ALTERNATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF HISTORY:
READING SOCIOPOLITICAL CRISIS THROUGH CHILEAN
TESTIMONIAL LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Alternative Representations of History: Rereading Sociopolitical Crisis through Chilean Testimonial Literature
by
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Master of Arts in English
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Latin American testimonio (testimonial narrative) develops critical insight into historical, social, and cultural conditions and can serve as a catalyst for social change. It provides the opportunity to engage in new readings of history and sociopolitics. Testimonio offers an alternative representation of history – it both denounces and challenges the official representation of historical events while serving as a sociopolitical tool in promoting truth and justice. Chilean testimonial narratives written in response to the Pinochet regime (1973-1990), explore and reflect social and human rights issues and challenge the official state of affairs. These alternative representations of history are often viewed as tools for political subversion, and many writers chose exile and freedom of expression over national residence and censorship.

This thesis will analyze alternative representations of the sociopolitical crisis in Chile by examining the relationship between history and corresponding literary phenomena. My analysis will focus on testimonial literature by exilic writers Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Allende, whose narratives reflect lived experiences and rewrite official history. Dorfman’s novel Widows and Allende’s novel Of Love and Shadows both depict cases of institutional disappearance by the Pinochet regime. Dorfman and Allende use the fictional form to express the horrors, sorrows, and intricate bonds that collectively joined Chilean individuals during the junta-years. Their testimonial fictions serve as forms of cultural opposition because they represent accounts of subtle resistance to institutional violence and repression. The Chilean dictatorship circulated their version of events by denying their involvement with torture, the disappeared, and murder. Likewise, testimonios present a rival perspective of history, based on viewpoints and truths of individuals persecuted by the government. Fictional testimonios, therefore, rewrite and revise official records and are a necessary component of the body of revolutionary literature devoted to social change and justice.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The right-wing military overthrow of democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973 sparked a fifteen-year controversial reign of terror and retaliation in Chile. After Allende’s three-year reign, the government abruptly degenerated into a dictatorship intent on eradicating opposition through tactics of press censorship, suspension of civil liberties, and violent repression of leading politicians, labor leaders, academics, and other Marxist sympathizers. The junta mercilessly targeted not only political leaders but also symbols of the cultural and institutional foundations of Chilean democracy. When Chilean Nobel prize-winning poet and Communist party activist Pablo Neruda died of cancer twelve days after the coup, his house was looted and his library vandalized. Though a spontaneous protest against the junta accompanied his funeral procession, the circumstances of his death also symbolized the junta’s determination to eliminate all remnants of the political left. Literature, sculpture, painting, and even popular songs now became targets of the junta’s violence. The murder of intellectual and folksinger Victor Jara, after detention and torture at the Estadio Chile—which, like the Estadio Nacional and soccer stadiums in the provinces, was turned into a makeshift prison, torture, and murder center—initiated an era in which listening to records or tapes by “subversive” artists was considered a subtle act of resistance.

Led by military commander General Augusto Pinochet, and covertly backed by the United States both economically and militarily, the dictatorship tortured, imprisoned, and murdered thousands of Chilean civilians.¹ Many civilians – including intellectuals, artists, writers, and political and cultural dissenters – went into exile and produced work seeking recognition of, and retribution for these crimes committed against humanity. Exile became a necessary state for many Chilean writers seeking social justice through their production of

¹ Under Nixon, the United States crippled the Chilean economy during the Allende years, and funded the military take over of the country. For a full account of this, see The Pinochet File: a Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability (2004) by Peter Kornbluh.
literature depicting the atrocities in their homeland. Testimonial accounts (testimonios) of torture, rape, and other acts of violence and human rights violations committed by the Pinochet regime, have since been published by writers in exile. Two examples of this are testimonial novels by Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Allende which, I argue, aim to accomplish the same goal as non-fictional testimonio narratives by such writers as Hernan Valdes, Sergio Bitar, Samuel Chavkin, and Emma Sepulveda, among others.2 These testimonios provide an alternative representation of history that has since been denied by the government junta. They both denounce and challenge the official representation of history while serving as a sociopolitical tool establishing truth and seeking justice. From this perspective, testimonial literature can be readily analyzed as a significant subversive weapon wielded by victims of repression. Hence, the main concern of this study is to examine how the novel can promote social justice and act as a catalyst for social change.

Pinochet’s death in December, 2006, reignited the controversy over his tumultuous fifteen-year reign. Both revered and despised among Chileans and the international community, Pinochet’s death implores the question: Did the general responsible for over 3,000 deaths and disappearances ever meet with justice? The answer to this question is somewhat ambiguous. On October 16, 1998, the Chilean dictator was arrested in London in response to an arrest warrant issued by a Spanish court charging him with human rights violations including murder, torture and “disappearance” committed during his administration in Chile between 1973 and 1990.3 Pinochet’s lawyers challenged the arrest and extradition on the basis that, as a former head of state, he was immune from prosecution. In a letter addressed to the Chilean people following his arrest, Pinochet wrote, “I am absolutely innocent of all the crimes and of the actions irrationally attributed to me. However, I fear that those who are doing so never have been nor will be prepared to agree and accept the truth.”4 In March, 2000, he was allowed to return to Chile on the grounds that he was not medically fit to stand trial. He remained in this state until his death.

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from heart failure in December, 2006. Until his death, Pinochet continued to plead innocent to his crimes and beseeched the Chilean people to “accept the truth.” But, the thousands of verbal accounts, memoirs, interviews, autobiographies, and testimonial fictions by Chilean citizens tortured and arrested by the coup attest to Pinochet’s guilt by telling their personal stories and pleading their own truths.

Many people question whether Pinochet escaped justice by avoiding trial for his despotic crimes. Others insist that “memory will provide a historical trial for him” (*The Pinochet Case*). With regard to Pinochet’s death, Ariel Dorfman writes, “He . . . will forever be remembered as the man who inaugurated a new leap in the concept of human rights, which is: Heads of states do not have impunity for those things they have done in crimes against humanity. Humanity can judge them for what they did against us all” (Gjelton). Peter Kornbluh asserts that “civil activism and the refusal to forget Chile’s tumultuous past brought Pinochet to justice. Both Chilean citizens and the international public were mobilized by Pinochet’s repression to make a difference.”

**THE ROLE OF TESTIMONIAL LITERATURE**

How does literature, specifically the testimonial narrative, fit into this collective body of social activism that seeks justice through its adamant refusal to forget the past? This study aims to explore and provide answers to this question by focusing on the novels of Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Allende, two Chilean writers who fled their homeland and lived and wrote in exile until the plebiscite of 1989. I will analyze Dorfman’s testimonial novel *Widows* (1983), and Allende’s testimonial novel *Of Love and Shadows* (1984). In addition to these novels, I will

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5 *The Pinochet Case*, a film by Patricio Guzmán, investigates the legal origins of the case in Spain where it began two years before Pinochet’s arrest. Crucial to the case against Pinochet were the testimonies of his victims. Hundreds of Chileans – relatives of the disappeared, ex-prisoners that had suffered torture and interrogation in secret prisons – traveled to Madrid to testify. *The Pinochet Case* documents their stories.

6 From notes taken at Kornbluh’s lecture at San Diego State University on May 1, 2007.

7 On October 5, 1988, the Chilean people rejected Pinochet’s proposal for continued rule in a public referendum. With fifty-five percent in favor of the No vote in the presidential plebiscite, it was constitutionally legal to schedule competitive presidential and congressional elections in 1989. Patricio Aylwin won a majority of the popular votes in the election that followed and became the first civilian president in Chile since 1973. Despite the change of government from an authoritarian to a democratic system, Pinochet remained in charge of the Chilean army until 1998.
explore specific passages within their respective memoirs, Dorfman’s *Heading South, Looking North* (1998) and Allende’s *Paula* (1995), which provide crucial contextual insight into their exilic experiences, and illuminate the relationship between sociopolitical crisis and testimonial literature. I have chosen to analyze the fictional form as *testimonio* because these novels have been formulated by marginalized writers persecuted by the government, whose narrative goal is to represent the oppression experienced by a collective body. I have chosen these specific works by Dorfman and Allende because they were written and published while the writers were living in exile. Both Dorfman’s and Allende’s novels testify to the injustice suffered by the Chilean people under a dictatorship that sacrificed human rights to further its political and economic goals. The urgency of their work is intensified by their lives in exile which influence their narrative choices. Furthermore, exile provides a critical lens through which they can reflect on the experiences they endured in their homeland.

The state of exile is a catalyst for writers seeking social justice. Like *testimonios*, exile narratives attempt to counter official versions of their nation’s history by providing alternative representations of historical events. These narratives further claim that certain kinds of experience are suppressed by official versions of national history. In Chile, for example, a national censor appointed by the government dictated what books could be legally published. Dorfman, whose books were routinely burned by the Chilean government, writes about the censorship of literature in his short story collection *My House is on Fire*. His other works produced in exile, such as *Widows* and *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero*, are vivid accounts of political repression that depict versions of events, such as institutional torture and the disappearance of Chilean citizens, which the Pinochet government publicly denied. Due to censorship laws, Dorfman could not have published his books within his homeland. In the dedication to *Widows*, Dorfman contemplates publishing his novel under a pseudonym “because books with [his] name on them could not circulate freely in Chile and other countries of the southern cone of Latin America” (5). Isabel Allende’s works written in exile also focus on Chilean historical events surrounding the Pinochet era. Her novels *The House of Spirits* and *Of Love and Shadows* represent accounts of Chilean oppression and human rights violations enacted by the government junta. Regarding her role as a writer, Allende says, “I want to go from . . .
person to person . . . telling about my country, telling about my continent, getting across our truth—that accumulated suffering and that marvelous expression of life that is Latin America.”

Allende’s focus on “getting across our truth” lends her writing to testimonial discourse. The narratives of both Allende and Dorfman serve as clear examples of testimonial literature; they both represent historical events in their homeland with the purpose of expounding a version of the truth that counteracts the official version of history dictated by the government of Chile.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND HISTORY**

Although critical work has been done on both Chilean *testimonio* and exilic discourse, most studies have treated these topics as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, few existing studies have included analyses of the novel from the perspective of *testimonio* for reasons of non-authentic narration, the misplacement of truth, and a subjective fictional form. I concur with scholars that the testimonial novel is distinguishable from the narrator/interlocutor and autobiographical *testimonio* in regards to methods of style and narration, but assert that the goals of these testimonial narratives are analogous. Furthermore, simply critiquing and essentializing truth within a *testimonio* becomes problematic because history can also be read as a subjective text. Historian, Hayden White illustrates this in his essay “Fictions of Factual Representation”:

Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another. We cannot easily distinguish between them on formal grounds unless we approach them with specific preconceptions about the kinds of truths that each is supposed to deal in. But the aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of “reality” . . . But the image of reality which the novelist thus constructs is meant to correspond in its general outline to some domain of human experience which is no less “real” than that referred to by the historian. (122)

Consequently, “history is no less a form of fiction than fiction is a form of historical representation” (122).

As human beings, we play an active role in history; we are surrounded by it and simultaneously constitute ourselves in our own “historicity.” Michel Foucault refers to a “historicity of man which is itself its own history but also the radical dispersion that provides a

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foundation for all other histories” (*The Order of Things* 369). Human beings are agents in history, not just passive bystanders. We actively partake in and attach meaning to historical events, creating and reacting to a discourse that is extremely influential in determining the course of history, and which is heavily embedded within power relations. The Chilean dictatorship propagated its truths by denying its involvement with torture, the disappeared, and murder. Likewise, *testimonios* produced by the group subjected and marginalized by the dictatorship present a rival version of history, based on their own perspective and truth. Furthermore, since all history is produced and written by humans, and therefore produced in relation to a particular discourse, or perspective, the fictional form can also be validated as an alternative representation of history. Each of these perspectives – the official version and the *testimonio*, whether nonfiction or fiction – shape the discourse through which we read, analyze, and interpret historical events.

White’s analysis of narrative history further clarifies this discussion. He acknowledges that narrative history can be regarded as something different than a scientific account of events but asserts that this is not “sufficient reason to deny narrative history substantial truth value” (*The Content of the Form* 44). He explains that the “truths in which narrative history deals are of an order different from those of its social scientific counterpart” (44). Both systems, narrative history and the social sciences, are valuable representations of how life experience is lived and interpreted by individuals. Therefore, the “narrative system” should not be ruled out as “merely imaginary constructions” because “[t]o do so would entail the denial that literature and poetry have anything valid to teach us about reality” (44). In addition, White affirms that

> the historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does is test the capacity of a culture’s fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of patterns of imaginary events (45).

