

The Remains of Testimonio: Eltit's *El padre mío*

Es Chile, pensé.

Chile entero y a pedazos en la enfermedad de este hombre; jirones de diarios, fragmentos de exterminio, sílabas de muerte, pauses de mentira, frases comerciales, nombres de difuntos. Es una honda crisis del lenguaje, una infección en la memoria, una desarticulación de todas las ideologías. Es una pena, pensé.

Es Chile, pensé.

Diamela Eltit, *El padre mío*

If there is an illusion from which one must protect oneself today more than ever, it is the illusion that consists in getting hung up on *words* (history, philosophy, art. . .) as if they were immediately to be equated with *things*. Those who insist obstinately on this illusion—that is, basically on the realism of the idea—reveal by this type of somnambulistic Platonism that they have not yet joined our time or its ends.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*

“Pero debería de servir de testimonio yo.”

Diamela Eltit, *El padre mío*

These days the “remains” of the dead are a commodity that is only growing in value. Just saying the word conjures up grizzly images of bodies unearthed from the Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia, Guatemala, perhaps now even Darfour—the list seems endless. Closer to home the US indigenous are trying to get the rights to over 18,000 bodies of their ancestors that are housed in the Smithsonian Institute. The hope is that through the deinstitutionalization of these bodies, these remains, they will be able to restore a past that is scarred

by injustice and horror. These are only examples, but it is clear that the industry of memory and witnessing is growing and “remains” seem to be the object of central interest. The genocide memorials in Nyamata and Ntarama in Rwanda, Cambodia’s “Killing Fields” in Choeung Ek and the National Holocaust Museum in DC, all exist with the hope that they can stand in for the sacred, for something lost, for that which was once thought authentic and that might carry a message from the dead to the living.

As some try to recuperate or expose remains, governments, the media and the tourist business are all trying to control remains, maintain remains, and capitalize on them. In the midst of this sacralization and monumentalization we must keep in mind that “remains” refer to what is left of something that was once living, whole, through which blood pulsed but that now is only a trace of what it once was: a hollow corpse, a body part, a tuft of hair clotted with coagulated blood. It can also refer to something left over, something that has been used and discarded, no longer needed, thrown out and forgotten. On the positive side remains can gesture toward the possibility of identification, recuperation of memory, knowledge and truth.

We can examine these various notions of the “remain” to better understand how they pertain to a literary genre such as the Latin American testimonio. At this moment the ongoing challenge to create a narrative of trauma and the *other* that functions beyond or outside of hegemonic power structures plagues academic discourse. This may be *especially* true for literature that falls under the heading of the testimonio. Testimonio has been accused of being a hegemonizing literature from the West, and academics, specifically in North America, have gone from the belief that testimonio is the answer to a more authentic representation of the *other*, to a point at which they see that their endeavor will always necessarily fail.

For these reasons we are at a juncture. We find ourselves at a pivotal moment where we can say that what we are faced with is the “remains” of testimonio. I want to clarify that I use the term “remains” not because I believe that testimonio is dead or in tatters and that all we have left is a few scattered remnants that we must piece together, but because testimonio is in a predicament. It is not what it once was

thought to be and what we have to work with now are the remains of these ideas. Therefore, in this paper I do not read the current debate about testimonio as a closure or an end per se, but as an opening onto something else that has not yet been named and which we can perhaps glimpse in the work of Diamela Eltit. What ensues then is a brief discussion about what I call the "predicament of testimonio" and reasons for why I posit Eltit's book *El padre mío*, and the body of the vagabond, not as a disintegrating remain of some fictional glorious past that claims to speak for the dead, but as something that vibrates at the borders of representation and opens onto what might lie beyond the quagmire of the debate still surrounding testimonio.

