

**PARADICTATORIAL NOSTALGIA:  
THE EXILE POETRY OF JUAN GELMAN, FERREIRA GULLAR,  
AND GONZALO MILLÁN**

BY

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## Introduction

### **Paradictatorial Nostalgia: The Exile Poetry of Juan Gelman, Ferreira Gullar, and Gonzalo Millán**

In his presentation of a collection of essays on exile and Latin American literature, Myron Lichtblau states: “The concept of remembrance and nostalgia are inherent in all forms of exilic literature” (11). As Lichtblau suggests, the nostalgic sentiment can be traced from the earliest poems and songs in the Hispanic tradition to the formation of mythologized Latin American identities (the Gaucho, for example) and themes of inner exile (11).<sup>1</sup> The central concern of this study, however, is the intersection of more recent nostalgia theory and Latin American poems of exclusion, expulsion, and exile at the end of the twentieth century. My conceptualization of nostalgia with regard to these poems relies on current theory that affirms the importance of idealization as a means of processing trauma. Nostalgia, in this study, goes beyond the traditional Greek roots of *nostos* (home) and *algia* (painful feeling). I propose that, in the context of selected poems of Juan Gelman, Ferreira Gullar, and Gonzalo Millán, exile nostalgia is not merely a melancholic desire for the past (as traditional notions of nostalgia would have suggested), but rather an attempt to recreate the self as an excluded member of a community wrestling with problematic progress and modernization.

Nostalgia studies have grown out of scholarship on memory and the trend of investigation of the past as a means by which to better frame the current cultural and political situation, especially in the context of trauma and suffering. Also informed

by the boom in testimonial literature and its related study in the early 1990s, nostalgia theories have been developed over the past few decades to question the relationship between the individual and his or her community, and how longing and idealization can play an integral part in personal and community identity-building.<sup>2</sup>

In the current investigation, I employ Svetlana Boym's theory that a contemporary conceptualization of nostalgia can be multi-temporal and related to the formation of social or group identity, as well as personal identity already assumed in traditional melancholic nostalgia. Boym's study, *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), traces nostalgia as a "historical rather than psychological genesis" (7) within the context of Russian literature and culture. Boym positions modern nostalgia at the end of the twentieth century as an evolution of longing and a "defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals" (xiv). She continues by asserting that nostalgia "is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into 'local' and 'universal' possible" (xvi). Most pertinent to this study, however, is that nostalgia, according to Boym, is unlike melancholia because it reflects the problems of the individual as a member of a community and that community's sense of identity based on the past:

Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. The future



of nostalgic longing and progressive thinking is at the center of this inquiry. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory. (xvi)

For Boym, nostalgia is a response to rapid modernization in the twentieth century, especially in the context of personal, community, and national trauma.<sup>3</sup> The nostalgia in the poems of my study incorporates, at times, the melancholia of traditional nostalgia, but it also differs in its multi-temporal nature, active voice, and exploratory poetic form and language. It is my view that Gelman, Gullar, and Millán nostalgically turn to a different time or place as a result of the violent rupture of exile and the ideals of neoliberal modernization put forth by the authoritarian regimes that, either directly or indirectly, caused their alienation.

Therefore, of particular interest to this study are those poems which question the power structures that have resulted in problematic modernization and ambivalent progress in the poets' native countries, producing a need for nostalgic idealization. The concept of idealization is fundamental to my study, since, as Aaron Santesso suggests, "nostalgia [is] not the desire for the past but rather idealization . . . Nostalgia . . . [is] an impersonal, highly literary mode of idealization responding first and foremost to present need" (13). Even though Santesso's study, *A Careful Longing* (2006), considers nostalgia in 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry, his characterization of nostalgia as a response to a "present need" sets up my investigation since all three

poets idealize, while in the ambiguous state of exile, absent people, places or time periods: the mother figure in Juan Gelman's epistolary poetry, the city of Ferreira Gullar's birth, or Gonzalo Millán's pre-dictatorial Santiago.<sup>4</sup>

Santesso's proposition, nevertheless, requires modification in the context of this investigation and the theories offered by Boym. I question Santesso's insertion of the "impersonal" in the statement that nostalgic poetry is "an impersonal, highly literary mode of idealization" (13). Santesso attempts to contextualize the "impersonal" nature of modern nostalgia by stating that "nostalgic works often reflect the influence of literary tradition rather than personal experience." (13) While this may be true of the 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry that he investigates, this assertion is somewhat problematic when held alongside the poems of this study since they are highly personal. In other words, incorporating and/or subverting literary conventions and personal involvement are not mutually exclusive; while these poems do respond to literary traditions, they are not impersonal. For this reason, the nostalgic poetry of this study fits into a blending of Santesso and Boym's definitions—a highly personal (individual) and intra-personal (communal) response to a present trauma, and is based on idealization of the past which will affect present and future conceptualizations of identity. Boym's assertion of the communal aspects of nostalgia is a corollary to Santesso's theory in that the nostalgic poem is *not only* personal—it may be a collective response guised as a personal lament. In other words, it is especially appropriate to say, in the context of these poems, that "individual memory is inseparably bound up with cultural memory" (Hodgkin and Radstone 8) because

these poems mimic the private (individual) space of exile to demonstrate a public, communal response to trauma. In this way, nostalgia is a desire for the past to inform the poet's current ambiguous exiled state as well as a longing for a different present and future, a consequence of the violent power structures in place in the poets' homelands which caused their exile.

There may be fewer studies on nostalgia per se (as compared to memory in general) because of the common association of nostalgia with an emotional response and the consequent disassociation with "history" and the problematics of memory and identity. Linda Hutcheon, for example, admits her previous bias against studying nostalgia because she considered other areas of study more "edgy" or sophisticated and thus more deserving of study ("Irony" 191). Isabel Allende also comments on the difficulty of approaching these "emotions [relating to nostalgia] without sounding insipid" (xii). Similarly, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer suggest that the "indiscriminate idealization of past time and lost place . . . engendered vitriolic denunciations of nostalgic memory as 'reactionary', 'sentimental', 'elitist', 'escapist', 'inauthentic'—as a 'retrospective mirage' that 'greatly simplifies, if not falsifies, the past'" (83).<sup>5</sup>

My study rejects the notion that nostalgic poetry must be an insipid, overly-affected, or an exaggeratedly sentimental longing for the past, and it challenges the notion of nostalgia as hyper-sentimentality that is removed from political and economic discourse. It represents a new Latin American reality because it responds to real places and people affected by the implementation of economic, social, and

political reforms by authoritarian governments. A close reading Juan Gelman's *cartas abiertas*, Ferreira Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, and Gonzalo Millán's *La ciudad* show that nostalgia in exile poetry is a struggle with alienation, both physical and temporal, and the redefinition of personal and social identities through memory and longing. Nostalgia has not traditionally been viewed in this context, although Santesso and Boym are some of the first theorists to conceptualize how modern nostalgia differs from traditional nostalgia.

For this reason, I offer a different view than those who have perceived nostalgia with marked ambivalence, especially in the study of Latin American literature. Even though Mike Gonzalez and David Treece, for example, propose that the poetry of this era focuses on the voice in exile where the deeply personal expression of pain and loss represents a collective experience, alienation, and the rebellion against models of North American and European discourse, they pejoratively categorize the longing for a different reality in twentieth century Latin American poetry as falling into "regionalisms and nostalgia" (xiii). While their book, *The Gathering of Voices* (1992), offers a highly useful conceptualization of Latin American poetry of the last century, and they carefully show that recent Latin American poetry does not entirely succumb to the trend of "triviality or sentimentalism" that may be associated with nostalgia, the characterization of nostalgia as a negative tendency underscores a prevalent attitude towards the nostalgic and its supposed irrelevance to contemporary literature. Nostalgia, in the exile poetry of this study, appears to be the result of these poets' sincere confusion

and panic at their state in the face of loss of homeland and loved ones, and the impossibility of returning in time.

While theories of nostalgia frame the current investigation, the broader trend of memory studies offers several useful tools to explore the role of the past in the primary poetry of this study. Nostalgia theory, as I employ it here, considers as fundamental the idealization and/or desire for an unreachable time or place, whereas memory studies in general explore the past and how it formulates the present, especially with regard to trauma. Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, and Jefferey Olick, for example, demonstrate that the academic literature related to memory grew out of exploring personal experience as a response to meta-narratives and the discourse of the authoritarian.<sup>6</sup> Most general studies of memory link it directly with the concept of cultural or national identity and personal trauma suffered by victims of hegemonic or authoritarian regimes.<sup>7</sup>

Especially in the case of investigations of memory and identity in Latin America, to study memory is often to study the relationship between identity and the traumatic events of the dictatorships and their methods for ensuring control in the last three decades of the twentieth century. For example, Susana Kaiser's collection of case studies, *Postmemories of Terror* (2005), traces the connection between memory and the events surrounding the *Guerra Sucia*. She considers the formation of her identity as indebted to the turbulent, traumatic memories that she and other members of her generation have had to process.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Jelín and Susana G. Kaufman find that the reconciliation of past trauma began in Argentina when juridical

testimony was given by victims of clandestine torture centers, underscoring the fact that public attempts at negotiating the traumatic past begin with personal reconciliation and memory.<sup>9</sup> While these authors treat memory in a particular context (Argentina), few others have looked at it comparatively across the Southern Cone, or, as in the case of this study, specifically with poetry. And, while the above studies all offer compelling views of how the past demands attention and, in some cases, reconciliation, they do not treat idealization or desire for an unattainable time period.

While memory studies and, more specifically, nostalgia theory frame my investigation, I am most interested in the particular kind of nostalgia that the exile poetry of Gelman, Gullar, and Millán displays. Because this nostalgia is complicated by innovative poetic techniques, the context of exile, and extra-textual historical factors, I have designated it *paradictatorial*. The paradictatorial nature of this poetry—residue of violence, alienation, uneven progress—is demonstrated by the complex blending of affect (the turmoil of expulsion from the homeland), an idealization of time periods or places, and linguistic exploration such as the neologisms of Juan Gelman’s *cartas* or the abruptly end-stopped lines in Gonzalo Millán’s *La ciudad*. These textual markers are symptomatic of the rupture caused by exile, as well as the violence that permeated the space from which the poet was separated. From the “privileged” space of exile, the three poets of this study—Juan Gelman (Argentina), Ferreira Gullar (Brazil), and Gonzalo Millán (Chile)—are able to explore idealized spaces, people, or time periods, an act that might not have been possible at all while living under the oppression of these particular regimes. While

several studies have been written about the effects that the dictatorships of the Southern Cone had on literature and culture (Avelar and Masiello, among others), questions remain about how the turbulent years of authoritarian control in Argentina, Brazil and Chile created a context in which poetry that expressed the painful realities of censorship, disappearance, and separation opposed official state doctrines of stability and control when the poet was writing from *outside* of his homeland.<sup>10</sup> Their shared state of exile offers them the space—both temporal and physical—to reread their pasts and better understand their present ambiguous states in order to explore the possibility of a different future for themselves and their communities.

For this reason, I offer the term *paradictatorial* to describe the nostalgia of the selected poems of Gelman, Gullar, and Millán. I am purposefully exploiting the ambiguity suggested by similar words (paramilitary, paradigm, paradox, postdictatorial, etc.), as well as the Greek prefix meaning “alongside” or “against.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, in the context of this investigation, the space (exile) that the poets inhabit during the dictatorships is separate, although it is still tainted by the violence and oppression of the authoritarian regimes. This poetry shares some of the characteristics of dictatorial, postdictatorial, and exile writing, but it blends these with a nostalgic longing and idealization that tries to subvert, in various ways, the negation of memory that the authoritarian demanded in the Southern Cone. The poems of this study demonstrate paradictatorial nostalgia because they were written in the space alongside the dictatorships, they are infected by the oppression of the violent regimes

that caused their exile, and they idealize a time, places, and people to whom they cannot return.

The fragmentary nature of these poems is a symptom of paradictatorial nostalgia; textual fragmentation complicates this nostalgia in which temporal ambiguity and diametrical feelings about the events surrounding their exile demonstrate a discordant reaction. In psychological terms, Hirsch and Spitzer call on the “psychic mechanism of ‘splitting’” to describe the difficulty of assimilating both the positive, idealized past and the traumatic events that caused separation by stating that the “survivor needs to split off nostalgic memory from negative and traumatic memory in order to sustain nostalgia’s positive aspects” (84). The concept of splitting, first developed by Freud but elaborated by other psychologists and investigators of memory and trauma,<sup>12</sup> is traditionally conceived of as resulting from the inability to return to the scene of trauma to better process it.<sup>13</sup> While Hirsch and Spitzer are referring to a physical place to which the survivor is denied return, this could also be caused by the inability to return in time to an idealized period in one’s life: for Gelman, the return to a time when he was with his family; for Gullar, the city of his birth; or for Millán, a Santiago pre-dictatorship. Hirsch and Spitzer go on to suggest how this results in fragmentation:

Memory is fragmented, and the fragments are shaded with clashing emotional colourings. Traumatic dissociation—the process by which traumatic fragments survive and remain vividly present without being integrated or mastered by the traumatized person—is an extreme form



of the splitting that characterizes ambivalent nostalgia / negative memory. (84)

In the context of the poetry of Gelman, Gullar, and Millán, splitting results in the fragmented nature of the poetry evident in neologisms, time frame clashes, and, above all, persistent questioning regarding their ambivalent state. These techniques create a nostalgia that both idealizes some aspects of the absent object or person and criticizes the poetic speaker's own identity and society.

Obsessing over past trauma—evidenced in these poems by neologisms and splitting, for example—seems like a rebellion against the notion of “progress”, even while it is generally acknowledged that to process trauma, one must revisit it as a means of processing and providing closure. Even Boym, whose theories of nostalgia I outlined earlier, highlights a few of the sticking points between nostalgia and “progress”: “Nostalgia, like progress, is dependent on the modern conception of unrepeatable and irreversible time” (13). Later, she clarifies: “At the same time, romantic nostalgia is not a mere antithesis to progress; it undermines both a linear conception of progress and a Hegelian dialectical teleology” (ibid.). Given the spotlight on the tension between “progress” and nostalgia by Boym and others (philosopher Dylan Trigg, for example), I will explore two specific problem areas that concern this study: notions of “progress” in capitalism and Marxism, and “progress” as both a movement forward in lineal time as a natural decline that makes nostalgia a longing for an impossible return.

As I stated earlier, nostalgia can be viewed as a type of progress; one must first regress, clearing up the past, before one can move forward. In this sense, the poetry of this study is only anti-progress when that “progress” is seen as an attempt to ignore, eradicate, or erase the past. “Progress” and nostalgia seem incompatible, unless we consider nostalgia as a response to forced progress; nostalgia is not a reaction to progress per se, rather a coping mechanism for processing a past traumatic rupture and present ambiguity. The nostalgia of these poems is not just a reaction to free-marketizing and the eradication of socialism, for example, but rather a reaction to the trauma with which these were instated and the hegemonic destruction of cultural memory of what immediately preceded the violent rupture.

For this reason, “progress” is another way to describe what the Southern Cone dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s wanted to achieve by radically (and violently) instating social, political, and economic structures that attempted to quash any socialist-leaning tendencies. I equate this “progress” with modernization, globalization, and any attempt at eradicating the memories of the past, especially those that were associated with what the authoritarian governments of the Southern Cone viewed as “subversive” in the context of the Cold War battle between capitalism and Marxism. At the same time, I do not wish to oversimplify the projects of the Southern Cone governments; part of their aim was to reestablish or restore what they thought had been lost in the 1960s and 1970s (we cannot ignore the “re-” in Argentina’s “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” that the *junta* established in 1976). Many of the goals of the authoritarian regimes, in the context of the Cold

War, were to eradicate Marxist tendencies. While many would argue that the dictatorships' were looking backwards for social and political models, their goal of erasure of the tendencies that grew out of the more immediate past (developmentalism and, on a broad level, the growing influence of Marxism/socialism of the mid-century decades) suggest that they were trying to move forward by violently eliminating memory of what had just come before.

Of course, considering that one of the tenets of Marxism is the radical and revolutionary "progress" towards a powerful proletariat and a class-less communist society, and that communism has often been paired with its own brand of authoritarian governments, the notion of "progress" of Marxism and that of the capitalists dictatorships of the Southern Cone, in effect, were two sides of the same coin; what one side deemed "regressive", the other side deemed "progressive". To be clear, when describing the goals of the Southern Cone dictatorships, I am not equating "progress" with "progressive" politics; many of the policies of the Southern Cone dictatorships were based on nineteenth-century ideals of capitalism and society.<sup>14</sup> However, I do believe that the poets of this study see these dictatorships' notions of "progress" as faulty because they attempt to eradicate the immediate past.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, in this study I equate "progress" with the attempts of the governments of the Southern Cone to radically modify and modernize their countries by creating a clean slate upon which their ideologies could be written. While Argentina, Brazil and Chile have had distinctive historical and social defining traits, what unites them in this study is the problematic "progress" through dictatorship, into

capitalism (neoliberalism, especially in the case of Chile), through human rights abuses, and, later, to democracy. Naomi Klein, in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), elaborates how authoritarian governments around the world use “moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering” (9). Especially in the case of Brazil, rampant modernization leads to severe inequalities, and that the poets’ exterior exile mimics, at times, the interior exile felt by those unable to escape the social injustices of their own countries.

All of these complications with the notion of “progress”—Marxism, capitalism, and authoritarianism—are offshoots of the grander argument that “progress” is also a movement through lineal time. Philosophically, nostalgia seeks to return, however impossibly, to an idealized time or place, an action that is denied by natural progress and decline. Dylan Trigg, for example, theorizes the temporal ambivalence of nostalgia when he suggests that the ruins of the past are indicative of our modern society’s desire to preserve when faced with “the acceleration of history” (224). Even though his study, *The Aesthetics of Decay* (2006), mainly focuses on the architecture and monuments, he lays out a very useful argument for how a culture as a whole responds to violence, the past, and how this shapes the present. Trigg suggests that dissolution into ruin is progress, as opposed to renovation and memorialization (especially in museums):

The future of the ruin can only be spoken of in terms of it actively disintegrating. The decline of the ruin occurs when the ruin becomes an artifact. Ruins might well be thought of as living organisms

embodying notions of progress, forgetfulness, and reclamation. We too must learn to forget the ruins themselves, not undermining their memory by striving to immortalize them as museum pieces of a given age but delighting in the possibility of the memory becoming indeterminate, and thus endless. In a culture that has dispensed with the idea of reason providing the pathway to a golden future, stipulated upon the resurrection of an equally golden past, no space remains for prolonged nostalgia. Nostalgia pre-supposes something that is fundamentally incompatible with the ontology of decline: namely, that there can be a homecoming whereof the home is absent. (249)

Nostalgia is diametrically opposed to progress (or, for Trigg, decline) because it demonstrates a longing for the past that contradicts progress evidenced by dissolution into ruin. Hence, the poetry of this study, obsessed with the past, could be said to be anti-progress in that it refuses to allow for a complete dissolution into ruin of remembered people or places. This poetry insists on exploring home because the poets are excluded from it in exile; they can no longer return home, either physically or temporally, even though nostalgia suggests a possibility (however remote) that the home—now idealized—has been spared progress into ruin.

It is imperative to recognize that the objects of nostalgia—Trigg’s “home” of which there can be no homecoming—do not always directly correspond with the cause of loss and separation. For Juan Gelman, the home is symbolized by his deceased mother and disappeared son. For Ferreira Gullar, home is the city of his

birth, and the sentiment he felt upon leaving it as a young man is a precursor for the pain experienced when he was exiled from Brazil. For Gonzalo Millán, home is the city of Santiago, as well as its inhabitants and the social intersubjectivity of the group identity. Just because there is no home (temporal or physical) to which the poets of this study can return does not mean that they cannot nostalgically long for or idealize it. John J. Su succinctly postulates in his dissertation entitled *Postmodern Nostalgia* (1999):<sup>16</sup>

Nostalgia is the longing to establish an impossible intimacy with a place of origin, a longing that conceals the impossibility of fulfillment by claiming to have experienced this intimacy in the past. Nostalgia responds to real conditions of loss, but the lost objects it conceives of do not necessarily correspond to the actual experiences of loss that initiated it. (242)

This lack of correspondence is played out in the exile texts of Juan Gelman, Ferreira Gullar and Gonzalo Millán in that the objects (or people) of nostalgic longing do not represent the factors that caused them to leave their homelands. Gelman, in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* and *Carta a mi madre*, writes letters to his deceased mother and missing son. His epistolary poetry wails with grief, reflecting the pain of loss of his family members that represent stability and his home in Argentina. Ferreira Gullar, on the other hand, recreates through memory the city of his birth (São Luís do Maranhão, Brazil) in *Poema Sujo*. Even though he has not lived in that city for much

of his adult life, he likens his exile from Brazil to being separated from his childhood home. Like Gullar, Gonzalo Millán explores the urban sphere of Santiago de Chile in *La ciudad*. The city becomes an object of longing while the poet is exiled in Canada, and authoritarian control of the city is inversed in the poem in favor of socialized, collective memory of a time pre-dictatorship.

These poets were all exiled from authoritarian states that, through violent means, were implementing structures in place of socialist-leaning governments (or powerful socio-political groups) of the 1960s and early 1970s. The *cartas* of Juan Gelman (Argentina) do not explicitly include economic factors, perhaps because the *Proceso* of 1976-1983 was, at first, as much about “reorganizing” and “re-establishing order”—however violently—as it was about economic policies (Alberto Romero 212-215). However, the poetry of Ferreira Gullar (Brazil) directly treats unequal modernization and social inequality as a descriptor of his native São Luis do Maranhão. The poetry of Gonzalo Millán, more than that of the other two of this study, directly responds to the implementation of capitalism in Chile during Pinochet’s rule.

Consequently, in these texts contemporary nostalgia is a direct affront to the favoring of the newer model over the old. While this paradigm most directly relates to the poetry of Gonzalo Millán, I propose, in a general sense, that it could be applied to Gelman and Gullar, as well, if the socio-economic tenants of capitalism are held as symbols for broader ideals of modernization and “progress.” To this end, I concur with Idelber Avelar’s assertion that, in the transition to a market economy post-

repression, commodification and the push for the “newest model” negate history and memory because continued emphasis is placed on progress and the future: “Growing commodification negates memory because new commodities must always replace previous commodities, send them to the dustbin of history” (2). Avelar also proposes in *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) that one of the projects of the dictatorships in these countries involved the suppression and/or distortion of history, and hence, the collective memory of the people (1-2). While memory as an affront specifically to neoliberalism applies more effectively to Millán’s case, nostalgia, in a broader sense, defies the supposed progress (economic, social, or political) of the Latin American societies from which they were expelled because these poets, in their expelled state, are able to explore their pasts that have created their own identities as well as that of their communities. Ironically, it is because of their exclusion that they are able to express a longing for a past and hope for a future different than that proposed by the authoritarian regimes in their home countries because they are not bound to follow doctrines that force them to forget the past.

While Avelar asserts that the exploration of memory confronts capitalist structures only after the establishment of commodity-driven economies by the dictatorships—in other words, in postdictatorial literature, I maintain that *paradictatorial* functions better to describe the paradigm of writers who explore the losses and alienation of exile through memory and nostalgic idealization while such economies are still being implemented. While Avelar attempts to define



“postdictatorial” in the context of his theories as “not so much the epoch posterior to defeat but rather the moment in which defeat is unapologetically accepted as the irreducible determination upon literary writing in the subcontinent” (16), and he cites Diamela Eltit and Tununa Mercado as two examples of writers active during the dictatorships, the characterization of the rebellion against the authoritarian as a “the topology of defeat” (15) does not fit the authors I study here. I do not believe, in the case of Gelman, Gullar, and Millán, that the “topology of defeat” defines them; their poetry written in exile—while at times a nostalgic mourning that accepts loss—more often actively struggles against the constructs that have caused their losses, precisely because they explore, through memory and nostalgia, a different reality than that of their present, ambiguous state.

While specific differences exist in the implementation of new social, political and economic structures in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in the 1970s and 1980s, similarities provoke a comparative reading of the exile poetry of this study. In Brazil, for example, the populist government of João Goulart was overthrown in 1964, unexpectedly marking the beginning of four years of fevered cultural production of leftist groups; student protests in universities were commonplace and the popular music scene thrived (Avelar 40).<sup>17</sup> The gradual increase of oppression did not cause as many deaths or political exiles as in neighboring Chile and Argentina.<sup>18</sup> However in 1968, the burgeoning popularity of opposition in differing social classes and in all sectors of society was seen by the military leaders as a direct threat to their control, and hence a brutal crackdown ensued on any intellectual activity that could be seen as

opposing the military government (41). Although censorship and armed conflict were common in the streets, a false representation of intellectual and economic prosperity was broadcast through government-controlled media outlets (43).

In Argentina there was also a slow build-up of oppression during these years, beginning with the coup in 1966 that led to the installation of a military government that maintained tight control until the *Cordobazo* rebellions in 1969. As Luis Alberto Romero explains in *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (2002), the 1973 election of a *peronista* government only lasted as long as the previously exiled Perón's trip back from Madrid (203-214). One year later, Perón and his wife, Isabel, won a landslide vote into power, but the ailing Perón died one year later, leaving her in charge until she was deposed by a military coup in 1976. Immediately following, a military *junta* organized the "Process of National Reorganization" and designated power to General Videla until 1978. This period of time was one of brutal censorship and executions, all in the name of curing the "sickness" of Argentinean society.

Similarly in Chile, the overthrow of Salvador Allende's popular coalition government in 1973 inaugurated a period of brutal oppression, immediately causing the flight of thousands. The military dictatorship that followed placed heavy emphasis on Catholic ideology and on the "curing" of the Chilean nation, so nearly ruined in their eyes by the populist left, a similar case to Argentina (Avelar 46). In the years directly following the coup, the majority of media outlets and publishing houses were either state-controlled or heavily censored, and the "official" cultural production authorized by the state was geared more towards the debate about how

best to institutionalize neoliberal market logic in all sectors of social life instead of focusing on questions about the authority in charge per se (ibid.).

While I highlight these historical markers in order to show the parallels between Argentina, Chile and Brazil, the primary focus of my investigation is not about what caused these particular poets to leave but rather how they responded while in exile to their countries' conditions because poetry written under authoritarian control has been signaled, by some, to have special significance. As Francine Masiello states about Chile during these years:

Poetry under military rule set alternative visions of social alliance, revising the status of language and form. As such, from the decade of the 1970s to the years of redemocratization, and as a countervailing force to market-based culture—with its emphasis on “light,” easily engageable texts that enter circulation without provoking conflict or radical signs of dissent—poetry continues to act, unsettling a late-*fin de siglo* preference for totalizing narratives of comfort. (223)

As Masiello puts it, poetry under military rule may respond to and combat official state doctrines and the “sheen of neutrality” that their governments attempted to paint (Masiello 3). Similarly, the poets of this study are thought-provoking and unsettling, while offering a vision of their own countries from a dislocated vantage point. While they nostalgically long for a different reality, they suggest no “totalizing narrative of comfort.” But again, while Avelar’s and Masiello’s books primarily describe

literature written during the transition to democracy, at the end of the dictatorships or shortly thereafter, I propose that many of the characteristics they signal were already in place in the poetry written during the dictatorships, but it was often produced outside of the dictatorships in the paradictatorial space of exile where the poets were not bound by authoritarian political structures.

While many academics have suggested that the poetry of exile demonstrates certain specific tendencies (Olivera-Williams, for example), not as much attention has been paid to comparing specific poetry of the Southern Cone in context of authoritarian regimes. The studies that have been published tend to be on a particular poet or groups of poets (for example Marcelo Couddou's short study of Chilean exile poetry<sup>19</sup>) and largely ignore the correlations between poets of different countries.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, I have chosen poets for this investigation who represent a significant turning point in the poetry of their homelands because of both their exploration of the limits of language and form as well as the perspective they share as exiled writers. Not only is their poetry widely read to this day, but their abundant participation in artistic circles as well as in other social dialogues has elevated their status to that of cultural icons.

Unlike the other two poets of this study, however, the poetry of Juan Gelman has been read extensively both within and beyond the borders of his native Argentina. His poetry is dense, full of linguistic experimentation, and it painfully expresses, as Elena Tamargo suggests, "que el exilio (irse, salir, escapar, renunciar), la muerte y la memoria pueden argumentar y dar cuerpo a la inmaterialidad de la poesía" (12). In

the first chapter, I begin with his work as the best-known example, and analyze two of Gelman's epistolary poems composed in exile: *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* (1980) and *Carta a mi madre* (1989). These complex book-length collections, full of neologisms and linguistic experimentation, demonstrate the tendencies for which Juan Gelman is known and celebrated: concentrated, intense language that shows the raw nature of mourning the death of his family members while in exile. I show that his unreciprocated epistolary poetry is a metaphor for an impossible reunification with his missing family members. More so than with Gullar and Millán, Gelman's poetry underscores the malleability of language, and the difficult expression of the pain and anguish of alienation and loss. For this reason, I read his poetry alongside Jacques Derrida's philosophical text, *The Post Card*, that explores language and correspondence to demonstrate how both the unreciprocated epistolary form and linguistic manipulation is nostalgic, for the letter poems destroy and reconstruct idealized, lost or absent people.

The second chapter treats Ferreira Gullar's book-length collection, *Poema Sujo*, first published in 1976 but written in exile the year before in Argentina. Gullar is widely considered as one of the most influential Brazilian poets of the twentieth century. Gullar's poetry explores language and poetic tropes, but within a culturally-specific context—*saudades* and *antropofagia*, for example. Similar to Gelman, his poetry is experimental, a fact that Charles Perrone signals as one of the reasons for Gullar's continued prominence in Brazilian literary circles: "Gullar challenges rationality and confronts the limits of his instrument and of literary experience"

(Perrone 23). The main collection of poetry that I analyze by Gullar is *Poema Sujo*, a long and fragmented text that proposes a “sprawling, tough, raw and bluntly direct indictment of Brazilian life” (Perrone 7). Denounced as being an active member of the Communist party under a strict military dictatorship in 1970, Gullar fled his native Brazil only to find himself in increasingly turbulent societies; first traveling to Buenos Aires, Gullar later moved to Paris, then Moscow, Santiago de Chile, Lima, and finally, to Buenos Aires again, all in the space of six years. He returned to Brazil in 1977 despite continual interrogations by the police. It is during the time away from Brazil he wrote what is widely considered to be his most influential work, *Poema Sujo*, in which he nostalgically returns to the city of his birth. Gullar’s poem is not only a nostalgic lament for the loss of childhood innocence, but also a commentary on Brazil’s complicated and uneven modernization. For example, the repeated references to flying over his country in a modern jet suggest both the poet’s reaction to the rapid modernization of his country and his spatial dislocation from his homeland. Nostalgia is a response to his own exclusion and expulsion through exile, and to how it mirrors the exclusion of Brazil from first-world privileges as well as those who are politically and socially excluded within Brazil due to its unequal modernization.<sup>21</sup>

The final chapter explores Gonzalo Millán’s celebration of the communal memory as a direct rebellion against objectifying capitalism in *La ciudad* (1979). Nostalgia, in his poem, is an inversion of time and a return to pre-dictatorship Chile. Gonzalo Millán’s poetic career began with the publication of *Relación personal* in

1968 and, hence, he is considered a member of the *generación de los sesenta*. The objective and the (inter)subjective nature of history clash in his later poetry, even though, as Carmen Foxley points out, the play between the objective and the subjective were early characteristics of the *generación de los sesenta*:

. . . el rasgo más destacable es la sistemática experimentación de diversos modos de objetivar la experiencia. Ellos hacen como que las cosas se presentaran independientes de su productor, aunque de hecho no se evitan las mediatizaciones sensoriales y cognoscitivas que determinan una aguda, sensible e inédita percepción de la realidad.  
(132)

After leaving Chile in 1973, he first took up residence in San José, Costa Rica. He later moved to Canada, where *La ciudad* was first published. This text, like Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, is a series of fragments that focus on daily life. However, there is a dark current that runs through the text, and the cast of characters reacts to their world in a muffled and taut way, suggesting hidden danger. In this chapter, a direct link is made between the "shock doctrine" of Pinochet's economic, social, and political reforms and the nostalgic, paradiatorial recreation of Santiago de Chile by Millán in exile.

The process of quantifying the exile experience is fraught with contentious and loaded queries of the past, the present and the future. An examination of the exile poetry of Juan Gelman, Ferreira Gullar and Gonzalo Millán shows that the nostalgic longing for people and places from which the poets are excluded is as much an

exploration of their own identities as it is a response to, and in some cases, a rebellion against an authoritarian system that disavows memory of the past in favor of progress and modernization by any means.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The *jarchas*, written in colloquial early Spanish, Hebrew and Arabic, could be said to be the first poems of loss in a traditionally nostalgic sense in the Hispanic literary tradition. These laments, characterized by the female poetic voice, often mourned a lost love.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the testimonial, see the collection of essays edited by Georg M. Gugelberger, *The Real Thing Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Boym's characterization of modernization is a general "fascination with newness" and "reinvention of tradition" that often follows revolution (xvi-xvii).

<sup>4</sup> Santesso only briefly engages Boym's study to support his own reading of nostalgia as a fundamental idealization of the past: "Even when a critic such as Svetlana Boym complicates the definition of nostalgia by arguing for the existence of different nostalgic types (for her, these are the positive 'reflective nostalgia' and dangerous 'restorative nostalgia'), those types remain modes of desire for the past." (16) He goes on to clarify that "nostalgia . . . is not a desire for the past per se; nor is it ever an emotion rooted in empirical reality or concrete autobiography. Rather, it is a longing for objects that are idealized, impersonal, and unattainable. A work may look to the past; it is only truly nostalgic if that past is idealized." (16)

<sup>5</sup> I thank Dr. Sarah Gendron for suggesting that these descriptions do not seem that different than idealization, a characteristic that I highlight as fundamental to modern nostalgia theory. It is important to point out that Hirsch and Spitzer are summarizing several traditional readings of nostalgia, hence the quotes. Taken together, these descriptors do sound like idealization—a fact that I do not argue. Rather, it is the negative connotation of many of these descriptors that I believe more recent theories of nostalgia seek to dismiss.

<sup>6</sup> Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone offer perhaps one of the best collections of essays on memory and truth in the context of historical identity and nation-building. In their

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introduction, they explicitly state that, despite a recent boom in memory studies, “a brief survey of recent works on historiography suggests that memory has had surprisingly little impact on historical writing or on theorisations of history” (3).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffery K. Olick explores the problematic relationships between official "History" and personal memory by criticizing the perception that history is a hegemonic, objective truth. See also Hodkins and Radstone where they investigate how memory may "challenge dominant or privileged narratives" (1).

<sup>8</sup> See Susana Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror*, (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2005) 2.

<sup>9</sup> See Elizabeth Jelín and Susana G. Kaufman, “Layers of Memories: Twenty Years After in Argentina.” *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 89-110.

<sup>10</sup> It is widely acknowledged that, for many of the intellectuals working inside their countries, writing about the turbulent political climate was tantamount to rebelling against the establishment, especially against the forces that sought to establish a new Latin American modernity by creating governments that used torture and disappearance to eradicate opposition. María Rosa Olivera-Williams succinctly sums up the tactics of the Southern Cone dictatorships (in her case, referring to Chile, Argentina and Uruguay) as an “ataque contra la cultura. La censura, el miedo, el exilio, la cárcel, la muerte les sirvieron a los usurpadores del poder para acallar las voces contestatarias” (125).

<sup>11</sup> “Para-,” *English Plus*, 1999, 21 July 2009 <<http://englishplus.com/news/news1199.htm>> or *Dictionary.com*, 2009, 21 July 2009 <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/para->>.

