of her body is being transgressed and offended, “She” simultaneously exercises her private right of self-ownership, body and voice. She exercises her *sovereignty of the self* even while in detention, even when her *habeas corpus* (literally, Latin for the possession

of the body) has been compromised, or worse (has she already been made to disappear?, which always was a euphemism for murdered). Despite her shackles and her absence (from the stage and probably from life), she comes across as a feminist warrior, not with belligerence, but with the edifying –and disarming-- example of her stalwart, poised posture of dissent. “She” becomes an exile while in detention and captivity to the encroaching thievery of her fundamental right to be. Her inner being is expelled from the sovereignty of her body, which the soldiers appropriate, trespass, litter and destroy. In her dissent, she withdraws into her own *insilio*. “She” surrenders her body to her burglars, but not her *sovereignty of self*, the intangible essence of being where her sense of ethics resides, the very core, the unreachable realm of identity, the vortex of her gravitas, her very soul.

Where one military man’s action isolates his own hubris from the dictatorship’s impunity in its genocidal acts, the despicable arrogance of military power over civilian vulnerability contradicts the heroic intention of the military uniform and the ethic expected of those who wear it. The non-erotic sexual invasiveness against a woman’s will operates as a manifestation of war –in a gang rape such as in this case. Where one little soldier commandeers some outpost where he wields the illusion of power, he imposes himself on the woman against her will in a form of sexual colonialism, and uses it against the fragile, where her refusal would only ignite his wrath. His act leaves behind evidence of his cowardice impersonating as power over the indefensible (not to be mistaken for the weak).

The petty-officer’s narrow-minded self-deception confuses pain with ecstasy and moral soiling for the pleasure of ejaculation. He’s obviously unable to discern public entitlement (right) from private molestation (wrong). Not understanding the intimate connection between ethics and human bonding, this man proceeded, unbridled, unconsciously, toward the Other and

simultaneously toward the Self. How could he not? Pain caused is pain felt. Confusing as this may be, it is purposely so given that a *state of exception* constitutes an exception to logic and common sense, as well as to decency. In such a no-holds barred scenario, every ancient value is suspended and re-interpreted to fit convenience; in the case of sexual transgression, what's given disproportionate value is the eternity of the fleeting moment. *Coral de guerra* unfurls its nightmarish tale in a dank and insalubrious torture chamber, where we're thrust into a dimension of moral vertigo:

Te pusieron con los brazos y las piernas abiertas contra la pared y uno de ellos te golpeaba con el rifle en las canillas. Pero, entonces, el huevón se vino entero, como un balde de agua tibia. Me ahogaba... se subió los pantalones⁶¹³.... Con las manos amarradas a la silla en que me pusieron, la espalda adolorida, las piernas acalambradas, posiblemente una rodilla como pelota, los ojos vendados y usted que me sacudió el pelo...⁶¹⁴

On another occasion, this occurred: “Un catre de alambre, las picanas, él y yo en calzones, mirando las paredes heladas y el suelo de cemento mojado. Se oía ruido de fierros o huesos o muebles y gritos en otras partes de la casa....”⁶¹⁵

The tone of the narrative seems to suggest, indirectly, under each character's breath, that we're colluding with the torturer. With such a premise, we may face our accusers, where we squandered our responsibility to come to the aid of our fellow-being. We've become voyeurs in other-gender torture. What we've not done is take the side of protest, of dissent, and become a “voice” of solidarity toward dissent and circle the wagons around the imprisoned woman's response to her jailers and torturers by her chosen strategy of self-defense and persuasion

⁶¹³ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 30.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

employing the rhetoric of silence⁶¹⁶ as something to listen for. Here, the author weaves a homage to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, when her 17th century cell experience at the San Jerónimo convent in Mexico City is said to have been even more oppressive than conditions in Spain, but clearly not comparable to the crushing political environment of Santiago, Chile, under Pinochet rule. In *Coral de guerra*, “She” has shown to have an identity which the pronoun “She” attempts to erase, above and beyond the customary erasure of female identity imposed by Chile’s traditional culture of proto-masculinity in social discourse. In such a social purgatory of liminal recognition in order for rejection to occur, she straddles two camps of non-being, as the poor woman who exists and toils in anonymity inside a society where women do not exist, and outside the realm of identity power in political spheres, where the role of woman is a nuisance and a disturbance to be robbed of credit for her contribution to society, making the work of men possible. “She” finds her self simultaneously inside and outside the realm of dominant discourse, as it was with the canonical writer and dramatic poet Sor Juana, even when the Chilean female story character, a simple woman, finds herself at the opposite end of the Mexican nun’s intellectual plateau. The Chilean woman’s effectiveness in her rational or in her intuitive response, unaware of her silence by having others name it, makes her a gender revolutionary, enlivening purpose, into a method that marks her rhetorical discourse and rhetorical theorization from her obviously non-rhetorical gestures and actions, enacting, as did Sor Juana, a version of *La respuesta*⁶¹⁷ of her own vintage, a theoretical intervention,⁶¹⁸ a rhetorical interplay of interruption and silence. The survival

⁶¹⁶ Julie A. Bokser, “Sor Juana’s Rhetoric of Silence,” in *Rhetoric Review* 25.1 (2006), p. 6.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 6. *La respuesta* (1691) is addressed to the bishop who effectively pursued Sor Juana’s downfall by writing to her employing the pseudonym of Sor Filotea to mask his identity and his critique of Sor Juana’s own critique of a well-known Jesuit’s sermon in her *Carta Atenagórica*. Sor Juana’s *respuesta* is a rhetorical response to a bishop’s effort to silence her. *La respuesta* was produced during the threatening heat of the Inquisition. It is at once a feminist manifesto, an autobiography, and an exegetical treatise as an apology for a woman’s intellectual capacity in a society and an era that silenced women.

⁶¹⁸ From Greek rhetorical theory, *aposiopesis*, in Julie A. Bokser, “Sor Juana’s Rhetoric of Silence,” in *Rhetoric Review* 25.1 (2006), p. 15.

instinct has thrust “She” into triggering a mechanism to contravene her gender’s forced subordination and identity marginality. Her role as a countercultural and hegemonic figure opens up a terrain for the subversion of authority via a power dynamic while avoiding spectacle and dismissing the all-important hierarchical distance, where the victim flaunts her moral superiority over the weaponized but otherwise vacuous and dogmatic military. Much like Sor Juana,⁶¹⁹ “She” shows us to refuse the convention of the silenced woman just as she invokes it. *Coral de guerra* pits her silence vs. the choral of a society that supports her position in defiance of military oppression and gender norms which fan and exacerbate gender oppression. To break out into a society-wide choral, her supporters must extinguish traditional complacency. Constricted from an explicit response given the shackles of her political circumstance under duress, her silence, an effective irritant, mirrors theirs, shaming them by modeling their own behavior. Bokser writes “the rhetoric of interruption merges with a rhetoric of silence”⁶²⁰ transforming a rhetorically replete act into her most critical and identity-determining praxis. “She” strips power openly from her own enclosure, much as Sor Juana did from her convent’s cell. “She” declares a non-violent war against the dictatorship’s noise with its political dogma eradicating human liberty and its condoning of sexual condescension by flaunting gender contempt. In her “Hear me silent,”⁶²¹ referring to the fact that Sor Juana *does speak*, despite her contention in a self-declared inscription of silence, Cheryl Glenn asserts: “Silence is perhaps the most undervalued and under-understood traditionally feminine rhetorical site. Silence has long been an unexamined trope of oppression, with ‘speaking out’ being the signal of liberation, especially given the Western tendency to valorize speech and language. But sometimes women choose the place of silence.”⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 16.

⁶²² Bokser, “Sor Juana’s Rhetoric of Silence,” in *Rhetoric Review*, p. 16.

The implied danger unleashed by a violent military dictatorship where laws have been suspended, where no one has legal recourse to fend from abuse is the loss of references. There is no longer a sense of being, an un-murky identity, there is no belonging or a not-being recognized as a citizen of the country that's dissolving in front of our eyes. Unmoored into space, where decency and respect no longer have value. To rescue ourselves from such dissolute political abyss, a survivor of a dictatorship reflects about what must be preserved in order to live an innerly healthy state of survival as a refugee, migrant, exile, or as a politically-displaced, often reduced person.

Dawn McCance in "L'écriture limite: Kristeva's Postmodern Feminist Ethics," *Hypatia*. studying the oeuvre of Julia Kristeva, uses the model of the 1522 painting "Holbein's Dead Christ" to signify the body as a "graphic rendition of pain... a serene disenchanted sadness."⁶²³ In Alegría's text, the body could well be that of a female Christ soiled. The more wounded and offended, the more victorious the modern-day patriarchal perpetrator, who, when he recounts the event to the husband reliving the abusive act, with each remembered pelvic thrust into the woman's body, he revisits the deed, re-wounding with the penetrating stab of language. Her husband listens. Fidgets. Swallows his tension. He knows he has become witness, voyeur -- complacent and tolerant-- yet also a fellow victim.