White’s discussion of the relationship between historical fictional narrative and historical scientific studies is fundamental to any analysis of testimonial literature. Testimonial is often scrutinized and criticized in regards to its authenticity and representation of truth. White validates the fictional narrative as a representation of history that should be considered when attempting to make sense of the past.
LITERATURE, DISCOURSE, AND POWER RELATIONS

The substantial body of Chilean testimonial literature – much of it written in exile – produced during the reign of the military coup, provides crucial insight into the correlation between knowledge, power relations, and social conditions. Foucault’s theories can be used to specifically analyze literature as a fundamental component of discourse and sociopolitics. Concerned more with the “production of truth” than with truth itself, Foucault’s work not only analyses social conditions but also the basis through which we critically think about analyzing social conditions. His critical work, on subjects such as madness for example, did not focus on answering what constitutes madness in individuals but rather asked the question: What types of discourse within a particular period created the divide between madness and reason? He was not specifically interested in what is known about a particular period but rather in the processes which led to certain facts being known rather than others. In short, he was interested in the knowledge produced through discourse. According to this framework, literature then is a means of creating and analyzing discourse. It both helps shape the discourse of a particular era, but also reflects the various discourses circulating within that same period of time. So, for example, testimonial literature from Chile influences the discourse which shapes our knowledge of the Pinochet dictatorship, and responds to the official discourse dictated by the authorities.

Foucault’s theories push us to ask questions such as: Why is literature produced in a particular way? How does the author function in literary texts? What is the role of literature and how can we understand texts as functions of power? What is the relationship between literature and history? For Foucault, knowledge is linked to power rather than truth: “The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (“Prison Talk” 52). Therefore, knowledge both results from and produces the effects of power struggles. That is, knowledge is often a product of the subjugation of objects or a process through which subjects are represented or dominated.

And just what type of discourse is necessary to create revolutionary change? Foucault would argue for a discourse against power, a discourse that directly reacts to the dominant group in power. Foucault cites numerous institutions such as schools, prisons, and insane asylums where power, in its most raw, bestial, and unchecked form, is practiced. In order to truly understand power relations, we must analyze and understand those who are repressed. In Foucault’s words, “It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against
power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents” ("Intellectuals and Power” 209). Furthermore, “to speak of power, to force institutionalized networks of information to listen; to produce names, to point fingers is the first step in the reversal of power and the initiation of new struggles against the existing form of power” (214). Revolutionary change is only possible by listening to the discourse of those who are reacting to the authoritative source of power. A true understanding of power relations can only be understood when the discourse of the disenfranchised, or subordinate, is given a voice. The subordinate, in this case, are the Chilean citizens interrogated, silenced, tortured, and persecuted by the military dictatorship. We can see in their work a revolutionary literature which promotes human rights and demands awareness, liberation, and social change. Many contemporary literary critics suggest that it is from those who have suffered the “sentence of history” – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn the most enduring lessons for living and thinking (Bhabha 438).

To clarify then, this thesis will view the testimonial literature of Dorfman and Allende through the lens of exilic discourse theory and within the framework of testimonio, emphasizing how the condition of exile and the narrative goals of testimonio shed insight on new representations of Chile’s sociopolitical crisis. By examining the relationship between history and corresponding literature written in exile, I will show that Dorfman’s and Allende’s narratives reflect lived experiences and in doing so, rewrite official history, and promote social justice. Chapter Two will provide a theoretical background for both testimonial and exile discourse, illuminating the ongoing debates. My emphasis is to clarify the goals of testimonio, which I argue are the same goals of Dorfman and Allende within their fictions. My analysis of exilic discourse specifically focuses on Latin American exile, and the effect exile has had on literature. In Chapter Three, I will outline the context of Dorfman’s and Allende’s respective exiles to show how the exilic experience shaped their perception of the Pinochet dictatorship. This chapter will also specifically analyze how Widows and Of Love and Shadows serve as testimonial fictions which subvert the official story, or the government’s account of repression. Chapter Four will explore specific narrative techniques which place these two novels within the genre of testimonial literature, and furthermore, clarify the novel as a revolutionary text that provides necessary representations of history regarding human rights abuses and the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship. Both Dorfman’s and Allende’s novels can be read as a call to action; their
subject matter demands awareness from a reader who may or may not be familiar with the atrocities occurring in Chile.
CHAPTER 2

TESTIMONIAL AND EXILIC DISCOURSE

TESTIMONIAL DISCOURSE

Testimonio emerged as a new narrative genre in the 1960s and developed in relation to movements for national liberation in Latin America. The roots of testimonio date back to narrative nonfictional texts such as the colonial crónicas, the costumbrista essay, the war diaries of, for example, Bolivar or Martí, and the Romantic biography. The genre gained recognition during the Cuban Revolution, specifically through Miguel Barnet’s recording of the life story of Esteban Montejo, Biografía de un Cimarron/The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave (1966). Although there are several ways to define the genre, two generally recognized definitions of testimonial discourse by John Beverley and George Yudice are essential for this discussion. Beverley defines testimonio as:

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a “life” or a significant life experience. Testimonio may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novella-testimonio, nonfiction novel, or “factographic literature.” . . . The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on. (“The Margin at the Center” 30)

Yudici qualifies this definition by focusing on social aspects of the genre. He asserts that the testimonio is:

an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history. (44)

Both scholars emphasize the “urgency” to communicate a particular experience of oppression. Testimonios function as counter-narratives to the grand narrative of Western modernity and
modernization; they are generally classified as narratives produced by an oppressed, marginalized people. *Testimonio* speaks directly to us, and furthermore, asks something of us. These voices come to us from the “place of an other, whom is repressed, occluded by our own norms of cultural and class authority and identity” (Beverley, “On the Politics” 2). The *testimonio* often involves a narrator who is not a professional writer and an interlocutor who records the narrator’s testimony. Moreover, *testimonio* is concerned with the problematic collective social situation that the narrator lives within, rather that with the life of an individual (Beverley, “The Margin at the Center” 27).

One criticism of *testimonio* as a literary genre focuses on the question of truth, or the “reality” of the testimony. In Spanish, *dar testimonio*, means to testify or to bear truthful witness. The *testimonio* is considered a first-person account of life experience. The publication of Rigoberta Menchu’s *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* sparked a vociferous controversy regarding the truth of her narrative and also the role of testimonial literature as a narrative genre. Anthropologist David Stoll investigated the facts behind Manchu’s testimony, and found fault with her representation of particular events, such as the torture of her brother. Menchu was criticized for misrepresented the truth and for fabricating historical events. Nora Strejilivich’s analysis of testimony fits well into this particular debate. A victim of torture during Argentina’s Dirty War, Strejilivich elaborates on the role of testimony to meticulously represent fact, and the testimonial narrative form: “The essential meaning of testimony is lost when defined as a means to provide information and knowledge based on facts” (703). Strejilivich believes that testimony should allow for “disruptive memories, discontinuities, blanks, silences and ambiguities; it should become literary” (704). Strejilivich echoes White when she asserts that the “[n]arration of history is always already an interpretation. Even historical discourse—which hides the historian’s viewpoint while a third person narrator tells the story, allowing for it to look objective—is an interpretation” (707). In short, there is no memory of the past without interpretation.

In spite of these definitions, the genre of testimony remains nebulous. Elżbieta Sklodowska insists that “*testimonio* remains undefined” and “serves as shorthand for a whole

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9 For further information, see Stoll’s *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* (1999).
spectrum of narrative conventions” (84). Beverley and Yudici emphasize the role that authenticity and truth play in the testimonio and insist that these works are based on real life experience. Furthermore, Beverley emphasizes the differences between testimonio and other narrative forms, such as autobiography, “documentary fiction” (articulated by Barbara Foley in Telling the Truth (1986), and the testimonial novel, such as Manlio Argueta’s award-winning One Day of Life (1983). Regarding the novel, Beverley writes, “the testimonio is not a form of the novel” (“Margin at the Center” 37). He perceives the novel as “a closed and private form in the sense that both the story and the subject end with the end of the text” (37). However, this critique proves problematic because it eradicates any analytical agency on the readers’ part. According to Beverley, the narrator in a testimonio is a “real person who continues living and acting in a real social history that also continues” (37). But the writer of the testimonial novel is also a “real person” who is actively involved in the social history that he or she depicts in the text. Furthermore, the reader also needs to be recognized as an active agent in the interpretive process; through reading these testimonials, the reader enters into the discourse which interprets and reacts to experiences being narrated and depicted. Given these points, I concur with Sklodowska in her conviction that “seeing testimonio as a seamless monument of authenticity and truth deprives it . . . of the ongoing tension between stories told and remaining to be told.” (98). Testimonial narratives recount history and life experience from a particular perspective. Their goal, to reiterate Beverley, “to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, [and] struggle for survival” (“Margin at the Center” 30) exposes an area of history that may, in fact, inspire other victims of oppression to respond. In this way, the testimonio remains an active contributor to the discourse of history, which is continually being retold and reinterpreted.

**EXILIC DISCOURSE**

Exile is simultaneously a physical and psychological phenomenon. It is as much a state of mind as a physical, forced absence from one’s home. The individual in exile exhibits a complex of emotional reactions which encompasses alienation, isolation, and displacement as well as inspiration, fulfillment, and clarity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines exile as the state of being barred from one’s native country. The Latin origin of the word, exilium, literally means “banishment.” Exile, then, can be defined as forced separation from one’s native country,
expulsion from home or the state of being expelled, banishment, and sometimes voluntary separation from one’s homeland. The genres of exilic experience—exile, expatriate, émigré, refugee—vary, but in all cases, the individual is undoubtedly affected by physical and psychological displacement from the nation and homeland. Paul Tabori considers the exile to be a “person who is compelled to leave his homeland—though the forces that send him on his way may be political, economic, or purely psychological” (37). We have here a case for exile as a necessity for political asylum, and/or exile as a voluntary response to psychological discrepancies between the individual and the nation. The conditions of the latter, the expatriate, are unique because this person can return to the homeland. The expatriate is a modern phenomenon that often stems from psychological exile – the expatriate requires an exilic period due to an inability to function within the confines of his/her homeland. In addition, “they [expatriates] are never at home until they travel beyond their home communities” (Tucker xiv). Both Dorfman and Allende now consider themselves to be expatriates; however, the period of their life and literature I will be analyzing is one of exilic status because they could not safely return to their country until the 1988 plebiscite. Although the expatriate could be considered “in exile,” the case I am making for Chilean writers is a state of exile primarily based on a tenuous separation from the nation due to political differences. Amy Kaminsky, (more accurately in relation to this thesis), considers exile to contain “as its principle elements, forced separation and a politically construed place of origin whose governing institutions have the ability to impose that separation” (22). Although both Dorfman and Allende left Chile voluntarily, their decision was based on the very real and public threat the military posed to their lives because of the writers’ political ideologies and their support of the Allende government.

Writers in exile are often driven by a political mission to spread awareness of homeland oppression. This is invariably the case with the thousands of Latin American exiles who fled their nation during the military dictatorships of the mid-twentieth century. Quite often the works of exiled writers are antagonistically opposed to the governing body of their country; their literature and politics challenge the official state of affairs. Like the testimonio, literature written in exile is frequently intended to be a subversive weapon against a system of oppression and stagnancy.

The history of exile in Latin America is extensive. An estimated two hundred thousand Chileans were forced to leave the country for political reasons (Wright 198). Many chose to
leave, which is the case of Dorfman and Allende, to escape imprisonment, torture, and potential
death. The Chilean exilic status is distinct from other Latin American communities, based on the
high number of exiles in many host countries, the much longer average length of exile, and the
number of countries that took in Chileans – approximately 119.

The Chilean dictatorship and transition back to an elected government cannot be
understood without taking exile into account (Wright 199). The military’s systematic use of
imprisonment, torture, assassination, and disappearance, and the mass exodus of thousands of
Chileans removed most of the active Left from Chile, allowing Pinochet to consolidate his
regime. However, the exile community abroad continued to challenge the official state of affairs
in their homeland by “creating thousands of opposition groups—political parties, unions, human
rights organizations, and cultural associations at local, regional, national and international
levels—in order to publicize the dictatorship’s abuses, shape world opinion, and funnel money
and support to the resistance within Chile” (Wright 199). These activities were crucial in
preventing the military government from attaining legitimacy in the international sphere, and
fueled repeated condemnations of Pinochet and his policies by the United Nations, and other
international bodies. Exiles’ activities helped to keep resistance against the regime alive.
Pinochet’s arrest can be at least partially attributed to the international support garnered by
opposition elicited by resistance groups working in exile.