<sup>12</sup> See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) for more on “splitting”.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Cohen also treats splitting in *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001) but from the perspective of perpetrators of violence. He posits

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that there are four types of splitting, a “denial of responsibility”: limited or situational morality, means-end dissociation, moral balance, and bad faith and role distance (92-95).

<sup>14</sup> Grínor Rojo explains that, at the end of the late-twentieth century, the “triumfo del capitalismo en nuestros países en las últimas décadas del siglo XIX es un acontecimiento cuyo impacto es desentrañable en todos y cada uno de los sistemas que componen el cuerpo social” (46). *Crítica del exilio: ensayos sobre literatura latinoamericana actual*, (Santiago: Pehuén Editores, Ltda., 1987).

<sup>15</sup> The fact that at least one of the poets (Gelman) was explicitly involved with a socialist group (the Montoneros, in Gelman’s case) makes the problem between progress and nostalgia even greater. Since the Montoneros, a leftist group that chose armed conflict to further their socialist agenda shows that the Marxism of the Southern Cone was also concerned with “progress”. Gelman broke with the Montoneros in 1979 because of growing disillusionment at their violent methods. Gullar was branded a communist under Castelo Branco’s regime, although he mainly participated in and directed youth cultural centers.

<sup>16</sup> Su’s study considers several contemporary novels (from Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*). Since his study was published in 1999, the nostalgia theory on which he basis his argument does not overlap with mine (published post 2001). I believe, in a broader sense, Su’s concept of nostalgia is based on traditional models that consider it a utopian, often melancholy, longing for the past.

<sup>17</sup> I use Avelar’s work to establish the historical timeline of the events of the Southern Cone because his project, in collaboration with others, provides a framework for my own investigation. Other broad historical (political and economic) perspectives are offered by Nicola Phillips in *The Southern Cone Model: The Political Economy of Regional Capitalist Development in Latin America*, (London: Routledge, 2004) and Wolfgang S. Heinz and Hugo Frühling in *Determinants of Gross Human Rights Violations by State and State-sponsored Actors in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina 1960-1990*, (London: Kluwer Law International, 1999). For individual countries’ perspectives, see

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Brian Loveman's *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Lincoln Gordon's *Brazil's Second Chance*, (Washington D.C.: The Century Foundation, 2001) and Luis Alberto Romero's *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. James P. Brennan (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Lincoln Gordon offers a different view than that of Avelar in *Brazil's Second Chance* (2001). Gordon suggests that the military governance in the years 1964-1985 did have an interest in maintaining a strict adherence to human rights doctrines (9), and he suggest that "the regime's enthusiasm for economic development has often been attributed to a narrow desire to maintain military rule." Gordon suggests, "That view disregards the more obvious motive, belief by the rulers that successful development could help meet both a collective desire for enhanced national stature and the individual desires of most Brazilians" (73). Needless to say, there is a discrepancy between Avelar's perspective and that of Gordon's, a political economist.

<sup>19</sup> See Marcelo Coddou, "Poesía Chilean en el Exilio," *Araucaria* 14 (1981): 99-111.

<sup>20</sup> Jill S. Kuhnheim suggests that there are not as many studies on the postmodern in poetry because of "a renewed importance of narrative or storytelling to global studies" and "may also be due to a changing audience for the lyric in the late twentieth century: it is frequently seen as a genre with an emphasis on language and its conventions that link it to high art, offering limited mass cultural appeal" (2).

<sup>21</sup> I would like to thank Paul Sneed for describing how Brazilian cultural studies have moved away from theories of *opressão* and *marginalização* to *exclusão*. I find the term *exclusion* to be most appropriate when describing the societal inequities in Brazil, a situation that I will describe more in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 1

### *Hijando: Nostalgia in Juan Gelman's Epistolary Poetry*

Juan Gelman (1930) closes his letter to his deceased mother with an inversion of the roles of mother and son. Their separation transforms the mother—a mystical figure of power during his childhood—into a howling infant:

. . . se crecieron la mirra  
y el incienso que sembraste en mi vez/dejá que  
te perfumen/acompañen tu gracia/mi alma  
calce tu transcurrir a nada/  
todavía recojo azucenas que habrás dejado aquí  
para que mire el doble rostro de tu amor/  
mecer tu cuna/lavar tus pañales/para que no me  
dejes nunca más/  
sin avisar/sin pedirme permiso/  
aullabas cuando te separé de mí/  
ya no nos perdonemos/ (339)

This inversion suggests that he, not his mother, cried upon his separation from his mother and, symbolically, his motherland of Argentina. *Carta abierta a mi hijo* (1980) and *Carta a mi madre* (1989), both written during Juan Gelman's prolonged exile, present two collections of epistolary poetry directed to Gelman's absent family members; the former is comprised of twenty-five poems that compulsively seek to

discover the whereabouts of two *desaparecidos* (the poet's disappeared son and his pregnant wife), and the latter is a fragmented and grief-filled elegy to his mother who died from cancer while he was exiled. Gelman uses the epistolary genre to explore and reconstruct his identity after the loss of his country, his mother, and his son. Expressing a longing for home borne of the ambiguous state of exile, Gelman's open letters are nostalgic because they imagine people (mother and son), a time (before exile) and a place (Argentina) that are impossible to reach but desired nonetheless. In this study, we will see that Gelman's epistolary poetry explores memory, the ambiguous present, and a desire for an impossible future, as an act of rebellion against the social and political structures that were being implemented by the military *junta* in Argentina during Gelman's exile.<sup>22</sup> This chapter focuses on the philosophical implications of epistolary poetry in the context of the social and political unrest in the Southern Cone region of Latin America. Gelman employs the epistolary tradition to simultaneously construct and negate a receptor. This act, in turn, represents a nostalgic longing for a past and an unattainable future.

The lines that open this chapter are from *Carta a mi madre* (1989), in which the separation from the mother is a metaphor for Gelman's exile from Argentina in the 1970s. "La suya no fue nunca una versión llorosa del exilio y la lucha, del dolor y la muerte, sino una respuesta entera y viril, lúcida y despojada, sin triunfalismos ni autoderrotas" (Benedetti 51). This affirmation by the late Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti summarizes the power with which Juan Gelman addresses memory, nostalgia, and trauma. Juan Gelman's body of work is compelling, innovative, and as

Eduardo Milán characterizes it, labyrinthine, tracing a prolific career beginning in the early 1950's and culminating in his most recent publications in 2007 (17). Born in Argentina to exiled Ukrainian Jews, Gelman's poetry is marked, from the earliest years, with themes of exile, religion and spirituality, lineage, and social engagement.

*Violín y otras cuestiones* (1956), *Gotán* (1962), and *Los poemas de Sidney West* (1969) represent the most celebrated publications of Gelman's early career, during which he first develops the concepts of *la conciencia social* through the use of heteronyms, "el juego lingüístico y [la] creación de posibilidades verbales" (Milán 11). Many of the themes that appear in this early poetry before his exile in 1976 with the *Pan duro* group will be recast and distilled, becoming the strongest tendencies of his later poetry: "Gelman, pero también Nicanor Parra, Ernesto Cardenal, Roque Dalton, Antonio Cisneros, Benedetti, Fernández Retamar y otros muchos, comenzaban a apostar a una lírica de lo cotidiano, de lo claro, de lo sentimental, de lo irónico, de lo histórico y, sobre todo, de lo social" (Achugar 27). Gelman, whose early body of work demonstrates the above tendencies indicative of a generation of Latin American poetry, differs in his relentless exploration of linguistic manipulation. Unlike the other poets who Achugar signals as contemporaries, Gelman's poetry is a dense and perpetual deconstruction (and reconstruction) of the themes of the quotidian, the sentimental, and the ironic, all produced by the constant renovation of poetic language. Especially after 1970, prolific neologisms (the creation of verbs from nouns, for example), question marks, and other innovative punctuation make his poetry unique.

The poetry of the latter half of Gelman's career, that which arose out of the turmoil of dictatorships, exile, and re-stabilization, is widely read as part of a larger trend of intellectual activity tied to the socio-political events of Latin America. This characteristic is widely-commented in academic circles, and, I would argue, one of the reasons for Gelman's popularity throughout the world. Geneviève Fabry, for example, elaborately traces Gelman's poetic production with the unfolding socio-political turbulence in Argentina in *Las formas del vacío*. Her study focuses on this relationship as a symbolic *duelo*, both in its combative sense as well as a period of mourning for something lost.<sup>23</sup>

La poesía de Juan Gelman despliega, a lo largo de casi cincuenta años de producción, un lenguaje candente, agónico, en el que se urde un combate contra la injusticia del mundo, y contra las máscaras interiores de la mezquindad. El duelo como combate apunta pues no sólo a la dimensión política presente en el conjunto de la obra de Gelman sino también a un proceso de depuración del intimismo y de sus trampas. (25)

I concur with Fabry's assertion that Gelman's poetry combats social injustices as well as exploring the nature of personal identity, however I propose in this study that the purging that Fabry suggests as a characteristic of mourning can be understood as a nostalgic rereading of the past and an idealization of the absent mother and son from the paradictatorial space of exile.



Gelman's case is not unique; he, like Chilean Gonzalo Millán and Ferreira Gullar from Brazil who will be discussed later in this study, escaped brutal oppression in his own country.<sup>24</sup> But, as Fabry's detailed study shows, the violent events in Argentina are displayed in Gelman's poetry post-1973 by profoundly pained linguistic expression, stylistic experimentation and testimonial themes (14-15). After a publishing hiatus that follows the first ten years of Gelman's exile, he publishes *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* (1980), followed by *Anunciaciones* (1988), *Interrupciones I* (1988), *Interrupciones II* (1988) and *Carta a mi madre* (1989). His most recent books of poetry include *País que fue será* (2004) and *Mundar* (2007), and he continues to publish collections of articles and other prose, such as *Miradas* (2005). The quotidian, sentimental, and socio-political elements that critics observe in his early works are magnified in the *cartas abiertas* published in the 1980's, making them exemplary for the study of nostalgia since they link memory of home and painful longing of a different time and place relative to the poet's exile. These works contribute to his status as one of the most prolific and celebrated poets of Argentina of the latter 20th century. Various prizes—the Premio Juan Rulfo in Mexico, the Premio Reina Sofía in Spain, the Premio Nacional de Poesía in Argentina, and the Premio Cervantes in 2007—all recognize what readers of Gelman's poetry have experienced; his poetry condenses the enlightening but often harrowing process of self-knowledge and actualization, and counters the passivity of denial of the past in the formation of personal and social identity.

The constant renovation of poetic language through multiple stylistic innovations complements Gelman's discourse with wide-ranging figures—poets, philosophers, religious figures, both real and invented. In the context of this study, this discourse will take place with the absent mother and son, as much as it will take place with the public reader of the epistolary *cartas abiertas*. When Jorge Boccanera—poet, journalist and specialist in Gelman's work—says, “el poeta Juan Gelman adentra al lector en su respiración ondulante y naufraga con él” (“Cinco” 25-6), he is referring to the dense nature of the linguistic exploration that demands an attentive reader. I propose that the nature of the relationship between poet/author and reader is fundamental to understanding how linguistic experimentation functions in Gelman's poetry. The malleability of language shows how the fundamental correspondence between signifier and signified can be deconstructed or reconstructed as much as the open letter shows how correspondence can be between one pair or multiple (public) correspondents.

For this reason, the nature of linguistic innovation in Gelman's *cartas* demonstrates a desire for reunification, albeit an impossible one, with his absent correspondents. Exile—a period of mourning and of battle—is the ultimate separation and expulsion for Gelman. During his exile, he nostalgically recuperates, through imagination, those lost during the violence of Argentina's *Guerra sucia*. In his seminal study of Gelman's works, *Confiar en el misterio*, Boccanera paraphrases the words of psychoanalyst Edmundo Gómez Camargo: “...el exilio plantea un duelo por aquello que ha desaparecido del presente pero que continúa vivo en una especie

de tiempo paralelo avivado por la imaginación” (176). As such, I rely on Boccanera’s theories as a starting point for my own investigation; Gelman’s exile poetry is the ultimate expression of expulsion and desire for reunification, a longing for physical and spiritual union and resolution (“Cinco” 40-42).

The present chapter explores this desire for union within the framework of nostalgia that many critics insinuate (Tamargo, Sillato) but seldom elaborate. Even though critics (Boccanera, for example) point to the importance of memory and the desire for union, questions remain as to how this fits into the larger context of exile and nostalgia for a different past and future. Boccanera, explicitly uses the word “nostalgia” in various publications, but he does not explain what nostalgia means in the context of the linguistic innovation or socio-political context of exile. For example, he postulates that the mother in *Carta a mi madre* represents an archetypal figure of broken unity in the poetry of Gelman, as well as that of the Latin American canon in general. Citing the last few lines as key to the conceptualization of the mother figure, he states, “La clave de este libro está en uno de sus versos finales: ‘¿soy el que vos morís?’ El extrañamiento gira sobre la unidad rota, la nostalgia del ‘uno en el otro’ que llevaron a su máxima expresión místicos españoles como Santa Teresa y San Juan de la Cruz” (*Confiar* 192). The theme of nostalgia appears again in one of Boccanera’s later studies, “Gelman despliega su nostalgia, la del que pide a cada paso vivir, como los místicos, uno en el otro” (“Cinco” 42). In a summary of an interview with Gelman, Boccanera states that “...la relación entre imaginación y memoria es tan intensa que crea otra memoria. De este modo, esa imaginación

frondosa es la herramienta con la que interroga pasado, presente y al porvenir” (“Conversaciones” 196). Since memory and nostalgia are suggested multiple times by Boccanera as metaphors for loss and a desire for reunification—although no reading of how this nostalgia functions is offered—my study shows that Gelman’s epistolary poetry to a non-existent intended reader is inherently nostalgic in its deconstruction, idealization, and subsequent reconstruction of the figures of the absent mother and missing son.<sup>25</sup>

Other critics have shown how a longing for reunification in Gelman’s poetry operates through a system of open circuits of the unreciprocated epistolary, although they stop short of calling it a nostalgic desire for return. María del Carmen Sillato, for example, investigates how the epistolary tradition in Gelman’s *cartas* demonstrates the desire for recuperation:

el deseo profundo del poeta de recuperar a través de la escritura a esos otros que son parte de sí—su hijo, su madre--, o que se han integrado a sus vivencias individuales gracias al cariño y a la amistad, como Paco [Urondo]. El género epistolar implica en sí un intento de comunicación más allá de que el circuito se complete o no con la respuesta. (110)

Sillato suggests that the epistolary genre serves as a painful metaphor for impossible return as a desire to recuperate through writing those whom he has lost because of or during his exile. While I agree with Sillato’s affirmation that the epistolary is a

symbol of incomplete (or variable) communication, I argue that specific linguistic manipulations in the text also reveal the impossibility of direct correspondence.

Elena Tamargo's seminal study, *Juan Gelman: Poesía de la sombra de la memoria*, most closely approximates the scope of my investigation, although she, like Boccanera and Sillato, only mentions nostalgia in passing as a kind of memory recuperation: "Y la nostalgia qué es si no la recuperación sublimada en la memoria, gozada y sufrida a la vez, de algo que existió, algo que fuimos y perdimos para siempre" (12). Tamargo's study explores the philosophical ways in which memory functions as an interiorization of identity of the poet and his mother in *Carta a mi madre*. Indeed, her study offers a companion to that of Fabry since both use Derrida as a theoretical backbone in the study of the *duelo* as an act of memory recuperation. Much like the other above critical studies, Tamargo considers nostalgia as a kind of memory, but she ignores what the nostalgic longing implies for Gelman's poetry in the context of exile from authoritarian regimes that implemented memory-erasing capitalism. Even though she considers *Carta a mi madre* an "extraordinaria elegía" (Tamargo 181), she does not explore what nostalgia could explain about the nature of identity construct in the context of the unreciprocated epistolary.

Even while Boccanera, Sillato, and Tamargo point towards the desire for return and nostalgia in Gelman's epistolary poetry, no study has been done to date with this focus, including Fabry's profoundly detailed investigation of mourning and longing. Hence, this study will focus on two of Gelman's *cartas*—*Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* (1980) and *Carta a mi madre* (1989)—to explore how nostalgia is produced

in the context of an epistolary tradition that, because of his exile, is linked to impossible unification and return. Gelman's *cartas* push the limits of language to describe extreme psychological distress beyond sadness, mourning, or worry. Stylistically weaving together elements from preceding Latin American *vanguardistas*<sup>26</sup> and the postmodern deconstruction of traditional modes of language and genre<sup>27</sup> that would dominate the years following the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, Gelman explores a crisis of communication that both emphasizes and seeks to destroy boundaries, be they national borders, generational hierarchies, or the separation between the reader and the text. By writing epistolary poetry to his deceased mother and to his disappeared son, Gelman longs for an impossible present, a past that preceded the traumatic experience of exile (the embodiment of expulsion, physical separation, and anxiety), and a future in which his son is alive. Gelman's *cartas abiertas* do not seem nostalgic in the conventional sense; while they convey a great deal of emotion, they never explicitly or obviously long for the lost home of Argentina, nor do they bemoan the poet's exile. The insipid melancholy that some consider to be the mark of a nostalgic text is not present in Gelman's *cartas*.<sup>28</sup> There are no overt exclamations or apostrophes longing for a lost place or an absent person that one may expect in a nostalgic poem. Rather, the complicated composite of the epistolary form and linguistic manipulations in the poems evokes a nostalgic reading because of the impossibility of rejoining or reunification with a lost family, the deceased mother and the disappeared son. The symbolic nature of the absent family

suggests a desire for a return to a time before the poet's exile and a desire for an impossible future.

An analysis of Gelmanian nostalgia, therefore, will necessarily consider several areas of interest: the epistolary genre and the *verse epistle*, the inability of language to reproduce affect, the intellectual participation of the reader, and the context of exile. The first part of my study considers the epistolary genre in general to see how Gelman's *cartas* pertain to this tradition. The subsequent section punctuates the lack of a receptor (even though the epistolary genre presumes the receptor exists), and I will dialogue with Jacques Derrida's theories of the *fort:da* explored in *The Post Card* (1987) to show that Gelman's *cartas* are simultaneously *a fortiori* and *a priori*. By exploiting the lack of correspondence in the open-system of the *cartas*, by mutating language so that no one single possible meaning exists, and by inverting and refracting the identities of his mother and son, Gelman destroys the traditional binary relationship of the epistolary tradition, and nostalgia is the simultaneous negation of and desire for a recipient. The third section will focus more immediately on a close reading of *Carta a mi madre* to explore nostalgia for the past through postmemory. To this end, I use Marianne Hirsch's theories of postmemory to explore the importance of lineage and transgenerational memory in the formation of identity. The last section considers nostalgia for the future in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* through an analysis of linguistic experimentation and neologisms relating to the missing son and grandchild.

## The Epistolary Tradition and Gelman's *cartas*: The Desire for a Receptor

The opening lines of Gelman's *Carta a mi madre* put into question the existence of the addressee since it is clear that the letter is directed to someone who has died:

recibí tu carta 20 días después de tu muerte y  
cinco minutos después de saber que habías muerto  
/una carta que el cansancio, decías, te  
interrumpió/te habían visto bien por entonces/  
aguda como siempre/activa a los 85 años de  
edad pese a las tres operaciones contra el cáncer  
que finalmente te llevó/ (329)

The letter is simultaneously directed towards us, public readers, and another, more intimate reader. We have the sensation of spying, snooping through someone else's correspondence when we read, "recibí tu carta . . .", as if we were involved in a dialogue or on-going conversation that was not necessarily meant for us to witness, even though the nature of the epistolary genre determines our participation.

However, if the nature of the convergence and/or confusion of the intended reader and the actual recipient of the letter is disorienting, the discovery that the addressee has recently died could be unsettling to the public reader. The description of the reader's final demise, a lost battle against cancer, is somewhat dark, and calls to mind Begoña López Bueno's characterization of the epistolary as elegiac in the symbolic and literal death of one of the correspondents (23).



Active reader participation is required for most any literary text, but the intense personal relationship that the reader develops with Gelman's addressees (recalling aforementioned Boccanera's assertion) seems to inherently go against the presumed private system of personal correspondence at the same time it establishes a connection with the larger trend of epistolary literature. The reader may intensely identify with the intended recipient of the *carta*, but could be simultaneously repulsed by the identification with a dead, nonexistent entity. The *verse epistle*—the poem in letter form or the letter in the form of a poem—was first explored in early Latin and Greek texts and perfected by Horace and Ovid. The former developed the epistolary poem as a forum for philosophical and moral explorations, while the latter utilized it as a vehicle for romantic or sentimental ends. The epistolary poem was exploited most at the peak of the Renaissance, with a general preference for the Horatian style due to its “common diction, personal details, and . . . plain style to lend familiarity to [its] philosophical subjects” (“verse epistle” 1351). Consequently, a great deal of the academic investigations into the tradition of the epistolary poem tradition in Spanish revolve around the broad usage of the form in the *Siglo de Oro* through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with an emphasis on classification of the epistolary and its function within a relatively closed group of well-read, socially-interconnected writers.

The letter form, then, would seem like a natural genre for Gelman to explore given the prevalence in his larger body of work of discourse with real or imagined literary, philosophical, and religious thinkers. As Lilián Uribe points out, the fact that Gelman dialogues with these texts from the past (or, in the case of *Citas y*

*comentarios*, with several of the great mystic poets of medieval Spain, such as Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz) reflects his way of reading the world and history (111). The *carta abierta*, or open letter, is explored by Gelman in both verse and prose. While his epistolary poems are generally found in collections published during his exile in the 1970s and 1980s, Gelman continues to employ the open letter as a tactical approach to making his private affairs a public call-to-arms in support of human rights both in Argentina and beyond. The collection of reprinted correspondence between Gelman and the President of Uruguay (“Carta abierta al doctor Julio María Sanguinetti” and “Respuesta del Presidente Sanguinetti a Juan Gelman”), as well as other letters of support for Gelman and human rights in general (“Carta del Sup Marcos para Juan Gelman 5.56 mm. NATO [el calibre de la mentira]” and “Una carta de Quino”) show how this methodology goes beyond the poetic and extends into essays and epistolary prose (“Brumaire”). Taken singularly, these letters could be read as powerful yet circumscribed texts that implore action by the reader, even while the “open” letter invites participation by a wider public. As a group, however, these letters show a *modus operandi*: the use of the letter form as a method for making traumatizing events public, efforts at coping with them, as well as the network of relationships relied upon for both moral and political support.

The joining of the addressee of the letter and the public (the reader with the letter-poem in hand) is one of the problematics of the epistolary genre, and also comes to play while reading Gelman’s *cartas*. As William Dowling suggests:

As in epic or lyric, in short, the formal features of verse operate in the poetic epistle to signal its status as public object, but only in epistolary verse, which has begun by announcing its own discourse as that of an isolated voice or consciousness, the letter-writer facing the blankness of the page, does this work out to the resolution of a paradox, an attempt to redeem solitude in the name of community. (8-9)

The epistolary poem fulfills both public and private functions; it creates a space for the writer to work out a private issue, either on the page or in a “conversation” with the intended receptor, and provides for public involvement in the resolution/discussion of that issue. The concept of the letter implies a writer, a specific *I*, and receptor or addressee, while the open letter suggests that that recipient may not exist or may not respond. The implied reader, therefore, fuses with the reader of the poem, producing a confluence of identities; “you” becomes “me, the reader of this poem” and places the reader in a complex position of intimacy with the poetic voice. While a private letter is intended for one addressee, the publication of an open letter makes it available to a wider audience, fusing the private addressee with the public.

Begoña López Bueno furthers the definition of the epistolary poem as a natural sphere for the complications of exile by pointing to the relationship between the epistolary and the real or metaphorical exile of the author. Although referring primarily to verse epistles from the *siglo de oro*, her argument supports a reading of Gelman’s *cartas*:

Estamos en realidad ante elegías epistolares (o, si se quiere, epístolas elegíacas), en las que, sean o no de tema amoroso, el locutor poético, lejos de interpretar el papel de sujeto-modelo, tan propio de la línea horaciana, asume el de desterrado (real o metafórico) en un exilio tanto exterior como interior. (23)

The epistolary verse of the exile, then, underscores the metaphorical and the literal separations of the writer and the addressee. The death of the addressee (and thus, the elegiac form) may be real or may represent symbolically the impossibility of union. The epistolary, therefore, treads in subjective waters where personal experience and the active participation of the addressee, real or metaphorical, are necessary agents in the formation of meaning.

Sam Hamill, quoting Thomas McGrath, underlines the importance of the writer's experience to the genre of epistolary poetry when he states, "The letter poem is, for the poet, 'the difficult homage of personal existence,' as all being is first personal, then universal. Its declarative nature permits the poet a freedom of commitment and subjective experience utterly alien to other genres" [*sic*] (234). Taken as a whole, Hamill, López Bueno, and Dowling's affirmations about the epistolary offer tools for a reading of Gelman's *cartas* as a meeting of public and private space, where "private" is the poet's negotiation of the disturbing and difficult reality of exile and loss, in Gelman's case, literal instead of solely metaphorical.

As can be expected from the above commentaries regarding the confluence of the receptor and the reader, many treatments of the epistolary emphasize the role of

the reader. Anne Bower explains, “Although literature in general can prompt our own intellectual and emotional insights and reappraisals, for each of us some forms of literature stimulate response more readily than others. For me, the epistolary is such a form” (3). The accessibility of the letter form, the confluence of the private and the public, as well as the inherently emotional tone that many epistolary poems foster provide a fertile paradigm with which the reader becomes involved.

### **Derridaean *fort:da* and the Rupture of Epistolary Correspondence in Gelman’s *cartas***

Even though the epistolary tradition presupposes direct correspondence between the poet and the reader, Gelman *cartas* disrupt this system because the intended reader of the letters is either dead (the mother figure) or disappeared (the son). By applying the Derridaean *fort:da* to Gelman’s *cartas*, we see that the epistolary tradition where the simple binary is assumed becomes a system of constant overlapping, inversion, and refraction. The opening lines to the mother at once propose and destroy a series of binary systems (mother/son, addressee/addressor) in that the mother, deceased, ceases to serve as receptor to Gelman’s letter. These lines, then, manifest Jacques Derrida’s affirmation that the transference of meaning has no direct path. While Derrida uses the epistolary form of *The Post Card* to philosophically explore phenomenological structures relating to the sign and the signified, he proves that imprecision of the relay between addressee and addressor calls into question any simple binary relationships, such as that set up in the first few

lines of *Carta a mi madre*. Derrida's *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* is a text that works as both methodology and a practice of how language, like the postal system, does not guarantee a receptor. Employing the postal metaphor, Derrida states:

No, the very idea of destination includes analytically the idea of death; like a predicate (p) included in the subject (S) of destination, the addressee or the addressor. And you are, my love unique the proof, the living proof precisely, that a letter can always not arrive at its destination, and that therefore it never arrives.<sup>29</sup>  
(*Post Card 33*)

Since Derrida is writing an open-ended post card to an invented reader, symbolically the destination equals death. No recipient exists, therefore the letter “can always not arrive” at its destination. Similarly, Gelman subverts the system of direct correspondence by affirming that the intended recipient (his mother) has died. The system of relays of information between Gelman and his mother has been interrupted; in his letter, the mother literally dies, just as the “always not arriving” of Derrida’s letter (or meaning) symbolically equals death.

While Derrida does not focus his investigation on nostalgia, two principal applications of *The Post Card* support how Gelman’s *cartas* are nostalgic: the epistolary as a form (or metaphor) for communication and the (dis)formation of meaning, and the language play and manipulation as the constant system of relays

(Derrida's *différance*). The genre-bending form of *The Post Card* offers a provocative parallel for Juan Gelman's *cartas*. A philosophical approach to language, *The Post Card* is comprised of two main sections—"Envois" and "To Speculate-on 'Freud'"—that simultaneously theorize and perform Derrida's theories on the meaning of language. At first read, the post cards themselves that form the "Envois" present one end of a series of correspondences to a lover, while the front "sides" of these cards depict the figures of Socrates and Plato in a (spatial) relationship that Derrida finds both immensely amusing and provocative. However, the post cards in the "Envois" present less of a methodological statement or hypothesis than an exercise in the impossibility of direct communication between two people via the metaphor of the postal system. Derrida explains that he writes

less in order to attempt a psychoanalysis of the postal effect than to start from a singular event, Freudian psychoanalysis, and to refer to a history and a technology of the *courrier*, to some general theory of the *envoi* and of everything which by means of some telecommunication allegedly *destines* itself. (*Post Card 3*)

The metaphor of the postal system, a transferal of meaning from one person/place to another, outlines the impossibility of direct communication within any dichotomous structure. In this way, a gap and a possible transference or change of meaning will always exist. What Derrida (the supposed writer) writes on the back of the post cards, for example, may or may not be interpreted by the reader (or possible readers) in any singular way. In fact, not only is the meaning in flux, but the problem of

authenticity of identity of the writer (origin) and the reader (receptor) is called in to question:

Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address? Without any desire to surprise, and thereby to grab attention by means of obscurity, I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say that I do not know . . . That the signers and the addressees are not always visibly and necessarily identical from one *envoi* to the other, that the signers are not inevitably to be confused with the senders, not the addressees with the receivers, that is with the readers (*you* for example), etc.—you will have the experience of all of this, and sometimes will feel it quite vividly, although confusedly. (5)

The epistolary genre in which Derrida is writing is a system of relays of meaning, never reproductions of experience, and the reader plays an integral part in the relay of meanings. The reader creates the meaning along with the writer; the system of correspondences functions on the postal/epistolary level and the level of transference of meaning.

What does this mean for Gelman's epistolary poetry? First and foremost, the reader of Gelman's *cartas* becomes inexorably involved in the creation of meaning of the very text being read. While this may be true of all texts, the explicit casting of the "you" as deceased implies more active participation by the reader, serving to spotlight his or her participation in the epistolary system that Gelman establishes in his *cartas*. While both the letter to his mother and the letter to his son have explicitly identified



addressees, the reader of the poems is, in effect, co-creating the meaning and experience of pain and loss of loved ones. Consequently, it is especially important to recognize the fundamental relationship between the reader and the intended addressee via the system of relays and transferences between them and the sender/author in the creation of the exile's nostalgic view of his family and homeland. Thus, Gelman's *cartas* with no addressee are nostalgic because they imagine an intended reader while simultaneously opening themselves for multiple, public readers.

When read together, *Carta a mi madre* and *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* function as diametrical mirrors that reflect back Gelman's longing for reunification, a Derridaean *fort:da* of anguish and anxiety at his own situation of exile. Derrida's theory *fort:da* negates the direct correlation between cause and effect or direct representation of meaning through language. Derrida's philosophy of *fort:da* challenges the original concept of the *fort:da* as first explored by Freud who based his theory on and observation of a child of 18 months who develops his own game of making a toy disappear and reappear again. The child repeats what is understood to be "fort" (gone) and "da" (there), and as Freud states, "This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return" (*Beyond 9*). Freud argues soon after that this game must have prepared the child for the permanent absence of his mother (her death) since he had suffered no apparent traumatic reaction. Generally speaking, Freud developed this theory to establish that the game played by the child is a way to navigate personal trauma, suggesting that pleasure is derived from mastering the painful aspect of the disappearance.

To a certain degree, it would appear that Gelman plays a similar game in his epistolary poetry by employing a Freudian *fort:da* game of simultaneously destroying and recreating his deceased mother and disappeared son through his letters. While Gelman destroys and recreates both figures in a classic Freudian *fort:da* construction, the manipulated linguistic and temporal markers also suggest a compulsion of inversion, in the case of the mother, and of refraction of the ephemeral existence of the son. Rather than a traditional *fort:da* binary relationship, Gelman compulsively destroys and recreates his mother, but with the desire to invert natural flow of time and genealogy. The son's whereabouts are not known like the mothers, hence Gelman refracts, as opposed to direct reflection, his son's identity. *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)*, were it a mirror, would project a deflected vision of both the poet's pain and suffering and the identity of the son, not a clear image of the son nor of the poet.

The direct discourse of the *fort:da* is ineffective given that a system of referents replaces the binary relationship (mother:son, father:son, fort:da). The spectator/author not only comments on the witnessed events, but implicates himself in the experience by his mere presence, and thus the "notion of truth is quite incapable of accounting" for an objective recounting. Derrida states:

Autobiography, then, is not a previously opened space within which the speculating grandfather (Freud) tells a story, a given story about what has happened to him in his life. What he recounts is autobiography. The *fort:da* in question here, as a particular story, is an autobiography which instructs: every autobiography is the

departure/return of a *fort/da*, for example this one. Which one? The *fort/da* of Ernst? Of his mother conjoined with his grandfather in the reading of his own *fort/da*? Of *her* father, in other words of *his* grandfather? Of the great speculator? Of the father of psychoanalysis? Of the author of *Beyond...*? But what access is there to the latter without a spectral analysis of all the others? (*Post Card* 323)

Albeit a paradigm related directly to Freud and his observations of his own grandson and daughter, the overlapping of autobiographies is an extremely important building block to the reading of Gelman's *cartas*. The unreciprocated epistolary poetry, in its open system of meaning and correspondence, serves as both a medium and a representation of the overlapping nature of these relationships. Not only is the poet addressing himself (literally) to a deceased mother, but to his disappeared son and possibly disappeared grandchild. The public reader, too, forms part of the system of relays in that a confluence of reader and addressee is implied in the epistolary genre. Gelman is not only son and grandson, but father and grandfather in these letters. All observations and queries into the identities of these "others" reflect back on the identity of the speculator, and, conversely, their descriptions are necessarily tied to the concept of identity of self of the letter writer, Gelman.

Thus, in a Derridaean sense, Gelman's letters are simultaneously *a fortiori* and *a priori* (*Post Card* 324) because they both negotiate the past already experienced (*a fortiori*) and the future yet to be experienced (*a priori*) by exploring the past (the

mother, the maternal grandfather) and postulating about the future (the son, the unborn grandchild). Consequently, the relative (in all senses of the word) nature of the relationships is multi-dimensional and multi-temporal. Reading the two letters together as one, longer text, these relative multiplicities mirror one another and cause repetition, negating a direct, one-on-one relationship between any two entities: father/son/mother, author/recipient. Gelman's mother cannot solely be a mother, for she is also the daughter of the grandfather imagined *Carta a mi madre*. The unborn grandson cannot be isolated without reference to the disappeared son. Derrida postulates:

It repeats (itself) and overlaps. But how to separate this graphics from that of the legacy? Between the two, however, there is no relation of causality or condition of possibility. Repetition legates itself, the legacy repeats itself . . . This scene of writing does not recount something, the content of an event which would be called the *fort:da*. This remains unrepresentable, but produces, there producing itself, the scene of writing. (336)

Thus, Gelman's "scene of writing" is a system of overlapping referents, where the past, the present and the future inform the present through the epistolary, but never effectively reproduce the pain of losing the loved ones.

### **Nostalgia for the Past and Postmemory in *Carta a mi madre***

Gelman nostalgically recreates his mother and his ancestors through memory and postmemory in *Carta a mi madre*. Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. (“Generation” 106-107)

Since the epistolary breaks down as a reliable communicator, Gelman recreates her in his letter through remembered events, photos, and family stories (postmemories). By rupturing temporal continuity and co-opting postmemories of previous generations as symbols for his own exile, Gelman employs the epistolary as a nostalgic desire and recreation of a lost mother figure—an act of reconstructing his mother in the context

of his mourning for her. As such, Gelman's use of neologisms, other stylistic experimentation that confuse temporal markers, and religious elements in *Carta a mi madre* reflect the finality of the mother's death as well as the desire to recreate her through language.