In such a warped set of coordinates, in its religious association, Judas installed in the "cathedral" of dictatorship intending to eviscerate a rebellious humanity through a *criollo* holocaust, the dictator's becomes a lofty name to a handful of adorers—and a criminal to the rest of the world. The woman victim in *Coral de guerra* plays the double role of Antigone dissenting against the Chilean Creon, the king-dictator Pinochet, as well as the role of her dead soldier, her

⁶²³ Dawn McCance, "L'écriture limite: Kristeva's Postmodern Feminist Ethics" in *Hypatia*, 11.2 (Spring 1996), p. 143.

unburied brother Polyneices (she and all other disappeared Chileans), whose proper burial she first requests and then demands in order to send his spirit to the care of the gods, vital to that era's culture, rather than letting it become a carcass for vultures. In *Coral de guerra*, the woman at the center of the quest is brought back to life and to a presence dialogically. One subplot is the story of two men's individual searches for reassurance of the sanity of their inner beings, where each stands at opposite moral ends from the other, but ensnared, in the macabre circumstance of rotational responsibility and guilt. Alegría has mounted a symbolic Dante-evoking representation of hell (with the similar strategic structure of the downward spiral) by staging a scene of abusiveness of power in Chile's thuggish dictatorship where it tightens the noose on the soldier's residual yet festering ethics.

The novel assumes a larger force at work where military cruelty is the law of the land. We're not told, but we sense that this horrifying force grew and transformed itself from ideological revenge to something monstrous that dovetails and bleeds similarities with the underpinnings of the immortal Sophoclean tragedy, *Antigone*. While Pinochet was fond of boasting that he was a lover of history and is said to have attempted to emulate Napoleon in his military tactics during his battle for Chile, he clearly emulated the blunders the ancient playwright-historian warned us against. This novel draws on the dictator's shadows, creating a plot on his boots' footprints. Other women's screams etched into *Coral de guerra's* pages are lingering echoes that "She" hears. They strengthen her decision to galvanize her harnessing of what power "She" still possesses within herself. Those screams continue to be heard in all sorts of chambers used to torture, including inane-looking homes, basements, attics, but also in the receiving salons of self-respecting families across Santiago. A lengthy, breathless series of alternating monologues between the two men continue for pages—constituting a form

aural/visual/intestinal torture for the reader. In them, the backdrop of their overlapping marginal lives is revealed, giving the reader a sense of the socio-cultural, economic level and idiosyncratic space that led to excesses and shortcomings during the most blistering years of the military dictatorship.

Even in peace time, preceding the military years, the reader is told –and shown through image evoking prose-- that a rumble of bottled rancor eventually finds outlets during the *state of exception*, when abuses of power, or, conversely, resourceful manipulations find an outlet because of a lack of power, resorting to their respective justifications. If a military dictatorship's pouncing on a vulnerable population were to be viewed as a form of perverse performative art, then with this novella it could be said that Alegría places an allegorical mirror before nearly two decades of heinous, reiterative, treasonous genocide by the Chilean despot against his own people. Since all art is political, one could, in theory, conceive of and critique street violence by perceiving it as performance art. If for one moment we could consider that art can be destructive and still be art, then, a military street assault could be perceived as art that is contemptuous of ideologically-dissenting life and therefore exults in its elimination. Genette writes about performance art thus: "Given that a performance unfolds through a succession of moments... none of its component elements... could evolve by changing their specific identity over the course of a performance."⁶²⁴ The allographic performance, where an image can represent a sound, action conveying meaning, is where Genette defers to Goodman's Aesthetics in regards to military actions conforming within aesthetics, then such performance can be viewed thus, according to Genette: "The allographic work... exhibits a paradox... being entirely itself only in the ideal object it immanates in; but this object, because it is ideal, is physically imperceptible" but for its fleetingness; that is, when the soldiers maim and kill and then leave, rendering their

⁶²⁴ Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence* (1997), 64.

presence after the fact “physically imperceptible... there exists, even for the mind,... a vanishing point that can be defined but not observed.... The same holds ... for all idealities, and especially for abstractions.... Whose cardinal function is aesthetic... In theory, ‘perceptual’ ... works can fulfill this function only by way of their manifestations.”⁶²⁵ This could well apply to the reader filling the gap of the unseen and unread context in his own mind, which is precisely what the author appears to intend by omitting it from the narration in *Coral de guerra*.

The narrative exposition in *Coral* drones on, gradually sedating the reader. But then there’s a bump in mid-page. The paragraph breaks and we notice the gender shift of the pronoun alerts the reader that it is a female who speaks, whose voice reappears, altering the atmosphere, revitalizing the prose. But the woman in question is not present at the table. “She” is not in the room. The symbolism of her existence causes the men to wish to tap into her inner being as if asking, Who was “She”? Who have we lost? Hers is a ghostly voice that speaks to men’s conscience. It fills the space changing the atmosphere as if icy air scraped our breathing as delicate classical music played.⁶²⁶ A macabre tour of one of Santiago’s historic markers begins: “... en un vericuetto de calles detrás de San Francisco”⁶²⁷ referring to the colonial-era red-colored church that soars among modern structures in the city’s principal avenue. Her voice predominates:

Me pasaron rápido, de pieza en pieza... En el dormitorio ya... Se sacó la gorra y el cinturón... y se arrodilló a mi lado... Se puso a sacarme las medias y, sin pensarlo, le di un rodillazo en la garganta... se levantó y comenzó una especie de baile extraño... Me agarró del pelo y me puso sus cosas en la cara. Quería mi boca. Me

⁶²⁵ Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence*, p. 125.

⁶²⁶ Dominic Gover, “Beethoven and George Harrison Used in Pinochet Torture in Chile: classical music used against socialist revolutionaries by brutal dictator’s regime” in *International Business Times*, July 1st, 2014.

⁶²⁷ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 55.

golpeó en la nuca y me arrastró por el suelo... . Se me echó encima gritando,
pidiéndome perdón, metiéndose o cayendo dentro de mí.⁶²⁸

Then there's a gap following this sequence of acts. The inaudible gap on the page is far from representing silence. The quiet seethes. It's heavy with meaning, with redress. A paragraph break ensues. The blank space doesn't feel like an aesthetic breathing pause. It reads as if representing something ineffable but tragic within the story. Her meaningful silence, pregnant with sensation, accusatory of a deeper undoing defies precision, defies sequential chronology. Is it time-transcendent silence? Withdrawal? Regret? Is her resistance a way to react and respond with her form of violence? But is it a non-physical form of violence, or rather, an ethically-calculated reprisal through non-violent resistance?

Judith Butler cites Elaine Scarry: "the body's pain is inexpressible in language."⁶²⁹ In Alegría's text where the female voice, anchored in indisputable gravitas, muffles out the male egos in an atmosphere of vigilance and fear-instilling compliance, we're reminded of George Orwell's *1984*: "the Thought Police... it seemed to him that he knew instinctively who would survive and who would perish: though just what it was that made for survival, it was not easy to say."⁶³⁰ Alegría's *Coral de guerra* is littered with lines and moments in the monologic dialogues that insinuate surveillance on the part of the uniformed listener, distrust of walls, thought prying, language caution scrutiny, semantic splintering, euphemisms. All of these elements suggesting ambiguity surround an explicit criminal act leaving no wiggle room for ambiguity in a court of law, were one to call on the participants in the act in a post-dictatorship era:

⁶²⁸ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 55.

⁶²⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* in Judith Butler, "On Linguistic Vulnerability" in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), 6.

⁶³⁰ George Orwell, *1984* (1972), 52.

Entre ella y yo –murmuró el uniformado—ella no entendía que mis intenciones fueran honorables.... El problema... es que la cubrieron treinta sujetos. Delante de mí... sólo ves una brutal ceremonia en ese desorden de cuerpos humanos y no llegas a comprender que me hicieron pedazos a mí en ella... y su sufrimiento no fue nunca de ella.... Toda esa bestia humana que pasaba sobre ella mordiéndola, mojándola, la hacía más hermosa y más noble. Pienso que algunos se repitieron el plato.... Unos pocos no se contentaron con dos veces, quisieron tres. Pudiéramos hablar de cuarenta, entonces.⁶³¹

The soldier took his time, luxuriating in the details when saying these things to the husband. He spoke slowly, enunciating the caustic image-words as if they were delicious morsels lingering in the palate's erogenous zone. While the soldier relished in the flavorful memory of sexual release, each word dripping nectar, the reader may suspect, was a stab in the husband's heart. Nowhere in the narrative does the reader get a sense of how the husband was living this recounting; how he was dying by the word-stabs and by the demeanor in the telling, relishing, floating in the atmosphere of the flashback. The author/non-narrator's voice and ghostly presence as yet one more spy from the walls of the page gives no hint that the soldier meant to hurt the husband also, or what the husband could have been feeling as he drowned in listening. This imposition of soliloquies rather than a dialogue or conversation, represents the dictatorship's denial of a cultural transition into new social imbalances, anticipating that neoliberalism constitutes the unfolding of a gag order to freedom of thought and expression; or rather, freedom to say anything within the confines of an open-air prison, which In Pinochet's case is another name for homeland. The dictator's orders felt like vengeful commands received from the oligarchy, enraged at the defiance of the servile class, thus feeding him script lines.