Therefore, writers in exile are key figures within the resistance league working to spread
awareness of the atrocities occurring at home. Their texts are based on memories, and they often
rely on the testimonies and experiences of other people whose voices have been silenced, or who
cannot leave the country. These memories may be fragmented due to distance and displacement,
but the experience of exile also formulates newfound perspectives on the nation. The past is
analyzed and personal clarity is attained via the relationship between the writer’s current exile,
and the past experience they are narrating and evaluating. Allende asserts that “it’s good for a
writer to be outside, to be marginal. I couldn’t have written about Chile if I had remained in
Chile. The distance helps, whether in terms of geography or time” (234).10 Angel Rama agrees
that the exile “by leaving his/her native country, does not represent defeat but rather gains a

10 “The Writer as Exile, and Her Search for Home.” Interview with John Rodden, ed. Conversations with
Isabel Allende. Austin: University of Texas. 225-36.
newfound perspective” which “allows past events to be seen and interpreted as a coherent whole” (13).

Many scholars have defined and debated the effect of exile. This discourse suggests that exile is either a creative and liberating condition that enables writers to function freely outside the constraints of an oppressive society, or argues that exile literature is profoundly nostalgic and yearns for the lost nation. Edward Said in “Reflections on Exile” supports the latter argument and considers exile the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (173). A fundamental loss occurs when one is indefinitely estranged from their homeland. Regardless of the liberalizing sanctions exile permits, the “achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (173). The exile can never hope to regain what is lost through displacement. Said further questions why then exile “has been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture” (173)?

While Angel Rama and Julio Cortazar would agree that a permanent sense of loss occurs through exile, they focus, rather, on the potential insight gained through displacement. Rama defines the exile as “one who voluntarily abandons his land to avoid persecution, prison or death, or, more frequently, in order to continue his work in a country which provides more appropriate conditions; this work often includes the struggle against the exile’s own government” (11). Most critics agree that under certain circumstances, exile is the only outlet for both individual and public struggle against an oppressive government. Oftentimes, the oppressor is diametrically opposed to intellectual freedom and writers are held responsible for the social unrest which tries to change the political structure of a country. Rama considers the exiled writer to be the “custodian and defender” of the “engendered culture” who, through literature, can affirm and preserve the causes, protests, and grudges of the people. Although exile stems from a period of anguish and terror, transcendence is possible. Through “writing this long and painful poem” by “sharing their obsession with a national past,” writers in exile are “founding the Latin American literary community of the future,” a network built on their cultural and historic al legacy (13).

Cortazar’s critique is possibly the most uplifting and empowering of the discourse surrounding Latin American exile. He also agrees that Latin American writers can surmount the uprooting and separation imposed on them through dictatorships. The writer in exile has a
responsibility to keep a readership informed. Through their fictions, the writers are maintaining resistance and promoting change. For Cortazar,

it is the duty of Latin American writers in exile to quicken, to breathe life into this information, to give it the unique corporality engendered by the synthesizing, symbolic powers of fiction: by the novel, the poem or the short story that can incarnate what can never be brought to life in a telex dispatch or in the column of a news analyst. (15)

The novel is one way of denying the official version of the truth. Literature’s power to [re]create meaning, through the vivid illustration of human experience, is immense. I agree with Cortazar that fiction can breathe life into, and animate, life experience on a scale that surmounts the journalistic and didactic style of the news media. Literature depicting human rights abuses is unsettling and triggers an emotional chord within us, enlisting us, as readers, to empathize and act as witnesses to the oppressive conditions depicted in the text. In this way, literature challenges the official state of affairs. Dorfman, who has written extensively on the exilic experience, mirrors Kafka in his memoir where he states “I knew that literature could be a prayer and a pickax, a way out of the frozen world in which we find ourselves trapped, our only protest against death and loneliness” (Heading South, Looking North 132).

Literature depicts and defines new angles to enter reality. The exilic experience further provides us with these angles. Exilic writers, by their very nature of being displaced, are writing from various perspectives. Because of their dichotomous backgrounds and experiences, they are able to recreate reality in a way that non-exilic writers could never possibly do. If the “accretion of experience is what shapes our present and future and makes possible our understanding of the past” (Tucker xxii), then exilic writers, through the act of physical displacement and psychological epiphany, have a unique and powerful perspective from which to produce their literature.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TESTIMONY AND EXILE

Exile leaves an indelible mark on a writer’s life and literary career. The state of exile is complex in nature and ambiguous by definition because it affects self-identity and the tenuous, unique relationship between the exiled individual’s past (the homeland), present (the exilic period), and future (the question of return). Widows and Of Love and Shadows reflect themes prominent in both testimonio and exilic literature. Distinctive exilic themes of alienation, loss,
nostalgia, and displacement are paired with distinguishing testimonial concerns of collectivity (or collective representation), authoritarianism and the author-function, and alternative representations of truth. Subsequently, these states and the themes they represent are not mutually exclusive. Many testimonial texts are written in exile because of issues of censorship and repression. *Testimonio* and exilic texts rely heavily on memory, which is often fragmented due to physical and psychological displacement.

Several distinct qualities can be applied to both types of narratives. First, they provide a version of history which authoritative powers attempt to silence. The Pinochet government censored Chilean citizens through book burning, and tactics of fear and terror. Over 3,000 people were permanently silenced, callously murdered by the military. Chilean testimonials provided an outlet and voice for these experiences, which were delegitimized by the authorities. Second, they urgently work to reclaim, or rewrite, past experience in an effort to record an alternative version of history which contradicts and thereby corrects official discourse. For example, both *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows* depict cases of Chileans who were arrested and covertly murdered by the government; Pinochet’s human rights abuse legacy includes thousands of individuals arrested by security forces who literally vanished – they were never seen, or heard from, again. Pinochet continuously denied his association with *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared). Through their narratives, Dorfman and Allende contribute to discourse which undermines and contradicts the government’s official story. Third, they represent a collective group and therefore utilize multiple narrative voices. In their texts, both authors depict events experienced by Chilean people who were persecuted by the government. Several different accounts of historical experience are presented through various narrative voices and varying perspectives of otherwise related events. Lastly, they record historical experience to preserve the past, assuring these events are never forgotten, or erased, from historical record. Dorfman and Allende preserve human experience, which counteracts the official accounts of events mandated by the authorities. They memorialize human experience through literature in order to preserve these records of past events. Their texts, although fictional, must be viewed as reflecting lived human experience, for without these alternative accounts, experiences of the oppressed risk being denied, dismissed, overwritten, and erased by official discourse. Exiled [and testimonial] writers use writing as a weapon: they fight with words. They write to declare their existence and they challenge their national absence by creating a textual presence (McClennen *The Dialectic of*
Exile 127). Dorfman wrote *Widows* under a pseudonym so that his novel could be released in Chile, revealing that “if he could not be in Chile, perhaps his writing could be there instead” (127).
CHAPTER 3
AGAINST THE OFFICIAL STORY

Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Allende both fled Chile shortly after the junta came into power. This chapter will examine the circumstances that led to their respective exiles and will explore how their fictional testimonios work as alternative representations of historical record which defy official accounts. Yvonne Unnold’s discussion of the relationship between official and alternative representations of truth and traumatic experience greatly influences this portion of my thesis. She explains that official representation of history does not identify a sociopolitical objective as cause for its representation, and does not “summon truth” because it pretends to represent truth. In contrast, testimonio is brought forth as an alternate representation. It is conceived as discourse which must summon truth because official discourse presents as truth what the testimonio author or narrator perceives as a misrepresentation, a distortion, a denial, and a silencing of reality. Empathy and popular political commitment help shape the socioeconomic and political cause and objective ascribed to testimonio, as much as pro-government commitment helps shape official history. The relationship between official and alternative representations of traumatic experiences in history under military rule corresponds to the antagonistic relationship shared by perpetrator and victim. According to Unnold, these “representations clash, manifesting the abyss that divides the ‘truth’ of one from that of another” (45).

Dorfman’s and Allende’s work can be read within the framework of Unnold’s theories because they provide alternate representations of the Chilean experience under the reign of Pinochet; their literature depicts specific events that were silenced and denied by the government. Their testimonios can be considered revolutionary texts intent on promoting social change because they are writing specifically to bring awareness to the global community of the human rights atrocities committed in their homeland. Within a dictatorship, freedom of speech is usually the first freedom lost; the writer, artist, musician, free-thinker is censored, silenced. Exile, therefore, was necessary for Dorfman’s and Allende’s survival, and was essential for the production and distribution of their texts. Their fictional representations of historical events demand awareness and pay homage to those who have suffered from trauma induced by
oppression, subjugation, and displacement. Their narratives shed insight on historical events from the position of the oppressed. Furthermore, they challenge official representations of history sympathetic to those in power which are oftentimes issued by a government controlled media. These narratives seek to disrupt the official state of affairs by giving an alternative account of history, providing their own truth regarding official historical representation.

Writing about Chileans victimized by the military publicly validates the victims’ experiences and assures that the coup does not legitimize itself by dictating the final, official version of history. General Augusto Pinochet justified the coup and the new government’s repressive actions by asserting the international significance of its victory over communism: “‘Chile was one of the first countries in the world to abolish slavery. Now our country has broken the chains of totalitarian Marxism, the great Twentieth-Century Slavery, before which so many bow their heads without the courage to defeat it. We are thus once again pioneers in Humanity’s fight for liberation’” (qtd. in Loveman 262). The initial campaign of terror and assassination evolved into the gradual institutionalization of a military-police state and “the regime’s leaders made clear that they intended to write the final epitaph for Chilean democracy and to transform the moral and intellectual foundations of Chilean life” (Loveman 262). Under Pinochet, social and ideological pluralism disappeared: military officials replaced academic administrators in the universities; Chilean higher education faced a thorough “pogrom” which practically eliminated departments and schools in the social sciences, philosophy, education, and other disciplines influenced by Marxist or liberal ideology (Loveman 262). The Pinochet dictatorship’s intent to restructure all elements of Chilean society threatened individuality and various social freedoms, one of these being the freedom of expression. The dictatorship employed fear tactics to enforce their own [United States influenced] capitalist ideology upon the people. Unlike Salvador Allende’s socialism, their version of Chilean democracy utilized totalitarian rather than democratic policies. Dorfman and Allende then, represent the Chileans

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11 The Chicago Boys were a group of Chilean neo-liberal economists, trained at the University of Chicago under Milton Friedman, who worked under the Augusto Pinochet administration to create a free market economy and decentralize economic and ultimately political power. They received their initial education from the School of Economy at Universidad Católica. In 1956, that School had signed a three-year program of intensive collaboration with the Economics Faculty of the University of Chicago, known as the “Chile Project.” This program eventually totally transformed the teaching of economics in Chile.
who fought against Pinochet’s restructuring of the Chilean “democratic” nation. Their work subverts the representation of nation that Pinochet used to justify his actions. Furthermore, the process of writing provides Dorfman and Allende with a political purpose while in exile. They write to delegitimize the dictatorship’s official version of events, record their own interpretation of the past, and increase global awareness of the human rights abuses occurring in Chile.

**CONTEXT OF EXILE**

Ariel Dorfman wrote three novels in exile: *Widows* (1981), *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero* (1982), and *Mascara* (1988). Each novel progressively reflects his sense of political disempowerment, and exudes not only a deep sense of loss but also a persistent hope. Even as these novels describe a seemingly omnipresent authoritarianism, they tell stories of successful, although minor, resistance to official history.

Dorfman’s experience in exile is threefold and overtly political. Born in Argentina to Jewish-Russian immigrants who, throughout their lifetime, were repeatedly persecuted for their Marxist beliefs, Dorfman left Argentina with his family in 1943 when a pro-Axis coup took over the country. Dorfman’s father, Adolfo, was stripped of his Buenos Aires professorship and left for the United States where he received a Guggenheim Fellowship. The Dorfman family lived in the United States until 1954, when the political onslaught of McCarthyism targeted Adolfo, and the family fled to Santiago, Chile. Dorfman’s testimonial memoir, *Heading South, Looking North* (1998), describes his multiple migrations and emphasizes the role this played in constructing his bilingual and transnational identity.

The success of Salvador Allende, socialist president of Chile from 1970 to 1973, profoundly affected Dorfman’s career. He served as the administration’s communications and media advisor and was actively engaged in advertising campaigns to communicate Allende’s message to the people. After struggling with exile and displacement early in life, Dorfman felt that he had truly found his home in Chile with Allende’s party, the Unidad Popular. Yet, when Allende was overthrown by the military coup on September 11, 1973, Dorfman was forced into

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12 “General Augusto Pinochet justified the coup and the new government’s repressive measures in part by alleging that the Allende coalition had a plot (*plan zeta*) to murder military and civilian opposition leaders in order to impose communism definitely upon Chile” (Loveman 261).