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To look briefly at the state of testimonio we can turn to Gugelberger's text *The Real Thing* in which he claims that "obviously the euphoric moment of the testimonio has passed, and it is now time to assess in a more self- and metacritical spirit its reception by the critical and academic disciplines" (1). This was mainly in reaction to the report in the Chilean newspaper *La Época* that the Nobel Prize winner Menchú was now married with two children. It seemed that the "euphoric" era that Gugelberger referred to was over because the prime subaltern subject, Menchú, had not only been recognized worldwide by winning the Nobel Peace prize, but had moved from the position of anonymous peasant to mystic human rights advocate, and then slipped (or was pushed) out of the academic scene of writing when she gave birth. That was nearly ten years ago, and at that moment it seemed that to write from the "space of the *other*," to enunciate from the site of the "subaltern," to avoid the hegemony of the Lyotardian "master narrative," the academic's desire, and the agency and ethics of the witnesses in the process, were a long list of the ever-growing impossibilities associated with the project. Testimonio was surely in a predicament. It was at an impasse and suspect by some as nothing more than a manifestation of the first world's desire to rewrite the developing world in its own vision, and therefore version, of history. Thus it is interesting and relevant to also note how Gugelberger (who understands these dilemmas) ends his

text with John Beverley's open ended question, "What is left today of this desire called testimonio?" (Beverly, "Real Thing" 282). What are we to do with the remains of a decaying corpse lying prone in expectancy of an autopsy? Do we bury it? Do we try to use our magical discourse to resurrect it? Or do we open ourselves up to something else?

To look more closely at this question of testimonio I turn to Alberto Moreiras's 1995 essay "The Aura of Testimonio," in which he examines how testimonio is just beginning to be understood as an extra-literary force that speaks from within literature, yet also goes beyond what we understand to be both literature and testimonio. Moreiras asserts that there is an extra-literary moment in the testimonio that speaks to the singularity of experience—be it the experience of pain or something else—while it simultaneously acknowledges the impossibility of the repetition of that singularity. He further writes "Testimonio is testimonio because it suspends the literary at the very same time that it constitutes itself as a literary act: as literature, it is a liminal event opening onto a nonrepresentational, drastically indexical order of experience" (212). To give credence to an experience such as the pain of torture, testimonio opens onto an "extra-literary stance" which arrests all symbolization for that which there is no example, no representation. It gives way to that which is nonrepresentational as it opens a door to a possibility of what lies beyond literature itself. For this reason testimonio also finds itself at an impasse that can be called the limit of representation where it is a "direct appeal" to that which lies beyond representation (such as the singular pain of torture). Perhaps one of the most important points that we can draw from Moreiras is brought up by Beasley-Murray when he says that "the dead cannot speak and we cannot speak for them. Yet the desire of testimonio is the desire to speak with and for the dead" (124). "The dead" refers to those who cannot speak for themselves and therefore seem to have no language of representation—the clinically dead, but also the silent and the oppressed. What traces remain of their voices?

In Chilean letters the testimonio most often refers to a strain of narrative production that aims to excise undesirable moments of the nation's past. It is the search for a voice that reflects an alternative side of historical events in a time when representation—the way the world views Chile and more importantly how Chile views itself—is what is at stake. These narratives also emphasize the need for an alternative discourse that calls attention to the historical cleansing going on in Chile. We know that each day memory fades, facts become fuzzy and witnesses die. Thus, 30 years after the coup, the historical narrative and issues of memory, repression and witnessing are perhaps more than ever a malleable political commodity as different groups with varied interests hold a virtual tug-of-war for control of language and history. It is now only a question of whose version of truth will stand in as the legitimate history of Chile under dictatorship. What is currently at issue is how to write a representational narrative that does not fall back into this idea of a “literature of resistance” that concentrates more on what it defies than on the development and proliferation of its own voice. The question then becomes one of how to create a narrative that does not promote the hegemonizing strength of the dictatorship nor of *La transición* but instead interrupts the flow of constructed memory and places stress on these systems of power.

To understand how these interruptions might occur we can look at Gareth Williams's essay about democratic Chile and the relation between neoliberal historical revisionism and the idea of community “Operational Whitewash and the Negative Community.” In it he adds another layer to the debate surrounding testimonio when he points to the ever-growing reality of a discourse in Latin America whose historicity is “deeply invested in the casting off, and in the consequent disappearance of negative or so-called archaic histories, cultural identifications or belief systems” (*Popular* 278). That is to say, there now exists a vast project of revisionism that uses language and image to cover over or erase what could be called “unhealthy” and “subversive” influences on contemporary Latin America. Although he does not claim to have the answers, Williams considers this literary conundrum through a discussion of the relation between two factors that he refers to as “posthegemony”—the theoretical and

practical site at which both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse cease to make sense” and the Derridean “perhaps”—“a possible whose possibilization must prevail over the impossible” (Williams, *Popular* 275; Derrida, *Politics* 29). Together, he says, these form a relation that “exceeds hegemony, denaturalizes its relation to the reproduction of intellectual mastery, and unbalances mastery’s authority” (Williams, *Popular* 276). In other words, there exists the possibility of a literature that does not *counter* hegemony but somehow attempts to put stress on it, to think beyond it and, ideally, to occur without the creation of another master discourse in its place:

[. . .] the relation between posthegemony and perhaps uncovers languages, wordings, narratives, and relations that point us toward those realms of experience, knowledge and commonality that promise meanings other than those that are immediately handed over to the history and reproduction of instrumental reason’s relation to cultural and social hegemonies. It promises areas of experience and forms of reflection that remain extraneous, or foreign, to the interests and orders of hegemony and hegemonic thought. (Williams, *Popular* 276)

Hence his request is for us to think beyond current patterns and orders, and to consider this question of how to create a theory of reading and of narrative production that is produced for interests other than hegemonic ones. He further writes:

As such, it [this relation] does not tend toward unity. On the contrary, it tends to challenge critical perspectives that are invested in the forging of unification or in the fabrication of hegemonic relations of equivalence between different subject positions such as those of the intellectual/subaltern relation. As such, it leans toward those sites of dislocation that demand *other* relations and *other* forms of measurement between subjects, and, for that matter, between (subaltern and elite) epistemologies and knowledge formations. (276)

Thus, there exists the possibility of knowledges and areas of experience that are somehow “extraneous” to the “interests and orders” of hegemonic thought and show us something which opens onto other possibilities (276). What these extraneous knowledges exactly are (such as that of how to speak for the dead that Moreiras discusses) is the challenge we are faced with.

Williams's discussion turns us toward the alternative literary and artistic circles in Chile where the manipulation of truth since 1973 has led writers to carry out a search for narratives that aim to write that space between "posthegemony" and the "perhaps." These alternative narratives, commonly referred to as "negative histories," question how to testify to that which lies at the limit of representation. They attempt to think beyond systems of social and political thought that are accepted as the truth of contemporary history and while negative histories aim to act as an alternative voice to the propaganda produced during dictatorship (and in its aftermath) they are also an attempt to untangle the sticky mass called history and narrative and then put it back together in a form that somehow reflects a truth of the national unconscious¹. Furthermore these narratives consciously try to skirt the trap of the mimetic representation of repression and trauma and attempt *not to represent* trauma or repression—but to *write* them. They tediously scrape away at the thin façade of official history to write a local, communal or what Deleuze and Guattari would call a "minor" discourse that breaks apart the hegemonic voice and then opens onto what Lacan describes as "the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, *the one between perception and consciousness*" (56). In the end these narratives open onto the possibility of creating something "other than what we have had in the past, beyond what we have in the hegemonic discourses of the present, and therefore, potentially constitutive of alternative critical pathways" (Williams, *Popular* 19). In other words, a discourse that does not counter hegemony but puts stress on it.

To further examine these notions we can turn to the work of Diamela Eltit which frequently centers upon those sectors of society that had been swept aside during Pinochet's time. In her search for an alternative to the official government propaganda she found people who had been marginalized and compartmentalized from the mainstream yet who at the same time were intimately associated with the

¹ By the "unconscious of a national truth," I refer to a truth that is an alternative one to the populist discourse of dictatorship or transition and that only appears in glimpses of moments that are impossible to recreate fully through a text.

society that shut them out. In 1983 Eltit came into contact with a vagabond whose transient lifestyle and disjointed language refracted a haunting version of Chile. *El padre mío* (1989) is a novelette-sized text (often referred to as an “extra-literary” project²) that was originally part of a joint project that she took part in with Lotty Rosenfeld beginning in 1980 in which the two women documented their trips on video and by tape recorder to the margins of the city of Santiago. It is the “unedited”³ testimony of a schizophrenic vagabond who lived in an isolated lot on the outskirts of Santiago in the early 1980s and whom Eltit never saw again after the meetings.