⁶³¹ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 57.

Hernán Vidal notes: “El modelo cultural imperante en una sociedad es resultado impersonal de pugnas inmemoriales entre dominadores y dominados... . [L]as clases dominantes y subordinadas intentan apropiarse de él para que coincidan con sus propuestas inmediatas para la construcción de la sociedad.... [N]os encontramos ante una manipulación ideológica de las narrativas de identidad nacional.”⁶³²

Each fragment, moment, exchange, allusion, of which Vidal speaks as a cultural and sociological phenomenon has its pointillist equivalent; that is, significant details in every single conversation between husband and soldier where a mere phrase complemented by a gesture or an emphatic tone constitutes meaning and message and a worldview that potentially affects the interlocutor in *Coral de guerra*. Imbedded in each fleeting commentary that wells up from deep depths is the Benjaminian idea that there are no brief snippets of thought stripped of value. Just the contrary. By breaking down long narratives to their essential components is where depth of meaning is to be found. In *Coral de guerra's* hyper-surveilled environment, words tend to be usually uttered with great caution while seeming to be inattentive to political consequences. They then become a semantic landscape on which to ponder intent, and more dangerous yet, ideological color. Such is the minefield of Alegría's novel. It is prose replete with signs of dysfunction, psychological deficiencies, pathos, old personal wounds, historical treachery, societal discontent, sickly dependence on powers both domestic and foreign with their corresponding hierarchies, and much individual, internalized sorrow. It often gives the impression that it is the soldier, who admittedly committed a crime, which he believes to be hubris by entitlement, that if he suffers morally, which he does, he is a patriot politically, which he is not. It is he who implicitly pleads for rescue from his victims, rather than the pathetic and self-demeaning obvious opposite.

⁶³² Hernán Vidal, *Crítica literaria como defensa de los derechos humanos* (1994), 74-75.

Alegría shows us how disconcerting it can be that he who wields the power of life and death over fellow-humans happens to be most infirm and unqualified to use it. And yet, it is exactly the profile who does, and usually decides blunderously. An afterthought occurs following the reading of a few pages of monologue by and about the soldier in *Coral de guerra* (pp. 48-55): “un prójimo castigador” (p. 48), “Me enfermé de soledad” (p. 48), “Volvió a arrodillarse” (p. 55), prompting a closer perusal of Benjaminian thought anticipating his work, *Critique of Violence* (1921): “To every good... there attaches the character of possession, as an expression of its transience. Possession, however, as encompassed in the same finitude, is always unjust... justice resides in the condition of a good that cannot be a possession. This alone is the good through which other goods are divested of ownership... . The immense gulf separating law and justice.”⁶³³

Freedom was the most significant possession denied during the *state of exception* that crippled national life. The at once iconoclastic and bourgeois Alegría crafted his bristling commentary on a Chile transformed, misshapen into a concentration and torture camp during the Pinochet regime. In this particular work that claws at the overbearing institution of the military as a self-nominated executive branch of government, arising from the role of the military as an effective political party, it wedged itself into national life by force. Such abrasive mannerism is a soldier’s self-possession, narcissistically in love with his self-image that becomes disemboweled by the soldier’s own monologue. The soldier’s outer image fills the emptiness behind the golden buttons; a small man addicted to the opportunity to use the power at his disposal without restraint. *Coral de guerra* broadens its scope philosophically to debunk the self-delusional yet contagious conviction that condoned violence as a form of patriotic righteousness. Possessing the conviction of superiority over others, especially testing it with violence, leads a society to its

⁶³³ Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (2014), 82-83.

undoing, Benjamin indirectly implies this when discussing the notion of the unjust and the addiction to possessing political power, which he deems a most evaporative and transient fluid.

Alegría takes us on a path where poetry and philosophy engage in courtship, rocky and indiscernible as it occasionally emerges. This author, child of the cultivation of fermenting dictatorship incubating for decades preparing the ground for a Pinochet, disguises action within his writing style, intimating the relation between historical knowledge, staging the clash between data-ism and humanism, precisely within linguistic magic. In an unexpected turn of literary fate, or perhaps intentional re-setting of literature's course, the deeper one plunges into the ontology of the wounded lives in *Coral de guerra*, one begins to grasp that the author's audience is the present (the generation that lived during Pinochet's era) but also citizens living under authoritarian republics anywhere, anytime, viewed from the future as a poignant and path-breaking chapter in literary theory. The author's audience appears to be the real-life people corralled within a suffocating citizenship, where the story characters are modeled after. On a dimension separate from the daily reality of duty and fear with which this work's immediate audience is all too familiar, Alegría confronts the Chilean idiosyncratic psychic language. Throughout the story, one can "hear" the Chilean accent, animated, eyes and hands being expressive as blood coursing through the words in the text.

Carried by this flow is the distinctive Chileanness Alegría began to search for since his first work in 1938, *Recabarren*. The living man that bore that name was a political pugilist, a fighter for the rights of workers, a true torch-bearer for the *individual sovereignty* in every man and woman. Without mentioning his name, *Coral de guerra* is imbued with his spirit of citizen protection; despite the fact that in this novel fundamental human rights are stifled and worse, trampled onto history, its atmosphere is flooded with the Chilean union leader's yearning,

perhaps the only scepter of power worth pursuing: *sovereignty of the self*, the only dignifying non-possession which Benjamin would embrace. But also inscribed with indelible ink into *Coral de guerra* is the rebellious, rescuing spirit of Orwell who dared to metaphorically call the Emperor naked.

In Orwell's case, his novels, which are a call to disarmament, pertain to the political events encroaching upon a humanity embroiled in the Civil War in Spain, but also to a politics of social control spreading across Europe, threatening to spill beyond in a robust era of crippling government surveillance. Orwell predicts worse is yet to come, as Chile's Pinochet has grotesquely proven. Orwell observed the generic pattern of dictatorship to behave as a vast and expanding blanket covering the globe, paralyzing initiatives and crippling social resistance. One of many possible excerpts from his *1984*, gives us a glimmer of hope in the eerily audible, soaring keening of a choral of voices resisting defiantly, non-belligerently, but immensely self-assuredly: "a tremendous shout of hundreds of voices –women's voices—had burst. . . . It was a great formidable cry of anger and despair, a deep, loud 'Oh-o-o-o-o!' that went humming on like the reverberation of a bell."⁶³⁴ This chorus harmonizes with the silence of one woman's tragedy, her *individual sovereignty* shredded, a vile act of bodily transgression imperiling all of society, suffered as a result of the Chilean dictatorship's excesses. Orwell, Butler, Levinas, Kristeva and Benjamin join Alegría with their voices, and that other distant and still-ricocheting utterance of Aristotle, who believed in human freedom and whose voice, undiminished by time, is remembered for having told us, *eudaimonia*, that the purpose of life is simply to live it well.

Alegría has composed a text from shards of broken hearts and beleaguered consciences, from torn pieces of protest march demands emblazoned in placards with "Dónde?! Por qué?" and "Muerta? Dénme su cuerpo!" If not these exact words pleading desperately for the return of

⁶³⁴ Orwell, *1984*, p. 59.

imprisoned, tortured, disappeared next of kin, their spirit floods the prose of *Coral de guerra*. Grimacing faces, searching, screaming, wailing, hoping in vain for hope have only their words to counter the military onslaught, prickly words allegorical of sentiments that metamorphose into rhetorical effigies.

There's a history of sorrow that time erodes because no words were written. Voicing words and pausing for silences as *Coral de guerra* does for an entire generation is a way of memorializing bonds of affection, testimonials of individual lives on the brink of death, others straining on the brink of survival but losing their hold among the living, souls that have only their voices and the lacunae left by their disappearances as evidence that they have bodies to save from the abyss of violence, voices that echo across a strenuously surviving humanity. When the soldier speaks, boasting, gloating the fact of his humiliating abuse, the husband listens. His active listening becomes an indelible mark of orality, a brush painting colorizing refrained utterances, restrained life-eroding emotion. Alegria's novella activates the husband's struggle making it not only a personal search, but a national ceremony as an entire society claims its *desaparecidos*; it even transforms into a transnational ritual in the open-door cathedral that is the city---and the cities caught in the net of Pinochet's international genocidal effort of his Operation Condor. The far reach of his belligerence across borders finds hearts kneeling in prayerful pleas to the authorities for the names, for the bodies of lost ones to be released, to be identified, to be returned so that their spirits may go home to a place of peace and closure. But no, mercenaries will know how to reach these indefensible citizens and their family members. *Coral de guerra* is the testimony of a brutal and cruel era, of a region, and it's not about just of one man and one woman, not even just one country, deeply wounded and incapable of convalescing within a foreseeable future, but of a prevalent international condition that threatens recalcitrant

entrenchment into a perennial state of undeclared war between an abrasive military state, the privacy of oligarchs behind them, and peoples corralled into pressured compliance. The self-determination of individuals is imperiled. Such are the schematics of *states of exception* advancing on the globe. *Coral de guerra* serves as a warning, as a protective shield to help preserve each private person's *sovereignty of the self*.