13 Dorfman writes in both Spanish and English.
exile again. Dorfman barely escaped death on the day of the coup, and left Chile only reluctantly in November, 1973. Escaping to the Argentine embassy in Chile, he fled first to the country of his birth, Argentina, then to France, Amsterdam, and the United States. In 1983, as a result of international protests, he was able to return to Chile. However, he visited the country only briefly and with much caution. After Chile’s vote to oust Pinochet in 1989 and since the transition to democracy in 1990, Dorfman has split his time between the United States and Chile.

In *Heading South, Looking North*, Dorfman invites the reader on a journey through his multiple exiles, which eventually culminate in his escape from Chile in 1973. Dorfman’s memoir investigates the relationships between literary representation and historical event, art and activism, and writing memoir and recording history. This text highlights the multiple ways that Dorfman’s life story intertwines personal memory and the history of the Americas. This encourages the reader to play an active role in the recollection of his life. Dorfman’s text crosses the boundaries of *testimonio* and autobiography, or memoir. As a *testimonio*, *Heading South, Looking North* represents Dorfman’s life and the lives of others who were traumatically affected by the coup. Sophia McClennen defines the text as both *testimonio* and autobiography, or memoir:

> Situated between the collective narrative of *testimonio* and the personal presentation of autobiography, memoir... with its allusion to memory and its etymological links to the creation of official records, situates the text between historical document and personal reflection, between recalling and recording, between musing and writing, between the self and the collective. (“The Diasporic Subject” 170)

*Heading South, Looking North* narrates both the experience of Dorfman, the individual, and the collective experience of Chileans under the dictatorship of Pinochet.

Dorfman begins his memoir with a direct reference to the political upheaval of his country, and in doing so, situates himself as an active agent in witnessing the sequence of events that led to Allende’s overthrow. In his opening statement, “I should not be here to tell this story... there is a day in my past, a day many years ago in Santiago de Chile, when I should have died and did not” (3), Dorfman invites the reader to share his grief, guilt and outrage. He describes

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14 Dorfman continued to be harassed by the government and three years later, the Chilean news reported him dead – the media deliberately falsified his death. By this time, Dorfman was a well-known writer in Chile for his highly political pieces targeting imperialism, such as *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comics* and *The Empire’s Old Clothes*. 
the guilt he felt preserving his own life by escaping the country, while many of his comrades were tortured, disappeared, and murdered by the military. Dorfman did not follow his usual schedule on the morning of September 11, 1973 and therefore was not at La Moneda, Allende’s presidential palace, when the military infiltrated Santiago. He discovered later that Fernando Flores, a Minister at La Moneda, at the last minute crossed Dorfman’s name off the list of party members to call when the military attacked. When Dorfman confronted Flores about intervening to save his [Dorfman’s] life, Flores responded that “‘somebody had to live to tell the story’” (39). Dorfman uses this anecdote to define his role as storyteller of the Chilean tragedy. He considers himself to be the reluctant scribe of history, a role he did not choose, and feels ardently compelled to retain and record the memories of this turbulent period. His appropriated responsibility to serve as bard to history stems from the fact that Dorfman is “[haunted] by the certainty that [he has] been keeping a promise to the dead” (40).

Like Dorfman, Isabel Allende is also driven by a fervent desire to record and publish the silenced accounts of traumatic experience under the dictatorship. One of the experiences she draws on occurred in 1978 when fifteen corpses were found in the abandoned lime kilns near Lonquén, a small town in the Chilean countryside. An investigation by the Catholic Church determined that the bodies were those of missing campesinos detained and shot by the government immediately after the coup in 1973. The case was investigated by a Court in Santiago, but once military participation in the crime was established, the perpetrators were prosecuted by military tribunals and set free by Pinochet under a decree of amnesty. The Lonquén case marked one of the first investigations in Chile where the bodies of desaparecidos were actually uncovered. The families of the murdered men at least knew of their fate. But they could not bury their loved ones because the military later scattered their remains and dynamited the lime kilns to prevent them from becoming a site for pilgrimages and worship.

In her memoir Paula, Allende writes “What happened in Lonquén was like a knife in my belly, I felt the pain for years. Five men from the same family, the Maureiras, had died, murdered by carabineros” (282). Consumed by the Lonquén case, Allende meticulously collected press clippings on the event and, in 1983, began writing her second novel Of Love and Shadows: “For my second novel, I didn’t have to think of a subject, the women of the Maureira, the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and millions of other victims pursued me, obliging me to write” (282). Allende also felt obligated to tell the victims’ stories; through writing their stories,
she voiced the collective turmoil boiling over in a country where disappearances commonly occurred along with human rights violations of the utmost gravity.

Allende was working as a journalist in Santiago when the military coup bombed the presidential palace and violently overthrew her uncle, Chilean President Salvador Allende, and his Unidad Popular political party. In *Paula*, she narrates the sequence of events which occurred on September 11, 1973:

Bomber planes flew like fatidic birds over the Palacio de La Moneda, dropping their bombs with such precision that they exploded through windows and in less than ten minutes set ablaze an entire wing of the building . . . The army’s assault troops stormed La Moneda through gaps burned by fire and shell, occupied the still blazing first floor, and with loudspeakers ordered the people above to exit the building by an external stone stairway. [Salvador] Allende realized that further resistance would end in a bloodbath and ordered his men to surrender, because they could better serve the people alive than dead. He said his final goodbyes with a firm handclasp, looking each man squarely in the eye. (194)

Allende, like many others (Dorfman included), adamantly disagrees with the official account which reports that Salvador Allende committed suicide, and instead argues that he was assassinated by the coup.¹⁵ Immediately after the coup, Allende, in defiance of military orders, began to work with Catholic organizations to provide food and aid to the poor, as well as to the families of prisoners and *desaparecidos*. She also helped persecuted Chilean citizens, labeled subversives, to escape the country.

By 1975, as Allende later writes, “repression had been refined to perfection, and I fell victim to my own terror” (*Paula* 225). Friends warned Allende that her name was on the military blacklist, and soon after she received two death threats by telephone. Terrified for her own life and her family, Allende and her two children moved to Venezuela where she lived in exile for fifteen years.

Allende compares exile to a state of immobility, isolation, and rootlessness: “My roots were chopped off with a single whack and it would take six years to grow new ones nurtured in memory and in the books I would write” (*Paula* 238). Her protagonists in *Of Love and Shadows* experience this same identity crisis when they leave Chile and go into exile under similar...

¹⁵ According to the military, Salvador Allende committed suicide after surviving aerial bombardment of the presidential palace. However, Allende’s suicide has been thoroughly disputed by his family and civil servants.
circumstances to her own. Although Allende had spent several years as a journalist in Chile, it isn’t until the coup and her subsequent exile that she begins writing fiction. The dialectical tension between historical events and Allende’s representation of events in the fictional form are always at play. Marita Wenzel states:

Her profession as a reporter and her experiences as a woman and an exile have provided her with sufficient material to construct ‘her’ version of ‘his’ story/history. The result is dissolution of the boundaries between fiction and history, creating a dialectic between fiction and reality and subverting the official version of events. (6)

Allende acts as witness to the events surrounding Lonquén and shares her account of these events with her readers. In Of Love and Shadows, Allende provides readers with her testimony of the circumstances surrounding this particular crime during the dictatorship’s reign of terror. Although Allende’s response to oppression is cast in fiction, her novels reflect a testimonial quality similar to the testimonies given by victims of oppression who, in their personal capacity, also bear witness as part of a collective experience.

The collective voice is used in testimonial writing to achieve solidarity through deflecting a singular authorial presence and to assure that the text represents the experiences of a group rather than an individual. Testimonios illustrate that the “self cannot be defined in individual terms but only as a collective self engaged in a common struggle” (Gugelberger, Kearney 9). Authorial positioning is displaced through the collective representation of human experience which thereby democratizes the writing project: “The erosion of the central authority of the first person author who is replaced by a collective ‘we’ effects a displacement from the bourgeois individual toward the community of the witness, and as such is consistent with a more democratic, socialist project” (Gugelberger, Kearney 9). A text which represents an oppressed and silenced collective body also validates the perspective of the intended group, as opposed to that of the singular entity. The more voices that speak against unjust policies, social inequality, and exploitation from the governing body, the greater impact these denunciations have on the public, and the readership.

**Authorship and Authority**

As with any type of testimonio or narrative, the author’s own perspectives, biases, and motivations inevitably color, manipulate, and influence the text. In a passage which alludes to this complex relationship between author and subject, Dorfman relates the story of Taty Allende,
Salvador Allende’s daughter, who committed suicide soon after her father’s death.\(^{16}\) Regarding Taty Allende’s suicide, Dorfman writes, “I will have to carry her and her father and all the other dead of Chile like an orphan till the day I die” (Heading South, Looking North 59). Using language similar to Dorfman, Allende also feels an obligation to speak for the dead. She is haunted by “the ghosts of those murdered campesinos [who] refused to leave me in peace until I wrote their story” (Cox 58). Allende and Dorfman make it their literary mission to represent the experiences of the dead, the disappeared, and the displaced. Their authorial positions are analogous to the interlocutor role of the testimonio dyad as they assume the responsibility to archive the Chilean experience. As with any ethnographic study, interlocutors can only record the narrator’s testimonio through the lens of their own perspective and context. The writer who represents the subaltern subject or who attempts to have the subaltern speak through the text mediates his or her presence (Craft 14). Dorfman and Allende are no exception. Their political goals and narrative choices inevitably color and manipulate the stories they recount.

Moreover, their announced position as the voice of the voiceless can be viewed as somewhat problematic. The intellectual’s ability to speak for the subaltern, or oppressed, has been heavily debated within the academy. In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Gayatri Spivak best demonstrates the process whereby postcolonial studies ironically re-inscribes the “neo-colonial” ideologies of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. She insists that postcolonial studies must encourage that “intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss” (Ashcroft 28). Jean Franco warns us to “beware the writer who sees himself as a redeemer and rescuer, appropriating and assimilating willy-nilly and claiming authorial rights. This person is politically and culturally dangerous” (qtd. in Craft 14). Based on these criteria, we cannot help but question Dorfman’s and Allende’s ability to function as storytellers for the Chilean crisis. Dorfman was, and is, part of the intellectual elite. His father was a highly respected professor of engineering, and Dorfman himself held a prestigious position on Salvador Allende’s staff. By the time of the coup he was already widely published and his books were circulating internationally. Isabel Allende was also a privileged member of Chilean society. Her biological

\(^{16}\) Allende also writes about Tati Allende’s suicide in Paula: “Tati never recovered from the pain of that separation and the death of her father, the man she loved most in life, and three years later, in exile in Cuba, she left her children in a friend’s care and, without telling anyone goodbye, shot herself” (193).
father was a Chilean diplomat and the cousin of Salvador Allende. She had lived in Bolivia and Lebanon with her mother and stepfather, another Chilean diplomat, and before the coup she had achieved moderate success as a journalist and television personality in Chile. How then, can Dorfman and Allende, from their privileged positions speak for all Chileans? Can the exile, who no longer resides in the country, adequately voice the suffering of those who remain under the repressive regime in their homeland? These questions are important to consider while analyzing testimonial literature as a representation of collective experience. While my goal is neither to assess Dorfman’s nor Allende’s validity as interlocutors, I do argue that through analyzing their novels we can see that they remain sensitive to this relationship between themselves as writers and the collective representation of the Chilean experience.

A brief segue into poststructuralist literary theory will clarify my approach to the complex relationship between author and text in relation to the testimonio. Regarding the function of the author, Roland Barthes argues that the text is “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146). The text, therefore, is viewed as a multifaceted sociological, environmental, and cultural production. According to this line of reasoning, there is no such thing as authorial authenticity. The author cannot be credited with original thought but is a product of the environment and therefore, absolute meaning cannot focus on his/her intentions. The author is a product of various cultural forces, and the text procures meaning through its communication as a whole, not through the exclusivity of its various parts.

Foucault, like Barthes, emphasizes a decentering of the textual authorial role and instead views the writer as the function of language itself. In his essay, “What is an Author?” Foucault claims that the author is not the ratifier of a text but is a form of organization for groups of texts. Rather than taking a humanist perspective which views the author as the source and origin of texts, Foucault declares that the author is dead. This deconstructs the idea that the author is the origin of something original, and replaces it with the idea that the author is the product of the writing function, or of the text. The author is no longer the speaking individual who wrote the text but is a product of cultural discourse. In this view, history and authorship are amalgamations of various postulates and values, rather than a linear progression of absolute truths. By applying these analyses of the author-function to Dorfman’s and Allende’s texts, we
can interpret these writers less as an authoritarian presence that dictates the final signified of a text, but more as both the producer and product of the writing function. Their novels reflect the multi-dimensional voices and experiences that create discourse.