Eltit equates the infirmity of “el padre” with the desperate situation that Chile found itself in during the 70s and early 80s because at the time that she met the man whom she calls “el padre” the country had been under the rule of the military for almost a decade and was in a dire state—politically, economically, morally and ethically. Chile was a disaster zone that had imploded and as a citizen living in the midst of this crisis Diamela Eltit says “I lived in a territory where history mingled with hysteria, crime coupled with sales. The signs of negative power fell mercilessly on Chilean bodies, producing disappearances, illegalities, indignities” (*E. Luminata* 5). It was a soulless country where “negative power” created its own hysteric narrative of history in which the market coupled with the horrendous crimes of the state to produce its own commodities—disappearance and death. For Eltit the incoherent speech of this “schizophrenic,” which also seemed to be devoid of any explicit biographical information, any history, evoked, for her, a testimony that reflected the reality of Pinochet’s Chile.

It may be that for some of these reasons the text of *El padre mío* appears as the presentation of language in one of its rawest forms: an unedited, uncensored, free-flowing stream of (un)consciousness work that has been transferred almost directly from oral testimony

² See Gisela Norat’s book *Marginalities*.

³ By “unedited” I refer to the fact that although Eltit has taken the testimony and transcribed it word for word, she has chosen when to punctuate and when to end each of the three monologues that she has marked with an ellipsis to let us know that there was more.

to the tape recorder to the page. With its somewhat surprising and confrontational form it dodges and defies traditionally structured narrative of any kind. Moreover, when we read it as testimonio it seems to lack many of the conventional comforts that we usually look for as readers. For example, traditional identitarian testimonios openly address their readers and call for some kind of action in response to oppression. In *El padre mío* there are no overt political calls to action, no drawings, poetry or photographs included, and no easily followed plot or characters that the reader can empathize with (at least not in a traditional manner). It neither asks for compassion nor overtly aims for redemption. For these reasons we can surmise that *El padre mío* is more reminiscent of a testimonio *about* testimonio. In other words, it can be read as testimonio's commentary back upon itself because it provokes reflection about the traditional narrative from inside literature and the genre of testimonio itself. It functions both as a narrative that speaks about language, history and the problematic of witnessing and as a meta-narrative that performs the struggle (and perhaps the failure) of how to create the narrative of the *other*.

One outstanding feature of the text then is that it remains difficult to categorize and interpret. For example, a problem of how to situate this text for Eltit is contained in the moment of recuperation of el padre's language—in the moment that the recording was first made. In this instant Eltit saw the need to “recoger” his speech. In Spanish “recoger” has many meanings: to pick up, to gather together, to clear up or tidy (a space), to harvest, to retrieve. Thus the question of how to “recoger” his language, and the history of Chile, is also one of how to gather together the varied elements of el padre's speech and to retrieve something from this space of utter confusion that his monologue presents us with. This retrieval of fragments dodges any type of traditional reading and Eltit believes that “[. . .] hay cuestiones contenidas en lo escrito que están dentro de un espacio que me sobrepasa” (*E. Luminata* 17). There are many unconscious aspects to the work that surpass her, yet at the same time consciously affect her. Yet Eltit still equates the unintelligibility of el padre's story with the incomprehensibility of Chile under dictatorship and attempts to make a connection between the two. For her, the text functions at an

ambiguous frontier where comprehension and order meet incomprehension and chaos. It is a testament to a world in which everything she thought she knew was erased almost overnight and replaced by a sick and mute society:

Habiendo reconocido en ella [la enfermedad de este hombre] una cierta equidad con la situación chilena bajo dictadura: su eclosión, el habla del Padre Mío me parece que ejerce una provocación y una demanda a habitar como testimonio, aunque en rigor su testimonio está desprovisto de toda información biográfica explícita. Él mismo lo dice en una de sus partes: "Pero debería de servir de testimonio yo". (*EPM* 17-18)

The sickness of this man, his disjointed speech that ceaselessly persists and his ruined appearance are of course very easy examples to play on since the notion of the schizophrenic reflecting society is nothing new in itself. Yet in this text we must ask not what it means to be insane, but how his presence (that of the vagabond) on the streets (his physicality) and then, when placed into Eltit's text, puts stress on hegemonic discourse and comments on the state of the testimonio.