As we have seen, the first few lines establish that the mother has passed away, and thus the letter has no receptor (no addressee). Her *being* is not questioned and, consequently, noun-verbs in the preterit tense dominate. This shows that the nostalgic longing is directed towards the past and, ultimately, is a reconstruction of the poet's ancestry to better understand his own identity. For example, Gelman employs some of the same noun-verb configurations found in the letter to his son, but uses the preterit to lend finality to the actions:

no sé qué daño es éste/tu soledad que arde/  
dame la rabia de tus huesos que yo los meceré/  
vos *me acunaste yo te ahueso*/¿quién podrá  
*desmadrar* al desterrado?/ . . .  
. . .  
¿qué cuentas pago todavía¿/¿qué acreedores  
desconozco?/necesito recorrer una a una tus  
penas para saber quién soy/quién fui cuando nos  
separamos por la carne/dolorosa del animal que  
diste a luz/sierva mía/ciega a mi servidumbre  
de tu sierva/pero esas maravillas donde me

*hijaste y te amadré/tu cercana distancia/ (334-335 emphasis added)*

In this selection, the manipulated verbs, “ahueso”, “desmadrar”, “hijaste” and “amadré”, point towards completed actions. While some of the root noun-verbs are used in other poems (“hijar”, for example), the focus shifts here to a resurrection (“te ahueso”) of his mother to discover her role in the development of his identity. The pun on “te ahueso” (literally, *I give you bones*) and the Latin American usage of “ahuesarse” (to be left with unsellable merchandise, or to become outmoded or without prestige<sup>30</sup>) is underscored in the lines that immediately follow: “¿qué cuentas pago todavía/¿qué acreedores /desconozco?. . .”. By establishing a link to marketable merchandise, Gelman reinforces the theme of guilt and debt in relation to the maternal figure. The poet acknowledges the guilt of not being present for death, and acknowledges the important debt he owes to her in the formation of his own self image.

The creation of verbs from nouns in Gelman’s *cartas* represents a systematic reaffirmation of lineage as a determining factor in the formation of personal identity. This theme recurs repeatedly in Gelman’s writing, especially that of the latter part of the 1990s, when he and his wife Mara La Madrid investigate human rights violations during the dictatorship. Miguel Dalmaroni points to this tendency when discussing an interview between Gelman and a member of HIJOS (Hijos Por la Identidad y la Justicia Contra el Olvido y el Silencio):

Es esa construcción presente para el futuro, compuesta con mucho más que restos del pasado, se destaca un movimiento que parece primero

como amenaza contra la identidad—la hija se confunde con la madre, especialmente en sueños—pero que se resuelve luego en una inversión intencional de la línea de parentesco y funciona como recurso de autoafirmación para darse una memoria operante. (70)

In other words, the use of the noun-verbs in *Carta a mi madre* is akin to the act of the children of the *desaparecidos*: a recreation of the lost parent in order to affirm their own lineage and self-identity. While Gelman's mother was not "disappeared" by the government like many enemies of the state, her loss is tied to the years of terror by the fact that Gelman was exiled at the time of her death. Dalmaroni continues:

La demanda de restitución se traducía, así, en su ejercicio presente antes que en mera recuperación del pasado e invertía la dirección *natural* de la descendencia cortada, ponía patas arriba el sistema de sentido que la cultura fija en la figura del árbol genealógico y anticipaba, entonces, otras experiencias de contra-construcción de identidad en reemplazo de las cadenas de identidades suprimidas. (74)

In *Carta a mi madre*, linguistic permutations serve to revivify the image of the mother and Gelman's ancestry in an effort to probe the poet's own distressed condition. To further Dalmaroni's assertion that exploration, recuperation and inversion of the ancestral line turns the family tree upside down, we can see that Gelman's desire to recreate (*ahuesar*) his deceased mother is a nostalgic inversion of the "dirección *natural*"—a simultaneous destruction and counter-construction of identity of the poet and his ancestry.



The inversion of the natural formation of identity in *Carta a mi madre* by the usage of noun-verbs that re-create the absent mother is echoed in other mutations of morphology and syntax. The confusion of temporal markers (past, present, future) presents a provocative and problematic recreation of the mother figure. The second verse begins with a question, immediately introducing doubt at both the circumstances of death of the intended reader and the function of the letter itself:

¿te llevó el cáncer?/¿no mi última carta;/la  
leíste, respondiste, moriste;/¿adivinaste que me  
preparaba a volver? . . . (392)

The possibility that the death was caused by reading the previous letter from the poet establishes a link between the cancer (the killer) and the act of reading or writing letters. While the acts of reading (“leíste”), responding (“respondiste”) and dying (“moriste”) seem to point to indisputable events, the fact that those actions are associated with the letter are emblematic of the broken relationship between *I* and *you*. While these lines underline the problematic nature of the letter as possible killer, the reference to other letters establish a conversation between the *I* and the *you* that has taken place over some time.

This ongoing dialogue, however, instead of creating an easy timeline to follow, puts into relief the temporal disjunction and/or condensation of past and present. The past does not stay static, rather it constantly mutates and pushes into the present to inform or probe the present identity, immediately seen in the first line, "recibí tu carta 20 días después de tu muerte y / cinco minutos después de saber que

habías muerto". Which happened first? The letter? The death? Finding out about the death? The timeline is perplexing at best, and at worst a cruel metaphor for how the past is ever-present.

These lines highlight how recreation of the past is cyclical and non-linear, and does not lend itself to reproduction. In fact, Gelman employs a technique time and time again of starting a fragment with a memory or question relating to the past, only to end up questioning the present. For example, the second fragment demonstrates how the past and the present blur and overlap, ultimately leading to a reference to the present:

. . . /yo entraría  
a tu cuarto y no lo ibas a admitir/y nos  
besábamos/nos abrazamos y lloramos/y nos  
volvemos a besar/a nombrar/y estamos juntos/  
no en estos fierros duros/ (392)

The use of the conditional by the *I* in the first line suggests a conjecture or a habitual action in the past, ‘I would enter’ (“yo entraría”). The connection to the past is further highlighted by the use of the imperfect of “ibas” and “besábamos”. The poetic voice then switches to the historical present, “nos abrazamos y lloramos / nos volvemos a besar / a nombrar / y estamos juntos,” further uprooting the sense of logical flow of time. What starts this fragment as a possible outcome is converted by the *I* into a seemingly real memory which, by the use of the present tense, is made into a simultaneous reality. This moment is immediately juxtaposed, however, with a

negation of that possibility. A metaphor for the real present, “not in these harsh shackles” (“no en estos fierros duros”) quickly nullifies and supplants the impossible coexistence of “estamos juntos”.

In this fragment we see that the relationship between the past and the present is precarious and non-linear. First, a real event of the past is questioned (in this case, the death of the mother by cancer). Then, a series of possible past events is imagined and fills in for missing information, representing unfulfilled desire of the *I*. Then, those events are extended to the current present (the moment of uttering), they are quickly negating by the shocking nature of the present, a juxtaposition that leaves the poetic voice searching for its own identity and manner of expression.

This pattern is continued throughout *Carta a mi madre* with varying degrees of temporal confusion. In one segment, the poet himself states that the memories he recreates are difficult to reconcile:

no sé cómo es que mueras/me sos/estás  
desordenada en mi memoria/de cuanto yo fui  
niño y de pronto muy grande/no alcanzo a fijar  
tus rostros en un rostro/tus rostros es un aire/ (330)

The attempt at recreating the mother's face by memory is difficult, ephemeral, with several images colliding into one and then separating themselves again. Time is difficult to measure—the poet was a child and then suddenly he is bigger. He is unable to fix an image to a specific time in his life.

In addition, the above lines represent a change in tone from other fragments of *Carta a mi madre*. Unlike the angry and probing questions found elsewhere, the poetic voice here demonstrates uncertainty. This segment shows that, with the passage of time, he is unable to imagine his mother's face, an image that was (and still is) fundamental to his concept of self-identity: "me sos". Instead, many images of her throughout time appear and disappear; the fleeting the image of her face(s) suggests a desire to return to childhood when it was possible to conceptualize her (static) image. Nostalgia for childhood innocence metaphorically is a longing for a time and place distant from that of the turbulent present of exile and anxiety.

The unpredictable nature of the resurgence of memories attached to his absent mother leaves the poet to question his own fugacious existence and how his memory interrupts his present existence. A memory surges to consciousness in seemingly capricious fashion:

. . . /¿los dos niñitos del Mercado de Ravelo  
con una gallinita en los brazos, ofreciendo barato  
y con gestos de madre, casi recién salidos de sus  
madres?/¿por qué te apareciste en el mercado  
boliviano?/¿en cada pena estás?/apagabas el sol  
para dormirme/ (332)

Not only does memory interject itself into present events, the connection between present events seems to have to relation to the memory that they recall. The seemingly unrelated nature of the memory and the present trigger (mother, children

selling livestock) cause the poet to reflect on the root of the relationship: pain and shame. Silvana Rabinovich describes this type of memory apparition in “Memoria por venir” as *incontinent*, suggesting that what we take for firm memory of the past (metaphorically, the *terra firme*) is really constantly in movement:

Solemos decir que un recuerdo “viene a la memoria”, como si ésta fuese un lugar de acogida; sin embargo, la memoria—esa argamasa de diversidad—se encuentra siempre por venir, toda ella está hecha de porvenir. A pesar de nuestra ilusión de firmeza, las “tierras de la memoria”. . .son, al igual que nuestros continentes, *itinerantes*. Y si seguimos la tentación del significante, si algo caracteriza a la memoria es cierta “incontinencia”. Irrumpiendo en los momentos menos esperados, cuando el pasado parece solidificarse, la memoria cuele, sale a borbotones y chorrea hasta anegar la inmaculada solidez.

*Incontinente* por no poder detener el flujo de recuerdos, pero *incontinente* también porque no puede darles cabida y rebalsa. (95)

In other words, the resurgence (movement) of memory from the past reasserts itself in unpredictable and uncontainable ways. The vision of the children in the Bolivian market reminds Gelman of his mother because of the sensation the image produces, not because of the subject matter he witnesses.

This falsity of correlation between the memory of the past and specific objects or persons is highlighted by Susana Kaiser in her exploration of the legacy of the *Guerra Sucia* in Argentina. While her study primarily focuses on younger adults who

have knowledge of the terrors of the dictatorship through “inter- and intragenerational dialogue...education, and the communication media,” Kaiser’s investigation lends itself to an exploration of the passage of time in Gelman’s *cartas abiertas* and how it relates to the development of self-identity (2). Kaiser, relying on Marianne Hirsch’s definition, states that a postmemory is

a second-generation memory characterized by displacement and belatedness, which is the memory of the children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma...Descendants remember their parents’ experiences through images they have seen and stories they were told. Postmemory, thus, implies intergenerational interconnections by which people adopt their elders’ memories as their own. (2)

While Gelman’s mother was not a victim of the repression under the dictatorship, her death during his exile creates a traumatic experience that he must confront to query his own present (and future) identity. Thus, the past events from her life that he explores, the postmemories, present a point of mediation of her past, his past and present situation.

The concept of postmemory, elaborated by Marianne Hirsch but employed by Kaiser in the context of Argentina, is usually reserved to describe second- and third-generation survivors of traumatic events. Since Gelman feels the effects of the Argentinian *Guerra Sucia* firsthand, one could argue that he has memories, not *postmemories*. However, the generational structure that Gelman elaborates—naming his paternal grandfather and his mother—to describe his own identity summons the

idea of postmemory because he draws a parallel between the traumatic lives of the previous generations and that of his own (and his son's). Gelman explains his family history as:

El único argentino de la familia soy yo. Mis padres y mis dos hermanos eran ucranianos. Emigraron en 1928. Mi padre era un socialrrevolucionario que había participado en la revolución de 1905. Yo no lo supe sino mucho después, en 1957, cuando encontré en Moscú a dos tías y a una prima que aún vivían en la casa de madera donde mi padre se había refugiado, y de la que debió escapar porque la policía del zar le pisaba los talones. Después anduvo por otras regiones de Rusia, vaya a saber por dónde, hasta que decidió ir a Buenos Aires. Llegó por primera vez en 1912, escapando del servicio militar . . . [mi madre era] hija de un rabino metido en su shtetl, un pequeño pueblo judío donde fungía como juez de paz. Era una especie de santo que se alimentaba de té y pan. Muchos años después, en la poesía norteamericana de los años 20, encontré la referencia del té y el pan en la boca del poeta judío. Mi infancia está muy lejos, en el barrio de Villa Crespo, en Buenos Aires. Nací ahí porque en un momento tan delicado como un alumbramiento quise acompañar a mi madre. Corresponde a un caballero estar con una mujer querida en una zona difícil como el parto . . . Mi infancia también está llena de cosas que no viví. Por ejemplo de historias extraordinarias y terribles que mi

madre me contaba, como el día aquel en que los cosacos quemaron todo durante un pogrom y mi abuela entró en la casa en llamas para salvar a sus hijos. Perdió uno. Cada vez que había peligro, mi abuelo sacaba una arquilla con un pergamino de mil setecientos y corno en el Génesis leía: “El rabino tal engendró al rabino tal que engendró a tal . . .” Él era el último de la lista. Cuando existía una amenaza, la lectura del pergamino les otorgaba cierto sentido de continuidad y supervivencia. (Robles Ortega “*Semblanza*”)

Like his grandfather’s reading of sacred words on parchment, Gelman’s inclusion of his ancestry and parentage provide a backdrop for his own identity and survival.

Two chief moments of postmemory examination are presented in *Carta a mi madre* that relate directly to the confusion of past and present with regard to his own personal identity, or, as Gelman explains above, his “infancia llena de cosas que no vivi[ó]” . Both are directly related to family photographs; the first is his mother at a young age, and the second deals with the presence of his grandfather’s photo in his mother’s bedroom. Gelman begins the first selection with a series of questions, and then diverts his memory through a photograph of his mother and her relation of events, only to end the fragment with a postulation of his present situation:

¿qué olvido es paz?/¿por qué de todos tus rostros  
vivos recuerdo con tanta precisión únicamente  
una fotografía?/Odessa, 1915, tenés 18 años,  
estudiás medicina, no hay de comer/pero a tus



mejillas habían subido dos manzanas (así me lo  
dijiste) (árbol del hambre que da frutas)/esas  
manzanas ¿tenían rojos del fuego del pogrom que  
te tocaba?/¿a los 5 años?/¿tu madre sacando de  
la casa en llamas a varios hermanitos?/¿y muerta  
a tu hermanita?/¿así me diste esta mujer, dentro/  
fuera de mí?/¿qué es esta herencia, madre/esa  
fotografía en tus 18 años hermosos/con tu largo  
cabello negriazul como noche del alma/partida  
en dos/ese vestido acampanado marcándote los  
pechos/las dos amigas reclinadas a tus pies/tu  
mirada hacia mí para que sepa que te amo  
irremediabilmente?/ (332)

The fluid movement between various pasts, those of his mother when she was a child (witnessing the death of her sister) and later, when she is captured in a photograph at the height of her seductive beauty and youth, is explored as an interior, integral part of Gelman's own identity. In fact, he overtly probes how his mother put those parts of his heritage "dentro," inside of him, and postulates that somehow she knew, while taking the photograph, that he would see it years later and remind him of how much, "irremediabilmente," he loves her. The above postmemory of his mother escaping the pogrom evokes both his Ukranian and Jewish roots, and parallels the violent destruction Gelman witnesses as part of the *Guerra sucia*. The memory has been

passed down through generations, as he could not have first-hand witnesses her childhood or youth, but it still formulates an integral part of his understanding of his family, himself, his current situation, and of his love for her.

The second instance of postmemories that Gelman explores is a series of reflections about his maternal grandfather, prompted by his photograph in the mother's bedroom. Again, his mother's memory of her father informs Gelman's exploration of his own relationship with her. In a decidedly erotic passage, he explores the oedipal relationship between himself and his mother, imagining her love for her father as a lover would, where he (Gelman) stands as a substitute male:

siempre conmigo fuiste doble/te hacía falta y me  
echaste e vos/¿para aprender a sernos otros?/  
cada mucho nos dabas un momento de paz:  
entonces me dejabas peinarte lentamente y te ibas  
en mí y yo era tu amante y más/¿tu padre?/¿ese  
rabino o santo?/¿Qué amabas?/¿más que a mí?/  
¿me perseguías porque no supe parecerme a él?/  
¿y cómo iba a parecerme?/¿no me querías otro?/ (333)

Shortly after this passage, he refers to the “ojos claros del retrato que presidía tu/cuarto” (334), a reference to the watchful eyes of the maternal grandfather in a photograph. The reference to the paternal grandfather as “rabino” o “santo” echoes Gelman's account of his family's history where he stresses the importance of this mythical figure during his childhood. Stylistic markers indicate a change of tone in

these lines; the dominance of the forward slashes and the interrogative towards the end of the fragment demonstrate that to which Milán refers as violent disruptions of logical syntax and rhythm, a “*redistribución constante del sentido*” (11-13). The interrupted questions, such as, “/¿ese / rabino o santo?/¿Qué amabas?/¿más que a mí?/”, force the reader link the phrases together for meaning by demonstrating Gelman’s exploration the limits of language to describe traumatic experiences and emotions.

In addition, the above passage is rich with sexual references between the three participants: the mother, her memory/relationship with her father, and Gelman. Like a child, he questions whether his mother loved him or the grandfather more, and doubts her faithfulness to him. He also probes what he represented to her: Did she create him to be a duplicate of the grandfather? Or possibly as an “otro,” a lover?

The references to the maternal grandfather as either *rabino* o *santo* also underscore the religious elements of the text. While one term explicitly points to Gelman’s Jewish heritage, the other signals the Catholicism of the Argentina, his family’s adopted country. By naming the maternal grandfather “ese rabino o santo,” Gelman suggests the dual cultural heritage to which his family pertains. This theme is prevalent in other texts Gelman has written, such as *Dibaxu* (1994), a text written in Ladino or Judeo-Spanish. In addition, the symbolism of the “ojos claros del retrato” calls to mind the religious paintings of saints that often are prevalent in Catholic homes. Gelman is exploring his dual heritage through synchronous selection of religious artefacts.

The Judeo-Christian rites of mourning become very important in the closing lines of the poem, as well:

. . . se crecieron la mirra  
y el incienso que sembraste en mi vez/dejá que  
te perfumen/acompañen tu gracia/mi alma  
calce tu transcurrir a nada/  
todavía recojo azucenas que habrás dejado aquí  
para que mire el doble rostro de tu amor/  
mecer tu cuna/lavar tus pañales/para que no me  
dejes nunca más/  
sin avisar/sin pedirme permiso/  
aullabas cuando te separé de mí/  
ya no nos perdonemos/ (339)

By closing the letter to his mother with references to Judeo-Christian mourning rituals (“mirra”, “incienso”, for example), Gelman again nostalgically longs for his mother’s presence, even in her death. Fabry considers this scene not so much as a resurrection of the mother figure, but as a ritual, through writing, that does not pretend any religious belief of the afterlife:

Pero en estas últimas líneas del poema, a la separación física y psicológica del nacimiento y de la infancia, corresponde otro pasaje: el que opera la escritura hacia la “honda noche” de la muerte acompañada. Muchas alusiones son oscuras pero sin embargo parecen

referirse a un ámbito ritual . . . Lo que el poema logra, finalmente, no es revivir la figura materna de la que sólo queda nítido el recuerdo de una fotografía, sino cumplir con un *rito* llevado a cabo por y en la escritura, sin que lo sostenga ninguna creencia en el más allá: la madre, devuelta a una infancia de la que fue expulsado el hijo . . . se desliza hacia la “nada”. (148-149 emphasis added by Fabry)

The ritualistic element to the final lines cannot be denied. I agree with Fabry’s postulation that resurrection of the mother is not seen in these final lines, but that the ritualistic aspect of the scene shows the poet’s mourning at her absence. My reading deviates, however, from Fabry’s; since mourning implies acknowledgment and pain in the face of that loss, Gelman is nostalgically longing for a reunification with her, not just a mourning of her.

Taken as a whole, we see that the grammatical confluence of the past and the present in *Carta a mi madre* demonstrates a concerted effort at the recreation and exploration of identity and of how the past informs the present understanding of one’s self and relationship to the world. It is of special importance in this case because of the exiled state of the poet—the exploration of roots, family ties and heritage are causally related to the separation from them. The emphasis on the trauma witnessed by previous generations, in this case the danger and exile of his grandfather and father, draws a parallel between Gelman’s experiences and those of his family before him. It is impossible to ignore the complicating nature of suffering and exile throughout multiple generations of the Gelman family. A certain romantic vision of

the past is created in that Gelman identifies with preceding generations. Consequently, the epistolary poem to his mother treats ancestry as fundamentally important to the poet's self-identity. When faced with the death of his mother, Gelman's family line is cut off. Not only are the poet's roots questioned—both because of his uprootedness in exile and the death of the mother—but the negation of a receptor to his letter symbolically, according to Derrida, equals death. There is no return for Juan Gelman, neither to his mother nor to his mother-land. In this way, the postmemories of the traumatic moments in his family's past are mirrored in his own fate, as well as that of his son and grandchild, as we will see in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)*.

#### **Nostalgia for the Future in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)***

While the epistolary genre as a whole is thought by some to be more accessible because of the established relationship between the recipient of the letter and the reader (Bower, Lazer), Gelman's *cartas* push the limits of linguistic experimentation, making comprehension of the letter (characterized by its communicative value) more arduous. The emphasis on layers of meaning built by language play characterizes Gelman's poetry and gives it its affective and intellectual power. Nostalgia for an unattainable present and future will be shown through an investigation of the linguistic experimentation and neologisms in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)*.

As Julio Cortázar points out in the introduction to *Interrupciones I*, the manipulations of language in Gelman's poetry seem like errors or inconsistencies at first, but upon further reading, form a discrete language system:

Cuando Juan convierte el sustantivo dictadura en un verbo, la primera reacción en la lectura rápida es de sorpresa y casi de escándalo, se mira el verso como si estuviera afeado por una errata de imprenta, y, de pronto, se da el salto (cuando se lo da, que es lo que espero) y se descubre la riqueza de esa metáfora tan profundamente ligada con nuestra realidad en la que todo está dictadurando, en la que la noción de durar se vuelve insoportablemente manifiesta, en la que seguirán dictadurándonos mientras no prendamos y apliquemos el infinito contralenguaje de la palabra y de la revolución. (Introduction, *Interrupciones I*, 8-9)

The crafting of a verb from a noun is not particularly spectacular; however, the Gelmanian language system, (in Cortázar's terms, his "counter language") demonstrates a deliberate desire to create a new language better-adapted to the communication of his reality. In an interview, Gelman asserts that:

El lenguaje me resultaba absolutamente insuficiente, y también ahora me resulta insuficiente. El lenguaje tiene límites terribles para decir determinadas cosas pero creo que la poesía interrogando al lenguaje trata de decirlas. En ese entonces, por mi desesperación personal, traté de buscarlas cambiando el género a ciertas palabras, convirtiendo

verbos en sustantivos y sustantivos en verbos, era una búsqueda contra las imposibilidades del lenguaje. (Verduchi, quoted in Friolet 110)

Gelman wrangles with these “impossibilities” of language in both *Carta a mi madre* and *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)*, the culminating effect being one of disorientation and anguish reflecting the loss of his mother to cancer and the “disappearance” of his son and pregnant daughter-in-law by military death squads.<sup>31</sup>

Many critics have focused on Gelman’s use of neologisms other than those previously mentioned (Boccanera, Fabry, and Sillato). Yoel Mesa Falcón, for example, postulates that the linguistic experimentation is so great that it is as if “el empuje de lo por decir fuera tal que no le bastaran al autor los verbos existentes.” (84) Miguel Dalmaroni, in his study of the mother-son dynamic in Gelman’s poetry, suggests:

Los parentescos que se inscriben en estos textos, entonces, lo hacen no sólo como restitución de los vínculos perdidos y de sus formas, sino también mediante invenciones de lenguaje en las que los lugares, los géneros, los tiempos y las direcciones de la identidad se recombinan contra la estructura de las subjetividades familiares provista por el orden social de la cultura. (83)

Most critics, including Falcón and Dalmaroni, contend that the linguistic experimentation in Gelman’s poetry is a function of the tremendous pain of exile and the creation of new language structures is attempt at exploring his traumatic subjectivity. While the linguistic experimentation shown in these two *cartas* is



extensive, I focus on several patterns that consistently contribute to the overall reading of nostalgia and memory, specifically that which is related to the missing son and grandchild: the creation of verbs from nouns and vice versa, the conversion of meaning of one word to another, the addition of suffixes to create new meanings, and the breakdown/exploration of tenses representing past, present and future.

In the first case, the creation of verbs from nouns, is most often encountered in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)*, although powerfully used in *Carta a mi madre* as well. Twenty-five fragments (*poemas*) make up the letter to his son, although the enumeration seems superfluous to a certain extent since all the selections could be read as a single text. Given the nature of the dedication in prose at the end, it comes as no surprise to find that the bulk of the noun-verb combinations relate to the act of fathering or of “child-ing.” The repeated usage of references to being a parent or fathering a child underscores the importance of the point of origin and the desire for a reunification with the impossible, in this case represented by the disappeared son. Since it would be impossible to separate the symbolic relationship (father/motherland-exiled) from Gelman’s life story (desperation at the disappearance of a son), the affective response can be interpreted as an unfulfilled longing for homeland as the locus of the disappearance of family. The first fragment contains several examples:

...

como desapenando la verdad

del acabar temprano/rostro o noche

donde brillás astrísimo de vos/  
hijo que *hijé* contra la lloradera/  
...

el no avisado de tu fuerza/amor  
derramadísimo como mi propio

volar de voz a vos/sangre de mí  
que desataron perros de la contra  
besar con besos de la boca/o

cielo que abrís *hijando* tu morida (131-132 emphasis added)

The verb *hijar* appears again at the beginning of the seventh fragment:

*deshijándote* mucho/*deshijándome*/

buscando por tu suavera/  
paso mi padre solo de vos/pasa

la voz secreta que tejés/paciente/ (138 emphasis added)

The collection closes with an interrogation using the same created verb, *hijar*:

¿almás?/¿bellísimo?/¿te descansás

del desamor?/¿amás?/¿alma que tierra/  
abierta al sol de la justicia?/¿*hijás*?/

¿incansable de puro desufrir? (156 emphasis added)

The extensive usage of a verb created from a noun demonstrates the desire on the part of the poet to extend the meaning of *to be a child*. It is no longer a passive state,

description or adjective, rather an active verb that delineates agency. The word ceases to solely indicate a person (via familial ties) and takes on the function of force, a subject who performs an action rather than a subject of another.

In addition to creating agency, the verb *hijar* functions on several linguistic levels. It leaves open the interpretation of its meaning because of its multiple functions since to whom or to which action it refers is not clear, and thus, all possible ascriptions of meaning are simultaneously possible. It signals the function of the son in relation to his father<sup>32</sup>; the one-word question “¿hijás?” could imply, “Are you (still) my child?” Additionally, this verb reciprocally points back to the father because to create “child” or “son” implies that the father, too, is simultaneously created. In other words, the birth (creation) of a child renders the adult a parent.

Taking the verb *hijar* one step further, it is impossible to ignore the biographical data that the supposed receptor of this *carta* was taken into custody along with his pregnant wife. The manipulation of the noun into a verb form could also signify the uncertainty regarding the receptor’s (Marcelo’s) unborn child. Not only does the poet question if his child is alive and well, but if his child’s child has been “sonned” or born.

While the formation of the verb, *hijar*, from the noun form is the most prevalent noun-verb form in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)*, other permutations underline the same premise: the questioning of the existence of both father and son (and son’s child). Again in the form of an interrogation, the poet asks, “¿me despadrás para despadecerme?” (136) and later, “¿acaso no te soy para padrearte?//” (141). The

correlation between the created verb, “despadrás” (to de-father) and the modified verb “despadecerme” (to make me not suffer/to unsuffer me) maintains a certain linguistic playfulness and establishes a corollary relationship of meaning: to de-father is to end suffering.

One of the most accessible forms of this same verb permutation is found in the same fragment:

el sufrimiento/¿es derrota o batalla?/

realidad que aplastás/¿sos compañera?

¿tu mucha perfección te salva de algo?/

*¿acaso no te duelo/te juaneo/*

*te gelmaneo/te cabalgo como*

loco de vos/potro tuyo que pasa

desabuenándose la desgracia¿/

¿esa que llora al pie de mis muereras?/ (141 emphasis added)

The manipulation of the poet’s name into a verb literally names the subject (son).

Not only does the father create the son, but the act of naming him implies a conscious act of establishing a family line by passing on the name label. While the first instance gives agency to the father/creator and makes the subject passive, the latter part of the fragment shows that the action is reciprocal. The poet questions, “¿contra mí?/¿me mostrás lo que yo sea?” (141) Identity, therefore, is construction that both the created and the creator conceive.

The linguistic malleability of the noun-verbs in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* all point to the questioning of the possibility of existence if one of the father-son pair ceases to exist. The complementary, bilateral relationship of father-son falls into a state of disarray and disharmony when the existence of the son is questioned. When the poet interrogates whether his son continues to exist, Gelman is also probing his own identity as well as the capacity of language to communicate meaning (loss, pain) in an effective manner.

This linguistic play in Gelman's *cartas* recalls the work of earlier *vanguardista* poets of Latin America, particularly that of César Vallejo. As Christian Von Buelow points out, "Vallejo's poems fervently question the nature of language" (41) by intentionally employing catachresis to link two words or concepts together to form new meaning (45). Von Buelow conceptualizes Vallejo's *Venus de Milo* as

the ceaseless dismemberment implicit in Vallejo's *vanguardismo*: the grammatical and semantic ruins signal the perennial imperfection of the artwork and of the will to self-transcendence and knowledge. But implicit in this deconstruction is a ceaseless dialectical reconstruction that the structure of allegory affords: the infinite recontextualization of meaning emanating from the power of signification places metaphoricity a hair's distance from a linguistic truth always about to emerge. (50)

The deconstruction of language is a recontextualization of meaning. Gelman, like Vallejo before him, employs syntactical disorder and verb creation (*hijar, padrear*).

By deconstructing the dichotomous pair through language—the word plays of father/son—Gelman reconstructs meaning in a new way, challenging the reader’s assumptions about traditional roles of creation and power in the family hierarchy. While the reader may understand “hijo”, for example, “hijar” suggests a different meaning that questions the existence of a conventional father/son relationship because it implies more agency (action) than the noun form, as well as multiplying the possible recipients of that action.

On two levels, Gelman utilizes the chasm between what is meant and what is received to better explore the nature of the pain at losing his son by the manipulation of nouns and verbs that refer to “fathering” and “child-ing.” On the one hand, since ordinary language does not suffice to adequately encompass the suffering of the father in exile, new words and meanings are needed to create a language sufficient to better approximate both the symbolic loss of homeland and the real loss of family. These are not merely poems written to a lost child, rather an attempt at expressing the anguish of exile as well: a wail against the disappearance of the son is also a roar against the same forces that caused Gelman’s exile.

On the other hand, the metaphor of meaning for product holds true for Gelman’s *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* in that the impossibility of describing the loss of the son is theoretically parallel to the gap or Derrida’s “impossible message” between the addressee and the addressor of the epistolary poem.<sup>33</sup> In this way, linguistic experimentation, such as the creation of verbs like *hijar*, mirrors the impossibility of the recipient-less epistolary poem. The poem speaks for itself with

the participation of the public reader since its intended reader is absent. The meaning (child) must be on the page, not in the receipt of the letter-poem since it is “always not arriving”.

We can only understand Gelman’s “impossible message” (using Derrida’s terminology) in the context of a longing for home and family as an imagined space/time different than that of exile. The manipulation of language by Gelman is an attempt to convey multiple meanings because one meaning is both impossible and inadequate when facing exile and the death and/or disappearance of family members. While explicit references to the nature of Gelman’s son are few in *Carta abierta*, the postscript informs the reader of biographical information underlying the preceding fragments:

*el 24 de agosto de 1976*  
*mi hijo marcelo ariel y*  
*su mujer claudia, encinta,*  
*fueron secuestrados en*  
*buenos aires por un*  
*comando militar.*  
*el hijo de ambos nació*  
*en el campo de concentración.*  
*como en docenas de miles*  
*de otros casos, la dictadura*  
*militar nunca reconoció*

*oficialmente a estos  
“desaparecidos”. hablo de  
“los ausentes para siempre”.  
hasta que no vea sus cadáveres  
o a sus asesinos, nunca los  
daré por muertos. (157)*

Upon reading these lines, other references, especially to violence and memory, become clear markers of Gelman’s attempt to reconcile the disappearance and possible death of his son. Fragment XII demonstrates the gradual incorporation of violent elements:

*día que soy fuera de mí/disparos  
de la verdad hundiéndome la frente  
carita que eras/¿ahora disparás?/  
...  
¿Revolución que andás por los reveses?  
¿herida/bella/lastimada como  
perrada dura que crecés/lunás/  
sobre derrotas/lástimas/errores?/  
¿pensativa de voz?/¿en goce?/¿en duele?/ (143)*

Explicit references to “disparos,” “revolución,” and “derrotas” the years of extreme repression following the installation of the military government. Fragment XV also contains language describing torture and mutilation:



doloración de vos como clausura/  
hijándote en la destemplada/alma  
que se despajadita la mitad/  
camino donde pasas a pie a veces/

torturas/penas/mutiladas/lápices  
escribiendo en los muros de la muerte/  
amor que alara para su amorar/  
hijo buscando altura por bajezas/ (146)

After reading the postscript, references to “doloración,” “torturas,” “penas,” “mutiladas,” and “muerte” make explicit the connection between Gelman’s son’s disappearance and the *Guerra sucia* in Argentina.

Linguistically juxtaposing terminology of war and torture with questions probing the location of the son and Gelman’s memory of him provoke a corollary investigation of the poet’s own state. Since both traumatic events are essentially due to the same causes, Gelman explores the nature of his own absence as it is mirrored in his son’s:

afligido de voz/toda una pueblo  
anda pidiendo verte/entendimiento  
que pierde sangre como vos/de vos/  
voluntad que no mira tu mirada/

memoria que amarísima de muere  
amarillea al pie de tu otoñar/  
memoria que morís con cada viva  
recordación/dulce que fue tu mano (145)

The reference to the whole “pueblo” asking to see the son demonstrates a longing for something impossible that only lives in memory, much like the survivors of the *Guerra sucia* who ask the government for information about their loved ones, “¿Dónde están?”. The act of remembering, tied by the structure of the poem to “viva”, “dulce” and “morís”, is both edifying and painful; edifying because the poet relishes the only remaining elements of his son that exist in his memory, and painful because the memory inevitably leads to questions to which he has no answers. “¿[D]ónde estás mesmo ahorita?”, the poet implores in fragment XXI (152). This question mirrors his own exile; while the son is absent because he was “disappeared” by the state, Gelman is absent because of the threat of disappearance and death.

The emphasis on longing in these fragments underscores a nostalgic reading of Gelman’s letter to his son, for the memory of him is coupled with a desire to reunite in the future. Thus, a complicated nostalgic pattern emerges in which the reader must link the anguished tone with the socio-political events that contextualize the poem and cipher the unique language system that Gelman creates. Since physical reunification is impossible in the present, Gelman deconstructs the binary pair that he and his son symbolize in order to explore the painful truth of his son’s disappearance and his own exile. Since the son’s disappearance mirrors the poet’s exile, it follows

that a longing for a reunification with the son, an “un-disappearance”, metaphorically represents a desire to end his own exile in the future.