Searching for clarity in *Coral de guerra* as to who speaks when a character changes in mid-paragraph is evocative of Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca*. In the rot of summer along the latitudinal equator, where everything melts into each other, so does his illustrative literary style. The story collapses into tropical putrefaction before regeneration. *Coral de guerra* chronicles the collapse into putrefaction of an austral society's civic standards by a corrupt military politics, but we don't see the glimmer of regeneration, except, perhaps, in the tortured woman's dignity as her dismembered body gradually disappears; albeit, not without leaving daunting ripples lapping on the collective moral conscience.

Consistent with the dizzying heat of tension and the muggy atmosphere of a deceptively benign interrogating technique that dissolves articulate thinking in Alegría's novella, it isn't clear whether it's the soldier or the intruding author or a version of literary anthropophagy as to who speaks for and about the soldier when, in mid-oration, the speaking subject changes without warning, without traditional grammatical conventions, without transition. This may well be a theoretical calculation, or, could it be the specter of an Orwellian warning?

Within a lengthy block paragraph in *Coral de guerra*, we suddenly stumble on the feminine voice: "Me fallaron las piernas. Desenfondada, con los huesos sueltos, las caderas fuera de foco, sentí que me iba abriendo por la mitad y me sujeté el vientre con las dos manos."⁶³⁵ The

⁶³⁵ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 60.

woman tells how the soldier spoke to her, how he treated her, what he did with her.⁶³⁶ Maybe her voice rises from the language of her gaze. If the walls can hear and transmit her voice searching rescue, “She” describes to the reader a form of kidnapping, where the soldier, through her telling, appears to wish to convince the reader that she remained with him on her own free will. “Me tomó en sus brazos y me besó mojándome la cara. Después me apartó las rodillas y se puso a mirar fijamente, respirando fuerte. Me dió vuelta y me llevó a la silla. ‘Una vez más,’ dijo, “pudiera ser la última.” Se desvistió... sin dejar de mirar hacia la puerta.”⁶³⁷ This snippet of a testimony documents an act of imposed seduction overlapping with insistence unleashing sexual brutality where what is, and what seems, do not coincide. The soldier’s violence against the apprehended woman, an act of overbearing anti-erotic power against the vulnerable, is not only an act of cowardice toward the significantly weaker, a feat of *unjust war* in theoretical terms, but neither does it constitute a justified ideological war against a threatening enemy, but a mere assault on the integrity of a vulnerable woman—swept among a crowd of ideological dissenters-- which renders such behavior, according to law at any level, a crime of moral turpitude.

Such was the act that the military dictatorship committed against an unarmed, unprovoking and unwitting society. In Chile’s post coup military behavior, all of Chile was that woman, when gender became secondary to human life imprisoned in their own country, the undeclared enemy of the State on whom it vented its wrath. Chile was that woman. The logical analogy follows: Pinochet raped Chile.

In *Coral de guerra*, the soldier’s military superiors, permissive of excesses, may have deemed it a delicious buffet, veritable spoils of war. Even though the soldier committed the act while wearing his uniform (or shedding it to commit the sexual act—well, dropping his pants but

⁶³⁶ “With” rather than “to,” thus signaling the objetivization of womanhood for the satisfaction of man.

⁶³⁷ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 60.

not his jacket as it was covered with medals for valor, dignity and heroism, which possibly shook during his pelvic thrusts), was not acting in fulfillment of the law of the land, and certainly not in accordance with the Geneva Convention's 1949 rules of war. This is a document that may have certainly declared such an offense a potentially punishable act even during the repressive state's norms of permissibility, when the sole purpose of all violence during this *state of exception's* particular rationale was to rid the country of the competing and threatening ideology. Sexual abuse does not square with a purposeful method toward this end. Of law and violence, Walter Benjamin writes "violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it... by its mere existence outside the law."⁶³⁸ Since the lofty goal of the military is murder and destruction in the name of life and its protection, signaling an inherent contradiction, violence must remain a consciously purposeful act, lest it functions as Benjamin states it: "When the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay."⁶³⁹ Furthermore, the said soldier, acting blindly to the nature of his official function, as well as to his role in pursuit of his country's (arguably) unimpeachable history, has slipped into believing that what pleases is permitted, excluding reflection on moral and historical dimensions, while also flying insultingly in the face of Kant's categorical imperative, an earlier insinuation of *sovereignty of the self*, which aims to "acknowledge and promote the interest of mankind in the person of each individual."⁶⁴⁰

From a setting that is not the physical present, nor a flashback, perhaps a posthumous reflection, "She" tells us (as we eavesdrop) what "She" heard him, the soldier, say to her during

⁶³⁸ Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1986), 281.

⁶³⁹ Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," p. 288.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

his taunting and sexual assault of her, during his act of mythic violence⁶⁴¹ promulgated by unwritten laws condoning it. “She” restates, or maybe it is us, readers, husband, who “hear” from her deposition in absentia, that it was all the act of the soldier objectifying her, and “She” never actually speaks but we “hear” her anguish, her yearning, her muffled plea in our mental reconstruction of events. We “hear” that it was “She” representing herself as a thing telling how the thing was used for his satisfaction as his nervous, confused, insecure, infirm use of her physicality was made available to his uncensored use of authority. What strikes the reader as an instance of objectivity, or detachment in language, is her way of preserving this distanced fusion, de-emotionalized sexual surrender, shielding yet yielding –grasping the oxymoron—, overpowered by traumatizing sexual violence without interrupting the preservation of her emotional alienation from him, her attacker. It’s also stroking to the reader, synergetically,⁶⁴² who acknowledges her efforts to protect her own emotional severance from herself. In physical terms, we perceive a “toward” her, yet in emotional terms we sense a “non-involvement” from her while also protecting the satisfaction of his desire for intrusion, for a physical fusion with her body (not her inner being). Despite her efforts to resist, her inner being is scathed, left jagged, traumatized beyond the hope of catharsis. Her appearance in the story feels as though we’re dissolving the scene into a filmic flashback. Her symbolic disappearance from the physical realm registers the level of her trauma. This literary version of a “Guernica,”⁶⁴³ both the military event and the artwork, leave a nation of people hurting, cast aside, abandoned to its unattended wounds.

⁶⁴¹ Walter Benjamin is cited by Tracy McNulty, “The Commandment against the Law: Writing and Divine Justice in Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’” in *Diacritics*, 37. 2/3 (Summer - Fall, 2007), 47.

⁶⁴² Synergy produces an interchange of reciprocal energy flow among people, causing influence, solidarity, mutual change.

⁶⁴³ This reference was previously employed in our analysis of *El paso de los gansos*.

Addressing layers of wounding, *Alegría* sketches for us a deep pond in the psychological re-enactment of Hegel's master (soldier) and slave (woman) relationship with a notable fictionally lyrical as well as ethical reversal. "She" becomes the master of the ethical conundrum and he the slave to his own unconsciousness of the sublime of her body's integrity. The pond of her spirit begins on its surface. Her sovereignty is both physical object (her body) and spiritual energy. The language of her monologue signals a disembodied level of identity after her corporeal self has been egregiously transgressed and thoroughly wounded, possibly beyond repair. Yet her voice, the lucidity of thought, her levitating spirit surviving a deadened body conforms to a limbo, an exiled psychology, a paroxysm of purgatorial expressionism, in a state of being and non-being, where her identity is only physicalized in her voice in what Kristeva would call an estrangement⁶⁴⁴ from the self. For the soldier, her claim of *sovereignty of the self* by simply being is irrelevant in the context of his conviction that he holds the authority to execute sovereign violence,⁶⁴⁵ where her meaning is constantly created and erased, since "She" speaks onto the page from an intangible beyond the sphere of realism, an oneiric dimension, a flashback space where the two men engage in a series of dia-monologues.

Through this story, the lines of thought and dialogue, the monologues, the silences, it is *Alegría* who speaks to us, the anti-oligarch behind the scene, challenging, disturbing us. His *Coral de guerra* is his crowning and last novel of dictatorship. He achieved this summit of a novel of horror, state terror, after decades of writing precursor novels, which, in themselves, were final products descriptive of the eras they reflected in Chile's tumultuous, uncertain, misguided, foreign-controlled, cocky and Constitutionally ill-founded country with every element available to become a model democracy but which, stirred by its oligarchical rumbles

⁶⁴⁴ Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (1996), 19.