If we look at the French we see that the concept of the vagabond is both physical and psychological. On the one hand, as in English, it implies transience, roving, wandering, roaming, change, movement, dispersion, non-center, lack of central history and lack of future. The more literary version is "Le vagabondage de l'esprit" –the wanderings of the mind– "vagabonder" [verb] according to *Le Robert* is "passer sans arrêter d'un sujet à l'autre". In a sense a vagabond such as el padre is seen as a loner—a man without community. He is the remains, the forgotten, the leftovers of society. Yet, he is an integral part of the community where there is no such thing as a true "inside" or "outside" and exists like a viscous fluid that passes from one "sujet à l'autre" and from one space to another. He is delegated to its periphery but still lives in the city. He lives out in the open, yet is made invisible by the public who choose to deny his existence rather than look at the refuse and ruins that their own society has produced. In other words, he is a member of an alternative or subaltern community (the homeless, the insane) whose presence and lifestyle appear

to transgress the laws of society and State but in reality he is closely tied to the community that "rejects" him because in that overt rejection is a form of recognition.

Thus his lifestyle is illustrative of a man who is recognized as part of the human race, yet at the same time is outcast as something foreign, alien, less than human—refuse. Through a play of words in the introduction to *El padre mío* Eltit further describes the body of the homeless:

La sujeción a la apariencia y a la exterioridad era común en ellos, más allá de las particularidades de su construcción. En esta perspectiva me era posible establecer nociones que permitían percibir algunos argumentos culturales propios, desde la alteridad que asumían sus cuerpos errantes en la ciudad.

Es-Cultura, pensé.

Esculturas diseminadas en los bordes negando la interioridad arquitectónica, tomando, en cambio las fachadas, a partir de constituirse ellos mismos en puros ornamentos, en fachadas después de un cataclismo. (*EPM* 12-13)

Yet what is the difference between culture and sculpture? Sculpture is merely culture that has been frozen in time. A Rodin, for example, is something to reflect on. It may not speak a traditional language, yet speaks a language all the same as it pays homage to a certain moment in nineteenth century France. *El padre's* world as homeless, as "escultura," in Santiago also speaks to a moment as it paints a portrait of a ghostly post-cataclysmic world, in which we can envision vagabonds as kinetic living sculptures indiscreetly posed high above the ruins of an urban cityscape drained of all color. The vagabond's role is to maintain his place and conceptual space on the streets as a nameless, faceless being who exists to remind Chileans that the past is still very much part of the present. In this way he plays a role similar to the numerous static sculptures dedicated to the forgotten citizens of the past and which now stand alone in city squares covered with pigeon dung. Like these bronzed ghostly heroes who go unnoticed, these contemporary living sculptures are afterthoughts which linger in the peripheral vision of passersby. Moreover, because he is in constant motion and carries all of his

possessions with him, we might say that he is a performative of the problematic of witnessing history. Like history, the vagabond is in constant flux, and is not grounded to one meaning but rather acts as a façade of something else. He is a remainder and therefore constant reminder of the recent past and the history that is still being played out in the hinterlands of the city⁴.

Here it is important not to confuse the vagabond's exposure and mobility with freedom. Though the vagabond lives outside, this does not mean that he is living a freer life than a typical Chilean nor does he have any special secret or knowledge that the average system does not have or cannot obtain. The homeless person lives in the center of the public arena, yet only appears to play no actively recognizable role in that civic life. According to Norat, the lifestyle of the vagabond necessarily represents a transgression of social institutions such as schools, home, work, and clubs—places that normally keep people off the streets (52). The vagabond's

[...] insubordination extends to every aspect of family and civic life. Disenfranchisement from the economy means that they do not support themselves, pay rent, pay taxes, participate in a consumer market, or obey community restrictions. Who do vagrants answer to? No one, and obviously there is inherent freedom in undermining the established system. (Norat 52)

Norat views the fact that the vagabond no longer takes part in normal civic life as a metaphor for a type of freedom that rebels

⁴ This discussion is indebted to Gisela Norat whose discussion of the "aesthetics of the urban vagabond" underscores their relation to sculpture. She writes "In considering an aesthetics of the urban vagabond, Eltit evokes the exorbitance of baroque art in general and sculpture in particular. Such an accumulation of objects extends to the multilayered assortment of clothing they wear. Paradoxically, excess exudes from their penury. Moreover, a three-dimensional sculpture is among the few art forms that can be designated outdoors, exposed to the gaze of the citizenry. The vagabond's physical existence is exposed to public view, much like the human subject that prevailed in classical sculpture. However, far from the statuary 'models' of antiquity, vagrants, as human spectacle, represent what society least wants to contemplate or admire. As such they become the visibly invisible, especially in large urban areas" (55).

against the status quo. Read in this way we can say that the vagabond represents the subversive and disenfranchised culture of the city. Like avant-garde art, one could then say that the lifestyle of the vagabond subverts and undermines preconceived notions of the way we sometimes blindly exist within the confines of the status quo. Yet one could also say that this "free" or subversive lifestyle of the vagabond serves as a reminder that freedom comes at a cost (if the concept can be defined at all). One can live in the city, one can exist under a dictatorship, but if one does not contribute to that community by paying taxes, following quotidian expectations, then one risks banishment to an alternative or negative community such as that of the vagabond.