Instead of a possible and attainable present and future reunification with the son, a paralysis of repetition is created, like mirrors facing each other that mimic and transfer partial meaning. Gelman describes this paralysis as “el mientras” (the meanwhile): the waiting, the unsatisfying present, the system of constant mirror reflections (memories) and projections. This “mientras” is best seen in the diurnal cycles in reference to the son in *Carta abierta (a mi hijo)* which represent the parallel process of birth, life, old age and death. Gelman employs this symbolism by manipulating verbs and images to produce a simultaneous past/present/future throughout the fragments. These time-frames are not presented in a logical sequence; instead they are jumbled, as if the sequence itself were less important than the existence of all of them together at once in memory. To illustrate, the poet utilizes references to his own blindness and the darkness of night in the absence of his son: “como trato con nadie sino estar / solo de vos/cieguísimo” (131), “. . . mi alma / moja un dedo en tu nombre/escribe las paredes de la noche con tu nombre” (135), “manito tuya / manando sombra/sombra/sombra/sombra” (137), and “¿quemás la noche?” (139). Here, references to the absence of light are in the present and correlate directly with the absence of the son.<sup>34</sup>

However, allusions to evening and night also point directly the impossibility of the son to continue the natural rhythm of life or to participate in the natural aging

process and death. The poet laments the disappearance of the son inasmuch that he will be unable to see him live out his natural life:

¿almita que volás fuera de mí/  
¿tan me desfuiste que ya no veré  
crepuscularte suave como hijo  
compañándome a pulso? . . . (134)

This reference to the future is also tied with the unnatural absence of the son. Not only is he absent in the present—symbolized by lack of light and darkness—but he will not finish out the end of his life in a natural way. Thus, the future tense is used in combination with references to dark.

These examples of the absence of the son symbolized by darkness, blindness or night contrast with references to the past, and hence, the childhood of the lost son represented by morning light, for instance, “la mañana mañanó de sol” (134), “dulce que fue tu mano / apoyadita contra madrugadas / que te oyeron crecer/niñando al mundo” (145). The past events, represented by the use of the finite preterit, are associated with morning and morning light.

Taken together, the usage of the preterit indicates the morning, and the absence of the sun/son is described as the present and future, leaving the poet in the less precise “mid-day”. This in-between state is referred to as “el mientras”:

que me penás el mientras/la dulcísima  
recordación donde se aplaca el siendo/  
la todo/la trabajo/alma de mí

hijito que el otoño desprendió (131)

The act of remembering the son is the “mientras”, the *during* or the *meanwhile*. It is an act of waiting, as if it were a parenthesis between the past and the future.

To further the metaphor of the diurnal cycle, the manipulation of the past, present and future calls to mind the flight of Daedalus and Icarus in that the son, straying too close to the sun, plunges into the darkness—the sea, in the case of Icarus, and disappearance for Gelman’s son. Read in this way, however, the disappearance of the son becomes an active choice that, in reality, could not have been the case. The act of disappearance, rather than being seen as an occurrence over which the son has no control, implies an active choice to disappear.

The manipulation of this fact, giving agency to the son for his own disappearance, demonstrates the poet’s nostalgic attempt to order the inherently chaotic or random present. Gelman’s epistolary poetry dedicated to his son is a nostalgic attempt to imagine an impossible reunification in the present or the future with the son, a brilliant sun-like figure swallowed by the shadows of evening and death.

### **Epistolary Nostalgia Without an Object: Summarizing Gelman’s *cartas***

We have seen that Gelman’s *cartas* lead the reader into union with the addressee due to the very nature of the epistolary genre, and that the unique language system compels an active reading as well. We have also observed how Freud’s *fort:da* breaks down in favor of Derrida’s multiple *fort:das*: a system of transfers and

repetition, instead of direct discourse, created by the multiple addressees, referents and temporal markers. Consequently, it is the reader's task to supplement knowledge of politics to create the final piece that creates nostalgia, the contextualizing element that is not present in the *cartas* themselves: the poet's exile during the death of his mother and the disappearance of his son.

As Susan Stewart contends, "Nostalgia is a sadness without an object" (23). Nostalgia, a "prelapsarian" utopia, presupposes a longing for something, some time or someplace that is not currently present, and the breakdown of the one-to-one relationship between experience and language exemplifies the failure of the sign to faithfully correspond to reality. Stewart maintains that

The crisis of the sign, emerging between signifier and signified, between the material nature of the former and the abstract and historical nature of the latter, as well as within the mediated reality between written and spoken language, is denied by the nostalgic's utopia, a utopia where authenticity suffuses both word and world. The nostalgic dreams of a moment before knowledge and self-consciousness that itself lives on only in the self-consciousness of the nostalgic narrative. Nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition and denies the repetition's capacity to form identity. Thus we find that the disjunctions of temporality traced here create the space for nostalgia's eruption. (23)

Nostalgia, then, resides in the space created between meaning and expression, between a utopian past and a problematic present, between the sender and the addressee. Gelman's epistolary interaction with the past and the present serves to highlight the problematic nature of nostalgia because direct reproduction of this experience is impossible. Hence, the *carta abierta* functions as a transmitter or a mirror of this difficulty, but never as a manufacturer of nostalgia.

The destruction of the binary pair implicit in the correspondence between two entities (sender/receptor) negates a closed system that would allow for effective processing (mourning) of his traumatic losses. For this reason, Gelman's letters must have multiple public receptors, even while the single, named receptor (mother or son) is negated; the open letters could not possibly form a closed system of linguistic or epistolary correspondence. By their very nature, they demonstrate all that is incommunicable: the guilt of not being present at the death of his mother or disappearance of his son, the impossibility of rejoining a family, the sadness of a lost utopia, and the anxiety of an uncertain present and future. Gelman incorporates information about his families' past (in the form of postmemories) to inform him of his present state of exile. The ambiguity of the present (exile) and the future mark his *carta* to his son. In these ways, Gelman's nostalgia is an avant-garde approach to identity creation; the manipulation of language (neologisms, for example), the temporal confusion, the breakdown of the binary pair, and the subsequent mirroring /reflection of a difficult past and ambiguous future all coalesce to form a dense, innovative, and powerful exploration into the process of self-actualization by an exile.

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## Notes

<sup>22</sup> For more information regarding the history of Argentina, please see the introductory chapter to this study.

<sup>23</sup> Fabry points out that the word “duelo” has several meanings in commonly used Spanish: “Combate o pelea entre dos, a consecuencia de un reto o desafío”, “Enfrentamiento entre dos personas o entre dos grupos”, “Dolor, lástima, aflicción o sentimiento”, “Demostraciones que se hacen para manifestar el sentimiento que se tiene por la muerte de alguien”, and “Reunión de parientes, amigos o invitados que asisten a la casa mortuoria, a la conducción del cadáver al cementerio, o a los funerales”. 19-21.

<sup>24</sup> Gelman was not in Argentina at the time of the junta's takeover in 1976, and, because of imminent danger to his life, resided in many other areas around the world: Rome, Paris and, most recently, Mexico.

<sup>25</sup> I have chosen to use the general word, *reader*, to establish a recipient for Gelman's letters. I recognize that this term may be simplistic since it does not necessarily take into account the construct of the implied reader as focalized and created by the poet. But, for the sake of clarity, I will use this term throughout this chapter.

<sup>26</sup> Fabry points to both Vallejo and Borges as influences of Gelman's (*Formas* 37-43). Boccanera also demonstrates Gelman's influences in *Confiar en el misterio*.

<sup>27</sup> Jill Kuhnheim's introduction in *Textual Disruptions: Spanish American Poetry at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.) gives a thoughtful summary of how themes of modernity and postmodernity function in the poetry of the last half of the twentieth century (1-13). In addition, González and Treece follow the trajectory of Latin American poetry of the twentieth century in *A Gathering of Voices* (London: Verso, 1992).



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<sup>28</sup> For more information on theories of nostalgia and my argument against “insipid” melancholy, see the introductory chapter.

<sup>29</sup> I preserve here the formatting Derrida signals as the “52 signs, the 52 mute spaces . . . a cipher that [he] wanted to be symbolic and secret” (5).

<sup>30</sup> These definitions were provided by Dr. Paola Hernández and *WordReference.com*. 12 April 2009. <<http://www.wordreference.com/definicion/ahuesarse>>.

<sup>31</sup> Both of Gelman’s children, Nora and Marcelo, were taken into custody in 1976 along with Marcelo’s wife, María Claudia Irureta Goyena, who was seven months pregnant at the time. Marcelo and María Claudia were never seen alive again. Marcelo’s remains were found in 1989 in a barrel that had been filled with cement and thrown in a river, while the remains of his wife have not been found to this day. Gelman discovered in 1978 that his grandchild had been born in captivity in Montevideo, Uruguay, but it took him nearly 20 years to discover where the child was located. Gelman was united with his granddaughter the first time in 2000, although she rejected meeting with him at first. Gelman’s granddaughter, Macarena Gelman, held a press conference in February 2008 asking the president of Uruguay for information regarding the disappearance of her mother.

<sup>32</sup> I choose “father” here to establish the relationship with the poet, Gelman. While in many cases it would be imprudent to discuss the gender of the poetic voice, the personal nature of these texts seems to imply a direct correspondence between poet and poetic voice. It goes without saying that under different circumstances, it would be possible to utilize “parent” or “mother”.

<sup>33</sup> “To the devil with the child,” Derrida states, “the only thing we ever will have discussed, the child, the child, the child. The impossible message between us” (*Post Card* 25).

<sup>34</sup> I am thankful to Jill Kunheim for suggesting I look for similarities between these verses and those found in Vallejo’s “Solía escribir con su dedo grande en el aire” from *España, aparta de mí este cáliz* (1937). The link between Gelman and Vallejo has been previously discussed, so it comes as no

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surprise that Gelman would choose this symbol, the “dedo grande”, in reference to his son since many of Vallejo’s poems of that period sought to establish a hero/anti-hero figure, such as Pedro Rojas.

## Chapter 2

### *Vomitando a memória: Saudades in Ferreira Gullar's Poema Sujo*

Como beber dessa bebida amarga  
Tragar a dor, engolir a labuta  
Mesmo calada a boca resta o peito  
Silêncio na cidade não se escuta  
De que me serve ser filho da outra  
Outra realidade menos morta  
Tanta mentira, tanta força bruta.

“Cálice”

Gilberto Gil and Chico  
Buarque

The lines from Gilberto Gil and Chico Buarque's famous song, “Cálice” (a play on the command in Portuguese, “cale-se” for “keep quiet”), demonstrate the social imperative of young Brazilian poets and songwriters during the 1960s and 1970s of symbolic and real-world protest against both the military dictatorship in Brazil and forces of oppression in the world at large.<sup>1</sup> Considered a part of Brazil's strong lyric tradition, these composers sought to unite the intellectual, literary and philosophical elements of social awareness with popular culture and solidarity with the traditionally marginalized, often illiterate Brazilian population.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of this chapter, Ferreira Gullar's *Poema Sujo* (1976), provides a poetic counterpoint to the musical movement which Gilberto Gil, Chico Buarque, Milton Nascimento, and Caetano Veloso (among others) fomented in the 1960s and 1970s. This music, with roots in both the *modernismo* and *concretismo* cultural and

literary movements, sought to define “Brazilian-ness” during an age of hegemonic government control, problematic modernization, and increasing foreign influence. Similarly, Gullar explores these themes, but within a poetic tradition heavy with culturally-specific tropes and tendencies: Brazilian *romanticismo* to the cultural cannibalism (*antropofagia*) of *modernismo* and *tropicália*.

Written in exile in 1975 by Ferreira Gullar, *Poema Sujo* pulls the reader into a swirling, gritty poetic narrative punctuated by moments of biting cynicism and tranquilized by tender reflections of the poet’s city of birth. Even though Gullar has resided mostly in Rio de Janeiro since the early 1950s, the reconstruction of the city of his birth in *Poema Sujo*, São Luís do Maranhão, demonstrates a longing for Brazil by including a panoply of uniquely Brazilian elements—the city’s geographical location, the social dynamics of the city, and the historical and cultural heritage with which its citizens identify. The *saudades* for childhood that Gullar explores in *Poema Sujo* mirror the longing he feels for his homeland in exile; *saudades* for the past is a longing for childhood, just as *saudades* for Brazil implies exile and expulsion from what Gullar considers essentially Brazilian. Gullar’s *Poema Sujo* effectively demonstrates and incorporates poetic tendencies elaborated over a century of Brazilian poetry; he employs the tropes of longing of Brazilian *romanticismo* to explore his cultural identity, relying on linguistic forms and preoccupations that were borne of *modernismo* and the mid-century neo-avant garde (*concretismo*) in order to mold a new definition of *saudades* in the context of socially committed poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. In *Poema Sujo* elements of social observation, political criticism

and personal narrative coalesce to create a powerful testimony/testament to the quotidian and seemingly mundane routines of a small Brazilian city.

Leland Guyer, one of the most prominent authorities on Gullar's poetry, states that "[f]ew works, if any, in recent decades have had as much literary impact in Brazil as [*Poema Sujo*]" ("Introduction" 1). Three of Gullar's subsequent works of poetry—*Dentro da Noite Veloz* (1975), *Na Vertigem no Dia* (1980), *Barulhos* (1987)—and a theatrical piece—*Um Rubi no Umbigo* (1979)—contribute to Gullar's status as a literary powerhouse in Brazil. In addition to his own literary works, Gullar also served as the Director of IBAC/FUNARTE (*Instituto Brasileira de Arte e Cultura*, 1992-1995) and is currently publishes as an art critic. Gullar's career spans five tumultuous decades, and he is often at the epicenter of debates in both literary and political circles regarding the importance of art in Brazilian society.

Born José Ribamar Ferreira in São Luís do Maranhão in 1930, Gullar moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1951, where he became involved with the Concrete Poetry movement conceptualized by Décio Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos and Augusto de Campos.<sup>3</sup> Although Gullar's introduction to art was sparked by his reaction to modern painting in the 1940s, his first forays into poetry led him to collaborate with the *concretismo* movement of the 1950s and 1960s because it sought modernization and renovation of poetic language and incorporated more visual aspects into poetry. Gullar eventually broke with the *concretismo* movement because of the group's shift away from populist ideas and towards avant-garde aesthetics that ignored "active dialogue between poet, reader and society" (González 230). Gullar's poetry and

involvement (and leadership) in Rio de Janeiro's *Centro Popular de Cultura* in the 1960s demonstrate a deliberate association and alliance with the working classes and otherwise marginalized groups, a fact that would later provide fodder for questioning and expulsion from Brazil in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Gullar's poetry was published in *Violão de Rua: Poemas para a liberdade* (Street Guitar) in 1962-1963, three volumes of poetry dedicated to the discovery and reinvention of Brazilianness through the unification of the working classes with the ideals of the intellectual and philosophical movements of the time. Charles A. Perrone postulates that this "involvement of middle-class intellectuals and students with the working class and peasants" was fundamental to the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s (70). In these volumes, Gullar's poetry, appearing alongside that of Joaquim Cardozo, Vinícius de Moraes and Moacyr Félix de Sousa, turned more radically towards the populist principles of community that would later appear in greater detail in the poetry written in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Gullar's poetry is contextualized by a renovation in many areas of cultural production during these years. For example, starting in 1968 *tropicália* or *tropicalismo* reflected many of the same social ideals, but sprouted from a musical tradition that incorporated the properties of lyric poetry more so than in most of Brazilian modern popular music up to that point. Poet-songwriters, such as Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, used a "neo-anthropophagic" strategy of contrast and appropriation" to create complex, socially-committed music that mirrored the concerns of literary movements of the era, but with an obvious nod to the first wave of *modernismo* of the 1920s which was evident in the group's *manifestos* and the incorporation of the philosophy of

*antropofagia* (Perrone 102). Like Gullar but preceding him by three years, *tropicália* initiators Veloso and Gil were exiled during the military regime's rule.

The upsurge of socially-committed poetry in the 1960s provides a backdrop to *Poema Sujo*. Because of his involvement with both literary and social groups that were concerned with the state of Brazil's marginalized (both working-classes and peasants), Gullar's life was threatened by government forces. Exile does not represent Gullar's cause, so to speak—it is a *consequence* of his exploration of how he, as an educated intellectual, could find solidarity with Brazil's under-represented. When the military coup occurred in 1964, the aforementioned poems of *Violão de Rua* were considered “subversive” by the government (Perrone 70). After two decades of success in both poetry and theatre, Gullar fled Brazil in 1971 due to mounting pressure and imminent imprisonment by Humberto Castelo Branco's government. Gullar, denounced as a member and activist of the Communist Party, first sought refuge in Buenos Aires, then Paris and Moscow, and finally Santiago de Chile, where he witnessed the military coup of September 1973 that destroyed Salvador Allende's socialist government. In Chile, Gullar was harrassed by the military police as a suspected terrorist. Fearing for his life, he returned to the relative safety of Buenos Aires, only to be in mortal danger again during the Argentinian *Proceso* that was rapidly gaining strength in 1974.

During this tumultuous timeframe and miserable emotional state Gullar composes *Poema Sujo*, a text he refers to as his “testemunho final” (Guyer “Interview” 38). “Its diction is powerful, its message is clear, its application is

global,” writes Leland Guyer, “and through it there pervades a sense of beauty, charity, and faith that is astonishing amid the corruption of the world that the author evokes” (9). A book-length series of fragments, *Poema Sujo* spirals in an imprecise chronological order, suggesting a rough trajectory of Gullar’s life from his childhood to exile in his forties.<sup>6</sup> The tone is playful at times, though the seriousness and cutting irony found in many of the fragments give gravity to the harsh criticisms of marginalization and oppression in São Luís do Maranhão, Gullar’s city of birth and setting for much of the poem.

These harsh criticisms are mirrored in the themes of (im)purity and putridness which Gullar explores throughout *Poema Sujo*, a fact that many scholars have related to the concept of *poesía pura*. Richard Roux suggests that “*Poema sujo* nous apparaît donc comme un poème de la dégradation,” where the passage of time equals “pourrissement” or putrescence (209-210). José Manuel Caballero Bonald sums up these relationships in Gullar’s work in one brief line: “Qué magnífica poesía impura la de Ferreira Gullar” (11). Caballero Bonald’s nod to *poesía impura*, from Pablo Neruda and others, certainly intersects the word choice for the title, that of a “dirty” poem.<sup>7</sup> Ricardo da Silveira Lobo Sternberg gives the clearest and most precise description of both a *poema sujo* and a *poema puro*, especially as it pertains to Ferreira Gullar:

The *poema sujo* rejects what it perceives to be an exaggerated concern for the formal properties of the poem in sacrifice of its *social*, communicative level, proposing instead art as a reflection of and a



reflection upon *life* outside the pages . . . the *poema puro* holds to the attitude that at one extreme has been labeled “art for art’s sake”: poetry that attempts to impose itself as an entirely autonomous and self-sufficient system and that has in Mallarmé its paradigmatic poet. (133)

It is impossible, as Lobo Sternberg points out, to conceive of *Poema Sujo* without the *sujo* because it forces the reader to automatically ponder the implications of ‘impure’ poetry upon reading the title (133).

The ‘dirtiness’ of Gullar’s book length poem responds to the ideals of modernization, Brazilian *modernismo*, socially-committed (or *engagé* poetry) and the reinvention of poetic language to describe both edifying and negative facets of *saudade* which is traditionally associated with Brazilian *romanticismo* longing. While the Argentinian Juan Gelman (Chapter 1 of the current dissertation) represents the problematic nature of the representation of nostalgia in the epistolary tradition in his *cartas abiertas*, Gullar’s *Poema Sujo* explores *saudade* for homeland in a different fashion; Gullar explicitly states his longing for a return to home—both Brazil and the city of his birth, São Luís do Maranhão—whereas Gelman’s letters with missing recipients embody the impossibility of return to the past or to his homeland. Gullar’s *saudades* of São Luís do Maranhão and his past, however, go beyond the traditional longing for home that has typified nostalgia. Instead, it is one of desire for a lost past and impossible return amidst acknowledgement of the abject nature of many elements of the longed for time and place.

In this regard, Julia Kristeva's theories of abjection provide a useful framework for evaluating how Gullar's longing for his childhood home in exile can contain a composite of dirty, "vomited" abject elements—"Garfos enferrujados facas cegas cadeiras furadas mesas gastas" (16), "rato / cocô de gato" (32), "o mau cheiro" (88), "uma perna de mulher" que "apodrece" (100-102)", "me sujas de merda e explode o meu sonho / em merda" (154), to name a few examples from *Poema Sujo*. Concerned with the conceptualization of the 'other' (metaphorically represented by the corpse, for example) as a representation of the limits of language (Yúdice 51), Kristeva attempts to define the subject in psychoanalytical and semiotic/symbolic terms (Moi 12). Vomiting, Kristeva proposes, is the act of ejecting oneself, "It is no longer 'I' who expel, 'I' is expelled" (543-544). In this way, the product of the act of expelling is abject, which is akin to an exile or a:

*deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter—since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaeic, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations. Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place: 'Where am I?' instead of

‘Who am I?’ For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. (546)

Kristeva’s conceptualization of the abject shows it to be both a product of expelling and a characteristic of the expeller, since it (he) often includes itself among the abjections it expels. Place becomes more important than identity, for it exists in multiple forms.

Kristeva draws on language of the exile (among others) to show that the act of expelling is the same as creating a deject.

On two levels, Gullar’s act of ‘vomiting’ memory correlates to Kristeva’s abject dejection, the ‘I’ that expels the ‘I’. Gullar, an exile, functions as an abjection (deject or expelled object) of his society; he is forced into a space that is “divisible, foldable, and catastrophic” because it is ultimately defined by where he *cannot* go (Brazil). In exile, as an abject himself, Gullar expels or vomits his memory in an attempt to recreate his home. What this suggests for Gullar’s home ‘sickness’, then, is a concerted effort at recreating all aspects—without judgment—of its positive or negative character. This is not to say that these references are without criticism. The abject elements in *Poema Sujo* are without judgement—but their appearance at all strongly condemns the hegemonic powers that would create them. By reliving the famine of Esmagado, by focusing the social and economic inequality of the peasant who takes care of the rich man’s canaries, and mixing the sewer waters with those of estuaries, Gullar is pointing out the dichotomous nature of Brazilian society, and

questions the forces that create inequality through modernization and industrialization. These abject elements have been assimilated by the poet his whole life; to use the terminology of the *antropofagia* movement, he has consumed them.<sup>8</sup> Now, he expels, vomits, them as a way to create an ‘other’ made of himself in the form of a poem about his home city where the underprivileged are dominated by *as well as* live alongside the cultural elite.

We will see the abject in Gullar’s employment of forms and tropes commonly associated with the Brazilian *modernismo* movement of the first part of the twentieth century (roughly 1922 to 1945) to explore his country’s unequal modernization in *Poema Sujo*—hence the *sujeira* in the title. Mike Gonzalez and David Treece conceptualize the *modernismo* project in general as:

[a] confused montage of apparently unrelated fragments making up the reality of contemporary Brazilian life...A culture of contradictions emerges, more complex than the simple struggle between modernity and underdevelopment. A whole series of polarities can be glimpsed beneath the random juxtaposition of ‘facts’, setting the natural, the popular, the primitive, the indigenous and the American against the technological, the elitist, the civilized, the cosmopolitan and the European. Yet even as the contradiction becomes apparent, its constituent elements do not remain distinct but interact, giving rise to a richly original, often grotesque syncretism, the peculiar product of a Western civilization in the tropics . . . (87)

These same forms and concerns are present in Gullar's *Poema sujo* written nearly 50 years later. Gullar relies on culturally-specific *saudade* explored in poetry by the Brazilian romantic poets of the nineteenth century to encapsulate the ideology of the *modernismo* movement, all within the context of socially committed poetry of the 1960s and 1970s which responded to social inequality and the weight of the authoritarian regime of Castelo Branco. In other words, Gullar's *saudades* for his home city are not entirely positive, for in the longing of his home city is the acknowledgment of the turbulent social and economic situation of the city's residents.

As a structure for the analysis, I will focus on the distinguishing characteristics of Brazilian *saudade* poetry as provided by Artur Eduardo Benevides. Gullar writes in a lyric tradition that Brazilian author Benevides' characterizes as typically Brazilian in its handling of *saudade*.<sup>9</sup> Benevides' extensive review of the theme of nostalgia in poetry written in Portuguese highlights dozens of examples of explicit references of *saudade*, all of which fall into one of three categories: "1) Quadrinhas ou trovas eruditas; 2) Sonetos, poemas e canções; 3) Versos populares" (43). Benevides explains that the nostalgic in the lyric tradition is a product of Brazil's unique history:

Se é verdade que os brasileiros são o produto de três solidões—a solidão da floresta, a do mar e a do exílio—como herdeiros da miscigenação e aculteração de índios, negros e colonizadores brancos, há uma saudade latente em nosso espírito, uma saudade profunda e indomável, que temos de reproduzir em versos e em música. Entre

nós, esse sentimento, como tema literário, cresce de intensidade no romantismo, depois de haver movimentado as serestas que engrandeceram as noites brasileiras. (40)

Even though Benevides' description of *saudade* and Brazilianness simplistically views racial democracy as did Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s during the second wave of *modernismo*, the three main characteristics that he highlights offer a useful structure to the close reading of *Poema Sujo*: the *floresta* (forest), the *mar* (sea), and *exilio* (exile). In addition, I propose a fourth element—sexual union—comprises Gullar's *saudade* depiction of his homeland. All four elements are symbolic in Brazilian cultural iconography, and we will see how Gullar incorporates them into *Poema Sujo* to redefine the legacy of *saudade*, *modernismo*'s concept of *antropofagia*, and social poetry.

Since *saudade* is culturally-specific, I will first explore the development and contextualization of the term with a review of literature, both academic and otherwise. Special emphasis will be placed on *saudade* in relationship to nostalgia as a whole to better understand how Gullar's poetry could be compared to fellow Southern Cone poets, Argentinian Juan Gelman and Chilean Gonzalo Millán. In this section, I argue that *saudade* is the best way to describe Gullar's relationship with the past—be it his own personal life story or that of Brazil—because *saudade*, like Gullar's reconstructed identity in exile, is uniquely Brazilian and culturally-specific.

The second section explores symbols of primordial Brazil—the flora, fauna and peoples that are indigenous to the area from which cultural identities have been

constructed. Gullar plays with the symbol of the Tupi-Guarani tribes of the region in which he was born, with a nod to both the romantic poets of the nineteenth century who exploited their image and those of the *modernismo* period that sought to explore the roots of Brazilianness. *Saudade*, in this section, will be shown as a simultaneous longing for lost childhood innocence (playing “Indian”, for example) and a preoccupation with cultural heritage built on romanticized visions of the past.

Water as a commodity and a defining geographic element is explored in the third section as a symbol for the *sujeira* of *Poema Sujo*. The salty coastal waters São Luis are contaminated, both from industry and from the rivers that meet in the city’s estuaries. This region of fusion in Gullar’s poem represents autochthonous Brazil, and we will see how it is linked to the *antropofagia* movement of the 1920s which sought to incorporate all aspects of Brazilian society (primordial, modern, industrialized) to better define Brazil’s cultural identity.

The next section considers the sex act as a metaphor for an impossible union with the city from which Gullar is exiled. The descriptions of the sex act as a union with a *you* who represents the city replace the focalizations through the eyes of a boy at the loss of his sexual innocence.

The last section explores exile as a metaphor for death, and how the poet’s exile is mirrored in the childhood memories of travel and early adventures outside the confines of his home city. By symbolizing modes of transportation (primarily the train and airplane) as a first-world commodity, we will see how Gullar criticizes Brazil’s uneven progress to modernity, as well as how he employs the ideologies of

the *modernismo* movement and the social poetry of the 1960s and 1970s to simultaneously glorify and denounce modernization and foreign influence. We will also observe the traces of what Charles A. Perrone calls the “inherent potential for contradiction” that derives from “contact with and adaptation of, the novel ideas and formal proposals of the European avant-gardes” and “nationalism of resistance to the foreign and to emphasis on Brazilian originality” (5).

### **Brazilian *Saudade*: Cultural Specificity and Comparisons to Nostalgia**

Linguists who work with the Portuguese language and those familiar with Brazilian culture alike agree that *saudade* is a fundamental concept in Brazilian self-identification. Before exploring Gullar’s *Poema Sujo*, I will examine the culturally-specific term, *saudade*, through linguistic and cultural lenses since we will see that Gullar’s poem seeks to define what is quintessentially Brazilian about the city of his youth and his own identity as a product of cultural and poetic heritage because he is exiled from them. Having said this, it may seem simplistic to suggest that there exists a “quintessential” Brazilianness, or that a term could symbolize an untranslatable sentiment (an emotion particular to one culture alone), for arguing that a “unique” cultural identity exists is dangerously close to reducing that identity to a stereotypical image. However, we will see that Gullar’s description of his homeland (a *saudade*-like longing for return) is based on a cultural identity that incorporates Brazil’s past into the present to explore under- or unequal modernization.



Generally speaking, Brazilians themselves suggest that *saudade* is a uniquely Brazilian sentiment. While it is derived from a Portuguese linguistic tradition, Brazilians have reserved *saudade* as their own, especially in the case of the *romanticismo* poets of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Bishop points to the importance of *saudade* in Brazilian romantic poetry and suggests that these poets relied heavily on the tropes of homesickness because most of them had to travel to Coimbra, Portugal for a university education since Brazil had no universities at the time (xviii). It is important to note, however, that the Brazilian Romanticists to whom Bishop is pointing were not literal exiles, unlike Gullar. Hence, the exaggeration in their poetry relates more to hope and longing and less with exclusion and pain as we will see with Gullar's poetry. For example, aforementioned Artur Eduardo Benevides, prolific Brazilian author and critic, suggests that *saudade* best describes the complex mixture of hope, longing, and sadness:

[Saudade] é um sentimento complexo e profundo, porque também é tristeza, ternura, amor, sonho, sofrimento e esperança. É algo que extravasa da alma e a entenece e poetiza . . . Tudo é saudades. Tudo o que está ausente resurge com força oprimente e desperta emoções ou pensamentos tão intensos que transfiguram, em nós, o objeto do nosso afeto. (39)

Benevides' conceptualization may seem a bit imprecise or exaggerated, but at its core his definition regards *saudades* as fundamental to the Brazilian expression of emotion, especially that which is expressed through poetry. In the introductory

chapter of this dissertation, I highlighted the problematic reputation that nostalgia and nostalgia studies have had in academic circles.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, if we view *saudade* as culturally-specific nostalgia, then we are bound to see overly-exaggerated conceptualizations of *saudade* as sentimental, insipid or melancholy, as well as how it relates to essentialist, reductionist (and possibly inflammatory) generalizations of Brazilian identity. However, I believe that *saudade* is the best term to describe Gullar's longing for Brazilianness and how it is synecdochally represented by the city of his birth, as well as his concerted efforts at recycling lyric tendencies and tropes of the Brazilian poets who came before him.<sup>12</sup>

Brazilian *saudade* and 'nostalgia' as it is used in English, while are very close in meaning, are not necessarily one and the same.<sup>13</sup> Leo Pap, in an exploration of the etymological roots of *saudade*, suggests that the term is "untranslatable; an approximate gloss would be 'nostalgic longing'" (97).<sup>14</sup> Patrick Farrell, on the other hand, relies on the semantic and syntactical information about *saudade* to compare it to various usages of similar words in English to better approximate its meaning for a non-native Portuguese speaker. "*Saudade*", he states, "is a quintessential Brazilian and Western Iberian emotion concept" (235). "Homesickness", "longing" and "miss" all compare in some ways to *saudade*, although Farrell argues that these terms do not suffice in capturing total meaning (236-7).<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Farrell also states that, within certain grammatical constructions (primarily with the expression *estou com*), *saudade* must be used over other words in Portuguese, even *nostalgia* and *falta*, because it is "conceived of as much more afflictive" (243). While *saudade* is seen as

primarily a reaction to the absence of a loved one, Farrell notes that it is also commonly used for a “cherished place . . . particularly a city of residence or homeland” (245). He later explains this possibility in more detail:

The fact that *saudades* is less often felt for possessions, for example, than for currently distant places with which one has had a significant relationship (*saudades do Brasil*, ‘*saudades* for Brazil’, for example) follows from the ease with which such places can be conceived of as being like people. As one of my informants suggests, it is possible to feel *saudades* for Brazil because Brazil has an *alma* ‘soul’. (250)

Farrell also disentangles the similar meanings between *saudade* and *nostalgia* in Portuguese using Natural Semantic Metalanguage:<sup>16</sup>

Nostalgia is a concept similar to *saudade* in that it involves separation from something that evokes good feelings, wanting there to be no separation, and feeling something bad as a result. The main differences are that the thinking associated with *nostalgia* focuses on past experience rather than on a person or people and the feeling is much less intense (although the feeling is bad, it is odd to talk about dying from it, for example.) (251)

These attempts to define *nostalgia* as it is used in the Portuguese language show that, while it is similar to *saudade*, *nostalgia* is not as grave nor does it have the same affective power.

Consequently, we are left with a nuanced definition of nostalgia as it pertains to this study of Gullar's *Poema Sujo*. *Saudade*, while very similar to nostalgia (in English, Spanish and Portuguese), implies a more intense emotional response that can be edifying, separating it from most other afflictive emotions (Farrell 248). The slightly more affective *saudades* in Portuguese, then, would be the most appropriate term to use for this study of *Poema Sujo* since the term is culturally specific to Brazil, as opposed to the Spanish *nostalgia* as it pertains to Juan Gelman and Gonzalo Millán. To this end, this study will focus on *saudades* and Gullar's work because it is more culturally-specific, a sub-set of nostalgia within the context of the Southern Cone poets of this study.

### ***Onde canta o Sabiá: Primordial Brazil and the Contradictions of Cultural Heritage***

The forced travel of exile serves as a context through which *saudades* for home (i.e. Brazilianness) is expressed. Travel characterizes the problematic nature of Gullar's identity and his kinship with the Brazilian people he leaves behind. However, spatial distancing is not necessary to appreciate the rift between a romanticized Brazilian past and the tensions of contemporary Brazil. In *Poema Sujo*, Gullar invokes the past by utilizing well-recognized tropes referring to Brazil's unique flora and fauna to further distance himself and his society from the idealized state for which he (and others) feel *saudade*. More precisely, the fecundity of regional vegetation and wildlife symbolizes the life force of his native Brazil, in sharp

contrast with both the modernizing forces invaded from the exterior as well as the sterile environment of exile. While Benevides deems it *saudade*-inducing, *floresta* in *Poema Sujo* as synecdochally related to all of primordial Brazil: vegetation, wildlife and indigenous peoples native to Maranhão.

Gullar's references to nature echo those employed by many of the most important poets throughout Brazilian history. And, as is the case with Gonçalves Dias, the celebrated nineteenth-century romantic lyricist also from the state of Maranhão (Caxias), these elements serve as objects of *saudade* in exile. If we compare other Gullar poems with Dias, we can appreciate how Gullar manipulates cultural symbols in his larger body of work. As seen in Dias' famous lines from "Canção do Exílio", the *palmeiras* (palm trees) and the *sabiá* (thrush) figure prominently in Dias' lauding of Brazil's flora and fauna. Dias includes other elements from nature in his celebrated poem:

Nosso céu tem mais estrelas,  
Nossas várzeas têm mais flores,  
Nossos bosques têm mais vida,  
Nossa vida mais amores.<sup>17</sup>

Several lines of Dias's poem are incorporated into the Brazilian National Anthem, a nod to the importance of the flora and fauna in the formation of Brazilian self-conceptualization.