⁶⁴⁵ Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1986), 300.

brewing for centuries, would squander such an opportunity with cavalier dismissiveness, if not outright blindness. There were military and civilian governments preceding Pinochet's, all of which, even center-left parties, demonstrated a propensity for explicit authoritarianism, or its more elegant veneer, to enter into Faustian pacts with the oligarchy in inevitable entrenchments in defense of core commitments, albeit diluted by negotiation.

Are there obvious and masked roots underneath it all? Reading and pondering is a form of skeptical investigating. The result: aplenty. Militarized greed and its victims' steely defense against greed's onslaught: the still-present reverberations of the Spanish fighting the indigenous as a model that has been preserved in its archeological essence. While the players changed across the eras, the game of corruption and abuse of power itself has endured, becoming more subtle, more embroidered, more sophisticated --to use a choice utterance of the oligarchy-- without ever relaxing violence against the vulnerable, out of sight, calculatingly away from the news media, thus retaining power while eliminating, or at least, minimizing, dissent. That is the core rumble voicing its underlying nightmarish presence under the epithelial tissue of the subtext; much like venules perceived through transparent skin. As the soldier and the raped/murdered woman's husband speak to one another in a shabby little military office somewhere in the dusty outskirts of the center of power, one can "hear" the fantasy of rebellion, its riotous spectacle, violently contained outside its walls, but brimming, though choked, in the husband's heart. The sounds of heavy weapons outside those walls, which only the military could possibly possess, reinforce the self-assuredness of the soldier's words, smug, slouching, his uniform unbuttoned, speaking down to the husband from a perch of advantage.

In this synthetic novella, we have made a political sojourn. We've filtered a palimpsestic panoply of other dictatorship novels from across the hemisphere along two long centuries of

gripping political abuse of the indefensible. Dimmed echoes of cries of pain and dissent are etched into the national psychic memory across Pan-Hispanic frontiers and epochs, which resonate in *Coral de guerra*, where one feeble voice rising from a threatened life triggers a chorale of support—voices rising from the margins: the elderly, the infirm, the handicapped, children of poverty, homosexuals, everyone who doesn't fit within a rigid normative society that has retained the social mold of less enlightened eras. "She" confronts us. This one voice of dignity and dissent emanates from a human life in despair; a life hanging from the arbitrary thread of hubris, suggesting deep rivers. Pinochet was the last of a goose-stepping parade of high-ranking military officers who grabbed the presidency in the maelstrom of political chaos as a spoil of warring postures, military provocations, mendacity, treachery and betrayal. His military predecessors tended to cloud their methods of persecution of dissenters and opponents, as he himself did, until he felt no need to mask his impunity with euphemisms, mendacious diplomacy, or demagoguery. He simply ordered tanks to roll in the streets and gave the nod, much like a crime family's godfather, to have anyone killed who wouldn't manifestly express adoration for him.

Until the world took notice of this miscreant. This novel is an early glimmer of the world taking notice that living under the domestic and international institutions that govern us, in a juridical culture where murder is a crime punishable with murder, where the murderer is protected only when shrouded by power, places the untethered individual in jeopardy, supine to the very institutions that purport to protect him/her. The issue with power, with a *state of exception's* use of excessive power, even with power hidden within the appearance of democracy, is a revamped notion of traditional state sovereignty with absolutist proclivities from yonder centuries. Giorgio Agamben, developing lines of thinking by Walter Benjamin, Michel

Foucault and Antonio Cassese,⁶⁴⁶ realized that the *state of exception* in the late-20th century was becoming predominant and permanent, where exceptionality has increasingly become the norm in synchronicity with the world becoming globalized.

Chile, Alegría points out, is at the fulcrum of two eras: one is rooted in law, which undergoes obsolescence, nearly imperceptible erosion. This culture of a law designed to secure the well-being of civilians is gradually being replaced by a law written into the ether, an abstraction, a knowing by nodding, a slight gesture unleashing ferocity manifested in the imposition of international market forces. These make national sovereignties permeable to the evolving neoliberal structures, and by the time *Coral de guerra* emerges as a public work, neo-fascist governments are firmly planted on formerly democratic terrain. The military, this novel shows and tells us, is a reinforcing mechanism of corporate vision refurbishing placebos of individual rights into individual dependence.

Coral de guerra is a historic marker. It straddles a tradition of democratic institutions giving way to oligarchical capitalism, late-stage capitalism, aggressive and overwhelming, where neoliberalism (which is neither new nor liberal) is a postmodern version of slavery, constituting itself in practical terms, if not yet in normative terms, as non-apologizing neo-feudalism. Given such a historic backdrop, *Coral de guerra* is nearly a nostalgic work. It looks to a vanishing past where a peaceful society was all of a sudden prompted by a humanist background to resist paradigmatic impositions from unbridled international commerce penetrating and obliterating national cultures. *Coral de guerra* renders a service as a steely commitment—transparent and unwavering as “She” shows us—for humanism to prevail from under the onslaught of neo-fascist neoliberalism. The moral strike that “She” undergoes resonates with the hunger strikes of

⁶⁴⁶ Antonio Cassese (1937-2011) was the first President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and a member of the European Commission on Human Rights.

imprisoned activist dissidents around the world. This act by “She” to contain neo-fascism with the shield of humanism speaks for the voices of the ilk of world renown activists such as Noam Chomsky, Ann Frank, Raoul Wallenberg, Jan Karski. This resistance in favor of national self-determination, individual and collective, is then met with military confrontations bent on eliminating obstacles, meaning people who stand in the way of a future of their design. *Coral de guerra* shows us, indirectly, that military coups are, in essence, corporate coups, masked oligarchical maneuvers. In this context, militarism’s violence, Benjamin (aligned with Orwell) tells us,⁶⁴⁷ is utilized as a means to meet the ends of the state, when the state’s ends constitute the paradigmatic vision of a reduction of the humanity in man to that of a mere piston in the production machine. Fritz Lang alerted us to this imminent reality by admonishing us with his 1927 German expressionist science-fiction drama film “Metropolis.” He admonished us under the guise of entertainment. Once man is so re-defined, as a replaceable part in the production belt, it makes perfect sense to strip him of all rights, and to dispose of him when deemed useless. In such a revamped realm of existence, music, painting, philosophy and the egregiously threatening poetry of the individual’s voice, the all-permeating independent spoken word, constitute intolerable threats against the state. Such a political crisis coupled with a tortured woman’s silent yet audible resistance, as in *Coral de guerra*, are cause for potential collective rebellion and expressionism in the arts to become intolerable acts of defiance challenging the legitimacy of the military authority, even (or perhaps especially) when assumed by extra-legal methods. Historic rationale aside, what matters to the military government is the quick and thorough overhaul of a system of law that obstructs the commercial blanketing of society. The military government perceives a dissenting civilian stance, individual and/or collective, as at once disarming and treasonous offenses toward the authority and legitimacy of the state.

⁶⁴⁷ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1996), 284.

Dissenters and conscientious objectors are obstructions. They are considered anti-historic and therefore are to be eliminated with belligerence, from the standpoint of a military dictatorship at the service of the private sector, which views such policy of violence as the single most effective method to bring about an enduring paradigm shift that brushes aside human rights as an impractical nuisance to economic progress. How Benjamin's Angelus Novus churns the air currents!

We've been indoctrinated to accept that sovereignty of judgment and the ultimate decision over our lives is the unchallengeable prerogative of the state, which, or rather, *who* has been deemed to be essentially a legal "person," since it functions from strings controlled by a higher source, a corporation, or a conglomerate of diversified power centers and individuals who remain unnamed and unseen. Of what crime could such *de-personed* entity possibly be accused of, given its wide moat of self-constructed legitimacy to use violence (military, legal, oral, or even issued by a gaze from someone in authority) as policy, thus rendering it impermeable? The question is rather rhetorical. However, the source of such power, a person's power, whether a legal fiction or a real *person*, points to a different historic origin.

From antecedents that precede the Magna Carta through Machiavelli, Cromwell, the French Revolution and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, the late-Kofi Annan, who gave new life to the concept of *individual sovereignty*, all show that the individual is the source and the finality of power. *Coral de guerra* illustrates that even exercising aggression and condescension toward the vulnerable, power instills a sense of insecurity in its possessor because it's an inherent characteristic of power to be slippery, transitory, fleeting, and to gravitate toward where it is foundational. In the case of the soldier's actions in this story, we can sense that the ripples of his sexually abused victim's dignified act of dissent through silence as her defense causes the

marrow of the man in the uniform, his insincere courtship, his unwelcomed seduction are but a front to his brawn which, after she dismisses him by her sexual surrender in silence, “Halagar al dictador santificándolo, equivalía a santificarse ellos mismos,”⁶⁴⁸ but then, in the work’s closure, subtitled, “Coro,” Spanish language original for choral, “She” reveals to us, the audience: “Mis ojos devolvían la Mirada del Verdugo. Ojo por ojo, decía el Verdugo, mientras me iba poniendo el capuchin.”⁶⁴⁹ In the closing section of *Coral de guerra*, subtitled, “Coro,” our “She” transmits to us words she is sure will be her last. This is an evocation of Allende’s last words. It’s an admittance of imminent death upholding the only thing he/she possesses —that Allende preserved until his last breath— which would constitute his/her legacy; namely, his/her dignity. Then the soldier goes on to tell the husband the details of what they did to his wife: “Se la tiraron treinta hienas frente a mí,”⁶⁵⁰ his spirit nonetheless shrivels within the encroaching space between his spine and his sternum. Silent acts can have as strong an impact as a scream, or a tank blast, and perhaps even more enduringly searing, or cathartic, depending upon the mettle of the person emboldened with power to hurt someone else, “la sevicia transforma no solo a la víctima y al verdugo, sino también a un co-partícipe tan pasivo como el marido,”⁶⁵¹ or to choose to abstain from wounding another human life at a morally critical moment.