This problem of authorship and authority is addressed in *Widows*, Dorfman’s novel illustrating the case of “the disappeared.” His authorial presence in *Widows* is yet another voice embedded in the discourse surrounding Chile and the sociopolitical crisis. In the introduction to *Widows*, Dorfman explains that he originally had planned to publish the novel under the pseudonym Eric Lohmann, because his books were regarded suspiciously by the Chilean government: “My body had already been banned from those countries, I didn’t want my new book to be banned as well” (5). One of Dorfman’s goals in exile was to write books that spoke both for and to the people within Chile. Dorfman’s use of a pseudonym and desire to publish the book in another language before having it translated into Spanish was “so that [his] child might grow up where it belonged, in its true land, among its own” (5). The relationship between father and son clearly denotes a relation of authority. But Dorfman does not draw a clear line between the father, or writer, of the text, and the son, or the text itself which disrupts the very notion of authority as a binary relationship. The linear/historical relationship between family generations becomes blurred as time collapses, bringing together fathers and sons from different eras who have shared similar struggles (McClenen 60). Dorfman asks us to question who is the father/author of the text, thereby linking fathers, sons, and brothers in a non-linear fashion.

This parallel between father/son and author/text is further illustrated in the forward to *Widows* titled “forward by the author’s son” (11). Although he ultimately published *Widows* without the use of a pseudonym, Dorfman did create a fictional author for his novel, Eric Lohmann (the pseudonym he had originally planned to use); we discover in this forward that *Widows* was originally a collection of manuscripts written by the fictional Lohmann who disappeared after he was arrested by the Gestapo in 1942. These manuscripts, uncovered by Lohmann’s son, contain a letter which asks that the novel be published under a false name due to the Nazi occupation. And so, in a sense, we have two authors depicting two similar stories here. One is Ariel Dorfman, the primary author of *Widows*. The second is the fictional Danish writer of *Widows*, Eric Lohmann, who claims the need to publish the novel under a pseudonym, and who is himself one of the disappeared. This framing technique distances the author, Dorfman, from the text. Dorfman’s exile parallels Eric Lohmann’s disappearance. Furthermore, Dorfman
deemphasizes his authorial role by using a fictional writer to author his novel. These techniques are utilized in testimonial literature in order to erode the “centrality of the author and also thereby standard assumptions about the ‘authority’ of texts” (Gugelberger, Kearney 10).

Although Isabel Allende does not deemphasize her authorial role as transparently as Dorfman, she does utilize similar techniques of authorial displacement. From the opening epigraph of the novel, we are aware that Of Love and Shadows is not her personal testimony, but a story which she has safeguarded in her memory for the purpose of one day sharing it with others:

This is the story of a woman and a man who loved one another so deeply that they saved themselves from a banal existence. I have carried it in my memory, guarding it carefully so it would not be eroded by time, and it is only now, in the silent nights of this place, that I can finally tell it. I do it for them, and for others who have confided their lives to me, saying: Here, write it, or it will be erased by the wind.

The novel is based on real life events and personal stories related to Allende while she resided in Chile, and afterward, in Venezuela, her place of exile. During the dictatorship, while she still worked in Chile as a journalist, she kept a record of the institutionalized oppression. She interviewed torture victims but could not publish the material due to censorship issues. While in exile in Caracas, Allende also interviewed exiles who had been in Chilean concentration camps. In 1975 she interviewed Dr. Arturo Jirón, Salvador Allende’s physician, who was at the presidential palace on the day of the coup: “He told me what he had experienced inside the burning palace that last day: Allende’s death, his own arrest, torture, and banishment to Dawson island, where he was held prisoner, and then his exile” (59).17 Another victim interviewed by Allende was the highest-ranking Chilean official in exile who refused to carry out execution orders and was expelled from the country. This man was the inspiration for Gustavo Morante in Of Love and Shadows.

Allende’s testimonial novel is part mystery, part love story and more specifically, a text based on a collective of voices which tell a version of Chilean history heavily silenced by the dictatorship. Of Love and Shadows focuses on the investigation of the Lonquén crime by Irene Beltran, a journalist, and her lover, Francisco Leal, a photographer. The protagonist Irene could

be Allende herself, although the author has said: “Irene Beltrán is the synthesis of three Chilean women, journalists like her who worked at investigating the frightful reality of the dictatorship” (44).

Irene’s conservative, bourgeois upbringing has sheltered her from the social and political realities of her country, yet she is by nature a free spirit with a humanitarian concern for the poor and the aged. In the course of her work, she meets Francisco, the son of an exiled Spanish anarchist and his wife. Unknown to Irene, Francisco leads a double life as a clandestine revolutionary, helping to smuggle political dissidents in and out of the country. When they go on assignment together to do a story about a fifteen year old peasant girl possessed of miraculous powers, they unexpectedly find themselves involved in a confrontation with the military police and the subsequent disappearance of the peasant girl, Evangelina. Irene’s decision that she must solve the mystery surrounding Evangelina’s abduction leads her and Francisco to uncover evidence of atrocities committed by the military: the bodies of several desaparecidos, identified as the Flores family, buried within the mines of Los Riscos. When they reveal what they know – implicating the government in mass murders – they are severely persecuted by the military and must go into exile.

The text clearly illustrates the fear and retaliation suffocating Chile during the years of the Pinochet dictatorship. Although Allende’s works are based on historical facts, she claims that the books she writes are primarily fictions. Allende makes clear that she is, first and foremost, a storyteller, yet she remains true to the moral imperative behind her writing which is to bear witness through literature to a time and place in Latin American history:

All those of us who write and are fortunate enough to be published ought to assume the responsibility for serving the cause of freedom and justice. We have a mission to accomplish in the front lines. In the face of the obscurantism that oppresses various countries on our continent, we must offer words, reason and hope. Literature must be placed at the service of mankind. Ideas are the worst enemies of barbarism. (qtd. in Meyer 151)

It is evident that Allende does bear a moral responsibility to promote justice through the telling of stories of those less fortunate (i.e. the victims of Lonquén). Yet, she accomplishes this through fiction which admits to its own fallibility. The element of truth is explored from every angle in the text and is the most prominent theme within the narrative. One of Allende’s goals is

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to promote the truth; analogously, her fictions serve as vessels meant to promote truths which contradict the official representations of history. In *Of Love and Shadows*, these truths are analyzed from multiple angles which fragment a fixed representation of truth in relation to human experience. However, by meticulously exploring the particular case of the disappeared at Los Riscos, the fictional Lonquén, Allende’s readers are offered various perspectives – both from the military and from the people oppressed by the military – and can therefore, judge the case respectively. This narrative technique deflects the authority of Allende as the sole creator of the text and instead, establishes the novel as a simulacrum of collective voices.

What is the truth about the disappearance of Evangelina? What is the truth about the bodies of los desaparecidos at Los Riscos? Who is telling the truth and who is fabricating a lie? Furthermore, how is truth manipulated by the dictatorship to justify acts of terror? Personal truths are also put to the test. Irene’s desire to discover the “truth” regarding Evangelina and los desaparecidos leads her down a path of violence and terror, and disrupts her understanding of the government. In her attempt to come to terms with political reality, Irene investigates the mystery of Evangelina and unearths unpleasant truths, namely the discovery of Evangelina’s body in a mass grave. This discovery changes Irene’s life because until then she had been “educated to deny any unpleasantness, discounting it as distortion of the facts” (*Of Love and Shadows* 123). The discovery of a mass grave also serves as a concrete example of the military regime’s duplicity, or hidden agenda. The truth cannot be ignored indefinitely because Irene’s search produces irrefutable evidence and contradicts official versions of history. Furthermore, the military maintains their version of the “truth” by denying their involvement with the murder of innocent civilians: they accuse the “Flores family of constituting a threat to national security because of their affiliation with a leftist group” (262). The military justifies these murders by fabricating a story which implicates the Flores family in terrorist acts and treason: “They were activists who were planning an attack against Headquarters…We questioned these men in accordance with our usual procedures, and obtained their confessions: they had received terrorist training from foreign agents who had infiltrated the nation by sea” (262). Truth is fractured within the text which elucidates the point that access to multiple truths is necessary in order to

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19 See page twenty-two for a brief discussion on the official story circulating via the government regarding Lonquén.
attain an accurate understanding of events. More pointedly, the representations of truth explored by Allende “represent the ‘other’ side of history by subverting official discourse through disparate perspectives in order to constitute a collective conscience” (Wenzel 6).

**COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE: MULTIPLE REPRESENTATIONS OF TRUTH**

Who has the authority to tell the story? Who is the author of the story? Who has the authority to alter history? Which version will prevail? These questions prove especially pertinent when an author deliberately writes to represent collective experience. In his novel *Widows*, Dorfman explores these concerns regarding authority and representation. *Widows* narrates the experiences of a small village in Greece on the eve of World War II. Caught in the grip of a repressive dictatorship, this village has lost practically its entire adult male population; they have simply “disappeared.” The plot is centered on a group of women (most are widows of the disappeared) who are claiming bodies found floating down the river. Dorfman provides personal and historical context. He writes,

> The novel I was planning dealt with the disappearance of thousands of men, and some women, into the hands of the secret police of those dictatorships. Taken from their homes in the dead of the night or abducted in open daylight on the streets, these people are never seen again . . . The “missing” are deprived of more than their homes, their livelihoods, their children. They are also deprived of their graves. It’s as if they had never existed. (5)

Of the 3,000 people killed during the seventeen years of military government under Pinochet, more than 1,000 were listed as “disappeared.” “To disappear” became an active verb with a direct object pronoun: “They disappeared him (her); “*lo desaparecieron.*” Most of the disappeared never reappeared; their murders by death squads and agents of the military junta, if not the whereabouts of their remains, would only be confirmed by a Truth Commission organized after termination of the military regime in 1990 (Loveman 264). Thus, *Widows* pays tribute not only to the hundreds of Chileans, but also to the non-Chileans, who were disappeared by their governments, and seeks to understand the dichotomy between those who wield power through terror and abuse, and the victims who maintain integrity in the face of oppression.

*Widows* also questions the authority of communication. The central conflict revolves around who has the right, and the authority, to explain the existence of the body (McClennen 132). As the bodies of identifiable males are found floating down the river, the women in the
village begin claiming these bodies as husbands and fathers, even though their faces are unrecognizable. A tug of war ensues between the local police, who insist the women cannot identify their family members, and the women, who demand the right to bury their dead. Multiple perspectives are voiced by both the women seeking justice for their loved ones and by the members of the military who are intent on maintaining order and retaining authority in the village.

Sophia Angelos appears in the office of the Captain after hearing about the discovery of a body. She claims entitlement to this body, before ever seeing it, and requests the right to bury her father, Karoulos Myslonas. They declare that the dead man is not her father – not even her relative. She hears them but does not pay attention: “The captain scrutinized her to see how she would react, but it was as if she’s heard the words before and now it made no sense to waste time listening or responding to them” (Widows 25). Whose version is correct? These are two discourses that do not intersect: what means father to her is a dead revolutionary to them. Her response finally is to reaffirm her authority to claim the body as her father: “Do you think, Captain, that I can’t recognize my own father” (25). The novel continues to stress the crisis of recognition for those living under dictatorship. Sophia Angelos insists that her version of the truth is accurate; the body she found floating down the river is, in fact, her father. The Captain denies this by emphasizing her inability to identity the body. The Captain feels “threatened, as if someone here or elsewhere were playing a trick on him,” by Sofia’s authoritative manner and stoic resilience. Frustrated by her relentless questioning, the Captain barks “How long to you think we can put up with this lack of respect for authority” (73)? The Captain is concerned with his authority being challenged, while Sofia merely wants to claim what is hers. She demands that justice be met and refuses to be cowed into submission by the military. We have here two representations of the same event. Multiple voices in the text continue to vie for authority which conveys that only through a multiplicity of perspectives can we truly appreciate history. This asserts a fundamental goal of the novel which parallels the goal of the testimonio: “to rewrite and retell, to correct Latin American history and reality from the people’s perspective” (Gugelberger, Kearney 11). Furthermore, the presence of multiple voices and truths democratizes the storytelling process. The text speaks as a collective struggle for equal representation.