Given this we must ask what kind of freedom the vagabond really has in this or any social or political system? For example, in the case of *el padre*, how aware is he of Norat's conclusion that he must answer to no one and thereby is able to undermine the State and function as a representative of a subversive community? In other words, living exposed, out in the open, does not always directly correlate to freedom because freedom is a very abstract and subjective notion that is in constant flux. If a person does not recognize his or her own freedom, then it is difficult to say that he or she is actually free. In fact, the idea of freedom (such as justice, for example) is a term that is loaded with possibilities and alternative meanings.

The homeless who live on the outskirts of the city are both inside and outside of the urban space simultaneously and as a result are inserted into the role as both naive and abject (like the mentally ill). They are living, breathing sculptures whose behemoth task is to be "visibly invisible" (Norat 55). Present yet absent, these vagrants' bodies are "...far from statuary 'models' of antiquity" (Norat 55). Rather they are "human spectacles" that represent "what society least wants to contemplate or admire"—the human body that reflects that refuse of the society that surrounds it (Norat 55). They are the embodiment of the repressed of urban society that represents both the civilized and the barbaric aspect of the city at the same time. Meaning that as the society around them becomes more repressed and removed from the social realities that lead to homelessness and diseases of the mind such as schizophrenia, these living symptoms fade

further into the background where they are only noticed at a passing glance, like an ancient statue in a city square. The statue is always there, but no one knows its origin nor the man it represents. Only the stiff figure, the shell that encases the survivor's myth of a man that once lived, remains frozen in time standing guard over a future for which he has not control nor voice. Though unlike the historical campaigns to civilize these outcasts, or to posit them as the other, there is no campaign in Chile to do anything but keep the *silent other silent*—like a historical statue standing in the square. Present yet absent, the vagabond is the distant reminder of another time, another life and life-style, that is far removed from the dealings of the contemporary world.

Thus this apparent expulsion from mainstream culture (whether it is self-imposed or forced) is neither whole nor complete because in Pinochet's epoch when speech is censored, movement is watched, and resistance to the State often ends with harsh punishment, those who do not follow the system designated by the dictatorship are relegated to its outer limits, yet are still kept within sight of the powers that be. In other words, freedom does not exist in a dictatorship. Thus the idea of the free vagabond wandering the streets wholly disconnected from civil life and civil strife is another myth of the subversive or of the insane. The latter is classified as part of one of the most developed institutions of modern Western society. In turn the cultural role of vagabonds is similar to the role that the insane play in society. They are unable to vote or make adult civic decisions. They are seen but not heard. They speak but are rarely listened to. They are also treated like the mentally ill who are confined to a particular space within the city streets, and are to be watched from a distance. Thus they are neither completely a part of society nor are they outside of it, but they exist at a border whose demarcations are fuzzy at best. He stands in for the remains of something lingering in society—a trauma that has not passed and has not yet been wholly marked.

Another point I wish to draw attention to is the placement of the vagabond into a text and how this comments on the notion of the "remain" and the state of *testimonio*. Eltit has placed the corporeality of the schizophrenic vagabond into a text and like the statue on

the street readers don't have to interact with the man. Unlike a face-to-face encounter with a homeless person, the text lets the reader avoid the unseemly smell of urine, no dirty hand to be awkwardly touched, no stale breath to assault our civilized senses. Eltit has done the work for us and presented us with a sterilized version of *el padre*. Hence, the text achieves the mimetic distancing that civilization wants to maintain between itself and the *other*. Through the text the other is within reach yet not too close. *El padre* is antiseptic—his body and lifestyle transformed. Yet something of his language remains. He is under control, translated into a readable form—a legible space.