The notion of the chorus of voices alluding to a vortex of power, an *ur*-source of germination of life, appears as intangible yet localizable, uncontainable yet omnipresent; it is ghostly and somewhat godly in its defiance to be harnessed and manipulated. Sovereignty as the gripping, hypnotizing energy soaring from the chorus --or choral— in this Greek-like yet distinctly Chilean play has the ability to cause disarray to the rectilinear shape of military platoon

⁶⁴⁸ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 64.

⁶⁴⁹ “Coro” is Alegría’s *Coral de guerra*’s last section, p. 79.

⁶⁵⁰ Alegría, *Coral de guerra*, p. 38.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

formation, disembowel its bellicosity, stifle its calculated thrust of impact. Humanism, compassion, solidarity are instruments rather than weapons, Alegría tells us obliquely. The husband in the story, the writer of “rojas píldoras de sabiduría para un periódico de la tarde,”⁶⁵² states his position to the soldier across the desk from his that a pernicious regime that pounces on their own people cannot be a long-lasting and unchallenged government without, at some point, extending sovereignty to its citizens, a sovereignty that has always flowed up to the leadership from the population’s widest concentration.

“If conscious of its roots,” Benjamin postulates, law will claim to “acknowledge and promote the interest of mankind in the person of each individual.”⁶⁵³ It is simply an historic fact, a millennial history littered with kingdoms, principalities and nations that rose but then collapsed due to folly in how power was used. It assumes the soldier, the military leader/statesman, or the plain grunt soldier in some outlying post, understands the choice-based nature, and the history of power (is it instrument? Is it weapon?), and its mystical dimension, since it dovetails with the divine’s “sovereign violence.”⁶⁵⁴ This capacity, this spiritual force, this energy that can be used either to build or to destroy --an ethical choice-- this thing, power, where destiny unhinges fate, renders politics consistent with physics in its law of gravity: power is at the base.

The newly-elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende (three years before his martyrdom in 1973), spoke of this concept, power, and that it resides with the people, in his inaugural speech. Here are some relevant excerpts: “Revolution does not mean to destroy, but to build... the people are the government, ... to make the country a beacon in progress, in social justice, in the rights of each man, of each woman...” This resonates profoundly with the absent heroine of Alegría’s *Coral de guerra*. “Chile’s anonymous men and forgotten women... staked their sorrow

⁶⁵² Ibid., 62.

⁶⁵³ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1996), p. 285.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 300.

and their hopes on this hour which belongs to the people... we will continue to be respectful of the thesis of nonintervention and of self-determination....⁶⁵⁵

Alegría's female character's monologue serves as the philosophically transcendent oracle in this work, which harkens back to a Greek classic play, since it displays enduring characteristics of the human condition under duress when the state, unprovoked, turns against its own people. President Allende's message echoes through time. It speaks to and hoists this woman's voice of resistance and defiance as recast in *Coral de guerra's* story that rises and glows from the fulcrum of historic crisis. While political times may be exposed to rises and collapses, to glory and to shame, the principles on which humanistic visions hinge do not suffer such ignoble ends, as long as human dignity remains a permanent value, a reliably referential point in the volatile universe of politics.

Alegría ushers us toward the sovereignty of the human spirit, that sacred place, the human person, worthy of allocating all resources of law to shroud and preserve each and every individual/citizen, each constituent in we-the-people, as the vital resource to be treasured that it is, that it should be. This nameless woman is all women. "She" represents humanity above gender; yet, she is a woman, wrongly perceived as the weakest being in human society, historically relegated to the shadows, yet utterly deserving of special consideration as bearer of life and propagator of culture. A woman is her man's base of strength, his home, his matrix, she is human life's first premise. She is also the home she provides for him, single mother often, single wife abandoned to the home chores. She is also her own source of strength, but rather than being a centripetal force, narcissistic and self-engrossed, as with many men, she is centrifugal. "She," the she of *Coral de guerra* and the she anywhere, gives her energy to others, thus

⁶⁵⁵ James D. Cockcroft assisted by Jane Canning, "Victory Speech to the People of Santiago, September 5, 1970" in *Salvador Allende Reader: Chile's Voice of Democracy* (Melbourne, New York: Ocean Press, 2000), 47-49.

spawning life. Alegría has imbued this work with Salvador Allende's spirit of social justice to make her character the centerpiece of a conversation between two men in restrained verbal war with each other. As a gentle brush on the mind, yet burnishing, "She" withdraws to the protagonism of her silence without ever debuting with her physical presence. It is not necessary. The awareness of her being is always implied; even more, assumed, felt, undeniably present. In line with a Greek tragedy, Alegría does not close this work with a tidal eruption of concluding wisdom. No. It is an ebbing turbulence, merely a ripple of sound and being, thus leaving ample space, as in Sophoclean time, to imbibe the words into one's being, to meditate on them serenely, to reflect on their import. The identity source of that reflection, before the purification of passion can occur, the sound that permits the eternal voice to be heard by these two men in their dialogue is invested in this hushed "She," unuttered, but heard from her *sovereignty of the self*, the luminous energy that hovers over the nation imbuing it with ethical conscience.

CONCLUSION

Sovereignty of the Self Reclaimed

In a seminal 1999 article titled “Two Concepts of Sovereignty” published in *The Economist* magazine, in his capacity as the incumbent Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan introduces the idea and conceptualization of “individual sovereignty” as a viable principle, which he deems both urgent and consistent with the UN Charter on Human Rights. By imbuing international culture with the consciousness that individuals are entitled to be shrouded by individual sovereignty, and that the world body supports this position, it gives credence to every man and woman to be protected from dictatorship abuses. However, in 1983, Fernando Alegría had already spoken of this concept to which he referred to as *soberanía personal* at a conference of major Latin American authors titled “*Tareas Comunes*,” which he delivered in Mexico. Annan calls for the law to protect man, whereas Alegría dispenses with law and certainly with governments. Instead, he exhorts the members of the intellectual community to encourage the social community to be the ones invested with the task of protecting each person reciprocally.

Kofi Annan established the Annan Doctrine of which his vision of “individual sovereignty... the fundamental freedom of each individual... has been enhanced by a renewed and spreading consciousness of individual rights... to protect individual human beings, not to protect those who abuse them.”⁶⁵⁶ Both Kofi Annan in “Two Concepts of Sovereignty” (1999)

⁶⁵⁶ Kofi Annan, “Two Concepts of Sovereignty,” in *The Economist*, September 16, 1999.

and the jurist Antonio Cassese⁶⁵⁷ in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (1993) tell us that all laws ought to protect human beings. More specifically, Cassese writes, “Covenants on Human Rights should only lay down the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals.”⁶⁵⁸ These philosophers, scholars and political heavyweights are aligned with Alegría’s theory of *soberanía personal*. His three dictatorship novels serve as awakening allegories of what life could be were our social contract with the State to be one of reciprocal reverence by placing *sovereignty of the self* as a centerpiece of transnational citizenship.

By assessing the inherent challenge of Alegría’s phrasing in his conference “*Tareas Comunes*,” I came to embrace a fusion of these initiatives. In this study I proposed to introduce the theoretical claim that *sovereignty of the self* and its latent energy, its vital power, its irrepressible promise is essential for the survival of democracy, making it ever clear that the level of sovereignty we’re concerned about has to do with that of individual human beings. Otherwise, *soberanía personal* (Fernando Alegría) or “individual sovereignty” (Kofi Annan) leave space for ambiguity making the reader wonder whose or what sovereignty it is. History has shown us that we can no longer afford confusion, nor to permit ourselves to lump persons with people, tossing the individual to be lost in the collective, just as it happened with “We the People...” contemptuously erasing the ancestral concept that led to it; whereas “We” always begins with “I,” and then grows communally to the aggregate of individual human beings. From the Magna Carta to Cromwell’s parliamentary usurpation of sovereignty from the absolutist king, to Machiavelli’s *stato* and Bodin’s earliest enunciation of sovereignty in the 16th century to date,

⁶⁵⁷ Antonio Cassese was an Italian jurist who specialized in public international law. He was the first President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the first President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which he presided over until 1 October 2011.