As Widows unfolds, women from other families also begin claiming the bodies of the disappeared. The plot broadens to include not only conflict between the military and the
Angelos women, but also between other females in the village. We have multiple stories from multiple characters who are claiming multiple representations of the truth. Authority is further decentralized. By opening up the narrative to a multiplicity of perspectives, Dorfman moves beyond the obvious binary relationship between the dominant [military] and oppressed [villagers]. The village women assert their own rights to authority by struggling against one another to claim the bodies as their own family members. This lateral fracture in the claim for authority further clarifies the testimonial’s function as a collective representation of human experience.

The storytelling process is additionally complicated, and democratized, due to the vastly different perceptions of los desaparecidos upheld by the military and the Angelos’ family. Sofia defends her husband against the “crimes and incursions” he is accused of while the military calls him a “scoundrel” (81). The military must maintain order against the “sinister passion” of the villagers’ intent to sabotage the mission of national identity:

This region was prosperous and peaceful until some of its inhabitants, stirred up by sinister passions and foreign ideas, decided to desecrate this country’s legitimate authority and to sabotage the mission of national unity which the forces of order had imposed when we were faced with our land’s moral, and even physical decay. (87)

The General clearly attempts to justify the disappearance of the men corrupted by “sinister passions and foreign ideas” by aligning the military’s actions with the moral mission of national unity.

We can see this same justification for terror, but with the reversal of roles, happening in accounts produced by the Pinochet government. The military junta based its legitimacy in the “‘natural right of rebellion against tyrannical government’” and defined the coup as a moral and necessary uprising against the tyranny of Allende’s Unidad Popular (qtd. in Loveman 263). Pinochet’s rhetoric inverts the roles of oppressor and oppressed and he uses the ideological tools of nationalism and national unity to justify the reign of terror: “‘This makes it necessary to apply restrictions as rigorous as the circumstances may require to those who defy the juridical norms in force…Our attitude must necessarily remain inflexible for the good of Chile and its people’” (qtd. in Loveman 263). Pinochet uses this position of inflexibility to justify human rights violations of the utmost severity.

One of these human rights violations involved the mass grave uncovered at Lonquén. Just as Dorfman’s work explores the various representations of truth regarding bodies of the
disappeared, Allende’s text explores various perspectives regarding the case of the victims disappeared by the government and dumped at the fictional Los Riscos. Earlier in this chapter, I briefly discussed the multiple representations of truth circulating within *Of Love and Shadows*. I will return to this discussion to illuminate the various stories regarding the military dictatorship and the disappearance of Evangelina within the text.

In *Of Love and Shadows*, we have various representations of the military dictatorship from different social groups within Chilean society: the military’s perspective, the elite perspective, and the revolutionary perspective. The split between these differing accounts is embedded in class distinction and illuminated in the following passage:

Everyone was talking of opulence, the economic miracle, the streams of foreign capital attracted by the new regime. Anyone who was discontented was considered anti-patriotic; happiness was obligatory. Through an unwritten but universally known law of segregation, two countries were functioning within the same national boundaries: one for a golden and powerful elite, the other for the excluded and silent masses. (177)

Both the “golden and powerful elite” and the “excluded and silent masses” are depicted in the text. The experiences of the marginalized lower-classes are described to reveal voices where there was initially silence and exclusion. Clearly, one of the main purposes of this text is to work against the official story dictated by government authorities, the elite, and a highly controlled news media which supported the Armed forces:

We owe to the Armed Forces the fact that we have reached the present stage in our programs. The period of emergency so happily surmounted was characterized by the exercise of the broad powers of established authority, which acted with all necessary strength to impose order and restore civic pride. (*Of Love and Shadows* 233)

Propaganda disseminated by the media functions as a hegemonic tool to promote patriotism and influence the people. In the preceding passage, the dictatorship is praised for the social order and “civic pride” it has brought to a country flailing under a period of emergency. This type of propaganda is readily absorbed by members of the elite social class, who are most favorably affected by the capitalist military-dictatorship.

In *Of Love and Shadows*, one component of the military perspective is represented by Pradelio Ranquileo, brother to the missing Evangelina, who tells his story to Irene and Francisco. Pradelio’s story illustrates the military’s rationale for staging a coup and implementing a dictatorship:
The day before the military coup, he had been told that the enemy intended to wipe out the Army and set up their Soviet tyranny. The enemy must truly have been dangerous and skillful, because to that day no one had ever learned of their bloodthirsty plans except the commanders of the armed forces, who were always vigilant on behalf of the nation’s interests. If the military had not made their move, the whole country would have been sunk into civil war, or would have been occupied by the Russians, as Lieutenant Juan de Dios Ramirez had explained to them. (165)

Pradelio twice states that this was information told to him by a higher-ranking official of the military. These scare tactics are a strategy implemented by the dictatorship to justify their actions in order to garner military and public support. The enemy Pradelio speaks of is the Allende government and its supporters, including the campesinos who remained loyal to Socialist forces. It is evident though, that Pradelio does not clearly understand the identity of the enemy, nor does he understand their plans. But he blindly trusts the commanders of the armed forces who “naturally” work for the nation’s best interests.

The perspective from the elite faction of society compliments and reflects the military’s viewpoint. Beatriz Beltrán, Irene’s mother, embodies this point of view. Beatriz is oblivious to the violence occurring in her country and refuses to blame the military for their involvement in the mass disappearances and executions. When she does acknowledge these acts of terror, Beatriz validates their occurrences by justifying the military’s fight against the enemy: “Episodes like this were bound to happen in the kind of war the heroic military had been forced to wage in eradicating the cancer of Marxism; there were casualties in every battle” (233). Beatriz deliberately remains ignorant to the brutal repression occurring in her country. She economically benefits from the capitalist policies of the dictatorship, and turns a blind eye to the violence and disappearances around her. Beatriz represents the faction of society which refuses to acknowledge the presence of a desaparecido: “She had often said that no one disappeared in their country, and that such stories were antipatriotic lies” (42). We can view this type of deliberate blindness as a collective amnesia which is heavily influenced by government propaganda. It is not until the end of the novel, when her daughter Irene is shot by the military for investigating Evangelina’s disappearance and uncovering the multiple corpses hidden at Los

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20 This reference to cancer parallels the Pinochet dictatorship’s task of “extirpating the Marxist cancer” (Loveman 264).
Riscos, that Beatriz finally comes to terms with her stubborn denial of the dictatorship’s brutality.

We also have differing truths regarding the disappearance of Evangelina and the bodies found at Los Riscos. In *Of Love and Shadows*, the official version of the story issued by the government is that “the bodies were those of terrorists executed by their own henchmen” (232). This parallels the official version of events promoted by the Pinochet government. However, according to Evangelina’s mother, Digna Ranquileo, and Sergeant Faustino Riviera, Evangelina was beaten to death by the military and then dumped in the mass grave at Los Riscos so that her body would not be found. These varying perspectives vie for authority within the novel. However, Allende assures that our sympathy rests with Evangelina’s family who has been mercilessly targeted by the military for refusing to submit to the government.

**TESTIMONIAL AND THE COLLECTIVE VOICE**

My analysis thus far has focused on the multiple representations of truth depicted within *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows*, and Dorfman’s and Allende’s strategies of representing the collective experience of Chileans oppressed by the dictatorship. Now, a brief discussion of the narrative techniques implemented to represent the collective body is in order.

In *Widows*, Dorfman not only depicts the multiple perspectives held by various members of the community and military, but also uses collective representation as a narrative technique to illustrate the solidarity of the Angelos women. The women in the novel function as a collective unit and mutually fight to maintain dignity in the face of oppression. Together, they find the bodies of *los desaparecidos* floating down the river. Together, they demand justice from the military. The Angelos women are often described as a universal force and their actions mimic each other: “There was an inclusive, total, multiple gesture indicating all and none, a restrained dance of hands, shoulders, linked black skirts against the line of the river, a motion that ran through them and then stopped. All, they’d all found it [the body] together this morning” (32). By positioning themselves as a communal body, they force the military authorities to address the disappearances of their family members. Collectively, they cannot be ignored.

The military also describes the women as a collective unit. Although the military retain power, they are unsure how to maintain authority in their interactions with the Angelos family. The captain qualifies the women’s cause as “collective hysteria” (86). He does not acknowledge
the women’s case for ownership of the bodies, and instead, defines the women’s behavior as neurotic and hysterical. At the end of the novel, the women refuse to comply with the military’s order to give up their post by their river. As the soldiers form ranks and approach the group, we witness the event from the captain’s viewpoint: “Beyond those backs he could just make out the group of women, in an opaque and foggy sort of way, some standing, others reclining or seated, next to the rocks . . . Together they still formed a floating, savage mass, one huge spread-out female with fifteen or twenty heads” (164). The captain views the women as a hydra-headed grotesque beast, a “savage mass,” which must be contained and controlled. They are stripped of their individuality, and described as a singular, cooperative unit. But, through their shared experience, the Angelos women form a collective authority that opposes and resists the military’s orders. They are united in their solidarity against tyranny. As a collective entity, the women bring attention to their cause. The media becomes interested in “the case of the thirty-seven widows,” and sends a reporter to cover the case (80). Through their communal struggle, the women share the burden of their collective suffering and assure that the disappeared are never forgotten.

The communal struggle for justice is also represented in Of Love and Shadows. Through analyzing Allende’s representation of the collective voice, we can see the range of techniques available to correct the official story. Allende’s narrative does not figuratively represent the collective body as does Dorfman’s Widows, but instead insists that individual experience under similar circumstances can unite people towards a collective directive. In their determination to discover the truth regarding Evangelina’s disappearance, Irene and Francisco are aided by several individuals with similar motives. Just as during post-coup Chile, Allende helped victims persecuted by the government to leave the country, families related to victims of the government’s abuse assist Irene and Francisco in their search for information. “There, as in all places where there is great suffering,” Allende writes, “human solidarity was the balm that eased shared misery” (Of Love and Shadows 114). The individuals in Of Love and Shadows work as a cooperative unit to assure that justice is served. Irene interviews members of the military and Evangelina’s family; Francisco photographs the corpses at Los Riscos mine; Sergeant Faustino Rivera meticulously documents events which connect the military to Evangelina’s disappearance and murder; Jose Leal, Francisco’s brother and a Catholic priest, informs the Cardinal about the mass grave at Los Riscos; and the Cardinal exposes the military crime by writing an official
letter to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court which explains the discovery of the mass grave and asks for the Court’s assistance in arresting the perpetrators. When the bodies are unearthed from Los Riscos and brought to the capital for identification purposes, the entire city unites to mourn the victims and denounce the government:

Hundreds of people held a sit-in in the street in front of the Vicariate, displaying photographs of their missing loved ones, whispering, Where are they? Where are they? Meanwhile, a group of working priests and nuns in slacks fasted in the Cathedral, adding to the total uproar. Sunday the Cardinal’s pastoral letter was read from every pulpit, and for the first time in so long and dark a time people dared to turn to their neighbors and weep together. People called one another to talk about cases that multiplied until it was impossible to keep count. A procession was organized to pray for the victims, and before the authorities realized what was happening, an unmanageable crowd was marching through the streets carrying banners and placards demanding liberty, bread and justice. The march began as little trickles of people from the outlying poor barrios. Gradually the trickles flowed together, the ranks swelled and finally grew into a compact mass that surged forward chanting in unison the religious hymns and political slogans stilled for so many years that people thought they had been forgotten forever. The crowds overflowed the churches and cemeteries, the only places that until then the police had not entered with their instruments of war. (231)

This passage is significant because it illustrates the transition from the individual to the collective body. Various members of society, those persecuted by the government, family members of the disappeared, and people who sympathize with the cause, join together in their personal struggles for justice.

The testimonial literature of Dorfman and Allende functions in a similar manner. Their respective narratives depict these struggles against oppression, and human rights violations. Yet, their individual stories can also be read together as a communal body of work that testifies against the Pinochet regime. In this way, the work of Chilean exilic writers serves as a collective voice which denounces unjust governmental practices. They work in solidarity and their narratives, to reiterate Allende, can be viewed as a “balm [to] ease shared misery.”
CHAPTER 4

THE FUNCTION OF TESTIMONY AND THE EFFECTS OF EXILE

Thus far, I have explored the testimonial novels *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows*, as alternative representations of historical experience. The previous chapter analyzed how Dorfman and Allende, in their texts, counter official history by representing the collective personal histories of Chileans who were traumatically affected by the sociopolitical crisis engendered by the Pinochet dictatorship. The current chapter will analyze the role that memory plays in recollecting and memorializing specific experiences that risk erasure by official rhetoric that benefits the agenda of the dictatorship. Written testimony provides a visible outlet for marginalized experiences that are rendered invisible through the language and propaganda of the dominant authoritative body. This chapter will also analyze the techniques which Dorfman and Allende employ to ensure that their texts promote global awareness of the Chilean crisis. Their novels can be read as a call to revolution. This implies a certain responsibility on the readers’ part. According to John Beverley, “the position of the reader of testimonio is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom” (“Margin at the Center” 26). Isabel Allende also encourages reader responsibility: “As a writer, I bear the responsibility to tell you and convince you that all this is happening. Now what are you going to do with that truth?”21 As a writer, Allende claims responsibility “for serving the cause of freedom and justice.” During the Pinochet era, she used her writing as a vehicle intended to bring down the dictatorship. Dorfman also shares this literary responsibility. In the introduction to his collection of essays *Some Write to the Future*, he writes “all of these meditations stem from the same fierce belief that our literature has an important role, indeed an essential one, to play in the liberation of the people of Latin America” (xii).