Ferreira Gullar echoes Dias' much-loved poem in his own adaptation of the exile song, "Nova Canção do Exílio" (2000), performed by Brazilian actor and director Paulo José in a video-poem:

Minha amada tem palmeiras  
Onde cantam passarinhos  
e as aves que ali gorjeiam  
em seus seios fazem ninhos  
Ao brincarmos sós à noite  
nem me dou conta de mim:  
seu corpo branco na noite  
luze mais do que o jasmim  
Minha amada tem palmeiras  
tem regatos tem cascata  
e as aves que ali gorjeiam  
são como flautas de prata  
Não permita Deus que eu viva  
perdido noutros caminhos  
sem gozar das alegrias  
que se escondem em seus carinhos  
sem me perder nas palmeiras  
onde cantam os passarinhos. (Gullar "Nova Canção")

Even though this poem was published fifteen years after *Poema Sujo* and over a century after Dias' "Canção do Exílio", the similarities between them provoke reflection on *saudades* and exile. The opening lines of Gullar's version are nearly identical to those of Dias', save the change from Dias' emphasis on exile from his "terra" to Gullar's exile from his "amada". Many of the references to vegetation and wildlife are the same: "palmeiras", "passarinhos" and the "sabiá", the birds that "gorjeiam" or twitter. In addition, the closing lines that implore God for the possibility of return ("Não permita Deus") are nearly identical; while Dias longs for a return to Brazil's fertile lands before his death, Gullar pleads for a life not spent lost on voyages away from his loved one. This highly erotic poem celebrating the sensuality of the *amada* establishes a direct connection between the lover and the natural elements of Brazil. While Dias' lines evoke *saudades* for the ubiquitous (though highly mythified) elements of the Brazilian landscape, Gullar twists the metaphors to represent the sensuality of his partner's body. The female body, then, is converted into an object of *saudades*. Even though this poem does not seem to directly represent the forest's *saudade*-inducing effect, the fertility of the female body represented by widely-recognized symbols (*palmeiras, passarinhos, cascata*) employed by Dias over 130 years earlier establishes a parallel between the two works.

Returning to the primary focus of this study, Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, the references to vegetation and wildlife underscore the singularity of the Brazilian landscape to which he desires to return while in exile, but these references also call to mind past conceptualizations of primordial Brazil (namely, romanticized versions like

Dias') and how they form a part of Brazil's cultural identity. More precisely, the variety and complexity of life suggest the tenacious fertility of the landscape where Gullar was born, a stark comparison to where he finds himself in exile. The first reference to the fecund nature of his city directly correlates to a memory of the poet's family during World War II:

Num cofo no quintal na terra preta cresciam plantas e rosas

...

Da lama à beira das calçadas, da água dos esgotos cresciam  
pés de tomate

Nos beirais das casas sobre as telhas cresciam capins

mais verdes que a esperança

...

Era a vida a explodir por todas as fendas da cidade

sob

as sombras da guerra (20-22)

The danger and the uncertainty of the family's economic situation during the war are directly challenged by the invading vegetation, the exploding life force that flourishes in every nook and cranny in the city. The natural world is unbridled by the developments of humankind, whether houses, pavement or destruction by war. Thus, the natural elements (while not directly examples of the Brazilian forest) underscore the importance of vegetation, both cultivated and wild, as a symbol of Gullar's home and childhood. These plants, "greener than hope" (Guyer *PS* 22<sup>18</sup>), are in direct



opposition with the destructive threat of war and modernizing forces that threaten the way of life of São Luís do Maranhão.

While these lines underline the sheer power of the vegetation in opposition to the modern, other references to the natural world of Brazil catalogue its extensive variety of life forms. On a train trip with his father, the young Gullar catalogues the natural landscape, and he realizes his smallness in comparison:

e ver que a vida era muita  
espalhada pelos campos  
que aqueles bois e marrecos  
existían ali sem mim  
e aquelas árvores todas  
águas capins nuvens—como  
era pequena a cidade!

E como era grande o mundo (56)

The realization as a child of the vastness of the world only serves to strengthen his ties to his city as a point of origin. Since everything that he catalogues on the trip exists “sem mim,” he relies on his city, a smaller sphere of reference, to form his identity. The inclusion of a blank line in this fragment focuses attention on the phrase, “E como era grande o mundo”; this reference resonates with a wistful pondering at his current location far from his home.

These passages demonstrate Gullar's conceptualization of the fecund vegetation and varied creatures as uniquely Brazilian, as well as fundamental to his own concept of identity in contrast to his surroundings in exile. Furthermore, Gullar associates the *floresta* in *Poema Sujo* with the indigenous tribes in Brazil, especially those from the area of his city and state:

Apenas os índios vinham banhar-se  
na praia do Jenipapeiro, apenas eles  
ouviam o vento nas árvores  
e caminhavam por onde  
hoje são avenidas e ruas  
...  
Mas desses índios timbiras  
nada resta, senão coisas contadas em livros  
e alguns poemas em que se tenta  
evocar a sombra dos guerreiros  
com seu arco  
ocultos entre as folhas (106-8)

The indigenous tribe of the state now called Maranhão—the Timbira—was glorified by Gonçalves Dias in a poem titled “Os Timbira”, no doubt to which Gullar is referring in this passage with the mention of poets who have attempted to “evocar a sombra dos guerreiros.” The fact that Dias, like Gullar, was from the state of Maranhão further links the two poets, although as Julio Cezar Melatti points out, Dias

likely invented much of this description of the Timbira based on limited contact he had with the Tupi group on the coast (“Timbira”). Gullar’s passage, unlike Dias’ romantic attempt to resurrect a glorious “noble savage”<sup>19</sup>, suggests that the vestiges of the Brazilian indigenous groups that inhabited the region are found in the natural elements of the environment: the beach, the native trees of the region (the *jenipapeiro*, for example), and the birds. Gullar reinforces this view by depicting a schoolboy, inspired by stories and comic books and his “coração batendo forte,” searching for the indigenous tribes:

mas não encontra mais  
que o rumor do vento nas árvores)

Exceto se encontra  
pousado  
um pássaro azul e vermelho  
--a brisa entortando-lhe as penas feito  
um leque feito  
o cocar de um guerreiro  
que nele se transformara  
para continuar habitando aqueles matos. (108-110)

The child does not find any remnants of the native tribes that once inhabited the area save the crested red and blue bird into which the warrior was transformed because in “na história dos pássaros / os guerreiros continuam vivos” (112).

Consequently, several layers of *saudade* operate in the above passage. First, Gullar reflects on the innocence of the young boy that searches for signs of the long-lost indigenous tribes. The *saudades* of youth mirror the longing for the childhood home as represented by the city of his birth that he reconstructs in exile. However, other layers of *saudades* appear in the mythification of the *índio* in that the noble warrior for which the child searches was a construct Brazil's colonizing forces, as well as those that would use the symbols to exclaim Brazil's strength and ancestry. By invoking the mythologized warrior, Gullar highlights the precarious and fugacious nature of the *saudades* object; a nostalgic view of childhood innocence combined with mythological figures from precolonial Brazil's paint *saudades* for the past and highlight spatial, temporal and modernizing distances. The symbol of the *índio guerreiro* that Gullar evokes through the red and blue bird juxtaposes the past and the present, since the *índio* must transform to continue living. To recall the past in this manner is to highlight its distance as well as celebrate its influence. While this warrior (and, hence, the indigenous tribes he represents) is uniquely Brazilian, Gullar does not seek to recreate or evoke him, as does Dias and other Romantic *indigenista* poets before him. Instead, the disappearance of these groups is an echo of the longing that Gullar feels for his land. While other poets recreated the indigenous groups as a way to celebrate the pre-colonial Brazil, Gullar freely admits that they are physically gone while their spirit lives on in Brazil's bountiful flora and fauna. Thus, Gullar's conversion of the spirit of the *guerreiro* into a bird serves as a metaphor for his own

exile: the bird, symbol of freedom and nature, always carries with it the imprint of its evolutionary ancestry, as does Gullar when exiled from his homeland.

The inclusion of the *índio guerreiro* suggests nonetheless a more complex reading of Gullar's poetry in the context of shifting Brazilian culture during the twentieth century because it evokes the tensions that arise from the *modernismo* struggle in the 1920s to reconcile the impact of the indigenous groups who pre-dated Portuguese settlers. While many of the artists influenced by the *Semana de Arte Moderna* in 1922 rejected, in some part, the influence that Europe (particularly Paris) traditionally had on Brazilian art, others more explicitly sought to glorify the indigenous tribes of pre-colonial Brazil as romanticized founders of the nation. One only needs to recall the famous lines in English of Oswald de Andrade's "O Manifesto Antropófago" of the first wave of *modernismo*: "Tupi, or not Tupi, that is the question" ("Manifesto"). Still other groups, such as *Verde-Amarelismo* (or 'Greenyellowism' and later 'Tapir'), praised the indigenous tribes but concluded that their "physical annihilation and assimilation" was "the necessary foundation of the Brazilian people's subjective, mystical sense of integral racial and national identity" (González 96). Members of this latter group employed quasi-fascist ideology to extol Brazilianness based on an assimilated primitive culture.

Consequently, the inclusion of the *índio guerreiro* in *Poema Sujo* calls to mind the romanticism of the indigenous tribes in Brazil as mythic figures that form part of the Brazilian national and cultural identity, but it also suggests that this characterization of Brazilianness is, at best, problematic, and at worst, could breed

ethnocentrism or fascism. Thus, Gullar succeeds as both evoking the symbol, especially by mirroring fellow Maranhese Gonçalves Dias' romantic depiction of the Tupi, and destroying it by suggesting its problematic implementation as cultural symbol. As such, the distance between the idealized past is symbolic of Gullar's separation from his city of birth, but it also represents the poet's exploration on a larger scale of the process of cultural identity and the contributing role of appropriated national symbols.

In the aforementioned passage, the bird represents the evocation of the *índios guerreiros* as cultural symbol for Brazilian identity. The brightly colored bird serves as a bridge between the past and the present, between the rural and the urban, and the destroyed indigenous tribes and the colonizers. The bird, because of its multi-faceted symbolic nature, appears many times throughout *Poema Sujo* as a simile the diversity of the Brazilian population, especially in regards to Gullar's city of São Luís do Maranhão:

desde  
o canário-da-terra (na gaiola  
de su Neco), a rolinha fogo-pagô  
(na cumeeira da casa)  
até o bigode-pardo  
(que se pegava com alçapão no capinzal)  
o galo de campina  
parecia um official

em uniforme de gala;  
o anum era um empregado  
da limpeza pública;  
o urubu, um crioulo  
de fraque; o bem-te-vi,  
um polícia de quepe  
e apito na boca  
sempre atarefado (114)

The birds in their assorted plumage remind Gullar of figures of his community. Given that the state of Maranhão (and Brazil in general) is known for its biodiversity, especially the immense number of species of birds, it comes as no surprise to find Gullar's identification of the figures of his city with birds of the region.

As is often the case with other elements of *Poema Sujo*, the birdlife is transformed into a symbol of the differences in social groups. Recalling the reasons for his exile, the birds demonstrate his commitment to the working class or the poor. For example, Gullar highlights the keeping of birds in a cage as a symbol of the elite class:

Enquanto isso  
o dr. Gonçalves Moreira mantinha na sua sala  
um casal de canários belgas numa gaiola de prata  
...  
E trouxe uma caboclinha

de suas terras em Barra do Corda

para arrumar as gavetas . . .

. . .

e cuidar dos canários (118)

The wealthy doctor, representing the cultural elite, brings Belgian canaries to live in a silver cage in his living room. The influence of the foreign is directly juxtaposed with the peasant that he brings from her land to clean and care for the birds. She, like the birds, is a symbol of his wealth and position in society. Here, the perversion of the relationship between the indigenous and nature demonstrates Gullar's conceptualization of the cultural and economic elite as controller and captor of nature, whether it be from the *floresta* or of humankind.

In the final appearance of the bird figure in *Poema Sujo*, Gullar explicitly aligns himself with the bird in flight:

O homem está na cidade

como uma coisa está em outra

e a cidade está no homem

que está em outra cidade

mas variados são os modos

como uma coisa

está em outra coisa:

. . .



a cidade está no homem  
mas não da mesma maneira  
que um pássaro está numa árvore  
...  
a cidade está no homem  
quase como a árvore voa  
no pássaro que a deixa (192-194)

The bird in flight recalls Gullar's exile. Seemingly representing free will movement, the flight of the bird (and Gullar's exile) is instead viewed as instinctual processes. The bird remembers the tree as a concept, as an instinctual place of landing, and carries that sentiment with it on its flight, just as Gullar's home city travels with him during his.

### **Water Symbolism, *Antropofagia* and *Saudade*: Vomiting a Memory of Cultural Inequity**

Coastal and fresh waters invade Gullar's *poema* unlike any other element; while the vegetation and the birds are always present to remind the reader of the unique Brazilianness of the flora and fauna, the water gives both gives life and putrefies. "Swirling", "formlessness that precedes clarity", "torrential"—these are a few of the descriptors that Leland Guyer uses to conceptualize *Poema Sujo* ("Introduction" 7). The ocean, simultaneously creating coastal boundaries and representing infinite horizons, serves as a symbol for exile, and Gullar emphatically

calls on the coastal waters of his hometown to give it definition, both geographically and culturally. Seen from above, São Luís do Maranhão sits on a peninsula riddled with rivers and estuaries that mix with salty waters of the Atlantic. His description validates Benevides' third characteristic of the Brazilian poem of *saudade*—*o mar*, but we will see that water, as a commodity, powerfully separates the “haves” from the “have-nots” in Maranhão. Consequently, Benevides' *mar* as a symbol of Brazilian *saudade* can be extended to include all water in *Poema Sujo*—oceans, rivers, mud and sewage—especially since Gullar sees in water a compelling fusion of life and death. Recalling this fusion, Gullar symbolically vomits the abject elements (Kristeva) that have given his home city its identity. By incorporating the abject into his own conceptualization of a body in exile, Gullar nods to the importance of another tenant of Brazilian *modernismo*—*antropofagia*.

The estuaries surrounding Gullar's city are the battle ground of salt waters from the Atlantic and the sweet waters flowing from the mainland of Brazil, a unique mixture of the autochthonous and the foreign. As a result, the poet presents them as a place of both sublime beauty and stinking decay, where both nature and the works of man are eroded by relentless tides. The poet recalls a particular solitary Sunday (or perhaps a series of Sundays collapsed into one) spent at the estuary during his childhood:

que perguntava eu ali  
com aquele cofo nas mãos  
sob o sol do Maranhão?

Não era o sol de Laplace  
nem era a ilha geográfica  
era o sol  
o sol apenas  
com cheiro de lama podre  
e o cheiro de peixe e gente  
corvine serra cação  
papista comendo merda  
na saída do bueiro  
pátria de sal e ferrugem (40-42)

The choice of *pátria* in place of *terra* or *chão* shows that Gullar extends the metaphor of that particular estuary to all of São Luís do Maranhão, possibly to all of Brazil, even though Leland Guyer translates it as “land of salt and rust” (*PS* 43) which leans towards a reading of *pátria* as merely an area of dry soil. In any case, the estuary, “essas aulas / de solidão” (42), presents young Gullar with an isolated place for reflection on the nature of the world around him. What he finds are not the palm-lined beaches and singing birds of Gonçalves Dias’ Brazil, rather he experiences the stinking mud of the estuaries where the city’s sewers collide with the salty waters of the sea.

This usage of the muddy estuaries of the river as a meeting point of Brazilian waters and salty Atlantic sea typifies the collision of industrialization and nature. In their march towards the sea, the river’s waters are joined by the pollution of the city.

The resulting mud, created with the addition of the heat of the tropical sun, reeks with the decay of fish and man alike. This mud, while not fitting directly with Benevides' conceptualization of the *mar* as typical of Brazilian *saudade*, is created by three forces that are found in Brazil and epitomize São Luís do Maranhão because of its geographic location: coastal waters, tropical rivers and hot sun.

This particular mud, then, gives rise to its own unique microclimate, complete with inhabitants: the *moradores das palafitas*, or as Guyer translates them, “the mud flat slum dwellers” (71). Water, in this area, typifies a social conflict caused by rapid industrialization and economic inequity about which Gullar rails in other parts of

*Poema Sujo:*

junto do Matadouro  
que fede  
o dia (um dia) apodrece  
envolvendo o dia  
dos moradores das palafitas  
e o dia do urubu  
e o da lata de azeite Sol Levante  
que sobre três pedras  
no chão de terra batida da palhoça  
onde mora Esmagado  
ferve  
com arroz-de-toucinho

para o almoço (70)

The vulture (*urubu*) soars over the mud flats and witnesses the slum-dweller (with a name meaning “crushed one”) boiling a meager lunch in a tin can over the fire. This usage of water (specifically its product, stinking mud) is diametric to that of the *saudade*-rendering of Brazil’s waters by Dias and others because it serves to underscore the unequal distribution of goods in an impoverished society. Clean water is a commodity much in the same way as food, and Gullar’s *Esmagado*, because of the socio-economic situation, is relegated to mud and rice.

This passage calls to mind the poetry of other socially committed poets of Brazil, in particular João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999). For example, Melo Neto’s poem “O urubu mobilizado” also invokes the vulture as a symbol of economic and social disparity:

Durante as sêcas do Sertão, o urubu,  
de urubu livre, passa a funcionário.  
O urubu não retira, pois prevendo cedo  
que lhe mobilizarão a técnica e o tacto,  
cala os serviços prestados e diplomas,  
que o enquadrariam num melhor salário,  
e vai acolitar os empreiteiros da sêca,  
veterano, mas ainda com zelos de novato:  
aviando com eutanásia o morte incerto,  
êle, que no civil quer o morto claro.

Embora mobilizado, nêsse urubu em ação  
reponha logo o perfeito profissional.  
No ar compenetrado, curvo e conselheiro,  
no todo de guarda-chuva, na unção clerical,  
com que age, embora em pôsto subalterno:  
êle, um convicto profissional liberal. (Bishop 160)<sup>20</sup>

The vulture, symbol of death, is employed to take care of the corpses that fill the backlands due to famine and sickness. This same vulture awaits the death of Esmagado in Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, a reference danger that faces the socially and economically disadvantaged mud flat slum dwellers.

João Cabral de Melo Neto, to a certain extent, paved the way for Gullar's poetry in that it was some of the first to combine the aesthetics of mid-century Brazilian poetry with the social realities of Northeastern Brazil.<sup>21</sup> Generally considered to coincide chronologically with Generation of 1945, Melo Neto nevertheless stood apart from many of his contemporaries given the "textual geometry and integration of social and regional phenomena" (Perrone 117) that he applied to masterpieces such as "Morte e Vida Severina." This poem (later converted into a musical theatre production written by Chico Buarque in 1966) explores what would in the 1960s and 1970s develop into *poesia marginal* in which "dominant tones were largely casual, often apparently anti-intellectual" (Perrone 120). We can see how "Morte e Vida Severina" explores what Manuela Brêtas asserts as a

fundamental characteristic of the poetry of the twenty years between 1945 and 1965: “O homem do campo, justamente por viver isolado dos grandes centros urbanos, passava a ser visto como o guardião da verdadeira cultura brasileira” (2). Gullar, like Melo Neto ten years or so before, focuses on the average Northeastern Brazilian to demonstrate the social inequities of Brazil (especially Maranhão) as well as to elaborate his own conceptualization of identity since he is separated from home in exile.

In *Poema Sujo*, Gullar furthers the relationship between water and economic status by employing the waterworks and plumbing distribution systems of his city. In this case, the mud is merely the environment in which the poor live without clean, running water—a luxury afforded only to those of higher social standing in the city. Gullar sets up this oppositional relationship by describing how “em todas as torneiras da cidade / a manhã está prestes a jorrar” (84). The mornings in the city are punctuated by the faucets gushing, while in other, poorer parts of the city, there is no running water:

Menos, claro

nas palafitas de Baixinha, à margem

da estrada-de-ferro,

onde não há água encanada:

ali

o clarão contido sob a noite

não é

como na cidade  
o punho fechado da água dentro dos canos:  
é o punho  
da vida  
fechada dentro da lama (86)

The water of the city, “clenched within the pipes” (Guyer *PS* 87), flows by design. The water of the mud flats, represented by the personified clenched fist of life, epitomizes a daily struggle for survival.

The last part of *Poema Sujo* effectively collects all of the water metaphors like larger river envelops its tributaries. Gullar identifies with water in all its forms, for the waters of São Luís do Maranhão are its most defining feature:

minha cidade doída

Me reflito em tuas águas

recolhidas:

no copo

d’água

no pote d’água

na tina d’água

no banho nu no banheiro

vestido com as roupas de tuas águas

que logo me despem e descem



diligentes para o ralo (152)

The waters of his home city—whether bath waters or drinking waters—bathe him before combining with others in the sewer system that flow into the rivers and the sea.

Water in all of its forms is such an integral part of *Poema Sujo* that it, better than many of the other elements in the text, underscores the complex relationships between life and death, purity and decay, and abjection and longing. The coastal waters join with the freshwater of the rivers in muddy, decaying estuaries. Sewers dump into the waters cutting through the city, and the region's poorest live above the mud flats, where advances of the industrialized city (electricity and water services) do not reach. Gullar conceptualizes himself similar to this water: fluid, always in movement, dirty but essential for life. Unlike other water metaphors used in *romanticismo* poetry—the ocean, especially—Gullar's water-rich home city teems with life and rots in the humid decay.

The implications of choosing impurity to nostalgically conceptualize his home city sets Gullar apart from the Brazilian lyric tradition of *saudade*, unless one conceives it as a logical trajectory of the goals set forth by Oswald de Andrade and others during the height of *modernismo* fifty years earlier. Kenneth David Jackson briefly summarizes de Andrade's "O Manifesto Antropófago" (1928), a key text that influences Brazilian society and arts to this day:

characterized by its mocking appropriation, inversion, and local application of European models, among them the rhetoric of manifestos and the primitivist discoveries of the European avant-

gardes, both transposed to the spaces and races of Brazil's vast interior.

*Antropofagia* exploits its avant-garde posture to address the question of Latin American cultural autonomy in dialogue with the primitivism then attracting attention in Europe. Vivaly engaged with the question of Latin American cultural autonomy, *Antropofagia* was a bold, provocative, if also ambiguous, attempt to respond to the conflicting imperatives of cultural nationalism and pluralist cosmopolitanism in a post-colonial context. (88-89)

The anthropophagous movement of the early twentieth century seeks to construct an authentic Brazilian identity by drawing on all autochthonous elements as well as incorporating (eating) those that had invaded. Thus, by consuming the 'other', Brazilian society would become stronger by incorporating the strongest elements of its invaders.

*Antropofagia* shares with the concept of *saudade* a cultural specificity in that both terms describe phenomena appropriated as fundamental aspects of Brazilian culture. While *antropofagia* was previously attributed by historians and anthropologists to 'barbaric' indigenous groups such as the Tupi, Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto" uses the concept of human-eating as a celebration of tribal elements as an incorporation of the victim's strength and identity into the body of the victor. In a cultural context, González and Treece explain that "Anthropophagy called for a genuine synthesis [of indigenous, primitive values and European culture] . . . The assimilation of the oppressive alien culture and its recreation in an autonomous

form was to be achieved by a critical act of ‘devouring’ ” (100). On a philosophical level, *antropofagia* is an expression of longing, capturing, and assimilating cultural symbols that represent nearly-extinguished Brazilian indigenous groups.

*Saudade*, similarly, is a desire similar to longing for something/some time that is unattainable. In this way, both *antropofagia* and *saudade* look towards a different time or the absent object/person for edification and cultural identity. They both consider the ‘other’ as essentially important to their identity; without a victim, *antropofagia* cannot exist, and without a longed-for object, *saudade* is just melancholy.

Since *antropofagia* and *saudade* both rely on multiple components, purity is impossible given the extent to which hybridization and cannibalizing represent an attempt to construct a self-identity made of the strongest parts of its own and other cultures. For this reason, Jackson’s assertion that “In the fractured world of post colonialism, the choice is not between purity and its opposite, but between competing kinds of impurity whose values are inseparable from settings and circumstances” (89) is extremely relevant to Gullar’s *saudade* vision of his homeland in *Poema Sujo*. Impurity and syncretism characterize Gullar’s dirty poem of tainted waters and composite social and economic constituents, evident most prominently in its title.

This instinct to include the impurities in his conceptualization of São Luís do Maranhão is echoed in Gullar’s own words when simultaneously describes *Poema Sujo* as a manifestation of his desire to “virar brasileiro” (Guyer 35) and as an act of “vomit[ando] a [sua] memória” (Guyer 39). The longing for a return to “Brazilian-

ness” is coupled with the act of vomiting his memory to relive it, an abject metaphor for re-experiencing one’s past that provokingly recalls the act of consuming and cannibalizing that *antropofagia* posits. The nostalgic homesickness of Gullar’s longing for his home city tends to highlight the sickness as well as the desire for return, a fact that flies in the face with a lyric tradition that highlights only the positive or unique aspects of Brazil to evoke *saudade*-like affect.

### **Urban Space and Sex: Physical Union as a *Saudades* –Longing**

In a larger context, the sexual act can be seen as a highly symbolic hybrid of many of the elements already seen in this study. For example, the sexual act is implicit in the discussion of the mythification of Brazil’s indigenous population because of their eradication *and* simultaneous racial mixing that came about during the post-colonial period. Brazilian society today is a fusion of various ethnicities—African, European, and indigenous American. For this reason, the sex act, as unification and reproduction, symbolizes the Brazilian culture that Gullar recreates, both in *Poema Sujo* and “Nova Canção do Exílio” which I previously highlighted. In the latter, the highly eroticized conceptualization of the female lover’s body through forest symbolism also underscores an amalgam of references to the sexual act. Exile, in that poem, is separation from the lover’s body—a symbolic rendering of Brazilian flora and fauna. Thus, the sex act is parallel to that of the entering, joining, or conquest of the Brazilian landscape—an action that recalls the conquest of Brazil by Europeans as well as the *antropofagia* that some Brazilian groups claimed as their

method of incorporating the other. Sex is fundamental to this close reading because it brings together many of the *saudade*-inducing phenomena that Benevides' proposes at the beginning of this study, as well serving as supreme symbol of the richly sensual nature of *Poema Sujo*.

As Lobo Sternberg emphasizes, *Poema Sujo* has a dramatic structure that roughly parallels the poet's life (138), especially the first part that introduces childhood and adolescent perceptions of the world and sexual initiation. These experiences are tightly woven with imagery from São Luís do Maranhão, establishing a link between the girls with whom he had novice sexual experiences and the city he left. The imagery of the first few lines of Gullar's poem—"turvo turvo / a turva / mão do sopra / contra o muro" (10)—is purposely vague to suggest Gullar's birth. "Não é nada. É uma imprecisão, uma tentativa de descrever uma coisa antes do meu próprio nascimento, antes da minha existência, antes do definido," suggests Gullar in an interview with Guyer ("Interview" 39). However, in the next several lines, he addresses a specific feminine *you* as the imagery swirls into focus: "tua gengiva igual a tua bucinha que parecia sorrir entre as folhas de / banana entre os cheiros de flor" (12). The confusion of objects and sensations is focalized through the lens of childhood perception, through which naming becomes an epistemological activity.

Within the next fragment, this process is questioned when the poet cannot remember the girl's name associated with the smells and images of the first sexual encounter:

bela bela

mais que bela  
mas como era o nome dela?  
Não era Helena nem Vera  
nem Nara nem Gabriela  
nem Tereza nem Maria  
Seu nome seu nome era . . .  
Perdeu-se na carne fria

perdeu-se na confusão de tanta noite e tanto dia  
perdeu-se na profusão das coisas acontecidas (12)

While the rhythmic pattern and rhyme of these lines recall those of the opening words, “turvo turvo”, the abrupt shift to the third-person (instead of the *you* found in the lines immediately preceding these) distances the child-like perceptions of the adolescent from those of the mature poet trying to remember the girl’s name.

Consequently, the first images of sexual union are vague—uncoordinated, clumsy references to body parts and smells, girls’ names that have been lost, seemingly random associations with the images that represent “a vida a explodir por todas as fendas da cidade” (22). The feminine *you* is confused with “balcões da quitanda pedras da Rua da Alegria beirais de casas / cobertos de limo muros de musgos palavras ditas à mesa do / jantar” when the poet hints at his exile:

voais comigo  
sobre continents e mares  
E também rastejais comigo

pelos túneis das noites clandestinas

...

vos esgueirais comigo, mesas velhas,

armários obsoletos gavetas perfumadas de passado (18)

The unnamed girl with whom he had his first sexual experiences becomes intertwined with the objects and sensations of the city he left. He takes the girl with him in his memory even though her name is “perdido . . . em alguma gaveta” (14) because she symbolizes the experience of sexual initiation during his youth.

The tone of many of the fragments relating to his sexual initiation is seemingly lighter than that of the rest of the poem. Rhymed verses, infrequent in other lines, permeate the descriptions of the sexual act when it is portrayed through the gaze of a younger man. In one of the other few instances of rhyming verse in the text, Gullar invokes a tone of youthful teasing when he refers to the train trip with his father and the girl he left behind:

adeus meu grupo escolar

adeus meu anzol de pescar

adeus menina que eu quis amar

que o trem me leva e nunca mais vai parar (50)

The train metaphor embodies his experiences as a youth at discovering the world at the side of his father, thus the brazen tone of adventure seems to mock the childish things he has left behind, including the girl that he “tried to mate” (Guyer *PS* 51).

The mocking, sing-song nature of these lines appears to directly contradict the

seriousness of the poet's exiled state, especially in the context of the abject elements previously discussed that permeate the text. Thus, while the playfulness of these lines seems at first to diminish the importance of the girl in his past as if it were too childish an experience, they underscore the fundamental nature of these events in the formation of the poet's identity. Forced separation from this girl, because of the passage of time (forgetting her name, for example) and exile from the space of the sexual initiation, distances the poet from the process of coming-of-age.

Hence, it comes as no surprise that the sexual references in the fragments concluding *Poema Sujo* consider the sexual act from a more mature stance, where retrospection and longing intertwine to create a sexual partner in the city that the exiled poet has left behind. Instead of school-boy references to girls he tried to "mate," for example, Gullar objectively catalogues some of the sexual practices that he witnessed in São Luís do Maranhão. Camélia, one of the characters in Gullar's representation of his city, "caiu na vida / porque ainda não existia a pílula" (120). Senhor Cunha, the city barber, "quase morre de vergonha . . . Por que vai um homem ter filhas, / meu Deus? E ele tinha três" (122). The narrative style of these lines breaks from the clumsy references to body parts that abound in the first fragments, as well as displaying a more mature perception of the sexual act than that found in the innocent mocking of girls and his own sexual initiation.

But embedded in these fragments are more personalized references to a sexual relationship with the *you* that is Gullar's city. Within the lines that I will discuss in a



later section of this study appear apostrophic references to São Luís do Maranhão coupled with references to sexual union:

Ah, minha cidade verde  
minha úmida cidade  
...  
Desce profundo o relâmpago  
de tuas águas em meu corpo  
...  
desce profundo  
o relâmpago de tuas águas numa  
vertigem de vozes brancas ecos de leite  
de cuspo morno no membro  
o corpo que busca o corpo (145-48)

The poet joins in copulation with another body without regard to the gender of the partner, as in other references to sex in *Poema Sujo*. However, the identification of the city as the *you* to whom the poet directs himself establishes a sexual connection between him and the city. Personifying the city as a sexual counterpart, either female or male, allows Gullar to figuratively unite with his homeland in a way that is impossible given his exile.

Through the expression of sexual desire, Gullar channels his longing for a return to Brazil and São Luís do Maranhão by establishing a parallel system of desire in the description of the girls with whom he had his first sexual experiences as well as

those of varying degrees of sexual maturity who representatives of the city from which he was separated. The sexual union of two bodies stands in substitute for the reunification of his body with that of the city he left.

### **Exile, Travel, and Transportation in *Poema Sujo***

*Poema Sujo* is a product of Ferreira Gullar's exile, thus it comes as no surprise that (forced) travel and travel-related themes figure prominently. Transportation will be shown to represent three distinct paradigms: exile from homeland/city (and, conversely, what the homeland/city symbolizes for his identity in exile), travel experiences as a youth that formed the poet's world view, and the problematic modernization of a third-world country in relationship to the first-world (either international or national) elite. Since travel equates distancing, either physical or emotional, *saudade* is a consequence of separation.

Ferreira Gullar explicitly addresses himself to his native city few times in *Poema Sujo*, employing an apostrophic marker akin to a sigh: "Ah, minha cidade verde/ . . . / constantemente batida de muitos ventos / rumorejando teus dias à entrada do mar" (144), "Ah, miha cidade suja / de muita dor em voz baixa" (150). These markers indicate a *saudade* view of the city from afar, the poet lamenting in his address the pain of distance as well as the present decayed state of the city. The prosopoeic elements suggest that the poet is waiting for a reply from his beloved, though dilapidated, city. Some of these markers are explicit, as suggested in the above lines, while others indicate that travel and separation from one's own physical

body are metaphors for exile. Traveling by train as a child with his father informs his world view, but forced travel as an adult drives him to acknowledge that his concept of identity is firmly attached to the city of his birth.

While the aforementioned direct addresses to the city certainly seem to underscore a *saudade* filled view of São Luís do Maranhão, they do not explicitly illustrate Gullar's painful exile from Brazil. The first mention of the poet's separation from his native city appears in the context of remembering while in a foreign place:

meu corpo cheio de sangue  
que o irriga como a um continente  
ou um jardim  
circulando por meus braços  
por meus dedos  
enquanto discuto caminho  
lembro relembro  
meu sangue feito de gases que aspiro  
dos céus da cidade estrangeira  
com a ajuda dos plátanos (26-28)

The mind, in remembering the separation from the homeland, is forced to reconcile that his physical body is now made up of elements from the foreign place. The self-destruction of the physical body in the succeeding passage is a way to negate the influence of the foreign:

e que pode—por um descuido—esvair-se por meo

pulso

aberto

Meu corpo

que deitado na cama vejo

como um objeto no espaço (28)

The visualization of out-of-body experience after suicide is corporeal exile. To separate one's body from the locus of thought and affect is similar to the exile's physical body being separated from its homeland. While the body may be in a foreign land, the exile constantly thinks, dreams and imagines its home and its function as memory-keeper:

corpo que se pára de funcionar provoca

um grave acontecimento na família:

sem ele não há José Ribamar Ferreira

não há Ferreira Gullar

e muitas pequenas coisas acontecidas no planeta

estarão esquecidas para sempre (30)

In a subsequent passage, Gullar identifies the body as being more than the sum of its physical parts:

Mas sobretudo meu

corpo

nordestino

mais que isso

maranhense

mais que isso

sanluisense

mais que isso

ferreireense

newtoniense

alziense (35)

The precision of the point of origin spirals from northeastern (Brazil), “maranhense” (São Luís do Maranhão), to “newtoniense” and “alziense”—plays on the names of his parents—indicate a strong self-identification with not only the place of his birth but his unique physical makeup as determined by his parents. The references in these lines to “nordestino” and “maranhense” also highlight the dichotomous relationship between the northeastern region of Brazil and the dominance of the southeastern cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. While Maranhão has served as home to many of the nation's favorite poets (Gonçalves Dias, among others), it has traditionally been overlooked as a center of cultural activity in favor of the larger, more technologically advanced, metropolitan areas of the south.<sup>22</sup> The strong ties to his somewhat marginalized home city while in exile force him to probe his concept of self-identity, both physical and emotional, as well as his place in the cultural sphere of Brazil as a whole, especially since Gullar has spent most of his life either living abroad or in Rio de Janeiro.

While the exploration of the body, its demolition through suicide, and self-identification as “sanluisense” all function on a symbolic level as a metaphor to exile, Gullar explicitly treats exile, as well. References to São Luís do Maranhão function in the above passages as the counterpart to the “here/now” of exile in Buenos Aires. Again, the body is the point of convergence between the exiled space and the homeland; created in Brazil but exiled to Buenos Aires, the location of the body forces memories of the past to combine with present experiences:

que eu debruçado no parapeito do alpendre  
via a terra preta do quintal  
e a galinha ciscando e bicando  
uma barata entre plantas  
e neste caso um dia-dois  
o de dentro e o de fora  
da sala  
um às minhas costas e outro  
diante dos olhos  
vazendo um no outro  
através de meu corpo  
dias que se vazam agora ambos em pleno coração  
de Buenos Aires  
às quatro horas desta tarde  
de 22 de maio de 1975

trinta anos depois (64-66)

His body, essentially “sanluisense,” is exiled in Buenos Aires. Memory recalls both places, united in a transposed vision of the living room—one in his past in Brazil and the real one in the “pleno coração” of Buenos Aires.