Yet while his language is frozen in the text, it also reflects the transience of language. Language is in constant flux and like the vagabond takes on new clothing, scraps of newspapers, and carries with him all that he is, language also moves about as it collects, loses and adds on meanings and interpretations. *El padre* is, in the end, a microcosm of a world where uncensored public opinion had altogether ceased and been replaced with the flood of government speeches and propaganda. Thus, to see a man such as *el padre* out on the streets talking endlessly to himself may be an all too constant reminder of the “negative” side of community that is very much integral to a national allegory of what lies beneath the shallow and fragile façade of the dictatorship's rhetoric

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It is no coincidence then that Moreiras tellingly ends his essay “The Aura of Testimonio” with a reference to Diamela Eltit's text. He considers *El padre mío* to be a pivotal work that calls into question this current predicament of testimonio:

In *El padre mío* [...] the resources of testimonio seem to be turned against themselves. The extra-literary dimension of testimonial production is here also constituted by the indexical reference to the singularity of pain beyond any possibility of representation, except that *El padre mío* refuses to be read, as much as it refuses to read itself, as an identitarian construction [...] the erratic singularity of *el padre's* voice configures a hyperliterary space where testimonio

exceeds its condition as a “document” of social reality and as a “monument” of Latin American representation. [...] If that is so [...] How do we read it, as literature, beyond literature? (238)

In texts such as *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* or *Let Me Speak: Testimony of Domitila* the identitarian testimonio aims to represent a “we” through a singular experience, but *el padre*’s schizophrenic speech appears to be the inverse of this. At first *el padre*’s twisted syntax and lifestyle appear to represent a singularity that refers back to itself without any notion of collectivity. But in fact, we might say that this appearance of singularity may only be a specter of reality. *El padre* as the representative of the “I” that is only that and nothing more in actuality may be the speech of the collective “we.” In other words, he represents the inverse of the identitarian where *el padre* is a collective subject in himself that speaks for the “singularity of pain beyond any possibility of representation” (Moreiras 238). This is illustrated when Eltit says that she wanted to recollect his language, to “recoger” his speech with its disparate fragments, which suggests a certain dispersal of the subject that goes beyond itself. This reversal of the identitarian notion of the “collective” we is evidenced by *el padre*’s physical presence on the streets of Santiago. This speaks to a particular collectivity in the trauma of being Chilean—what is supposed to be hidden is exposed, what is meant to be exemplary or aberrant, such as insanity, is the norm. *El padre*’s is a collective speech because it recognizes the identitarian construction but then side-steps it as it takes us into a labyrinthal hyperlinguistic space that moves beyond our traditional classification of the testimonio as a “social” document or a “monument” to Latin Americanism—a collective space that lacks a temporal or a spatial definition. It refuses to be read as an identitarian construction by others, but it also refuses to read itself into any specific identification or definition.

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Thus if the role of the remain is to speak from the dead, and to present the survivor with a way to memorialize and witness a traumatic event, then the body of the vagabond, when placed into the

text, exemplifies the notion that he is a remainder, a residue of Pinochet's dictatorship—forgotten but not dead. He is not a corpse but a living, breathing man who has been placed into a text to illustrate that stress can be put on historical consensus and that there is further need and desire for discourses that move to the borders of the ever-present desire to speak beyond oneself and the apparent lack of any ego or ideological aim. Thus, his incessant need to speak, "pero debería servir de testimonio yo," may be a testimonial to the impossibility of speech in a setting where language was used as a weapon to promote a hypocritical propaganda campaign that publicly supported democracy while it privately tortured those who exercised too many of these democratic freedoms.

At one time testimonio signified a kind of hope for the leftist academics who studied it. It was to be a redefinition of disciplinary space in Latin American criticism where politics as solidarity could exist alongside the literary to form a union unlike any other to date. It is now understood that this was impossible and that in the words of Moreiras the "[. . .] moment of truth is in the loss of truth itself" (223). Testimonio can never return to the ideal space of the identitarian where literature and political solidarity combined to form a counter-hegemonic narrative because that space never existed in the first place except as a construct of desire and power. Yet if what we have is only "remains" to work with then we should view them as a departure into a different way of thinking about the way we read, write and witness. *El padre mío* does not give any specific answers to this notion but it moves into that space between what Williams calls "posthegemony" and the "perhaps" by constantly reminding us that what we are reading is only a text and that, as Jean-Luc Nancy says, we should not "get hung up on *words* [such as history and perhaps testimonio] as if they were immediately to be equated with *things*" but examine how these concepts force us to think about the way we construct and view the testimonio.

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