Through their literature, Dorfman and Allende position themselves as working for liberation and

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against despotism. *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows* can then be viewed as tools to transmit an awareness of these goals, thereby situating readers as witnesses to the plight of the Latin American people.

**THE ROLE OF MEMORY**

In *Widows*, Dorfman specifically uses memory as an instrument to retain and record human experience. When Sofia Angelos’ grandson, Alexis, is beaten and arrested by the military as a form of blackmail, Sophia leaves her permanent post by the river to see Alexis and meet with the Captain. The Captain threatens Sophia and her family:

‘Advise the women to go back home,’ the Captain tells Sofia. ‘The ones in your family and the others. We don’t want to resort to force, Mrs. Angelos. You can bear witness to the goodwill of the nation’s army. But our patience has a limit. In exactly six hours, at dawn, we’re going to move them out of there . . . with arms if necessary. They’re better off going on their own, and that way the boy goes free’ (145).

Sofia refuses to comply and responds that because of the military’s deceit and ruthless abuse of power, the dead bodies will continue to appear: “‘You see already, Captain, how the river’s been bringing them home. Until they’ve all come back. We’re going to get them all, Captain, every single one’” (155). The government’s ability to disappear its citizens also allows them to erase collective social history. To disappear someone is to erase the fact that this person exists: “The ‘missing’ are deprived of more than their homes, their livelihoods, their children. They are also deprived of their graves. It’s as if they had never existed” (5). This also fosters non-accountability and a convenient amnesia on the institutional level. In response to Sofia’s refusal to leave her vigil by the river, and her criticism of the military’s immoral abuse of power, the Captain says: “And this conversation, this conversation never took place. I’m erasing it just like that. Nobody’s going to remember it. Because you people, you people don’t count” (155).

Speaking from a position of power, the Captain asserts he can manipulate events by erasing conversations from the official discourse. In doing so, he can potentially restructure the course of history which further benefits the agenda of the dictatorship.

But disappearance of individual lives and the erasure of history are counteracted by power of memory and testimony. Dorfman writes “I hope . . . that the publication of this book may contribute, even in the smallest way, toward the prevention of what is told here ever happening again” (13). Dorfman’s novel memorializes the plight of the disappeared and asserts
that history cannot be erased as long as memories remain intact. Sophia uses memory when she visits her grandson in jail and urges him to remain strong in the face of adversity. She stresses that “the important thing is, was, that the people we’ve carried inside us find another home, they mustn’t die out” (154). Memory preserves the past; as long as memories persist, the disappeared will continue to exist. Testimony memorializes events which can be ignored, silenced, or erased by official discourse, so that the injustices suffered are never forgotten.

In *Heading South, Looking North*, Dorfman examines two photos that lie juxtaposed next to one another. One is of Salvador Allende on the balcony of the presidential palace the day he was inaugurated. The other is of the same balcony, taken three years later after the Hawker Hunters bombed the palace in 1973 and all that remains of the balcony is a “black yawning gap” left by the bombs. The jagged hole in the balcony signifies historical truths that risk being overwritten if not recorded and memorialized. “I was not going to let that hole claim me,” Dorfman asserts (275). “That hole” represents the annihilation of the Allende party, the silenced voices, burned texts, erased history, the untold stories of the dead, exiled, and disappeared:

> The emptiness of that balcony drilled itself into me as we passed through the plaza and turned the corner, and then it was gone from view, it was behind us, out of sight, but I could feel it growing inside me, its darkness threatening to engulf me in its void, to erase us all forever from the memory of Chile just as it had extirpated the presence of Allende, left nothing of that day when he had stood there defiantly, inaugurating the future. (275)

Words, writings, testimonies – these can fill the void of history when the official story threatens to trump other experience. Dorfman insists that the Chilean people must not admit defeat nor drown in this void:

> I fought back against the black hole that was sucking me into despair, I told myself that I would keep alive that balcony, that if we could keep it fiercely alive and warm inside us during the years to come, we would be able to return Chile to all its glory, we could ourselves return to the country we would resurrect. (275)

When read in light of this passage, *Widows* can be viewed as a narrative which stresses the importance of memory to retain human experience that risks obliteration in the void left by the junta. Dorfman’s fiction, in a sense, keeps the democratic objectives and idealism of the Unidad Popular “alive and warm.” As long as these testimonies remain intact, the actual balcony from which Salvador Allende addressed the Chilean people will continue to exist figuratively as a beacon of hope against tyranny.
We can read parallel motives in Allende’s work. In her essay “Writing as an Act of Hope,” Allende stresses the importance of memory: “Maybe the most important reason for writing is to prevent the erosion of time, so that memories will not be blown away by the wind. Write to register history and name each thing. Write what should not be forgotten” (45). Allende makes the connection here between writing memory and preserving history. According to Marita Wenzel, Allende’s writing “becomes a means of confronting and exposing official silence by keeping the collective memory alive” (11). In *Of Love and Shadows*, the collective memory is kept alive through the dissemination of information using such techniques as journalism and photography. Through these methods, Allende extends the theme of memory found within *Widows*. Whereas *Widows* uses memory as a motif meant to assure the disappeared are never forgotten, *Of Love and Shadows* explores ways by which individuals can memorialize human experience through personal testimony and action.

After Irene and Francisco investigate Los Riscos and document the carnage, they discuss with Francisco’s family their options for publicizing the information. They realize that their own disappearance will ensue if the government connects them to this information. Nevertheless, they understand that this incriminating evidence needs to be released in a manner that will assure its widespread dispersion: “[t]he best solution was to shout the news from the rooftops, to send it echoing around the world, awakening consciences and shaking the very foundations of the nation” (*Of Love and Shadows* 215). Their decision to inform the Church of their discovery parallels the investigation of Lonquén by the Catholic Church in 1978. Official history reports that although the members of the military implicated in the case were tried and convicted, their sentence lasted only a few hours and they were set free by Pinochet, “delivered by a decree of amnesty at the last possible moment” (274). Furthermore, the mine was dynamited and destroyed by the military to cover up the evidence of their crime and “to eliminate its memory from history” (273). Hence, the vital need for personal testimonies to assure that human struggle against subjugation is not overwritten by an exploitive dominant discourse.

Irene’s role as a journalist in the story can be considered a medium for testimony. Just as Allende used her personal interviews with the Chilean military, exiles, and torture victims to fuel her novel, Irene uses her reporting skills to extract information from members of the military. In numerous conversations with Sergeant Faustino Rivera, Irene tape records his dialogue regarding the military’s guilt in murdering Evangelina Ranquileo and the other five members of the
Ranquileo family. She also tape records her conversations with Digna and Pradelio Ranquileo, and Evangelina Flores, who tell her their memories of the military’s unwarranted violence and cruelty. These tapes are taken to the Cardinal of the Church, and used at the trial against the guardsmen to present the memories of the multiple individuals victimized by the dictatorship.

Photographs are also used to document critical incidents in history. At Los Riscos, Francisco photographs the mine and the corpses buried within. A photograph is a motionless, permanent image which documents only a particular moment in time, and does not encapsulate the entirety of an experience. Wenzel provides an insightful critique of the use of photographs in *Of Love and Shadows*. She states that the “concept of immobilizing history and memory in a photograph only presents one dimension of reality and therefore does not provide sufficient evidence of the multiple versions of reality” (11). Likewise, Barbara Harlow comments that photographs “while they preserve the memories and genealogical existence of a culture and a heritage, nonetheless stop short of disclosing the context within which they are implicated” (83). In the same way, the official history only conveys one side, or often the public side of events. For a complete account, the multiple perspectives of witnesses should be included. Francisco’s photos, then, represent one perspective of the case. Yet, Allende provides various other perspectives of this same event in order to illustrate a complete account of the incident. Her dissemination of oppressive practices with the publication of the novel *Of Love and Shadows* parallels the multiple perspectives of these same practices found within the pages of the text. In this way, *Of Love and Shadows* works on two levels: first, the novel serves as a form of testimony and resistance; and second, the multiple forms of testimony embedded within the novel work to communicate various forms of personal resistance and subversion. By recording these multiple perspectives of human experience, Allende maintains that these memories continue to exist in the collective conscious: “Her attempt to bear witness to oppressive practices is to keep them alive in the collective memory and to avoid their repetition and perpetuation” (Wenzel 4).

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22 See Chapter Three for a complete analysis of the multiple voices and perspectives represented in *Of Love and Shadows*. 
THE LIMITS OF MEMORY

Writing about the past relies on both memory and the act of remembering. However, is it ever possible to accurately represent and meticulously document the past? Both the writer of testimony and the exile writing about the homeland must rely on memory to produce their works. The testimony is a narrative of past life experience and the exilic text, in this case, also seeks to represent events which occurred in a previous time. Place and time, therefore, are oftentimes occluded or exaggerated because of the uncertainty of memory. Salman Rushdie, who spent fifteen years in hiding after the Iranian government sentenced him to death for his allegedly sacrilegious representation of Islam in *The Satanic Verses*, has discussed the relationship between exile, memory, and fiction:

> Writers in my position, exile or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back...But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge...that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands (10).

Memory is ambiguous, subjective, and fragmented. These “imaginary homelands” may be fictional creations, but these fictions still serve to represent the truth of human experience. Dorfman and Allende, like Rushdie, are haunted by a severe sense of loss. Their exilic status physically distances them from their homeland. Their loss is not just one of their country, Chile, but also encompasses the obliteration of Allende’s Unidad Popular, which served as a symbol of hope and national unity for many Chileans.

Dorfman is driven by the obsessive urge to reclaim and elucidate events of the past, and to do so, he must rely on memory of personal experience and on the stories of others. When recounting his time spent in the hospital as a young boy, Dorfman reveals that his memory may not even be his own: “My parents have told me the story so often that sometimes I have the illusion that I am the one remembering” (*Heading South* 28). He admits that these stories he tells are, at times, factually ambiguous. By doing so, he engages the reader as a fellow conspirator to decipher the “truth of [his] perishable, sliding words” (81). In her study on Dorfman’s memoir, McClennen clarifies the relationship between Dorfman and his readership:

> Dorfman’s goal is to challenge the reader to take an active role in attending to history and his consistent references to faulty memories are meant to distance the reader while simultaneously building a sense of fraternity; for by admitting his inaccuracies he lets the reader in on a shared secret and makes the reader his accomplice.
Dorfman’s authorial strategy is clear: the memories of the dead will not be honored by a passive reading; they require collaboration between the reader and the writer. (“The Diasporic Subject” 177)

This collaboration between reader and writer depends on a certain textual ambiguity. Through positing that textual meaning is subjective and open to interpretation, the reader can be considered an active contributor to the explanation of his story.

Allende also deliberately invites the reader to actively engage the text. This is most clear at the end of Of Love and Shadows. After their photos, audio tapes, and reports are released to the public on the crime at Los Riscos, Irene and Francisco clandestinely leave Chile. They must go into exile to escape capture by the military. The last scene of the text depicts the pair’s final moments before crossing the Chilean border:

“Will we be back?” whispered Irene.
“We will return,” Francisco replied

And in the years that followed, those words would point the way to their destinies: we will return, we will return . . . (290)

The last sentence of the novel ends with an ellipses. The story, then, does not end – the ending is open for interpretation. Wenzel addresses this point: “The open endings of her novels then force the reader to assess his/her own stance and realize his/her own complicity in the past and in future developments. The reader must realize that s/he has the power to change the future and discredit the past” (6). The ending of the novel is intentionally ambiguous. The ellipses encourage the reader to become an active contributor to the couple’s fate. What will occur in exile? Will they ever return to Chile? Will the crimes of the military ever be atoned for? The text does not end with a final signified, indicating that the story will continue and is open to interpretation. The open ending of the text also suggests that this cycle of oppression, disappearance, and forced exile will continue to exist unless action is taken by the larger community. The reader is now an accomplice in Irene and Francisco’s fate, and is made aware through the narrative of the repression plaguing Chile.