The juxtaposition of agricultural elements—the chicken scratching at the dirt in the previous passage, for example—with the heart of Buenos Aires, serves to further distance home from his current state of exile. Gullar states in a later fragment:

Mudar de casa já era  
um aprendizado da morte: aquele  
meu quarto com sua úmida parede manchada  
aquele quintal tomado de plantas verdes  
sob a chuva  
e a cozinha  
e o fio de lâmpada coberto de moscas,  
nossa casa  
cheia de nossas vozes

tem agora outros moradores (138-140)

The childhood home from which he is exiled is associated with the natural world, inhabited by mold, vegetation, flies and rain. Leaving the fecund home of his youth (a representation of Brazilianness) is akin to death in a sterile foreign city, a sentiment echoed in various fragments throughout *Poema Sujo*. Even though he was not exiled

from his childhood home, separation from that home is later echoed in his exile to another country, further establishing the impossible temporal or physical return.

While many fragments explore the vision of his homeland as life-giving, Gullar is less obvious about the reasons for leaving, a somewhat surprising fact given the extensive repetition of the themes of separation and multiple realities. The first hint of a reason for his exile echoes in the lines that close the first fragment, “combatente clandestino aliado da classe operária / meu coração de menino” (36). The allusion to being a clandestine combatant in favor of the working classes fits well with the description that Lelend Guyer gives of Gullar’s work in the 1960’s in “leftist student organizations hoping to topple the structures of the cultural elite” (5). After the military dictatorship installed itself in power in 1964 with Humberto Castelo Branco in power, Gullar was branded as a member of the Communist Party, a fact that would later cause his imprisonment and torture: “Mas, como eu me identifiquei, terminei preso, fui torturado, exilado, perseguido, só porque eu escolhi o lado do povo fodido.” (Guyer “Interview” 27)<sup>23</sup>

I highlight the political situation because it directly underscores the tension in Brazil at the time between development/industrialization and socio-economic equality. The region of Gullar’s birth suffered the most brutal repression because it is an area ripe for conflict between modernizing forces and those that would put populist causes at the forefront of social and economic renovation in Brazil. Even though Gullar moves from the city of his birth to Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s—two decades before being exiled and writing *Poema Sujo*—he returns through poetry to



São Luís, a traditionally marginalized, under-modernized city as a symbol of temporal exile as well as spatial exile. He is separated physically from this city in exile, and he cannot return to his childhood. As such, identifying with the city of his birth more so than with his adopted city (Rio) or those of exile (Buenos Aires, Santiago) aligns him with social groups that were critical of the regime's project. It comes as no surprise that the regime's hammer would hit hardest in an area of Brazil where inequality was rampant, and communist/socialist forces would have more of a foothold.<sup>24</sup>

Modernized travel (by airplane and train) is perceived by young Gullar as a first-world privilege: those who fly are literally and metaphorically far from the problems of São Luís do Maranhão. The memories of youth inevitably bring the social inequities of under-modernized Maranhão (a representation of Brazil as a whole) to the forefront. Since many of the memories of childhood in *Poema Sujo* are contextualized by observations of inequality, they represent the loss of childhood innocence or an awakening of a socially-oriented person. As an adult, travel represents a forced displacement from his own sense of identity, akin to separating the physical body from the spirit or soul, but young Gullar, on the other hand, is exposed to the geographical vastness of Brazil, the people of his homeland and the inequality between varying social groups by travel. *Saudade*, in this case, is a longing for a lost time of youth and innocence, before observations of social and economic inequality were meaningful.

The longest of these passages describes a train trip the poet took with his father when he was young. The trip begins with references to boarding and the excitement the child felt upon traveling by train for the first time. The onomatopoeic rendering of the sounds of the train hold traces of Gullar's experimentation with concrete poetry earlier in his career:<sup>25</sup>

ali parado esperando

muito comprido e chiava

entramos no carros os dois

eu alegre e assustado

. . .

meu pai (que já não existe)

sorria, os olhos brilhando

VAARÃ VAARÃ VAARÃ VAARÃ

tchuc tchuc tchuc

tchuc tchuc tchuc

TRARÃ TRARÃ TRARÃ

TRARÃ TRARÃ TRARÃ (54)

The final segment of the train passage rhythmically mimics the train coming to a stop, as well as providing a social commentary on what the young boy saw out the window during his journey:

vale quem tem

vale quem tem

vale quem tem

vale que tem

nada vale

quem não tem

nada não vale

nada vale

quem nada

tem

nesta vale

nada

vale

nada

vale

quem

não

tem

nada

no

v

a

l

e

### TCHIBUM!!! (58-60)

While these lines do not explicitly allude to exile, they reinforce the importance of travel in the poet's life, especially in connection with the realization of the conflict between different social classes in Brazil. The combination of the rhythm and the word play, “não vale/no vale” (in the valley/no worth), suggests both a physical location as well as a criticism of value based on economic strength. These words show that one does not need to leave Brazil to feel isolated or exiled, rather the strict separation of social classes based on wealth accumulation (or lack thereof) is an exiling force in and of itself—an “interior” exile, expulsion, or marginalization.

The disjunction that travel presents is not only echoed in fragments with the train as a metaphor for the separation of social classes; the airplane is also used as a distancing machine. While it is possible to conceive of the airplane as a relatively easy and fast way to connect points on a two dimensional plane (a map, for example), Gullar exploits the airplane as a metaphor for the distortion that occurs with distance from high above a subject. Unlike his train voyage with his father, during which Gullar catalogues the Brazilian landscape and people, the plane voyage erases the quotidian details of life in favor of quick, broad views from above. In other words, all detail is lost when one views a subject from afar:

cômodas

antigas, pequenas caixas com botões e novelos de linha,

parentes tuberculosos em quartos escuros, tossindo

...

debaixo daqueles telhados encardidos  
de nossa pequena cidade  
a qual  
alguém que venha de avião dos EUA  
poderá ver  
postada na desembocadura suja de dois rios  
lá embaixo  
e como se para sempre. Mas  
e o quintal da Rua das Cajazeiras? O tanque  
do Caga-Osso? a Fonte do Bispo? a quitanda  
de Newton Ferreira?  
Nada disso verá  
de tão alto  
aquele hipotético passageiro da Braniff. (134)

This hypothetical passenger from the United States does not see the city as it exists on ground level: the families, the houses and the quotidian contents.<sup>26</sup> Rather, the passenger only perceives the geographic outline of the city, wedged between two dirty rivers.

These lines hint at how Gullar conceives of the world's view of Brazil at the time of writing *Poema Sujo*. The hypothetical passenger from the first world flies high over the Brazilian landscape, missing all of the details that make the land uniquely Brazilian. Instead, the passenger only sees geographic markers, here with

descriptors like “encardidos” (dingy) and “suja” (dirty). The characterization of the Brazilian landscape, and consequently its people, as dirty, vaguely identifiable, and faceless not only derogates them, but distances them from the technological advances of the first world: “. . . a vida / passava por sobre nós, / de avião” (162).

Therefore, Gullar’s usage of the airplane as a mode of transportation of the cultural and economic elite third-world forces a connection between Brazil’s internal policies and the United States’ foreign policies. The obliteration of communist sentiment in Brazil, the goal of both Brazil and the United States, causes Gullar’s exile.

This sentiment, solidarity with the working class and forced exile because of those views, is found many times in *Poema Sujo*, most notably in the lines, “Prego a subversão da ordem / poética, me pagam. Prego / a subversão da ordem política, / me enforcam junto ao campo de tênis dos ingleses” (158). The constant threat of violence for his political ideas is tied directly to foreign influence. For this reason, “Mudar de casa já era / um aprendizado da morte” (138). Gullar’s portrays his exile as death-like out-of-body experience:

Não sei que tecido é feita minha carne e essa vertigem  
que me arrasta por avenidas e vaginas entre cheiros de gás  
e mijo a me consumer como un facho-corpo sem chama,  
ou dentro de um ônibus  
ou no bojo de um Boeing 707 acimo do Atlântico  
acima do arco-íris (16)

Forced travel, especially travel by airplane, separates Gullar from his native land. The vertigo that pulls him through other cities and eventually pushes him up above the rainbows is akin to the out-of-body experience—the first step down the tunnel of light towards death. His angels of death are not beatific, rather they are sterilized and modernized modes of transport—the bus and the Boeing 707.

While not necessarily romantic, *saudade*-filled laments at his exile, the nod to travel and displacement for social and political view places Gullar at the cross-roads of Brazil's exile/*saudade* tradition and *modernismo*'s preoccupation with “marvels such as airplanes, automobiles, electrical appliances, [and] urban growth” (Williams 33). Furthermore, the social commentary included in these verses ties him to the musical movement of *tropicália* of the late 1960s which radically supported a renovation of Brazilian popular music through the incorporation of autochthonous musical forms and folklore. Caetano Veloso's song, “Tropicália”, demonstrates some of the same themes:

Sobre a cabeça os aviões

Sob os meus pés os caminhos

Aponta contra os chapadões

Meu nariz

Eu organizo o movimento

Eu oriento o carnaval

Eu inauguro o monumento

No planalto central do país... (“Tropicália”)

Veloso, before Gullar, was also exiled for social and political beliefs that considered participation of artist and intellectual groups fundamental to erasing Brazil's problematic modernization and the resulting inequalities.<sup>27</sup> In *Poema Sujo*, Gullar conceives of travel (especially by plane) as a death-like event. Not only does the travel separate him from his homeland of Brazil, but the airplane is a metaphor for foreign elites that ignore what is quintessentially Brazilian. Thus, modes of transportation (precisely the train and plane) are symbols for distancing or excluding mechanisms that force travel (his exile) or distort (in the case of foreign elites) Brazilian identity.

#### ***Testemunho final: Concluding Gullar's Poema Sujo***

Gritty, littered, fecund, beautiful, rotten: These adjectives describe the complex nature of Gullar's "testemunho final", *Poema Sujo*:

Então eu senti que podia morrer a qualquer hora e que era preciso eu fazer um poema que dissesse tudo, que fizesse um balance da minha vida, que não sobrasse nada para ser dito, como testemunho final. Assim foi que esse poema foi escrito. E ao mesmo tempo, ele é a vontade de resgatar a vida, a alegria, de buscar um novo solo onde eu me apoiasse. Eu estava tão desamparado. Talvez por isso tenha voltado à minha cidade de São Luís do Maranhão . . . ("Interview" 38)

Gullar's designation of his own work as a *saudade* for the city of his birth underscores the various Brazilian lyric traditions to which he subscribes:



*romanticismo*'s *saudades*, *modernismo*'s desire to incorporate the modern and the foreign into its concept of Brazilianness, and late-*modernismo* and mid-century concerns for social inequality. By exploring his own (forced) travel, the flora and fauna, and the water elements of his region, Gullar's *Poema Sujo* draws on traditional Brazilian imagery and metaphors to evoke *saudades* for a return. By contrast, the use of the sexual act as a parallel for reunification with his abandoned city as well as the incorporation of the abject represent a clear divergence from the tradition of nostalgic poetry in Brazil. Gullar, in his own words, conceives of the blending of these elements as a *testemunho*, where the relived happiness and innocence of youth are interjected by the *sujeira* of his depressed emotional state upon writing in exile.

Through a *saudade*-filled representation of the city of his birth, Gullar reaches the goal laid out by the Brazilian Modernists fifty years before. His poetry touches on the clashes between elite/civilized and underdeveloped/primitive, cosmopolitan and rural, not to mention Brazilian and European/American. While these conflicts abound, Gullar's longing to return São Luís do Maranhão typifies Brazilian *saudades* in that the exiled poet explores the past and the city of his birth in order to cling desperately to the idea of a return in the future. As Gullar expresses in his short verse, "Esperar é ter saudade . . . De uma coisa que ainda vem" (Benevides 51).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This song was censored by police agents when Gil and Buarque performed a purposely mangled version of it at the São Paulo music festival in 1973 (Buarque's microphone was turned off). The censorship in Brazil was strongest after 1968 when the military government suspended habeas corpus, and detention, torture, and disappearance became more common. Music had to pass through government censors (Serviço de Censura Federal) before it could be recorded. To a certain extent, this song served to underscore *Proibido Proibir*--the slogan for university student protests in France in 1968--period of the late 1960s and 1970s. While "Cálice" was written and first performed in the early 1970s, and thus did not fit in with the *tropicália*, cultural and musical movement of the 1967-1969 period, the song echoed the repression that many, including *tropicália*'s main figures (Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, both exiled in London between 1969 and 1971, and Chico Buarque, exiled to Italy 1970), still protested against. See Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 162-163, or the BBC documentary "Brasil, Brasil: A *Tropicália* Revolution," dir. Robin Denselow, November 2007, *BBC*, 28 July 2009 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWZDqHe3Tws&feature=related>>.

<sup>2</sup> See Arto Lindsay, *Beleza Tropical*, 1988, Comp. David Byrne, Compact Disc, Sire Records, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> For more information regarding the Concrete movement itself, see Charles A. Perrone's chapter, "The Imperative of Invention: Concrete Poetry" in *Seven Faces: Brazilian Poetry Since Modernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pages 25-66. Briefly, Perrone outlines the three stages of concrete poetry --the Noigandres group in which "verselike but visual factors and verbal dispersion began to play a leading role" (26), the "High Concrete" phase in which Gullar became more active that appealed to "simultaneity, the reliance on geometric plotting, the visual layout of

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phonolexical connections, and the manipulation of relations of proximity and likeness” (33), and the third stage which was more concerned with social aspects of poetry since “many were still challenging the appropriateness and the very notion of concrete poetry as an experimental avant-garde in a severely imbalanced, underdeveloped country” (51).

<sup>4</sup> “The CPC worked to make and disseminate ‘popular revolutionary art,’ aiming to de-alienate the people and to foster social change” (Perrone 72-73).

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this poetry of the 1960s and 1970s generally regarded the experimental poetry of the *concretismo* movement (with which Gullar briefly aligned) as out-of-touch with Brazilian social issues.

<sup>6</sup> Ricardo da Silveira Lobo Sternberg argues that *Poema Sujo* has a dramatic structure that follows the “transformation in the consciousness of the poet” (138). “Memory and History in Ferreira Gullar’s *Poema sujo*,” *Revisa Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 otoño 1989: 131-143.

<sup>7</sup> See Pablo Neruda’s “Sobre una poesía sin pureza” (1935). “Así sea la poesía que buscamos, gastada como por un ácido por los deberes de la mano, penetrada por el sudor y el humo, oliente a orina y a azucena salpicada por las diversas profesiones que se ejercen dentro y fuera de la ley.” *Obras completas III*, fourth edition (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1973) 636-637.

<sup>8</sup> Anthropophagy (*antropofagia*) is ritualized cannibalism. Symbolically used in Oswald de Andrade’s “O Manifesto Antropófago” (1928), this tendency sparked a renovation in poetic (and cultural) language and identity during the *modernismo* period. Charles A. Perrone states, “Critical perspective on Brazilian cultural history, beginning with the contact of Portuguese and Amerindian populations, is gained through an encounter with the primitive forces of the unconscious. The pivotal symbol of cannibalism is an attempt to comprehend a native totemic sense of eating one’s enemies to absorb their forces via magical disposition. This, in literature, would be understood as a critical

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assimilation of foreign (or even nonliterary) information and experiences for reelaboration in local terms” (11).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Benevides even includes an example of Gullar’s untitled popular verse in his catalogue of Brazilian *saudade* poetry:

Esperar . . . felicidade?

Suplício de quem quer bem?

Esperar é ter saudade . . .

De uma coisa que inda vem . . . (Benevides 51)

Benevides does not offer a citation for this quote. Despite research, the origin of this quote is unknown.

<sup>10</sup> Gonçalves Dias is one of the most-widely studied poets of *romanticismo*. His influence on Gullar will be studied later in this chapter. Other poets, such as Gonçalves Magalhães, Casimir de Abreu, Castro Alves, and Álvares de Azevedo figure prominently in the *romanticismo* period.

<sup>11</sup> See the Introduction of the current dissertation.

<sup>12</sup> More information about Brazilian *romanticismo* and *saudades* is in the next section, with a specific comparison with Gonçalves Dias.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Farrell also notes that the singular form of *saudade* is used when describing the emotion in abstract, while the plural form is used anytime a person talks about having *saudade*, such as “Estou com saudades de você” (243). I alternate my usage in this study between the two, depending on whether I am talking about the emotion or the concept itself.

<sup>14</sup> Pap suggests that *saudade* is derived from several root words and languages, *solitude* (Latin, “loneliness”, “forlornness”) or *saudá* (Arabic, “black bile”, “hypochondria”, “melancholy”), to name a few (98-99).

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<sup>15</sup> Farrell develops a working definition of the “key features” of *saudade*, most of which will be apparent in Gullar’s *Poema sujo*:

--[S]*saudade* is primarily an afflictive feeling (as it involves or resembles sorrow and sadness);

--[I]t is stimulated by a distant loved on (or thing);

--[I]t involves wanting this distance to be removed.

--It is typically an intense feeling.

--It is a feeling that is thought to occur in the *coração* ‘heart’.

--It can be an edifying feeling. (239)

<sup>16</sup> For more information on NSM, see <http://www.une.edu.au/bcss/linguistics/nsm/semantics-in-brief.php>, which defines it as “the basic idea is that we should try to describe complex meanings in terms of simpler ones”. An example of NSM for Brazilian *nostalgia* would be:

*Nostalgia (Eu sinto nostalgia (deY))*

(a) sometimes a person (X) thinks:

(b) things happened some time ago

(c) because of this I felt something good

(d) I think I will feel something good if these things happen now

(e) I want these things to happen now

(f) I know that these things cannot happen now

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(g) when X thinks this X feels something bad, not very bad

(h) I feel like this

(i) because I think something like this (because of Y). (Farrell 251)

<sup>17</sup> This version was taken from an online site, *Horizonte de Poesía Mexicana*, Gustavo Jiménez Aguirre and Rodolfo Mata. 1996. 24 July 2008 <  
<http://www.horizonte.unam.mx/brasil/gdias.html>>. Versions of this poem, because of its ubiquity, can be found in almost any anthology of Brazilian poetry, such as *Poets of Brazil: A Bilingual Selection*, Trans. Frederick G. Williams, (Provo: Brigham Young University Studies, 2004) 104-105. The complete poem from Williams' anthology is:

Minha terra tem palmeiras,  
Onde canta o Sabiá;  
As aves, que aquí gorjeiam,  
Não gorjeiam como lá.

Nosso céu tem mais estrelas,  
Nossas várzeas têm mais flores,  
Nossos bosques têm mais vida,  
Nossa vida mais amores.

Em cismar, sozinho, à noite,  
Mais prazer encontro eu lá;  
Minha terra tem palmeiras,  
Onde canta o Sabiá.

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Minha terra tem primores,  
Que tais não encontro eu cá;  
Em cismar—sozinho, à noite—  
Mais prazer encontro eu lá;  
Minha terra tem palmeiras,  
Onde canta o Sabiá.

Não permita Deus que eu morra,  
Sem que eu volte para lá;  
Sem que desfrute os primores  
Que não encontro por cá;  
Sem qu'inda aviste as palmeiras,  
Onde canta o Sabiá. (104)

<sup>18</sup> Many of the translations of Gullar's *Poema Sujo* are my own, however I often rely on those provided by Leland Guyer in this edition. If they are his translations, they will be noted with his name, *PS*, and the page number on which they are found.

<sup>19</sup> For a brief introduction on the “noble savage” in Brazilian poetry, see *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*, Ed. Elizabeth Bishop (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1972) xvii-xvi.

<sup>20</sup> I have faithfully transcribed the version of this poem found in Bishop's collection, even though there seem to be several inconsistencies regarding spelling when compared with other versions of the poem.

<sup>21</sup> The Generation of 1945 is generally considered to be preoccupied with a return to formal tropes of lyric poetry (refined language, the sonnet, etc.), abandoning those championed by the poets of *modernismo*, such as free verse and *pastiche*-like elements.

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick G. Williams points out that Northeast Brazil enjoyed quite a bit of power and influence in both economic and social terms until the early part of the eighteenth century, when gold was discovered in the area that is now called Minas Gerais. Later, Rio de Janeiro became the cultural and political capital of the Portuguese empire when John VI became ruler in 1816 (19-27).

<sup>23</sup> According to Heinz and Frühling, this was a common response by the military regime: “Immediately after the coup, repression and investigation of ‘communist’ and corrupt people started. Military police inquiries were set up that investigated such cases with little respect, if any, for legal and judicial procedures. The sectors most concerned included organizers of Catholic groups (*Juventude Universitária Católica/JUC, Ação Popular/AP*), labor and student leaders, peasant, and other political leaders of the Left. (28) Heinz and Frühling go on to suggest that, using Thomas Skidmore’s model, the repression was “most severe” in the northeast, location of Gullar’s native city of São Luís do Maranhão. (28) Thus, Gullar appears to depict his exile from Brazil as directly related to the economic and cultural hegemony perpetrated by Castelo Branco’s regime against leftist (communist or socialist) forces.

<sup>24</sup> Heinz and Frühling show U.S. State Department documents in which recommendations are made for U.S. military assistance to Brazil for training and economic development, among other things. Two recommendations in particular pertain to Brazil’s economic stratification and the anti-communist sentiment that would come to affect Gullar personally in the late 1960’s:

55. Brazilian armed Forces should be encourage to expand their capability to conduct civic action projects that contribute to the economic development of the country, particularly those conducted by engineer combat battalions in areas where such forces can provide internal security as well as economic benefits.

56. U.S. military programs should assist the Brazilian armed forces in a coordinated program of anti-communist information and indoctrination. (158)



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<sup>25</sup> Brasil, Smith, Gonzalez and Treece also treat concrete poetry in great detail (Gonzalez and Treece contextualize it within the broader Latin American literary movements). See Emanuel Brasil and William Jay Smith, eds., *Brazilian Poetry (1950-1980)* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1983) 2-7, or Mike Gonzalez and David Treece, *The Gathering of Voices* (New York: Verso, 1992) 227-266.

<sup>26</sup> The passenger from the United States is not an inconsequential inclusion, given the involvement by the United States government in Brazilian and Latin American policies during the 1960s.

<sup>27</sup> A subject of a future study would be to compare lyrics of the *Tropicália* and the poetry of Gullar. Since many artists of that era—Veloso, Zé, Gil, Nascimento, among others—were heavily influenced by British and American pop-rock, it would be an interesting direct comparison on issues of exile, modernization, and Brazilian identity. Also, an analysis of how Brazilian culture—music and/or literature—was affected by official U.S. doctrine towards Brazil would be provocative since the U.S. government participated in the the installation and maintenance of the Brazilian dictatorship (as noted above in Note 24).

**Chapter 3**  
**Shock and the Intersubjective Utopia that Contests It:**  
**Nostalgia in Gonzalo Millán's *La ciudad***

¿Qué es lo peor, la muerte o el dolor? Lo peor es el olvido.  
--Gonzalo Millán, *Veneno de Escorpión Azul*

“Amanece. / Se abre el poema / . . . / La herida se abre.” With these persistently haunting words, Gonzalo Millán (1947-2006) lists the quotidian morning routines of the city and its inhabitants under authoritarian control. *La ciudad*, perhaps Millán’s best-known work and one of the most important pieces of Chilean literature written in exile (Coddou 107), is a confluence of varied and, at times, oppositional, elements: memory and deflection, observation (inaction) and action, a preoccupation with artistic production and culture, a critique of government and economic policy, a community’s account of living under authoritarian control, and a reaction to his own exile. Expelled from his homeland, Millán watches his city from the outside, like a scientific observer peering in awe through the glass of the bell jar at an experiment over which he no longer has control. The society that he recreates through memory shatters the official, objective account of Chile’s economic miracle by insisting on an intersubjective, collective account of trauma, the by-product of the implementation hegemonic authoritarian structures of control and repression that favor neoliberal capitalism.

The creation of the city space of *La ciudad* through memory offers a nostalgic paradigm that is not seen in the other poets of this study because it responds explicitly to the economic, political, and social “shock doctrines” that the Pinochet dictatorship

used to gain power and eliminate opposition . In the first chapter, I demonstrated how Argentinian Juan Gelman's *cartas* seek to deconstruct and subsequently rebuild language in exile as a way to bridge the gap between loved ones lost during the authoritarian *junta* in Argentina and himself. His poetry is nostalgic in both its yearning for a different time (with the mother representing the past and the missing son symbolizing the future) and its need for a new language to express the elusiveness of a recipient of the poet's anguish. Brazilian Ferreira Gullar, similar to Millán, illustrates with words the city of his birth—in its beauty and its filth—in a nostalgic attempt to recreate it in exile. Millán's nostalgia diverges from that of Gelman and Gullar in the objectification of a collective subjectivity by fracturing the authoritarian implementation of neoliberal capitalism that would crush dissent and memory in a post-socialist society. Millán's book-length poem unites characteristics that seem oppositional; on the one hand, he effectively catalogues the pressurized cityscape under an authoritarian regime, while on the other, he explores the disorienting reality of exile. His recreation in exile of a complete society that both witnesses and actively ends the dictatorship is nostalgic in its utopian yearning for a different reality.

For these reasons, unlike the previous two chapters of this investigation, I draw direct parallels between Millán's life and works—primarily *La ciudad* (1979)—and the specific political, social, and economic policies that Chile endured during the years of authoritarian government. After the *golpe de estado* against Salvador Allende's socialist government in 1973, Millán fled Chile and lived in Costa Rica

and, later, Canada, to escape the brutal tactics of oppression implemented by the military government of Augusto Pinochet. In exile in Canada he published *La ciudad* (1979) and, five years later, his collection, *Vida* (which includes *Relación Personal*, a selection entitled *Ouróboros*, and previously unpublished works, *Vida, Vida Doméstica*, and *Nombres de la era*). After a brief return to Chile in 1984, two more books of new poems appeared in Chile, *Seudónimos de la muerte* (1984) and *Virus* (1987). After a stay in Holland that began in 1987, *Strange Houses* was published in Canada in 1991. Millán returned permanently to Chile in 1994, where he continued to publish new poems and re-work versions of previously published books such as *Trece lunas: Gonzalo Millán* (Chile, 1997) and *Claroscuro* (Chile, 2002) until his death from cancer in 2006. Two books published posthumously, *Veneno del escorpión azul* (2007) and *Gabinete de papel* (2008), demonstrate Millán's continued exploration of memory and subjectivity.

While the poetry of Juan Gelman and Ferreira Gullar responds to exile, government control, and problematic “progress” or modernization on a generalized level, Millán's *La ciudad* explicitly treats the trauma of exile and the dictatorship's implementation of a neoliberal market driven economy. As such, the first two parts of my investigation are underpinned by Naomi Klein's thesis in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007)<sup>62</sup> in which she

challenge[s] . . . the central and most cherished claim in the official story—that the triumph of deregulated capitalism has been born of freedom, that unfettered free markets go hand in hand with democracy.

Instead . . . this fundamentalist form of capitalism has consistently been midwived by the most brutal forms of coercion, inflicted on the collective body politic as well as on countless individual bodies. The history of the contemporary free market—better understood as the rise of corporatism—was written in shocks. (22-23)

Klein proposes that the coup against socialist president Salvador Allende by the authoritarian military dictatorship by Pinochet was supported, in part, by the Chicago School followers of Milton Friedman and the CIA to institute a “shock” to the Chilean system—both economic and political—that would provide a “clean slate” onto which the ideals of laissez-faire market structure could be written (86-87). The strength of her argument lies, more specific to my current study, in her assertion that the shock of political, economic, and social upheaval is like electroshock therapy/torture that was developed by early psychological pioneers as a method for removing unwanted characteristics and forcing coercion (19). I concur with Klein’s analysis because it details the harsh, systematic dismantling of the Chilean left to which Millán belonged, even while she does not specifically treat the effects this oppression had on cultural spheres.<sup>63</sup> I will show that the shock of the coup itself, the “shock treatment” applied by the Chicago School and Milton Friedman, and the shock of “drug and sensory deprivation research, now codified as torture techniques in the *Kubark* manual and disseminated through extensive CIA training programs for Latin American police and military” (87) are all patently evident in Millán’s *La ciudad* even though it was written in the paradictatorial space of exile. The tone of

torture and fear, the monotonous present tense that, at times, reads like repressed speech, and the inclusion of economic factors and publicity lingo manifest the shock that the coup and ensuing oppression and exile have on Millán's language.

While Klein's reading of the methods and effects of the implementation of the free-market in Chile provide a starting point for my study, it does not breach the topic of memory or nostalgia that I argue is fundamental to understanding *La ciudad*. The bulk of my investigation, therefore, resides at the intersection of Klein's theories about shock as it relates to neoliberal capitalism and Steve J. Stern's assertion in *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988* (2006) that "The crisis of 1973 and the violence of the new order generated a contentious memory question in Chilean life" (x). In particular, I will show how the collective, communal nature (intersubjectivity) of memory and nostalgia defeat objectivist, hegemonic discourse (political, economic, and social) in Millán's Chile based on Stern's observation that

... memory becomes "emblematic" and thereby feeds into struggles over legitimacy. Memory is the meaning we attach to experience, not simply the recall of the events and emotions of experience. What makes a memory framework influential—what makes it resonate culturally—is precisely its emblematic aspect. Memory struggles about traumatic times that affected or mobilized large numbers of people create a symbolic process that blurs the line between the social and the personal. (5)

These personal memories become the social history of the group, or as I deem it, a collective memory. While in other areas of this study I have attempted to distinguish nostalgia from memory,<sup>64</sup> I concur with Stern's general proposal regarding memory: memory of traumatic events (recalling Klein's "shock") is a symbolic process that unites groups of people even while it explores "personal" memories. I rely on Stern's theory of memory to inform my own hypothesis that this conversion of the private into the public occurs in Millán's *La ciudad* when the objective nature of authoritarianism control is fissured in favor of the (inter) subjective, collective memory of the group. The nostalgic in *La ciudad*, then, is the attempt at erasing the shock and memory deprivation used by the authoritarian regime.

Since I will pair selections from *La ciudad* directly with specific elements of the dictatorship's plan for a social, political, and economic "clean slate", I highlight here specific historical events to contextualize the "shock treatment". Gonzalo Millán's early career coincided with the creation of the "Revolution in Liberty" proposed by the Christian Democrat government.<sup>65</sup> Led by Eduardo Frei, this revolution was intended to help ease the economic crisis facing Chile, especially the urban areas of Santiago. In *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (2001), Brian Loveman details the squalid conditions of many areas of Santiago in the 1960s due to high rates of migration from rural areas (239).<sup>66</sup> Within this context of stressed economical and social infrastructure, leftist groups including the radical Marxist contingent were able to win support because the "redistribution of wealth and land would greatly improve the lot of the masses" (Loveman 240).<sup>67</sup> The elections of

1970 offered a three-party race between Salvador Allende (Popular Unity or UP—a coalition of several leftist groups), Jorge Alessandri (independent), and Radomiro Tomic (Christian Democrat). Allende won the elections with a weak coalition on the left and without a clear majority—36.3% of the vote--proposing a “peaceful transition to socialism” (246-7). Loveman translates the platform of the UP, which proclaimed the following:

Chile is a capitalist country, dependent on the imperialist nations and dominated by bourgeois groups who are structurally related to foreign capital and cannot resolve the country’s fundamental problems— problems which are clearly the result of class privilege which will never be given up voluntarily. (246)

Notwithstanding his popular (if marginal) election, opposition within the country as well as pressure from the United States government and several multinational companies unsuccessfully attempted to prevent Allende’s socialist government from assuming the presidency, for, as Loveman notes, “the concentration in Santiago of numerous leftist intellectuals and political exiles from other Latin American countries made the Chilean capital a center of revolutionary activity” (249). Moreover, continual economic problems, strikes, labor shortages, and divisions within the UP party splintered the tenuous support for Allende’s government, leading to demonstrations and the mobilizations of strikes by opposing political parties, both on the right and the left (253). By early 1973, an imminent threat of “insurrection” loomed and the “UP government declared a partial state of emergency” (254). Both



the government, taking leads from Cuban and Nicaraguan models, and the opposing political parties including the military itself “began preparing for armed confrontation” (254). While an attempted *coup d'état* in June of 1973 was unsuccessful, it was a premonition of what would take place later that year.

On September 11, 1973, the Allende government was completely dismantled with the violent *golpe de estado* led by military commanders, including General Pinochet who would later become the head of the *junta militar* and head of the Chilean state. As Loveman points out, recently declassified documents point to the involvement of the United States government in the *golpe*, thus highlighting the importance of involvement by foreign governments that later became paramount in the military junta's determination to obliterate the “Marxist cancer” evidenced in the world-wide spread of communist and/or socialist doctrine (257-258).

The military junta after the *golpe de estado* immediately implemented drastic measures to gain control of the government and social institutions. Loveman outlines several stages of the military's plan for restructuring Chile that coincide with Klein's observation that there were three phases of “shock”. The first stage is marked by the decree of a “state of seige” giving all power to military courts for those who challenged military rule and the creation of the secret police who were given ultimate power in detaining and “eradicating” subversives, leading to numerous “disappearances” of political prisoners (Loveman 263-264). A second stage began after two years with Pinochet's consolidation of power and control of the secret police as well as radical implementation of politically-motivated strategic economic

policies designed to eliminate agencies and organizations that conflicted with the overall agenda of the military government (Loveman 265). The implementation of this “shock treatment” was designed to garner more control of the economic realm in addition to fomenting a new society steeped in the concepts of “love of God, the Fatherland and the family” (265). In 1977, Pinochet announced the “Chacarillas Plan” and introduced several changes to the Constitution of 1925 designed to establish a new path for Chilean politics and government. This plan established a “protected democracy” that would eventually pave the way for a transition from a military government to a civilian government (272). As Loveman points out, tremendous growth of the Chilean economy during this time period was due in part to the implementation of neoliberal economics by economists influenced by the University of Chicago in an attempt to “correct” what went wrong with the path to socialism implemented by Allende and previous governments (266).<sup>68</sup> Later in the decade, growing availability of commodities such as “Television sets, calculators, stereos, computers, and more esoteric imports were justification enough for many Chileans of the overthrow of the Popular Unity government” (279).

However, while many Chileans enjoyed the free market “miracle”—a term coined by Milton Friedman of the Chicago School—for which the dictatorship took responsibility; others began to more vocally express concern and abhorrence at the means in which the “miracle” took place. Whereas any dissenting opinion was quickly and violently controlled at the beginning of the military period, more and more people found a venue for expressing themselves against the dictatorship and its

actions as the initial shock of the coup wore off. Of course, danger was still present for those who spoke out against the military regime, but, as Loveman points out, “a number of dissident intellectuals, artists, and writers . . . produced work with subtle ironies and/or horrific details . . . In the press, magazines, and dramatic presentations [contained] seemingly innocuous messages encoded scathing critiques of the military dictatorship.” (279)

These harsh criticisms of Pinochet’s regime were certainly not limited to intellectual circles within Chile itself. In fact, many exiled Chileans were teaching, publishing, establishing literary journals, and creating discussion groups and other protest-oriented assemblies during this time in other countries.<sup>69</sup> For instance, Gonzalo Millán published *La ciudad* in Canada at this time, (physically) far-removed from the chaos in Chile.<sup>70</sup> Yet in spite of the geographic dislocation, the events in Chile profoundly impacted the lives of the exiled, given that the political and social turmoil was precisely the reason for their exile in the first place. While not all exiled intellectuals focused their energies on exile-related themes, examples of exile literature from the Southern Cone began to proliferate, with many artists directly addressing the impact that exile had on their creative production.