⁶⁵⁸ Antonio Cassese, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (1993), 47.

sovereignty's provenance, admittedly, was always from the people. Each man and woman have participated in the shared structure of values, each contributing to weave the social contract. In the era of exploding First World dictatorships such as ours, pitting vulnerable persons against states armed with nuclear weapons, empowering the individual with the shrouding protection that *sovereignty of the self* could well afford --thus revering man's humanity—would simply change the legal and political world as we know it, instilling a mindset of human ecology into a constructivist mix, thereby potentially altering the course of history.

Thinkers like Butler, Grimm, Benjamin and Chomsky have supported this study of *sovereignty of the self* by expressing its principle in their different voices. These intellectuals espouse ideas that harmonize with Alegría's refashioning antiquated sovereignty into the limber *sovereignty of the self*. Vincent Leitch's article brings us Jacques Derrida who gave us his view: "Human rights pose and presuppose the human being as sovereign (equal, free, self-determined)... one cannot simply jettison the sovereign self, its liberty, equality, responsibility, and power any more than the sovereign nation-state."⁶⁵⁹ Judith Butler, on the other hand, affirms a *sovereignty of the self* in her version of *Antigone*, where the body, alive or dead, male or female, constitutes a territory, inviolable, with posthumous rights, and thereby must also be viewed and dealt with as an untransgressable sovereignty.

Fernando Alegría had already conceived of the notion of *soberanía personal* (personal sovereignty) as applied to the subtext of his novels, a pioneering disclosure tantamount to a humanistic principle and an original contribution to literary theory. Alegría's theory complements my perspective of *sovereignty of the self* on the social community front with a Levinasian vision of reciprocity: doing for the Other is doing for myself. But I emphasize the self as his own activist to elicit from the State a sense of compelling reciprocal respectability --and a

⁶⁵⁹ Leitch, "The Politics of Sovereignty," in *Critical Inquiry*, 33.2 (2007), 235.

reverence-- for the fact that every individual contributes to and helps forge the nation's life—a true and re-fathomed social contract. In an era of perilously expanding global hubris, Alegría's dictatorship novels (commenting artistically on the post-Salvador Allende socialist regime deposed and replaced through military intervention by the coup plotter general Augusto Pinochet) are suffused with the inherent social resistance of *sovereignty of the self* given that allegory may well help us avert falling again off the totalitarian abyss.

From the age of absolutist monarchies to the current era of republican oligopolies, sovereignty can no longer be appropriated as the exclusive prerogative of the State since it originated among the people, which is where it rightfully belongs. Drawing from philosophical and legal sources, Alegría developed the notion comparable to *sovereignty of the self* through his *soberanía personal* exhuming it from the morass of political authoritarianism. In a parallel vein to the impact George Orwell has had on our political consciousness, Alegría has demonstrated in his novels what dangers a society faces when they bequeath this scepter of power, sovereignty, for transient, self-serving, psychopathic and shortsighted politicians to wield. This study on Alegría's trilogy of dictatorship novels afforded us an evolutive path in what became a dramatic curve steering Chile and the region onto a more progressive course. When *sovereignty of the self* is finally, unambiguously, assertively reclaimed, only then will we see a glimmer of social justice emerge. After having reigned supreme for centuries, state sovereignty has become porous to the inquiry of legal institutions protective of peoples exposed to the excesses of rulers who forget their power was simply entrusted to them for the welfare of the national community. The Pinochet case established an international precedent in jurisprudence after his acts of genocide. Once we've made it clear that *sovereignty of the self* indeed rises to the level of a human right (Annan, Cassese), it can only survive by believing in it, by struggling to preserve it, and by

honoring it. We can accomplish this Sisyphean enterprise by upholding *sovereignty of the self* beginning with the most vulnerable individuals among us. To avert this totalitarian tide lunging toward us, we must sojourn within the story lines in the works by Fernando Alegría to allow ourselves the opportunity to be inspired into greater consciousness by his theorizations where a subtextual *sovereignty of the self* can be seized and reclaimed as a social entitlement.

Each novel Alegría wrote became a portrait of a particular decade or the highlight of an issue in a given epoch. In hindsight we see this *pentagonía*, these five precursor novels: *Recabarren*, *Lautaro*, *joven libertador de America*, *Camaleón*, *Mañana los guerreros* and *Allende: mi vecino el presidente* as practice toward his eventual shift in narrative approaches.

His first novelized biography, *Recabarren*, (1938), was perhaps the first time in Alegría's Chile when a sense of optimism electrified the historically demeaned working class. Chile is a conservative, class-based and highly stratified society, proud of its biases and prejudices which people are not shy to express. The social divides are reflected in this eponymous work named after the workers' union leader, Luis Emilio Recabarren. Much like Allende five decades later, the activist's courage Recabarren displayed made considerable inroads for workers' rights, thus breaking unprecedented ground in social politics. However, this fleeting euphoria resulted in only one printing of *Recabarren*.

It was followed by *Lautaro, joven libertador de Arauco*, (1943), a youthful story of pride and resistance, a coming-of-age novelized historical biography about a heroic Indian youth who stood up against the conquering Spaniards in the 15th century. *Lautaro* profiles the epitome of self-sacrificing loyalty toward one's tribe, one's society, bristling its spiny rejection at foreign invaders. This work served as a metaphor for a Chile that opened its doors to the United States' unrelenting cultural colonialism.

On the subject of imperialism, we have *Camaleón* (1950), which developed *Lautaro*'s notions further for contemporary times, albeit from the invader's perspective. Here, an American spy blends in with Chileans during one of the early 20th century's oppressive authoritarian governments. The businessman-spy becomes a true chameleon, but his objective is to syphon information that will enrich him and his country's corporate interests. Martin Littleford then leaves Chile having dismissed the kind Chileans he met, where all that mattered was to secure corporate profit.

Mañana los guerreros (1964) develops around a foiled coup d'état by a group of Chilean Nazi youths against a center-right government. It also examines the unimpeded impact of Chilean government politics closely aided by the military and police forces on national life as political leaders compete for power. The people recede into the background as undeveloped shadows to which it would be wasteful to extend civil rights. These are the mid-thirties and Chileans are vulnerable to a revolving door of demagogues, which is when the socialist politician Salvador Allende breaks into the scene.

Alegría subsequently pens *Allende: mi vecino el presidente*, a biographical novel of this medical doctor turned warrior-priest. He quickly becomes a mythological figure. Without developing the references in the chapter on precursor novels, Alegría profiles Allende as a Mío Cid, as Don Quijote, Robin Hood and as a secular Francis of Assisi. Alegría draws his narrative silhouette as the rescuer of Chile's downtrodden as his personal mandate. Alegría's own socio-political idealism converges in this homage to his fallen friend, a work from the heart where the slogan "Allende, Allende, el pueblo te defiende!" rings beyond his death as a nationwide –yet also as a very personal—tribute. Each of these precursor works contribute seeds of idiosyncratic insights, social enthusiasm, regrets, frustrations, profound pathos and longings as the panoply of

animus that motivate Alegría to craft his dictatorship novels, where the theory of *sovereignty of the self* rising from the subtext becomes implicit.

For Alegría the coup d'état of 1973 parted the waters in his narrative career. The violent death of his friend the president, the shattering of the ideology of social justice he shared with Allende, and the witnessing of acts of post-coup violence against fellow-Chileans caused him to abandon the old aesthetic of a mellifluous prose designing broad cultural and historic narrative strokes portraying his native country. We observe the inertia of a sudden shift in author consciousness. The tone evolves into a weave of restrained emotion with politicized assertiveness. Self-vigilant of a vicious military government's censorship, Alegría took the bull by the horns determined to explore the guts and innards of a humanity slapped and shoved away from decency and democracy by an erupting military and embarked upon penning his three dictatorship novels. His tone swings from nostalgic to assertive to blunt without losing suppleness in namely *Una especie de memoria*, *El paso de los gansos* and *Coral de guerra*.