Consequently, a whole generation of Chilean artists and intellectuals came of age during the years during the years leading up to and after the traumatic switch from democracy to dictatorship. Carmen Foxley links Gonzalo Millán with other members of the *promoción de los 60* in Chile, such as Waldo Rojas and Manuel Silva Acevedo, not only because of the dates of publication of their first poetry but also due

to several shared conventions; these poets tend to objectify and, at the same time, collectivize shared experiences (132).<sup>71</sup> Thorpe Running also highlights the tendency in Millán's poetry of "cosas nombradas" or *objetivismo* (68). Other critics, such as María Inés Zaldívar and Jaime Concha, and the poet, Waldo Rojas,<sup>72</sup> point to the comradeship and similar spirit that the poets of this generation share in the reinvention and renewal of the collective memory of Chilean poetry, paying homage to previous masters such as Nicanor Parra and Gonzalo Rojas (Zaldívar 16).

While I do not dispute Millán's place in the *promoción de los sesenta* as defined by Foxley or Teresa Calderón,<sup>73</sup> I show that the *objetivista* nature of Gonzalo Millán's poetry is actually a subjective, traumatic response to shock, and therefore, inherently nostalgic when it idealizes a time pre-dictatorship. Indeed, Millán characterizes three distinct phases that reflect his own experience with exile and how it changed his poetry: the initial stage (*La emergencia fundadora*) of prolific work from 1960 to 1973, the dispersion of the "emergency" characterized by "los efectos de la represión—censura y autocensura—el exilio y el aislamiento," and last, the recapitulation of the "emergency" characterized by the reviving of memory and the challenges to silence and repression. (Millán in Zaldívar 17). At first glance, a contradiction seems to emerge between the systematic creation of an objective view of shared experience—characteristic of this generation, according to Foxley—and the personal experience of exile, yet it is also possible to see the thrust of objectifying experience as the intent to articulate a collective reaction. Millán's poetry, including

early works such as *Relación personal* (1968) and works published decades later, increasingly represents this oscillation between the personal and the collective.

This primary motivator for this oscillation is the trauma of exile and Millán's response to the authoritarian regime that sought to eradicate the personal subjective memory in favor of the newest commodity. I am not the first to notice this reaction; indeed Javier Campos investigates it in his study of the Chilean lyric tradition in the context of the "postmodern neoliberal" period following the coup by Pinochet.<sup>74</sup> However, my study diverges with his in that I propose *La ciudad* is a response to state-sponsored "shock treatment", not just poetry that characterizes the postmodern lyric in Chile during and after the dictatorship.

*La ciudad* demonstrates a greater preoccupation with poetry as a function of cultural context where the profoundly personal is intertwined with the collective psyche. *La ciudad* is radically different from *Relación personal* published the previous decade; in place of distinct poems, *La ciudad* consists of 73 fragments that are stylistically and thematically united, forcing the reader to consider them in relationship with one another, given that a number of narrative threads are woven throughout the text. The series of succinct descriptions of daily routines in an urban environment lend themselves to a visual recreation, such as video clips or a photographic montage, but spatial mapping is nearly impossible given the lack of directional indicators. *La ciudad*, rich with imagery inspired by all facets of Santiago's society, draws attention to minutiae; no aspect of daily life in Chile's capital escapes the magnifying glass, each with similar weight and importance as

threads with which the fabric of the society is woven. While many fragments are comprised of short, end-stopped lines with no apparent lyric voice or subjective perspective, other fragments conspicuously swing from one subjective perspective to another, either by employing gender markers or by incorporating pseudo-autobiographical information that identifies the speaking subject. Still other fragments are meta-poetic creations by a fictional *recopiladora*, the *anciana*, whose verses are woven through the text. Her figure is the perspective of the poet in the pressurized bell jar of the city, and also recalls the Chilean cultural icon, Gabriela Mistral. While most of the individual fragments adhere to similar patterns, Millán clearly explores varied poetic forms that stem from concrete poetry and the epistolary tradition, like Juan Gelman and Ferreira Gullar.

The first part of my investigation focuses on the language of fear and shock. The somewhat homogeneous series of fragments that comprise *La ciudad* expand and contract in relationship to a danger that lurks in the city, provoking tension as associations become more meaningful with further reading. The language is clear; there are few instances of creation or destruction of the signs themselves. Rather, the tension is produced by the clash of objective cataloguing of actions and profoundly intuitive, traumatic experience and observation under the authoritarian rule of a military government. In other words, while these tensions are common characteristics of exile writing, Millán's *La ciudad* also offers a unique challenge because it grapples with being exiled from home *and* the limitations of artistic production under an authoritarian regime, at times creating a speaking subject that,

though removed from the physical shock and fear in the paradictatorial space of exile, still suffers trauma.

Since Millán's poetry offers a unique space of intersection where form and poetic convention reflect and are challenged by extra-textual elements and socio-political turmoil, the second section of my investigation explores how the effects of economic reforms and oppression of dissidents under the control of Pinochet's government become central factors in the development of the city of *La ciudad* even though Millán was not physically present in Chile during the creation of the text. Only two years after the publication of *La ciudad*, Marcelo Coddou frames it and other literature written during the Chilean dictatorship in terms of "producción" and "consumo" (99), terms that already hint at the importance of the economic reforms that were implemented as an eradication of socialist socio-economic policies outlined in previous decades.

Hence, the third part of my study of Millán's *La ciudad* will consider how nostalgia exists in the space of social community (re)building and its function as an antidote to memory-erasing neoliberal capitalism. I propose that the subjective fissures of the authoritarian objective are evidenced by various speaking subjects and the inclusion of rewound historical events.

### **"*Vvms mrdzds*"<sup>75</sup>: Crushing Dissent with a Doctrine of Shock in *La ciudad***

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1976—two years after Pinochet's coup against Allende and well into the process of the implementation of Friedman's theories of free-market

neoliberalism in Chile—a bomb was detonated in Orlando Letelier’s car in Washington D.C., killing both him and a passenger. Letelier, former Chilean ambassador to the United States, just one month before had published a scathing attack against the policies of the Chilean *junta* in his report “The Chicago Boys in Chile”:

While the *Chicago boys* have provided an appearance of technical respectability to the *laissez-faire* dreams and political greed of the old landowning oligarchy and upper bourgeoisie of monopolists and financial speculators, the military has applied the brutal force required to achieve those goals. Repression for the majorities and *economic freedom* for small privileged groups are in Chile two sides of the same coin. There is, therefore, an inner harmony between the two central priorities announced by the junta after the coup in 1973: the *'destruction of the Marxist cancer* (which has come to mean not only the repression of the political parties of the Left but also the destruction of all labor organizations democratically elected and all opposition, including Christian-Democrats and church organizations), the establishment of a free *private economy* and the control of inflation à la Friedman. It is nonsensical, consequently, that those who inspire, support or finance that economic policy should try to present their advocacy as restricted to *technical considerations*, while pretending to reject the system of terror it requires to succeed. (“Chicago Boys”)<sup>76</sup>



Letelier's criticism of the economic policies implemented by the dictatorship and the bold proposition that human rights abuses were the method through which these policies could take hold made him a target for extermination, even though he was outside of his country.

I highlight Letelier's case because it represents how the culture of fear under a ruthless authoritarian dictatorship extends well beyond national boundaries. For Gonzalo Millán (and many others), exile was supposed to offer an escape from the brutalities of repression, torture, and death. However, as Letelier's case demonstrates in a very concrete way, violence crosses borders. This violence is represented metaphorically in Millán's poetry by a language of fear and repression. He responds to the coup d'état against Allende, the subsequent state-sponsored violence, and his exile by employing the tight, constricted language of shock. As Klein states, "The shock of the coup prepared the ground for economic shock therapy; the shock of the torture chamber terrorized anyone thinking of standing in the way of the economic shocks." (87) I propose that the element of shock, both as a reaction to the coup and as a response to the state-sponsored torture centers, is central to understanding Millán's language and poetic techniques in *La Ciudad*, even though it was written far-removed from Chile.

In an interview with Juan Carlos Ramiro Quiroga, Millán directly acknowledges the effect that the coup and ensuing military dictatorship had on his writing. He recognizes that both the form and the content of *La ciudad* reflect the tremendous tension felt in Chile:

El poema-libro *La Ciudad* es "arduo" . . . porque su tema más inmediato y reconocible es el de una ciudad latinoamericana que sufre la ocupación y la represión de una despiadada dictadura militar. Pienso que hay ciertos temas de carácter límite que es necesario abordar mediante formas extremas. Me parece contradictorio e inapropiado en algunos casos responder al horror mediante formas de belleza consagrada. En estos casos el tema no requiere la ilusión estética ni sublimadora del mal. Por el contrario necesita formas abruptas y consecuentes. Yo elegí la monotonía, la fatiga, la impersonalidad, el lugar común, la sentencia llana como un módulo, la repetición maquinal de lo idéntico como procedimientos. Sobrevivir a diario durante décadas a una tiranía y al exilio no es una experiencia amena ni divertida. ("Palabra")

Monotony, fatigue, impersonality, machine-like repetition: Millán states explicitly that the language of *La ciudad* is meant to reflect the daily struggle to survive under the oppression of an authoritarian regime. The systematic breakdown of language into its most basic forms symbolizes the electroshock therapy recipient in a regressed, nearly child-like state who is unable to form coherent sentences, who may hear voices, or who has amnesia. The system of "complete depatterning"—electroshock therapy—was investigated by Ewen Cameron in the 1950s at McGill University's Allan Memorial Institute as a way to create a blank slate on to which the personality of an individual who demonstrated "undesirable" traits could be rewritten (Klein 38).

Millán's language, in *La Ciudad*, mimics the traits that a "depatterned" person would exhibit after shock:

El río es hondo.

El río es ancho.

Los ríos tienen afluentes.

Los afluentes tienen cascadas.

Los afluentes desembocan en el río.

Las avenidas son anchas.

Las calles desembocan en las avenidas.

El río desemboca en el mar.

El mar es amplio. (10)

In the above fragment, the repetition of the nouns *río*, *afluentes*, and *mar* are linked by their association with water. However, the short, end-stopped lines create rhythmic tension that makes the words read like obsessed mutterings of an imbalanced person or someone who has suffered cognitive dissociation—because of the traumatizing nature of an event (shock, torture) the victim is only able to focus on the minutiae of reality, not the larger-picture implications of their mental state.

Even while much of the language is simplistic and avoids philosophical judgments, many of the fragments cultivate tension by forcing destabilization of meanings and associations. Despite the nature of the short, end-stopped lines, the first segment that opens *La ciudad* creates a prophetic and metapoetic tone that is quickly destabilized by the end of the fragment:

Amanece.  
Se abre el poema.  
Las aves abren las alas.  
Las aves abren el pico.  
Cantan los gallos.  
Se abren las flores.  
Se abren los ojos.  
Los oídos se abren.  
La ciudad se levanta.  
Se abren llaves.  
El agua corre.  
Se abren navajas tijeras.  
Corren pestillos cortinas.  
Se abren puertas cartas.  
Se abren diarios.  
La herida se abre. (9)

The short, simplified lines create tension by subverting the reader's expectations; the repetition of verbs and linking of similar actions is ultimately derailed by a final, dissonant image. Friction between the mundane and the subversive simultaneously compels the reader forward and demands a renegotiation of meaning and association of the passage. Tight control of tone and rhythm reflect the pressurized Chilean state

under authoritarian control, but it also demonstrates the repressed/regressed torture victim's inability to lucidly order or rationalize his/her traumatized state.

The above opening fragment demonstrates the relative syntactic simplicity found in the other fragments where a palpable rhythm is established by the subject-verb relationship in the sentences, despite frequent changes of syntax, lack of adjectives and the reflexive verbs. The monotonous nature of the sentences is reinforced by both end-stopped lines and the repetition of sounds and words, lending the poem a degree of orality despite the lack of a specified speaker within the fragment. The repetition of open vowel sounds such as the "a" in "Amanece. / Se abre el poema. / Las aves abren las alas" disrupts fluidity. While the repetition of *abrir* echoes the dawning of a new day signaled in the first line and establishes a unity within the fragment, the return to this verb in the last line calls the reader's attention to something different that is being opened, "la herida." Since the image of an open wound does not fit with the other images of morning routine (the opening of eyes and ears, newspapers, doors, letters, etc.) the unity is broken and dissonance is created since there is no change in rhythm, forcing the reader to reconsider the previous images that may have been taken for granted as typical quotidian practices. Thus the previous lines, upon rereading, are no longer innocuous observations of morning habits, but instead become vaguely dangerous, especially coupled with "navajas" in the twelfth line.

The sensation that this technique produces is one of pressure and apprehension since the hypnotizing effect of the fragments is frequently disrupted by

unexpected and difficult elements. The insertion of the unexpected, such as the bodiless wound opening simultaneous to the quotidian morning routine in above fragment, works both to highlight some connections and destroy the reader's expectations of unity and order. The last verse of fragment 4 offers another example:

Se abren cuentas.

Se abre el apetito.

El bosque es umbrío.

En el bosque se abren senderos.

El buho ulula.

Los conejos abren madrigueras.

Los sepultureros abren fosas.

Los presos abren un agujero. (14)

The repetition of the verb *abrir* causes certain expectations of objects that can be opened, and, towards the end, more emphasis is placed on the subject than the verb. Hence, the combination in the last two lines of *sepultureros* and *presos* startles the reader and provokes more questions than answers as to the relationship between nature and keeping prisoners. Both symbolic and semiotic levels are disrupted, and the reader is left to contemplate why natural elements (the owl's hoot in the forest, for example) are no more or less important than the gravediggers' tombs or prisoners' escape.

Shock and torture, both in the literal sense and their symbolic representation of the Chilean coup and subsequent oppression, permeate *La ciudad*. Often, these

fragments suggest a theatrical recreation of interrogation. Fragment 71, for example, demonstrates an interrogation, although it is unclear what the motivation is for the questioning:

...

¿De qué color era el automóvil?

Gris.

¿Cuántos automóviles eran?

Dos.

...

¿Oyeron llegar los automóviles?

No.

¿Qué hacían cuando los automóviles llegaron?

Había platos sucios en el lavaplatos.

Yo lavaba los platos.

El hombre estaba cansado.

El hombre estaba sentado en el sillón.

El sillón es confortable.

Varios hombres entraron a la casa.

Los basketbolistas son altos. (121-122)

In this fragment, the past actions are intermingled with present descriptions as if in a stream of consciousness, disrupting the temporal continuum. If we read this fragment as a model of interrogation, it is possible to see that questions about the past

inevitably lead to an observation in the present, as if the interrogated would rather not focus on the past even though those observations seem to be objective descriptions of factual events. Instead, the objective observations break down, leading to a subjective judgment about the comfort a favorite chair provides. The fluctuations between the past and the present and the breakdown of the dichotomy between objective and subjective create instability and a difficulty in locating a lyric voice, although instinctively we feel that the voice witnessed some type of trauma because it is clear that a link between two objective statements causes an emotional response and a desire for self-preservation in the form of deflection. The subjectivity, then, can be said to reside in the linking of these objective statements. It is impossible to conclude that the splintered elements are randomly placed in these selections; it is not a collection of “found objects” that lends the text its layered quality, but rather carefully placed fragments that force the reader to establish connections. Indeed, even calling this convention stream of consciousness is misleading, for many assume that the *stream* has no logic. Quite the opposite is true, however, since these elements will be linked by something, as well as flowing in a prescribed order.

Despite the dissonance in symbolic meaning, monotonous conventions pervade the *La ciudad* given the similar word choice, line length and rhythm of the fragments. This uniformity produces a tone of organization, similar to that of a list of ingredients for a recipe or a catalogue of events. Other sections do not contain interruptions like the charged prisoner scene above, but they still demonstrate a



fragmentation that pushes the reader to find the points where meanings coincide.

Fragment 12, for example, shows this technique:

Cambia el viento.

El viento anuncia lluvia.

El cambiador empuja las agujas.

La locomotora cambia de vía. (24)

This fragment, like many others, does not reveal emotion on the part of the poetic voice. Instead, an objective tone is created where events are named, not described, in a constant rhythm only broken by the reader's attempts to connect the seemingly unrelated parts. The monotonous tone could suggest inaction or inability on the part of the poetic speaker who is not affected by (or has an effect on) the environment.

The monotony of the text is also created, in part, by the compulsive use of the present tense. Often, the linking of events by the present tense gives them equal weight, even though the symbolic connections between them seem to elevate some events from the mundane to the macabre, and vice versa. Fragment 26 exemplifies the predominant use of the present tense found in the rest of the text:

La llave entra en la cerradura.

Los dedos entran en la manopla.

La llave gira.

El fotógrafo entra en la cámara nupcial.

¡Chas! hace el látigo.

El detenido entra en la cámara de tortura.

Saltan las fieras.

El clavo entra en la pared. (46)

Since all verbs are in the present tense, the separate actions seem to occur at the same time, though perhaps in different locations. Each element is united only by the reader's attention to the repeated verb, *entrar*. This time oppressive element is named, juxtaposing torture with the other events with a far more pedestrian tone. A certain irony is produced by the combination of images all occurring at the same moment, as if the exterior wall were taken from an apartment building and the tenants continued their routines without noticing the presence of an observer. The combination of these events through the repetition of words as well as the use of the present tense causes the reader to establish a connection between the "cámara nupcial" and the "cámara de tortura".

The juxtaposition of unrelated elements in the present tense, some benign and others gruesome, reduces any hierarchy between them. No element is given more weight textually; the "cámara nupcial" should be as important as the "cámara de tortura", and vice versa, according to the text. However, the reader of these segments cannot help but focus on the negative because the placement of the two together makes the negative that much more shocking. This mixture of elements, then, creates a complex series of present moments in which the ordinary coexists with the tragic, the sublime, and the awe-inspiring.

Memory and recreation of the past become increasingly important because the verbs found in *La ciudad* invoke a series of continual presents; fissures in the

monotony of the present tense stand out more forcefully since they are so rare.

Several fragments contain images described in the past, but only Fragment 32 utilizes an emphatic preterit in every line:

Desacataron la autoridad.

Desacuartelaron regimientos.

Desmantelaron el palacio presidencial.

Desempedrarón las calles.

Desembaldosaron las veredas.

...

Desalaron el mar.

Desanduvieron el camino.

Destruyeron la ciudad. (54-57)

The concurrence of several elements in the past only highlights the differences in meaning, forcing the reader to establish the connections, if any are to be found. In this case, the similarities are grounded in the repetition of “des-” or the “undoing” of what once. Most of the verbs exist alone with or without the prefix, however “destruyeron” cannot be reduced to the infinite “truir” which highlights the final verb of the fragment. Generally speaking, because the short verses and simplified, controlled language force the reader to establish his or her own connections, they produce the effect of constant searching—a sharp contrast to the idea of inactive monotony.

In a sense, this constant upheaval of expectations through semiotic and symbolic levels suggests rebellion against authoritative control. While the tight control of language and rhythm mirror the repressive bell jar under which the city simmers, it gives way to moments of profound surprise when the mundane is associated with the gruesome, or when the past suddenly appears in a poem that occurs predominantly in the present. For this reason, I agree when Nelly Richard, the Chilean cultural critic, postulates that many cultural works employed an “alphabet of survival” that was “to be recycled via the precarious economies of the fragmentary and the trace.” (2) Since many cultural works (poetry, in this case) treat Chile’s violent history by focusing on the desire to remember the past coupled with the natural instinct to forget or *disremember* painful events, artists use this tension to “take aim at the larger order of [the dominant point of view’s] signifying structures” instead of merely inverting the dominant order in “in its symmetrical inverse” (4). Consequently, “Chilean poetry and narrative . . . took on the task of excising hegemonic narrations, of fissuring them with words hostile to the claims of official truth “(13).

Richard’s assertion that cultural works produced during the dictatorship, especially narrative and poetry, wrangled not only with memory and forgetting but with creating a language system that would challenge hegemonic (authoritarian) control by subjugating and fissuring “official” narrations is particularly appropriate for Millán’s *La ciudad* given the continual usurping expectations and associations of meaning. For example, the seventh fragment demonstrates how Richard’s “alphabet

of survival” functions by fissuring the control of the seemingly objective, authoritative description of the passage of time:

El río sigue su curso.  
El otoño sigue al verano.  
Siguen mis pasos.  
Se acortan los días.  
Se alargan las noches.  
Abril sigue a marzo.  
Alargan el toque de queda.  
Alargan el estado de sitio.  
Abril cuenta con treinta días.  
Abril es el cuarto mes del año.  
Pasas los días.  
Cae otra hoja del calendario. (18)

While several of the lines suggest forced rote memorization of the months by a school-age child (“Abril cuenta con treinta días. / Abril es el cuarto mes del año.”), a subjective voice and a hint of military control—a trace, using Richard’s terminology—break the monotonous discourse of the changing season’s description, “Siguen mis pasos . . . Alargan el toque de queda.”

Thus, Millán’s language in *La ciudad* simultaneously reflects the shock of the coup d’état, state-sponsored terror and interrogation, and his own exile through the use of the monotonous present tense and juxtaposed imagery that evokes horror and

repression/regression. Millán attributes the importance of space and language in his poetry to the linguistic crisis he suffered in exile, a shock secondary only to the brutality of the coup itself:

Después de “Relación personal” escribí un libro muy introspectivo, que se llama “Dragón que se muerde la cola”, que son poemas del doble, figura que me ha acompañado siempre, y a la par empecé a escribir versos totalmente objetivos sobre refrigeradores, autos, electrodomésticos... Entonces se dio un extremo subjetivismo y objetivismo. Y de ahí llegué a un diccionario donde hallé truisms, que son verdades mínimas, como decir “la nieve es blanca”, donde no hay verdad filosófica, y de ese absurdo estético creé una materia prima, y en Canadá al tener que aprender inglés y yo enseñar español, me encontré en una situación de crisis lingüística. Y bajo ese material comencé a dar esta visión de la ciudad del cono sur bajo una dictadura militar, aplicando un español estándar. (García “Pellejo”)

The crisis to which he refers linguistically reflects the shock treatment that Millán witnessed, both as a citizen under the authoritarian *junta* and as an exile. Millán utilizes the paradigm shift (Chile: Spanish, Canada: English) to not only explore the nature of “un español estándar”, but to explore the capacity of language to reveal (or not) philosophical truths. This is seen in Fragment 28, where it is presented as temporal and spatial separation from a quotidian cultural symbol: butter. While in

this case no product names are given, the symbolic *mantequilla* of Chile is replaced by products from other countries.

. . .

Aquí hay “beurre” y “butter”.

En todo pan en cada plato.

“Boter” “butter” “burro”.

Lo que yo quisiera es saber.

¡Dónde está mi mantequilla! (48)

The deictic word, “aquí,” shows the position of the lyric voice in relationship to the place that he recreates in *La ciudad*. Not only does “aquí” refer to a vague space, it could also mean “at this point in time.” Combined with the words for butter in other languages (French, English, Dutch, Italian), one can assume that the voice is located somewhere other than a Spanish-speaking country. Although the specific place is not made evident in the fragment itself, it is fairly safe to assume that the lyric voice in this case could represent the poet himself living in exile in Canada, where English and French are spoken. The universality of butter and bread is directly contradicted by the lyric voice’s desire for “[su] mantequilla”, *his* butter. A seemingly mundane object is transformed into a representation of identity because of the use of “mantequilla” in Spanish. This longing for something familiar is translated to the linguistic level; in lieu of stating directly that home is missed or that language-barriers have become difficult, the lyric voice instead opts for using a commonplace object as a nostalgic symbol for an ideal that cannot be achieved at this time or in this

place. The nature of this symbol is temporal and spatial, in that the lyric voice seems to want to return to a place where he could find the familiar objects he desires as well as perhaps wishing to turn back the clock to when everyday life was a comforting routine. The nostalgia of this excerpt is directly tied to the voice's subjective perspective and represents a desire for a different state of being, a different time and/or place, from that of exile.

The linguistic crisis in *La ciudad* reveals several shocks to which Millán responds: the shock of the coup, the shock of fear and torture, the shock of exile, and the shock of not being able to communicate through one's native language. The condensation of language to its most basic forms and vocabulary reflects the ambiguous state of exile in which the poet grapples with language for survival, as well as his desire for indisputable truths through language. The recreation of interrogation scenes and the use of language that suggests dissociation or traumatic repression through shock treatment also symbolize the repressive tactics of the authoritarian regime even though the poet is absent.

### **“*Vvmos mrdzdos*”: Capitalism and the Negation of Memory and Nostalgia**

The shock to which Gonzalo Millán responds in *La Ciudad* is more than that provoked by the violent *golpe de estado* and his own subsequent exile; he is also reacting to the massive economic conversion undertaken by the Chilean right, under the tutelage of Friedman and the Chicago Boys, to change Chile from a socialist country to a free market. The reforms of the Chilean dictatorship were designed to



erase both the developmentalism of the 1950s and 1960s and the socialism of Allende's UP government from 1970-1973. The eradication of Allende supporters (or anyone remotely in opposition to the plan of Pinochet's government) was meant to instill shock and fear as much as it was meant to erase from memory the socialist experiment.<sup>77</sup> Millán revolts against both the economic policies of the new dictatorship as well as the violent means through which they were implemented. *La ciudad* demonstrates a reaction to the free-market economic policies of Pinochet's dictatorship in three ways: the present tense—both in its verb structure and its philosophical implications—represents the capitalist mantra favoring the newest model, the poet considers himself as a product for export, and commodification is converted into a symbol for the decay-covering façade.

In the previous section, I showed how the present tense pervades *La ciudad*, often through multifarious images of the mundane and the seditious. I argued that Millán chooses the present tense for his observations, in part, to recreate the trauma of shock. In addition, I propose that the present tense is used to reflect the mantra of the market-driven economy that Pinochet and his economic advisors put in to action as soon as they took power after the coup. To this end, I highlight Idelber Avelar's theory that capitalism negates memory and nostalgia:

Growing commodification negates memory because new commodities must always replace previous commodities, send them to the dustbin of history. The free market established by the Latin American dictatorships must, therefore, impose forgetting not only because it

needs to erase the reminiscence of its barbaric origins but also because it is proper to the market to live in a perpetual present. The erasure of the past as past is the cornerstone of all commodification, even when the past becomes yet another commodity for sale in the present. The market operates according to a substitutive, metaphorical logic in which the past must be relegated to obsolescence. . . The task of the oppositional intellectual would be to point out the residue left by every substitution, thereby showing that the past is never simply erased by the latest novelty. (2)

Although Avelar uses this framework to examine certain trends in fictional narration in the period following the dictatorship, it remains relevant to Millán's poetry because it establishes the importance of the present tense as an affirmation of free-market commodification as it opposes memory and the past. The monotonous present tense in *La ciudad* mirrors the authoritarian push to negate memory since memory would bring to the forefront the nefarious method by which the free-market was established.

Hence, it is possible to see the monotonous present tied to publicity lingo that suggests the capitalist mantra of corporatism and commodification. The personification of "beauty" and the "tyrant", for example, in *La ciudad* show the commodification of beauty products in direct relationship with maintaining the appearance of youth, vitality and health of a governing system (and, I would argue, entire society) on the brink of collapse due to decay and age. The commodity being bought and sold is at first reading only hair dye and lip color. However, these

products are converted into metaphors for a controlling system that pushes the newest, latest model (or looking younger) over the old, hence supporting Avelar's assertion that commodification is at its core a desire to erase the past in favor of the eternal (beautiful) present. Many fragments make unequivocal references to a consumer market in Chile. *Beauty* is personified as "la beldad" in Fragment 39:

La beldad se pinta los labios.

La beldad anuncia un lápiz labial.

La beldad usa el lápiz labial VANIDAD.

La beldad sonr e.

La beldad tiene dientes de perlas.

La beldad se lava los dientes.

La beldad anuncia un dentr fico.

La beldad se lava con pasta BLANCOR. (66)

In a subsequent fragment, "la beldad" is unified with "el tirano" by their common usage of beauty products:

La beldad anuncia un champ .

La beldad se lava con champ  ROSEDAL.

La beldad es rubia.

La beldad se ti e el cabello.

Los lustrabotas ti en.

La beldad se ti e con tinturas GAMA.

...

El tirano envejece.

El tirano engorda.

El tirano usa faja.

El tirano se tiñe las canas.

El tirano se tiñe las canas con tinturas GAMA.

...

La beldad anuncia.

La beldad publicita.

La beldad vende.

La beldad es la mujer más bella del mundo.

La beldad y el tirano se abrazan.

La beldad se cuelga del cuello del tirano.

La beldad es la diosa de la ciudad.

La beldad es una falsa deidad. (75-77)

The lines from these two fragments show a direct correlation between product naming (Vanidad, Blancor, Rosedal and Gama) and two types of discourse—beauty and state control. The conscientious choice is made to name the products used; instead of stating that *la beldad* has crimson lips, special attention is given to the brand of lipstick that she uses, given that the product name appears in capital letters. The placement of the product name in capital letters suggests an advertisement, belying the seemingly neutral tone of the objective descriptions.

In the second part of this fragment, however, the decaying tyrant, somewhat ironically, advertises the same hair product as the beauty. The beauty is an active participant in the selling of the product that the tyrant must use to cover his state of decay. Interestingly, beauty is seen in a sexual and religious entity that is tied to the tyrant, an aging, powerful man that maintains control by maintaining a look of youthfulness.

The commodification of beauty is an integral part of any capitalist economy since it urges the purchasing of products. Naomi Wolf offers a polarizing view of the commodification of “beauty” as it pertains to systematic paternalism:

“Beauty” is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (12)

Wolf regards “beauty” as a currency that supports an economy set-up and controlled by a paternalistic force. This same paradigm is created by *la beldad* and *el tirano* in *La ciudad*; beauty sells herself to support the economy and thus the discourse created by the leader. The leader, an easy correlation to Pinochet, is seen as in decay, in need of falsities to cover-up the extent of his demise. The commodification of beauty products is a reference to capitalist marketing strategies and advertisements as well as

a metaphor for the instability of the entire system that places faith in a decaying leader preserved by a false deity. For *la beldad* in this context, achieving beauty through the use of specific commodities is tantamount to supporting and participating in a hierarchical power structure; beauty has more access to power. However, the use of beauty products by *el tirano* suggests a desire to return to a more glorified past appearance. Since a correlation between *el tirano* in Millán's *ciudad* and Pinochet is unavoidable, it stands to reason he is looking nostalgically towards a past when he was younger and perceived as more powerful. Ironically, the figurehead, by using beauty products to achieve a more youthful look, nostalgically desires a past, an action which his capitalist system—always pushing the newest model—does not support.

On a broader level, the inclusion of names of these products suggests a reaction to the idealism of corporatism. Klein correlates the idealism of the free-market with Friedman's view that it represents "the purest form of 'participatory democracy' because in the free market, 'each man can vote, as it were, for the color of tie he wants.'" Friedman's project, in his mind, "liberated them to express their absolute free will through their consumer choices." (63) The product-placement in Millán's *La ciudad* (*Vanidad*, *Blancor*, etc.) mirrors the constant barrage of free-market advertisement that the dictatorship used to bring to life the capitalist ideal of "participatory democracy" through commodification.

While the above fragments demonstrate the mantra of capitalism within Chile, other fragments directly allude to the changing economic system's symbolic effects

on the exiled population. Millán, in exile, sees himself as a product (commodity) for export: a commodification of people and ideas. The following fragment is enclosed by quotation marks on the page, as if the message were to form part of a postcard:

“Hay hermosas mariposas en Costa Rica.

En Canadá hay mucha nieve.

Extensos bosques y lagos.

...

Miradme el orgullo de la huerta familiar.

Ahora un producto de exportación.

Oíd mi nombre irreconocible.

Y mi cerebro voceado como un repollo.

En este extranjero mercado de trabajo.

Mi querido quirquincho.

Mi cóndor y guanaco.

Saludos les mandan alces y renos.

El oso polar y la ardilla voladora.” (87-88)

The choice of a format closely resembling that of a postcard or a travel letter is an appropriate one for several reasons, the most obvious being the relationship between the lyric voice and the poet in exile away from his homeland. Exile writing falls under the larger umbrella of travel writing, but exile writing is often characterized by its desire to recreate, revisit, “reassemble an identity” or to “transform the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return” (Said 179). While a travel diary

or letters home emphasize the process of travel—places visited, people met—exile writing always contains both the echo of impossibility the desire to return to home, the “nostos-“ that Svetlana Boym signals as a root of the term *nostalgia* (xiii).

This element of nostalgia is best seen in the inversion of the typical postcard message, “Wish you were here” in this segment, and, instead, this postcard seems to suggest, “I wish I were there.” The reference word “este” in front of “extranjero” places the lyric voice away from its homeland. Various elements are used by the lyric voice as symbols of difference between here (exile) and there (home). References to typically Chilean (or South American) animals such as the *cóndor*, the *guanaco*, and the *quirquincho*, are juxtaposed with elements from other places, like the butterflies of Costa Rica and animals from Canada. The possessive pronoun “mi” is used to here establish ownership of these typically Chilean animals. No longer mundane objects, they are charged with nostalgia because they represent a timeless place (home) to which the speaker wants to return.

The tone of the segment also suggests that nostalgia has a tendency to waver in its strength, reinforcing the assertion that the objective observations found in this and other fragments are interrupted by subjective responses. The first line is more playful in meaning and tone due to the repeated sounds in “hermosas mariposas” while the next few lines revert to a description of nature in Canada. The lyric voice appears later in the fragment with a decidedly more forceful tone, “Miradme” and “Oíd.” No longer merely descriptive, the commands in the second-person plural are semantically unusual because the Spanish-speaking countries referenced are in



Central and South America where the second-person plural form is not frequently used. A command issued in this form tends to take on a prophetic tone, differing greatly from the tone established in the first few lines of the segment. Also, the use of a command establishes the existence of a speaker and receiver. While not at odds with the concept of a postcard or other travel writing such as letters, a sole speaker is created by the object pronoun “me” while a plural receiver is established by the use of the second-person plural.

The exportation of cultural commodities shown in the lines, “Miradme el orgullo de la huerta familiar. / Ahora un producto de exportación. / . . . / En este extranjero mercado de trabajo” again sets up the dichotomy between “here”—exile—and “there.” The first lines indicates that the speaker considers himself (or is considered) a product for trade, probably organic and/or perishable given the previous reference to the garden. Once an important member of a small, familiar society (“el orgullo”), the lyric voice is now in a new environment, a product of exportation that hints of the mass, impersonal distribution goods between international markets. This sentiment is reinforced in the last line with a play on words; from the placement of the adjective, the reader expects “extraño” to be the modifier of “mercado”, meaning strange or unknown markets, but instead “extranjero” highlights the global nature of the exportation. It is impossible to read these lines without referring back to two elements of historical reality; the exiled poet who wrote them as well as the nature of Chile’s economic situation during the dictatorship. Once a proud symbol of the

cultural fertility of his homeland, the lyric voice now finds himself exported, not by choice but rather by market demands.

**“*Vivimos mordazados*”: The Collective’s Objective**

Thus far, I have shown that the shock to which *La ciudad* responds is triple: the shock of the coup itself, the shock of torture and fear, and the shock of the total reversal of economic policy in Chile under the dictatorship. I propose in this last section to show that Millán attempts to completely erase these shocks by dismantling the hegemonic, objective nature of the authoritarian by asserting the power of subjective, communal memory. As Steve Stern suggests, memory has the power to convert private experience into a collective, cultural memory:

Beyond political and moral legitimacy in the narrowest senses,  
memory struggles also related to personal and collective identity.

They built the mirrors in which people saw or imagined what it meant  
to be “Chilean” in rough and violent times. (237)

Millán’s language exemplifies the friction between repression and the subjective perspective, and these moments of subjectivity are reflected in the community of voices that erupt through the monotony of the objective. Deciphering the speaking voice’s point of origin is tantamount to locating the epicenter of an earthquake; from such a point, it would be possible to discern who is suffering, as well as in which direction the subjugation is focused. However, the reader cannot identify a single speaker, only subjective flashes that appear like a dot-to-dot picture in a children’s

coloring book. An examination of the voices that appear throughout, when examined in detail, reveals multiple points of origin, constituting a community of individual reactions to the pressure of the authoritative.

One example of this is the voice that abruptly appears in Fragment 12, whose trauma is reflected in the pathetic fallacy of nature's barrenness:

No tienen hojas los árboles.

Los hongos no tienen hojas.

Pedí un anticipo.

Pedí peras al olmo.

Se anticipan las lluvias.

El jugador pide cartas.

El novio pide la mano.

Nos llueve sobre mojado.

El tirano pide sacrificios.

El invierno ha llegado. (25)

An abrupt shift between the descriptions of seemingly innocent observations, such as the arrival of winter indicated by the state of the trees and rain nearly obscures the use of a first-person verb—"Pedí un anticipo./ "Pedí peras al olmo." However, the perspective shifts back again to objective descriptions that seem to redirect attention to what is *not* personal, as if in an attempt to refocus attention on something less immediate, and therefore, not as painful.

The listed observations about nature are broken again with the use of the pronoun, “nos”, in the line, “Nos llueve sobre mojado”, indicates a slightly different, collective response. Since both the lines, “Pedí peras al olmo” and “Nos llueve sobre mojado”, point to the oral tradition of idiomatic expressions, collective cultural wisdom invokes a pluralized, intersubjective voice. This, coupled with pathetic fallacy of winter’s arrival and the bleakness of leafless trees, reflects the subjective emotional state of a larger community.

These moments where a subjective voice breaks through, as exemplified in the above lines, are not always difficult to pinpoint, but they come as a surprise nonetheless to a reader expecting a continuation of the objective catalogue. Often, the subjective voice, like that in the above fragment, abruptly appears. Fragment 3 demonstrates the multi-faceted uses of *andar* in order to develop the speaker’s identity, as well as establishing a pun between the verb and the Andes mountain range that forms one of Chile’s borders:

Andan los relojes.

Andan los planetas.

¿Cómo andamos?

Ando enfermo.

...

Ando con miedo.

Ando huyendo.

¡Ándate! me dijeron.

Andan tras de mí.

Ando por los andenes.

¡Andando! Adiós.

Los Andes están nevados. (12)

In this fragment, the various uses of the verb *andar* show that the subject is experiencing emotion (“¿Cómo andamos?”) as well as taking action (“Ando huyendo.”). The speaking subject is singular, although the question, “¿Cómo andamos?” suggests a response to a question in relation to multiple perspectives or a first-person question colloquial question of “How are we doing?” This level of dialogue is emphasized again by the use of the imperative form and the pun on the verb, “andar”. The use of “andar huyendo” and “Adiós. / Los Andes están nevados” make explicit reference to escape by crossing the Andes, the range of mountains that serves as the border between Chile and the rest of the world. Again, the relative simplicity of the language and syntax is deceiving because the juxtaposition of a playful or experimental tone towards syntax and morphology collides with the serious nature of the experience. The last line, “Los Andes están nevados,” offers another indisputable observation, however the subjective nature of the previous lines strains the relationship between the objective and the individual experience. This fragment shows a tendency in *La ciudad* where the personal and the objective collide; an objective experience is focalized by many subjects, converting the objective into a reflection of multiple subjective perspectives.

The voices of *La ciudad* do not let us assume that they all represent the voice of the poet in exile, however easy the transference of the “yo” to the personal experiences of Millán. In fact, many different subjective voices in *La Ciudad* are explicitly named, and, depending on the edition of the poem,<sup>78</sup> are indicated with titles in capital letters. Grínor Rojo, a Chilean cultural critic also exiled during the dictatorship, makes a very compelling argument that those voices that are named explicitly most frequently—El Anciano, El Enfermo, La Beldad y El Tirano—represent Chilean society as a whole:

Aun sin precisar demasiado, a mí no me parece caprichoso argüir que estas figuras dan vida a sendas abstracciones, sea a conceptos que caracterizan a la multitud urbana en general, como ocurre con El Anciano y El Enfermo, sea conceptos que caracterizan a sectores más acotados de ella, como sucede con La Beldad y El Tirano. (265)

While these four appear throughout *La ciudad*, the figure of the old woman is the most prominent given the creative control she exercises; the *anciana* is the collector, organizer and, at times, creator of the poem:

Llueve.

La lluvia mancha las calles.

. . .

La lluvia moja.

La lluvia humedece las paredes.

La tierra se empapa.

Llueve en la ciudad.

Llueve en el poema.

La anciana escribe llueve tinta.

Las gotas de lluvia no son centavos.

Ojalá fueran centavos las gotas de lluvia. (26)

The old woman's writing is reflected in the poem; the ink that drips from her pen is the rain that falls in the city she creates on paper. Towards the close of the poem, the *anciana*, on her deathbed, returns to childhood innocence: "La anciana se pasa el tiempo jugando. / Inventa una ciudad de juguete." (108) At her death, the poem ends:

El poema llega a su término.

La anciana finaliza el poema.

Termina su vida.

La anciana testa.

El poema es su testamento.

...

La anciana aún respira.

La anciana está en sus postrimerías.

Estos son los versos postrimeros:

Y después de ir con los ojos cerrados.

Por la oscuridad que nos lleva.

Abrir los ojos y ver la oscuridad que nos lleva.

Con los ojos abiertos y cerrar los ojos.

Se cierra el poema. (126)

The *anciana*'s life is tied with the poem's creation. While her voice does not come through as a first-person perspective, her inherent control over the text seems to conflict with the dominant monotony of the authoritarian objective.

This figure, signals Millán, is of singular importance in *La ciudad* as an archetypal symbol. After several publications of the poem, the masculine *anciano* was changed to *la anciana*, with obvious reference to the figure of Chilean poet/teacher Gabriela Mistral. Millán states in an interview with Marcelo Montecinos and Jaime Pinos that

En *La Ciudad*, en su primera versión, el organizador del texto era este anciano. Siempre me interesaron las representaciones arquetípicas de la vida humana. Y para *La Ciudad*, necesitaba la representación del hombre anciano, además por hechos muy ligados a la política contingente, porque me llamó muchísimo la atención que dentro de la lucha política, de repente aparecieran elementos de organización que eran arcaicos. Me refiero a que en los campos de concentración en Chile, los que dirigían a los prisioneros eran un consejo de ancianos, como ocurría en las antiguas tribus. Esas eran las autoridades de los prisioneros organizados. Ese valor dado al anciano me llamó la atención. El anciano había sufrido una revalorización gracias a la represión. Es algo que refleja la situación de la dictadura. El ausente es reemplazado por otro, actores no comunes de la vida normal,



ancianos, mujeres. De allí el hecho de anciano y de hombre y mujer. La mujer como maestra, claro, allí está latente la figura de Gabriela Mistral, la maestra primaria, de alguna manera la prolongación de la figura de la madre en la instrucción, como que eso completaba el mundo ciudadano. Porque ahí en *La Ciudad* hay otra figura que es la beldad y que es lo contrario, la mujer frívola, es decir, el arquetipo tradicional de la mujer como fetiche, como objeto que induce al consumo, a la alienación. (Montecinos “Poesía”)

Consequently, the gender change from *anciano* to *anciana* does not allow for an easy correspondence between the poet and the compiler of the poem. Rather, the *anciana* poet is a symbol that many Chileans and those familiar with Chilean poetry would associate with Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, who spent the last part of her life away from her homeland because of tension with the ministers of the Chilean educational system of the early 1900s.<sup>79</sup> By invoking this figure, Millán resurrects a cultural icon associated with early feminism and progressive educational and literary reforms. These principles would eventually create strained relationships with the Chilean establishment, enough to force her to spend much of her adult life outside of her homeland. By using the *anciana* as the mirror for the poet within his own creation, Millán establishes a parallel between himself and the archetypal figure of Mistral—a nostalgic invocation of a cultural icon.

Given the multitude of voices that speak, however, it is obvious that the *anciana* does not control all aspects of the city, even though she is able to create or

compile parts of the poem. Other voices appear in *La ciudad* with less creative control but with more individual perspective. For example, a female voice without name or title appears throughout:

Los soldados cargan armas.

Los mozos cargan bandejas.

Estoy cargada de hijos.

La carga agobia. (23)

The use of a feminine adjective indicates another speaker, different from the poet (masculine) and the *anciana*—a “mujer de edad avanzada” (61) no longer burdened with care of children.

Another voice gives testimony to the present and the past, focalized through the perceptions of a blind man:

El ciego va tentando el camino.

El ciego tiene el oído muy fino.

...

Oí ráfagas de ametralladoras.

Las ametralladoras tableteaban.

Oí rodar tanques.

Rebombaban los disparos.

Oí volar rasantes a los aviones.

Repercutían los estampidos.

Los estampidos turbaban el silencio.

Después silencio.

¡Tarará! suena la trompeta.

...

Oigo marchar soldados.

Oigo cajas.

Los tambores redoblan.

¡Rataplán! hacen los tambores.

...

Oigo voces de mando.

...

Oigo ruidos insólitos.

Oigo voces lagrimosas.

Oigo lamentaciones. (68-69)

The blind man's memory of the *golpe de estado* is focused through his auditory perception, and is coupled with strange sounds in the present: shots and bombs were heard, followed by silence, then sounds of military bands. Now he hears only sounds of unrest and sadness, coupled with the olfactory sensations of rot and fear:

Los pescadores huelen a pescado.

Los bomberos huelen a humo.

...

Los avaros a dinero.

Los agentes del tirano huelen a rata. (70-71)

These observations, while seemingly objective, are focalized through a blind man's sensory perceptions, rendering them necessarily subjective since he serves as a filter through which they pass.

Other voices represent the privileged, dominant class, as well, suggesting that the panoply of perspectives that Millán employs truly represents all facets of society. While the *anciana*, the anonymous woman and the blind man give testimony to the pressure of the authoritarian objective, other voices display both support for and justification for its control. In fragment 29 a masculine voice associates familial obligations with duty to the military and the *patria*:

Desciendo de abuelos ilustres.

Tengo numerosa descendencia.

Cumplo con los mandamientos.

Doy trabajo a miles de obreros.

Doy el brazo a mi señora.

Doy educación a mis hijos.

Doy limosna a los pobres.

Doy mi apoyo al gobierno.

Doy constitución al país. (50)

The association of *descender* and *dar*, to descend from and to give, suggests that the speaker considers his duty to his country to be linked with his socio-economic standing and ancestry, and thus justifying his support for the authoritarian control of the state. This subjective voice is in direct contrast of that of the blind man and the

marginalized groups he represents; the aristocrat here attempts to rationalize his implicit participation in the creation and upholding of values that would serve to maintain control.

The catalogue of possible voices, therefore, raises the question: if so many subjective voices are present in the seemingly objective catalogue of quotidian life under authoritarian control, where does the frontier lie between the dispassionate, unprejudiced “real” events and the personal stories that recreate them? For this reason, it seems more appropriate to cast *La ciudad* as a “re-telling” of objective events from the perspective of many subjective voices. To this end, Carmen Foxley suggests:

Esta operación objetivante y perspectivística pone en crisis el compulsivo control apropiador del lenguaje, y defrauda la expectativa de encontrar en la poesía el despliegue de una subjetividad individual que legitime y dé consistencia al sujeto y a la representación. (132)

A plurality of voices defrauds the language of control as well as usurping the expectations of the reader to find *one* legitimate, unifying subjective voice. Even the *anciana*, the representation of Millán in the text (Giordano 272), has seemingly temporary control over the contents of the poem itself. While there are certain voices that may be more apparent or easily identified (*el tirano*, for example), there is no more value placed on them than the other, “marginalized” voices such as *el enfermo* or those without names. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the origin of the voices; the poet’s voice is difficult to locate amidst the collective voices of the figures of the

poem. Consequently, the objective catalogue of “real” events is more easily read as focalizations of many different subjects—some of which may indeed be the poet’s voice, while others are invocations of archetypes that represent many facets of Chilean society.

When not every objective observation or perpetual present can completely fill or (re)create the new “reality” as proposed by the all-encompassing nature of *La ciudad*, the subjective lyric voice(s) turns to nostalgic flashes—not necessarily memories, rather moments of desire for a different time and/or place, perhaps in the past but more likely occurring concurrently or in the future. As we have seen in this study, the perpetual present is everywhere in *La ciudad*, creating a tone of repetition and restlessness created by lists of objective observations. When other temporal markers are used, the juxtapositions of present/past and here/there are explored in relationship to the collective perspective and the objective catalogue of events. The position of the lyric voice is put into question because of the interplay between those more subjective moments of nostalgia and objective statements in the present tense. Therefore, the residues (to use Avelar’s term) of Millán’s *La ciudad* are points of nostalgia that have escaped the control of a system in power that attempts to erase the past in favor of the “newest model” of idyllic society.

Consequently, moments of true rebellion against the economic system of eternal presents are generated when specific flashes of the past—either tenses or time reversals—occur in *La ciudad*. This tendency is best observed in the inversion of the events ultimately responsible for Millán’s exile in Fragments 52 and 53. In a stylistic

break from the rest of *La ciudad*, these lines nostalgically invert time *within* the city, a direct insurrection to the system of power of the authoritarian regime. Fragment 52 ends with a declaration of the importance of memory, while Fragment 53 is an upending of the regime's domination:

Hoy es el aniversario de su muerte.

Hoy es 11 de Septiembre.

...

Los trabajadores recuerdan.

La ciudad recuerda.

...

Aniquilaron la Moneda.

Destruyeron la ciudad.

No podrán aniquilar su recuerdo. (89-90)

Memory functions in direct opposition to the power of the authoritarian dictatorship. In addition, the explicit mention of the anniversary of Allende's death coupled with the date of the coup suggests Stern's concept of a "memory knot":<sup>80</sup> the anniversary and date of the coup will always be a moment for a public (communal) reflection on the experience of the subsequent dictatorship, even while each individual will remember his/her own participation or reaction.

The next fragment, subverting the standard of the hegemonic objective present, rewinds the events of the dictatorship:

El río invierte el curso de su corriente.

El agua de las cascadas sube.

...

Los torturados dejan de agitarse.

Los torturados cierran sus bocas.

Los campos de concentración se vacían.

...

Los aviones vuelan hacia atrás.

Los “rockets” suben hacia los aviones.

Allende dispara.

Las llamas se apagan.

...

11 de Septiembre.

...

Chile es un país democrático.

Argentina es un país democrático.

...

Renace Neruda.

...

El tirano abraza a Prats.

Desaparece. Prats revive.

Los cesantes son recontratados.

Los obreros desfilan cantando.



¡Venceremos! (91-92)

These fragments effectively demolish the authoritarian objective in favor of recreation through memory. The objective nature of the statements breaks down because the persistent use of the present tense inverts “real” historical events and disrupts the flow of time in order to recreate a past utopia, but in the present time. Not surprisingly, this utopian society is directly linked to the Chile, pre-September 11, 1973, and the disappearance of *el tirano*, Augusto Pinochet, and the resuscitation of Salvador Allende and his vice-president, Carlos Prats. Consequently, the socialist realm is recreated through memory, replacing the capitalist structures of commodification that were implemented post-coup.

In addition, the last line of the fragment, “¡Venceremos!”, is highly charged with intersubjectivity, a collective call to action that both ends the military dictatorship before it starts (in the inversion of time of this fragment) and indicates a future action. Consequently, by placing the collective voice at the end of the fragment that inverts time, memory and action ultimately destroy the authoritarian present which is marked by the catalogue of objective, real events in other fragments.

This friction between the subjective and the objective is especially appropriate when discussing exile literature because its creator is forced to leave an environment where language itself is suppressed as a means of control or censorship. In the censored environment, subjective opinion is suppressed or removed if it does not support the system in control; the poet, whose dominion is language, must leave the environment to respond, in a subjective/personalized manner, to the pressures

imposed by the state. Millán, in exile, chooses a multitude of voices to represent the city in *La ciudad*. This becomes the de facto representation of the experience in the new environment *because of the lack of other perspectives* that cannot escape the enclosed society. In exile, Millán recreates a society through plural voices that both represent and break apart the authoritarian control of the Chilean government, but by doing so the dichotomy of collective experience and objective begins to dissolve. By writing outside of the hegemony of the Chilean state, Millán is able to create representation of what is occurring in his absence by generating multiple (subjective) voices that signify the stratified city that he left. Thus, the amalgamation of plural, individual voices creates an intersubjective account that, at times, plays out like an objective catalogue of events.

Marcelo Coddou treats this paradox—the subjective voice becoming the concrete historical event—by signaling a dramatic shift both in convention as well as content in Chilean literature written after the *golpe de estado*:

cabría ver que el golpe lo que fundamentalmente vino a significarle a la literatura chilena fue que le dio la inmediatez de la realidad histórica como su materia esencial y el sentido mismo de su función. El testimonio deja de ser indirecto, el sujeto poético no es ya el *yo* y sus conflictos, ni su voz dominio privativo del individuo poeta. Sujeto y voz se hacen colectivos, representan y expresan una sensibilidad vital y unas convicciones que trascienden toda subjetividad, para pasar a ser las de una entidad histórica concreta. (100)

The concrete historical experience (i.e. objective History) is comprised of the fusion or collectivization of voices that transcends subjectivity.

Carmen Foxley also identifies the amalgamation of personal experience to create an objective representation as a characteristic of the generation of poets to which Millán belongs:

. . . el rasgo más destacable es la sistemática experimentación de diversos modos de objetivar la experiencia. Ellos hacen como que las cosas se presentaran independientes de su productor, aunque de hecho no se evitan las mediatizaciones sensoriales y cognoscitivas que determinan una aguda, sensible e inédita percepción de la realidad. Esta operación objetivante y perspectivística pone en crisis el compulsivo control apropiador del lenguaje, y defrauda la expectativa de encontrar en la poesía el despliegue de una subjetividad individual que legitime y dé consistencia al sujeto y a la representación. (132)

Foxley's assertion that the objectifying nature of the collectivization of voices subverts the reader's expectation of a subjective voice is an insightful take on Millán's *La ciudad*. The reader wants to find a subjective voice with whom he or she can identify, not to mention the desire to associate what is known about Millán's life with the traumatic events unfolding in Chile at the time of *La ciudad*'s publication.

#### ***“Se cierra el poema”*: Concluding *La ciudad***

Gonzalo Millán's city simmers within the confines of the bell jar. The text both reflects the pressure under which the city lives, as well as demonstrates the

poet's longing for a return to a time before the bell jar enclosed the city. The authoritarian regime that controls the city manifests itself in the poem as the dominant present in a series of seemingly objective accounts of quotidian routines. The personal perspectives of those suffering under the hegemonic control are witnessed in the intersubjective voices that populate the city. The subjective and the objective are in constant battle; seemingly objective, impersonal statements reveal themselves to be focalized through the lyric voices speaking throughout the fragments. These voices do not always offer an easy correspondence with that of the poet, and many of them take on an archetypal role as representations of elements of Chile's cultural identity.

The collectivization of voices suggests a recreation through memory of a society before the bell jar of state control was imposed in 1973. As a result, the military regime's implementation of neoliberal capitalism becomes a hegemonic structure in *La ciudad* that is correlated with censorship and control. Since commodification, as suggested by Idelber Avelar, implies a destruction of memory, Millán's recreation of a society of voices through memory seeks to fissure or reverse the authoritative structure that imposes neoliberal capitalism. *La ciudad* demonstrates the poet's longing for a time (pre-1973 or post-authoritarian regime) and a place (the city the poet calls home) that he cannot access in exile. Relying on an "alphabet of survival", Gonzalo Millán's language demonstrates both the stress (linguistic and otherwise) of living in exile as well as the pressures of the society he left behind.

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## Notes

<sup>62</sup> Klein's book treats several countries around the world (including Chile and the rest of the Southern Cone) as well the participation by scientists (Ewan Cameron, for example), economists (Milton Friedman), and political figures (Henry Kissenger) from the United States.

<sup>63</sup> While the aim of her book is not necessarily based on cultural repercussions of the dictatorships, Klein does sum up the situation in the Southern Cone in two subsections entitled *Cleansing Cultures* and *Who Was Killed—and Why*: “In Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, the juntas staged massive ideological cleanup operations, burning books by Freud, Marx and Neruda, closing hundreds of newspapers and magazines, occupying universities, banning strikes and political meetings.” (129)

<sup>64</sup> Please see the introductory chapter from this investigation for more on my definitions of memory and nostalgia.

<sup>65</sup> Millán quickly became a prominent figure in the country's poetic circles with the publication of *Relación personal* in 1968.

<sup>66</sup> Loveman describes the large cities of Chile in the 1960s: “This migration enlarged the rings of misery surrounding Santiago and other major cities, as the shantytowns and squatter settlements (*callampas*, or “mushroom towns”) grew at alarming rates. In Santiago alone the *callampas* and squatter settlements sheltered nearly one-half million people, or 20 to 25 percent of the city's population. Living conditions in these urban settlements varied from poor to deplorable. Most lacked basic urban services and amenities, including sewers and potable water.” (239)

<sup>67</sup> Klein points out that the wave of *developmentalism* in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America paved the way for socialists, like Allende in Chile, to enjoy relative success even though their ideologies opposed those of the United States during the Cold War (66-76).

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<sup>68</sup> Loveman explains: “In Chile they were soon nicknamed “the Chicago Boys” or, more generically, the neo-liberal economists. These economists focused upon the inefficient allocation of resources that resulted from politicization of the economy, overregulation, excessive protectionism, and the burden of unprofitable public enterprises. Underlying these defects was a *political system* that spawned irresponsible demands and demagogic promises.” (266)

<sup>69</sup> Bella Jozef treats exiled Chilean writers Poli Délano and Antonio Skármeta, among others, in “Memoria y exilio,” eds. Karl Kohut and José morales Saravia, *Literatura chilena hoy: La difícil transición* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2002) 120-133.

<sup>70</sup> Please see the introductory chapter of this investigation for my definition of “paradictatorial” space as it relates to memory and nostalgia.

<sup>71</sup> Soledad Bianchi breaks down the *promoción de los 60* into various groups (Trilce and Arúspice, among others). Her book *La memoria: Modelo para armar* (Santiago: Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 1995) contains several interviews with prominent Chilean poets of the last 40 years to explore how various poetry groups were formed as well as the construction of memory through multiple voices.

<sup>72</sup> Waldo Rojas was also exiled from Chile, as well as Nelly Davis, Oscar Hahn, and many others. Many poets did not leave, such as Manuel Silva Acevedo, also a member of the *promoción de los sesenta*.

A complete list can be found Tomás Harris’s article, “La voz de los 80 (promociones poéticas 1979-1989),” eds. Karl Kohut and José morales Saravia, *Literatura chilena hoy: La difícil transición* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2002) 297-214. Harris bases his list on Soledad Bianchi’s book *Viajes de ida y vuelta: poetas chilenos en Europa (un panorama)* (Santiago: Documentas/Cordillera, 1992).

<sup>73</sup> For more on the *promoción de los sesenta*, see *Veinticinco años de la poesía chilena*, eds. Teresa Calderón, Lila Calderón and Tomás Harris (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

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<sup>74</sup> See Javier F. Campos, “Lírica chilena de fin de siglo y (post)modernidad neoliberal en América latina,” *Revista Iberoamericana* Volume LX 198-169 (July-December 1994) 891-912.

<sup>75</sup> This subtitle, as well as subsequent subtitles used in this study, appear in Millán’s *La Ciudad*, Fragment 5.

<sup>76</sup> The version that I cite here is made available in English by The Transnational Institute under Creative Commons. No page number is offered for this version, as it is published on-line. August 28, 1976. *Transnational Institute*. 1 July 2009. <[http://www.tni.org/detail\\_page.phtml?page=letelier-docs\\_thenation](http://www.tni.org/detail_page.phtml?page=letelier-docs_thenation)>.

<sup>77</sup> Klein describes the platform of the *junta*: “To us, it was a revolution,” said Cristián Larroulet, one of Pinochet’s economic aides. It was a fir description. September 11, 1973, was far more than the violent end of Allende’s peaceful socialist revolution; it was the beginning of what *The Economist* would later describe as a “counterrevolution”—the first concrete victory in the Chicago School campaign to seize back the gains that had been won under developmentalism and Keynesianism. Unlike Allende’s partial revolution, tempered and compromised by the push and pull of democracy, this revolt, imposed through brute force, was free to go all the way. In the coming years, the same policies laid out in “The Brick” would be imposed in dozens of other countries under cover of a wide range of crises. But Chile was the counterrevolution’s genesis—a genesis of terror.” (94-95)

<sup>78</sup> Grínor Rojo’s study was written in 1983, only four years after the first edition of *La Ciudad* was published. He uses capital letters to mark the character’s identities (El Anciano, for example). The edition that I use was published in 1994; by this time Millán had changed the gender of the *anciano* to *anciana*. I have chosen to reproduce *anciana* (and other figures) as they occur in the text with lower-case letters.

<sup>79</sup> For more on Gabriela Mistral’s life, see *Centro Virtual Cervantes*, 2003-2009, Instituto Cervantes, 1 July 2009 <<http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/mistral/cronologia/>>

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<sup>80</sup> Stern describes the memory knot as a process of making the private experience into a public commemoration: “Strongly motivated human groups, symbolically powerful events and anniversary or commemoration dates, haunting remains and places—these galvanize struggles to shape and project into the public cultural domain ways of remembering that capture an essential truth.” (4)



## Never Again?: An Afterword

The exile poetry of Juan Gelman, Ferreira Gullar, and Gonzalo Millán nostalgically responds to multiple shocks: the authoritarian governments' rise to power and the subsequent violence through which they ruled, the loss of familiar space, the death of friends and family members who opposed the regimes' philosophies, and the problematic path towards progress and modernization in their homelands. The most obvious commonality that these three poets share is the vantage point of exile; alienation, the result of the exile, also provides the space in which the pain of exclusion and loss can be explored. However, the space in which they write is still governed, in part, by the authoritarian. Thus, paradictatorial space, as I use it in this investigation, is the mental and physical space of exile; even though they are separated from the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, these poets are still influenced by the repression of the authoritarian. As I have shown, the poetic tendencies of paradictatorial writing overlap somewhat with those of postdictatorial writing, both in thematic and lyric techniques. However, differing from postdictatorial literature, paradictatorial nostalgia is the act of processing trauma *in real time*, as the events in the poets' homelands are unfolding.

These poets are responding to events that are occurring at the moment of writing, especially in regards to the larger processes of modernization and progress. Consequently, nostalgia does not necessarily equate a longing for the past in the poems of this study—Gelman's *cartas*, Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, and Millán's *La ciudad*. Affective to be sure, nostalgia differs from memory in the desire for a different time

(past, present, or future) or place, not just a recollection of it. These three poets show us that nostalgia is a confluence of emotions—anger, confusion, grief—encapsulated in a lyric representation of idealization, longing, and desire for a situation different from the one in which they find themselves. Nostalgia is not just relegated to an idealization of the past, rather it is an idealization of a different reality.

For these reasons, the poetry of this study is ambivalently nostalgic in relationship to linear time. It simultaneously wails at the forces that caused the rupture from their homelands while it seeks to reconstruct that which was lost. Juan Gelman's *cartas*, perhaps the most mournful of the major works studied here, demonstrate both the deconstruction of the past—his mother and family history through postmemory—as well as the reconstruction of her, his son, and his missing grandchild. Gelman's use of the epistolary with a negated, singular reader directly addresses the incapacity of language to accomplish this task; neologisms and other textual manipulations mark the poetry as a pained expression of the un-expressible.

Ferreira Gullar, unlike the other two poets of this study, explicitly longs for a childhood home that symbolizes the country from which he is exiled. Because of the tropes that he incorporates from Brazil's rich cultural and literary tradition (the *saudades* of the Brazilian Romantics or the *antropofagia* of its Modernists), it is more appropriate to discuss his *saudades* of his native city, São Luís do Maranhão. By making *Poema Sujo* "dirty," Gullar effectively integrates the grungy residue of Brazil's unequal modernization into the text.

Gonzalo Millán's poem more directly responds to the shock of government repression and the implementation of modernizing government strategies, neoliberalism being the most obvious. His poem responds linguistically to the shock of exile, even while it idealizes a different past pre-dictatorship. By inserting communal, intersubjective memory, Millán's *La ciudad* looks for ways to combat the authoritarianism in his homeland by reversing time and turning the subjective responses into a de facto objective history of Chile.

The poetry I have analyzed here—Gelman's *cartas*, Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, and Millán's *La ciudad*—could be read as part of a larger trend of investigation into the role of the individual in a globalized world. If we understand globalization as an international standard of economic, political, and social policy, we can appreciate how, in the context of the Southern Cone, ideals of national identity are assimilated by those from dominant cultures (either European or North American). The authoritarian regimes, in order to modernize (and “globalize”) their countries sought to eradicate subversive ideas, killing or exiling those who would disagree with their goals or methods in the name of national unity. Testimonial in nature, these poets probe what it means to watch from the outside as trauma affects change on their identities, both as artists and as members of a community or nation. For this reason, on a broader scale, these poems question the capacity to affect change on an imposed system or discourse.

Since the poems of this study are selections based on limiting circumstances—dates of publication, the commonality of exile, similarities of

political and economic oppression—they are similar in their obsessive questioning of personal identity and how it relates to concepts of cultural character. It stands to reason that the poetry of Gelman, Gullar, and Millán may, therefore, share characteristics throughout the rest of their careers (at the date of publication of this study, Gelman and Gullar still actively publish new work, and Millán’s poetry is being published posthumously). But, instead, their later poetry leads to new questions, some of which will demand a new theoretical framework to answer.

Juan Gelman’s later poetry most closely resembles his earlier works. In his most recent publication, *Mundar* (2007), memory, family, religious themes, and longing for a different future still haunt his quest for identity:

En las migas de tu splendor,  
mamá, recibí el recital  
de pogroms y de sangre  
que dio rostro a mi rostro.  
El puente de esas vidas es  
lo respirado a cuestras.  
Desde tus hombros miro  
las arrugas de las estrellas célebres.  
A un dedo de lo que fui me soy  
en lo que habré de ser. Tanto mundo,  
tanta abierta confianza en su cambiar  
el accidente,

desastres que dicen al lado adiós. (“Accidentes”)

Interestingly, this constant polishing of themes found in his earlier work is its own form of nostalgia and memory. Like in *Carta a mi madre*, the pogrom (a postmemory) informs his view of his family ancestry. The mother figure, onto whose shoulders he stands to see the stars, is his foundation as she has formed his identity, both in her life and her death. The poet questions what will become of the future while, at the same moment, he references his past.

Millán’s poetry post-*La ciudad* has taken a slightly different path; while Gelman’s language and themes are often similar, Millán has experimented with diverse forms. The last two of his works were published after his death in 2006 in Chile; *Veneno de escorpión azul* (2007) is a series of diary-like entries that contemplate his death, while *Gabinete de papel* (2008) is poetry that philosophically questions the process of dying in relationship to visual art. This emphasis on visual art is also evident in *Archivo Zonalgo*, a short film by Pinorra Aguirre, debuted at the Cineteca Nacional in August, 2008. Aguirre’s short film celebrates the visual imagery of Millán’s poetry and notes:

Para Millán, su archivo era un diario visual, todos los días dibujaba y garrapateaba sobre las tarjetas; incluso él mismo lo definía como un archivo que recoge de todo, como el desarrollo de un lenguaje que se inventa a la medida que se escribe, signos que se repiten y se combinan. (Gómez Bravo “Poeta”)

As Aguirre (Millán's step-son) points out, the act of visually representing his work on note cards is like the development of a new language. Like *La ciudad*, with its objective and, at times, visual catalogue of quotidian life, Millán's later poetry seeks to define through language the subjective individual in relationship to his or her surroundings.

Perhaps in this regard, Millán's later poetry most mirrors the works of Ferreira Gullar who has returned to the inspiration of visual art that originally informed his Concrete poetry of the 1950s. In 2003, he published *Relâmpagos*, a series of essays inspired by the works of artists from Michelangelo to Paul Klee. We can appreciate the importance of the visual in his much earlier works like *Poema Sujo*, in which sensory stimuli are the vehicles through which Gullar recreates the city of his birth.

The prolific careers of these poets suggest a continual reworking of certain themes: for Gelman, memory and the future of his country; for Millán, the subjective response to trauma and death; for Gullar, the visual imagery of language. But, as their careers also show, these poets are not in perpetual exile, nor does their more recent poetry exclusively treat themes of separation and loss. Therefore, while the focus of the current study has been on key texts written in exile, a logical extension would be to consider each poet in within the context of his own career by examining how his poetry has changed, as we assume it has, after exile, even though certain tendencies and linguistic markers may indeed still permeate his work. Is the idealization of nostalgia still present in Millán's later poetry, that grapples with his imminent death? A reading of *Veneno de escorpión azul* certainly seems to suggest

that proleptic nostalgia is an undercurrent. Does Gullar consider problematic modernization and culturally-specific Brazilian tendencies when he writes short stories and essays inspired by world-renowned visual artists? Do Gelman's poetry and essays continue to struggle with his losses and expulsion from Argentina? Again, even a cursory read of his later publications suggests that these threads are still present in his work—not entirely a surprise since he still resides in Mexico, his home during his exile.

Aaron Santesso suggests that “Nostalgia poems . . . are often more timely than timeless.” (189) While I agree that that the poems of this study—Gelman's *cartas*, Gullar's *Poema Sujo*, and Millán's *La ciudad*—are timely, I argue that they are also timeless because they force the reader to consider his or her own identity, as well as people and places from which they have been separated. Why do poems of exile move us to tears when we ourselves are not exiles? If we are the “postmemorial generation”, as Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer suggest, why do memories of the past so deeply haunt us, even when it is not our own past? We identify with Argentinian Juan Gelman, because the thought of losing our own children paralyzes us with fear. We sympathize with Brazilian Ferreira Gullar, because we associate our childhood homes with lost innocence. We watch in horror with Chilean Gonzalo Millán as the city he loves succumbs to terror. We participate in the mourning process with them because we can see our own losses reflected in their mourning. Broadly speaking, exile poetry ignites in the reader the sense of loss, betrayal and confusion that the poet suffers, because we have all lost someone dear to us and we

have been betrayed by that which was once most prized. We long for that person, we dream of a time before our betrayal, we work through our confusion by nostalgically turning to the past or a different idealized state to better situate our disjointed present. The importance of this poetry, then, is the collectivization and making-public of private pain. The texts are physical manifestations of the turmoil of the poets' minds, reeling from the multiple shocks they encountered in an attempt to reconcile what has happened to them and their countries. The poets are not in denial, but the process of overcoming their trauma makes them investigate how both history and personal identities are constructed.

Unfortunately, the chasm between what we, as a society, know and what we do is vast. As Stanley Cohen suggests, "Truth and wisdom are no longer the burdens they once were. We can hardly believe that only full knowledge about the past or present can guarantee 'never again'." (279) While these poetic texts show the trauma of repression and exile, as well as the idealization of something *different*, they fall short of imposing 'never again'. As recent history has shown us—whether it be played out in the wars in the Middle East, the refugees of Darfur, or the military coup against the democratically-elected president of Honduras—we, as a "modernized," "globalized," and "postdictatorialized" society, have not necessarily learned from our past enough to do differently.



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