Alegría's novelistic lens bracketed sixty years of his Chilean life—many years in Chile but many more abroad-- observing strident politics increasingly impinging upon the society of his native country—to which he claimed he was more attached while living in the United States—a society that had to find creative ways of resilience under the duress of political oppression. This ponderous first landmark flashback became *Una especie de memoria* (1983). The first glimmers of authoritarianism butted against the confident rise of a self-respecting worker class wielding their *sovereignty of self* as instrument of change and as a weapon of resistance rearticulating and reclaiming sovereignty as a people's prerogative on loan to rulers entrusted with its management on condition that they serve the people. They were expected to protect their dignity by supporting the development of their potential. In this novel-memoir

sovereignty of the self awakens in our main character as a result of authoritarianism spilling into the streets in ever blunter spurts becoming manifest across the decades, contrasting with a series of conservative governments' restrained ways yet harboring totalitarian tendencies as depicted in *Una especie de memoria*, where the broad-based workers union constituency rivaled local Nazi upheavals in the 1930s; it also depicts a litany of authoritarian manifestations erupting and clashing with isolated pockets of popular upheavals throughout the memoir. Neither does it forget to reminisce about a women's massive protest march banging kitchen pots nearly forty years later. *Una especie de memoria* showed the insidious methods by which authoritarianism seeps into the culture as a masked dictatorship. Like a Trojan horse, it sedates, demolishes its defenses from within, imperceptibly. By the time people realize how their lives have been curtailed, the monster has transformed into totalitarianism, remaining mostly unseen, but activated as an institutional state of war against its citizens by re-codifying laws and placing numerous demands on civil existence. When its power is galvanized, it sheds its pretenses and dictatorship bristles arrogantly and threateningly. Wielding *sovereignty of the self* may be an act of impotence by then as it occurred when Leonor chose to end her role of mentoring Fernando unless the Leonors of Chile perceive trends early, as she did for a time, and use the youth and energy of a Fernando to implement effective resistance. When such toiling bears fruit, then people can rise, stifle and dismantle a dictatorship by a groundswell of popular and unwavering will, consequently unmasking the veneer of ferocity of the otherwise vacuous and insecure regime. This work was published at the height of Pinochet's military dictatorship's censorship-inclined tenure and distinguishes itself for two glaring omissions: the names of Allende and Pinochet remain unmentioned. *Una especie de memoria* subtly but effectively contributes in essence as an allegorical warning sign about the corrosive nature of a Chilean dictatorship. The

memoir was written in real time and as a later recall of events lived as they were unfolding. The discovery of the stowaway in the memoir reveals that patriotism and civility means nothing to power when it suddenly hammers its presence to circle the wagons around the interests of the oligarchy often by treating the citizenry brutally. The lens begins to focus on specifics as the trilogy of dictatorship novels narrows its gaze.

El paso de los gansos more overtly lays out the ripples of dictatorship in Chilean culture through an alter-ego who helps us see a terrifyingly violent military coup d'état with the collateral loss of civilian life. Gawking the horror of jets flying overhead, dropping bombs and destroying the virtually-sacred architectural emblem of Chilean governance, its 18th-century relic of ancient idealism, its Palace of Government, must have been a cataclysmic sight to behold. Politics by other means shed the metaphoric cloak that day when blood spilled helter-skelter. The theory of military onslaught, putsch, state of siege were all terms widely theorized, intellectually feared and conceptually repulsive. When bursting into a shuddering reality, the experience shrivels one's skin. It is that level of shock on the nerves what Alegría conveys to the reader, who, as the passers-by in Santiago on that early afternoon of September 11, 1973, were ill-prepared to feel their heart pound on their chest just as tonnages of explosive thundered on their city, pulverizing historic walls and ancient documents on such an apocalyptic day lasting an eternity. Alegría re-enacts the atrocity, the noise, the darkened daytime sky covered by soot and smoke every time we read these pages. The entire chess game corners the indefensible pawn, the citizen, who can at best whimper his right to *sovereignty of the self*, and as he does, and because he does, his life ends by a bullet. The world is tragically upside down when we have to witness and acknowledge that during such a scene, *might claims to be right*. Emulating the revolutionary Che Guevara's audacity, clad in every vulnerable Chilean's *sovereignty of the self*, the leading

character Cristián lunges himself body and soul on his motorcycle at the military convoys in the name of every man, woman and child mistreated by self-serving and abusive power to show that a man possesses more value than violence, than totalitarianism, than any ideology that tramples on humanity. *Sovereignty of the self* charges forth mounted on a motorcycle against the totalitarian behemoth. Cristián's behavior screamed out that the military can kill a man but not his vision, not his promise, not his dignity, not an entire society that harbors the same longings. Cristián's plunge into a battle for moral principles with the State portrays for us that life cannot be lived without the promise of a dignified humanity.

Finally, *Coral de guerra* closes the circle of discursive fire encircling a false trinity of anonymous characters who capture and manifest the interior ruins of individuals, as the plurality of consequences of a dictatorship that hovers, penetrates, manipulates, mangles, and ultimately attempts to control minds. Alegría weaves a plot to show us that unlike the dictatorship's weaponry used to assault its own citizens, silence is dignity's manifestation of *sovereignty of the self* as the undefeatable weapon of the self-respecting individual. This type of silence rumbles and roils in the subtext to then emerge audible in gestures and attitudes that muffle the histrionics of rhetorical noise neutralizing its intended effectiveness. This strategic selection unfolds as a subtle homage vindicating Gabriela Mistral's purposeful allegory pitting the condor with the *huemul* (deer),⁶⁶⁰ ultimately proving that *right is might*. In this sense, Fernando Alegría has brilliantly joined the ranks of regional authors by contributing to and superseding many aspects of the dictatorship novel in Latin American literature in great part due to the renewed concept and application of *sovereignty of the self* in his novels.

⁶⁶⁰ Mistral herself morally and intellectually battled a previous dictator, Ibáñez, with her deceptively childish verses honoring childhood.

Alegría's dictatorship novels are unapologetically anti-fascist creative works. They endeavor to preserve democracy, which has become an endangered species. By hoisting the individual person above structures of power that tend to diminish the average person's value, Alegría elevates the currency of human life, something he believes we must all embrace as social activists, lest we ourselves become a giant pile of poached elephant tusks; lest we admit that it is we who have failed democracy from thriving.

Una especie de memoria's political rumbles sharpened a subtext that concealed opposing forces, dictatorship brewing and sovereignty of the self rising in social consciousness until both become explosively manifest in *El paso de los gansos*, where we witness victims and death under the dictatorship's boot. We felt the impact of a ventriloquist oligarchy feeding the dictator's ideological lines to corral an unwitting population suddenly ensnared by a totalitarian dictatorship annihilating an ill-prepared collectivity of isolated and disenfranchised individuals claiming *sovereignty of the self* ineffectively while ineffectually attempting dissent and resistance. Insidious political forces worked in the shadows in this Dantesque inferno of words producing fire, of promises implemented as mendacity. The dictatorship burst onto the stage as a volcanic eruption leaving a human wreckage. The only antidote is individual courage in the name of a nation, as Cristián showed us, a figure emulating the likes of Jesus Christ, Che Guevara and Salvador Allende. His conviction and behavior embracing *sovereignty of the self* defying the dictator head-on tells us dramatically in this narrative that one man may die, ten may die, but a society is ultimately saved because of these individual sacrifices in order to regenerate from yet another cycle of political blindness. But then, an imposing political strategy takes a drastic turn in *Coral de guerra*, where the inner sanctum of willed resistance of one woman disarms the bristling soldier and the regime structure he represents. Metaphorically, she touches

one card in the deck (the rapist soldier) with the sound of her silence, yes, Paul Simon style, and the dictatorship's edifice in the deck of cards collapses by the sheer power of *sovereignty of the self* committedly wielded. The societal and international choral of protest caused the exulting dictatorship to crumble.

This trilogy of dictatorship novels has demonstrated that as authoritarian regimes are quickly transmogrifying into totalitarian powerhouses, humanism can nonetheless flourish from under the onslaught of dictatorships that have paved the way for neo-feudal and enslaving neoliberalism. Maybe a successful way of resistance is to actively embrace the notion of *sovereignty of the self* as Alegría's dictatorship novels have eloquently articulated and the tenacity of their characters have exemplified. This democratic notion, renewing the ancient origin of sovereignty and returning it to the widest swath of populations, awaits broad international recognition. Albeit, due to the fact that small presses have published Alegría's work without significant news media, shrewd advertisement, or even widely read critics, he has not become a household name as deserved. Nonetheless, he left us a prolific legacy with the riveting theme --*sovereignty of the self*-- at its core, bringing the marginalized, Chilean society's pariahs, to the center of social respectability -- a veritably ideological aleph. His dictatorship-admonishing novels are written in fluid, engaging prose. They must be re-printed in Spanish, translated into English and other major languages. Alegría's broad concept of what I call *sovereignty of the self*, inherently possesses such a life force, it ought to become a social mantra.

By enacting the salvo of *sovereignty of the self* within the throes of frequently repeated dictatorships in Latin America, Alegría decodes and deciphers yearning from anguish, a clear-sounding clarion from a muffled rumbling, articulating longings where only fear, complacency and resignation have festered. Alegría carves character and vision from the muddled subtext of

Chile's political history by tapping into the national character's instinctive sense that something ethical, something clear, crystalline and good is reachable. From a dehumanizing military dictatorship in a century of burgeoning tyrannies, Fernando Alegría has contributed timely originality to literary theory as an effective antidote to the pernicious flare-ups of totalitarianism. He accomplished this feat in his trilogy of dictatorship novels by entwining a citizen's sense of self-respect and solidarity with a shared humanity. For those who lived through the long and tortuous years of suffocating surrender to oligarchical fury clad in military violence, living under Pinochet meant to suffer his genocidal policies. Fernando Alegría's dictatorship novels constitute a conscious stance of dissent by enacting *sovereignty of the self* as a requiem for a national wound that yearns for catharsis.

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