In her narratives, Allende employs memory to explore the relationship between personal experience and Chilean history. In her memoir dedicated to her daughter, Paula, Allende addresses the concept of a fallible memory. As a narrative, Paula is part autobiography, part
account of her daughter Paula’s fatal disease, and a “vivid testimony of the Chilean military coup of 1973 and the repressive Pinochet regime” (Gould Levine 114).\footnote{In December 1991, Allende’s twenty-eight year-old daughter, Paula, was diagnosed with porphyria, a curable hereditary disease characterized by a metabolic disorder and enzyme deficiency. While in a Madrid hospital, she was administered the wrong drugs and fell into a coma. “Allende’s year-long struggle to save her daughter’s life and ultimately accept the inevitably of her death” is documented in moving detail in her book, Paula (Gould-Levine 114).} In her memoir, Allende suggests that the process of memory involves recollecting actual life experiences, as well as inventing incidents that never occurred. Hence, the final result of Paula is not the true story of Isabel Allende, but the text in which Allende remembers and reads Allende. The reader, then, reads a text in which Allende is reflecting on, and interpreting her own life experience. As Allende attempts to “fix the fleeting images of an imperfect memory” (Paula 238), she engages in the process of “transformative remembering,” meaning “the recollection of past events that acquire special meaning in the context of her present emotional stress and that serve the necessary function of contributing to the redefinition of her self” (Gould Levine 115). “There is no memory of the past without interpretation” (Strejilevich 708) especially when memory references trauma, or when traumatic experience induces memory. Allende is deeply traumatized by her daughter’s demise, and in Paula, she voices this pain while reflecting on her life. A particular section of the book narrates Salvador Allende’s downfall, the coup of 1973, and its aftermath. Paula serves as Allende’s personal testimony of these harrowing years and “telling the story to a listener is one way for witnesses to work through trauma” (Strejilevich 708). Writing about her life could serve as a cathartic process for Allende while she seeks the strength to accept her daughter’s death.

**Fragments of Memory, Fragment of Self**

A writer influenced by exile who relies on memory to create meaning, often composes a narrative fragmented in content and structure. Jaina C. Sanga agrees that the notion of fragmentation is relevant as the exile, or migrant’s, identity can be seen as a compilation of “shreds and scraps” of meanings, arranged and rearranged by the experience of migration (26). Migration is clearly evident through Dorfman’s exile from Chile and his reliance on memory to capture and record past experience. The very structure of Heading South, Looking North is
fragmented. Even the title of Dorfman’s memoir denotes a schism between South (Latin America, Chile) and North (specifically the United States). The chapters are arranged in a consecutive juxtaposition of Dorfman’s life and the crisis of the coup. For example, chapter one titled “A Chapter Dealing with the Discovery of Death at an Early Age” narrates the eve of the Chilean revolution. The following chapter “A Chapter Dealing with the Discovery of Life and Language at an Early Age” begins with Dorfman’s birth in Buenos Aires. Through these juxtaposed stories of Dorfman’s biography, multiple exiles, and the crisis of 1973, we can see how time and space are fragmented and mutable. Even within each distinct chapter, Dorfman wavers between narrating experiences of his childhood, and marking the key moments of September 11, 1973, describing his actions the night before the coup, and describing the present moment of writing. Fragmentation within the narrative marks the limits of geography and chronology and affirms that all experience plays a role in creating meaning. According to McClennen, the text’s play with time points to the “incommensurability of the subjective time of memory and historical time” (181). This is further compounded by the text’s structure around a traumatic event [the coup] which cannot be logically explained by one person. This type of fragmented narration reveals the “murkiness and messiness of memory, as well as the exile’s acute awareness of, on the one hand, how dates and places can change one’s life forever and, on the other hand, how these watershed moments leak beyond traditional conceptual strategies of containment” (McClennen 182).

We see this same type of fragmented narrative structure occurring in *Widows*. Chapter ten is completely missing from the text. Here, we have a major gap in the narrative with the following explanatory note from the fictional author’s son:

My father had indicated here the existence of a section in the original manuscript, coinciding with the above number. As there seems, in fact, to be a gap at this point in the text, it’s preferable to advise the reader of this omission. There is no way of knowing what might have happened or what was planned for this section of the novel. (139)

Chapter eleven begins with a scene of Alexis in a jail cell, with a dislocated shoulder and hood over his head. There is a disconnection in the narrative. Why did Alexis get arrested? We learn from Alexis’ stream of consciousness that he dislocated his shoulder while trying to escape. We are not aware from whom Alexis was trying to escape, although we can speculate that it was from the military. Alexis’ arrest is obviously a climactic and traumatic moment in the sequence
of the story. This attests to the failings of memory to accurately atone for every moment of human experience. The gap in the narration also encourages the reader to play an active role in deciphering the narrative action. This type of fragmented storyline was a deliberate narrative choice made by Dorfman. As noted earlier, Dorfman had originally planned to publish *Widows* under a pseudonym so that his novel could circulate freely within Chile. He “hoped readers would be persuaded that it had indeed been penned forty years ago in Denmark, just before the author himself was taken off into the “nacht und nebel” (5). Dorfman wanted the text to accurately reflect the writings of the fictional Eric Lohmann, who was arrested and disappeared by the Gestapo a few weeks after he finished the draft of *Widows*. The gap in the narrative then could denote a portion of the manuscript that was lost, or could simply be related to Lohmann’s need to finish his book before his pending arrest.

Allende also acknowledges gaps in *Of Love and Shadows* and attributes these holes in the narrative to issues of censorship and the physical distance endemic to exile:

> Although I had abundant information, there were large lacunae in the story, because many of the military trials were conducted in secret and what was published was distorted by censorship. In addition, I was far from the scene and could not go to Chile to interrogate the involved parties as I would have done under other circumstances . . . I wrote the novel from the material in my file of clippings, a few books, some tapes from Amnesty International, and the inexhaustible voices of the women of the *desaparecidos* speaking to me across distance and time. (Paula 284)

This passage brings us to a crucial turning point. Allende admits to the “lacunae” in her narrative, and partially attributes these spaces to the displacement that results from exile. Yet, she does state that the “inexhaustible voices of the women of the *desaparecidos*” spoke to her “across distance and time.” Distance and time are occluded in the exilic experience because exile disrupts the relationship between the present, past, and future. Sophia McClennen’s analysis of the exile’s relationship to the past provides insight on this issue:

> In addition to being outside of the present and the future of their former nations, exiles are also excluded from the past. In dictatorial versions of history, the exile is erased. For these reasons, exiles often find themselves obsessed with recording their

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24 Nacht und Nebel (German for “Night and Fog”) was a directive of Adolf Hitler on December 7, 1941 which resulted in the kidnapping and disappearance of many political activists throughout Nazi Germany’s occupied territories.
version of history, one that accounts for those who opposed the dictatorship. Yet these memories are always flawed, always tainted by the distortions of the exile’s imagination and desire. The past is solely understood in light of the present and vice-versa. (*Dialectic of Exile* 59)

We can read both Allende’s and Dorfman’s texts in light of McClennen’s point that exilic literature often refutes official history with personal testimonies that rely on a “flawed” memory to interpret the past while being influenced by the present. In *Paula*, Allende views memory as “a Mexican mural in which all times are simultaneous” (23). The narrative structure of the text juxtaposes Allende’s present care for Paula with momentous events from Allende’s past. For example, the electric shock stimuli Paula receives in the hospital to measure her reactions project Allende back in time to the torture of political prisoners in Pinochet’s Chile; the re-creation of Allende’s painful exile in 1975 to Venezuela transpires into a description of the birth of her granddaughter in 1992, California.

Regarding her exile, Allende writes: “I learned very quickly that when you emigrate, you lose the crutches that have been your support; you must begin from zero, because the past is erased with a single stroke and no one cares where you’re from or what you did before” (*Paula* 242). This sentiment is echoed in *Of Love and Shadows* by Professor Leal, Francisco’s father, who fled from Franco’s Spanish dictatorship years before. He warns Irene and Francisco to not allow nostalgia for their past to burden their future lives in exile: “All you will have is the present. Waste no energy crying over yesterday or dreaming of tomorrow. Nostalgia is fatiguing and destructive, it is the vice of the expatriate. You must put down roots as if they were forever, you *must* have a sense of permanence” (278). In *Of Love and Shadows*, Allende writes about her past which also encompasses the past of numerous Chileans. The end of the novel parallels her own persecution by the junta and subsequent journey into exile. Although she eventually put down her roots in Venezuela, she maintained her relationship to the past in order to devote her writing to the liberation of the Chilean people under the tyranny of Pinochet. In this way, Allende bridged the gap between past and present. In *The Anatomy of Exile*, Paul Tabori cites Joséf Wittlin on the tenuous relationship between past and present:

> In Spanish, there exists for describing an exile, the word *destierro*, a man deprived of his land. I take the liberty to forge one more definition, *destiempo*, a man who has been deprived of his time. That means, deprived of the time which now passes in his country. The time of his exile is different. Or rather, the exile lives in two different times simultaneously, in the present and in the past. (32)
We can read both Allende and Dorfman in light of this concept. Their testimonials explore traumatic incidents in the past, and their texts are inevitably affected by their current lives in exile. Displacement from Chile, although painful, provides them with the opportunity to openly speak and write against the brutality occurring in their homeland.

**Universalizing Place and Time**

The elements of place and time can also be analyzed within the content and structure of *Widows*. This is depicted through a fragmented, non-linear structure which universalizes the setting of the novel. The fragmented narrative parallels the uncertainty of memory, as well as the exile’s futile desire to claim precisely what is lost. When publishers refused to publish his book in South America, Dorfman’s decision to not use the pseudonym did not change its content or structure. Although “access to the readers [he] wanted to reach was blocked,” he chose to keep the narrative intact:

> By forcing myself to choose my words with caution, by forcing myself to witness such a traumatic and immediate experience from a distance, by forcing myself to explore a language which could not be traced to the style that Latin American readers and critics might have recognized as my own, it seemed to me I had managed to make the plight of the missing people into something more universal, which could happen anywhere, at any time, to anyone. (7)

The novel is set in Greece, transforming the local and universal space. Disappearance is universal; it occurs throughout the world during times of strict government control. Dorfman disengages the plight of the disappeared as a strictly Chilean issue, and affirms that this book speaks on behalf of victims of disappearance throughout the world. This technique affects the urgency of the issue and demands awareness from a global readership. According to McClennen, exile literature wavers between seeking subversion locally and globally (43). The exile, in a sense, is without borders. No longer confined to the national borders of Chile, Dorfman exists in a physical space without boundaries. He must speak on behalf of his homeland, but he [or rather the fictionalized Danish author he creates] roots the novel in an

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25 Notorious for their occurrence in Argentina, Chile and other countries in the 1970s, disappearances are more than just a Latin American problem. Hundreds of thousands of people have disappeared in countries such as Iraq, Sri Lanka, South Africa, the United States, China, the former Yugoslavia and many others. These men, women and children are the victims not of wars between nations, but of deliberate government policies of repression.
ambiguous village in Greece, “an imaginary place equivalent to all Europe of that epoch” (Widows 13). So in Widows, the case of the disappeared in Chile is extended to represent the disappeared from a global perspective. Finally, the location of the novel is set within a universal space that represents Chile, Greece, Europe, and the entire global community.

This universalism of place within Widows is further commented on within the novel. The fictional son who compiles his father’s manuscripts describes the novel as the “unusual mixture of two previous epochs in Greek’s twentieth-century history—the Metaxas dictatorship and the foreign invasion that followed” (12). His father, the fictional author Eric Lohmann, mirrors Dorfman in the need to disguise the setting of his novel to avoid censorship and to promote circulation. This extension of place from a local to global sphere further denotes the universal exigency for illuminating the issue. Furthermore, “he set his novel in that distant realm, which suffered a similar tragedy, the better to comment on what was occurring around him. The Norwegian and Danish events that he knew so well were perhaps too close to home to contain his visions” (12). In language that mirrors Rushdie’s reference to “imaginary homelands,” the narrator continues, “It may be that his distancing explains one of the greatest merits, in my judgment, of his work. The country he created is not Greece but an imaginary place equivalent to all Europe of that epoch” (12). This imaginary place is extended to include Chile, other countries in the Latin American Southern Cone which also suffered from military dictatorships in the mid-twentieth century, and all other countries which experience terror and trauma under a tyrannical government. By including this dialogue between the fictional Lohmann and the reader, Dorfman clarifies that this novel about the disappeared set in Greece is analogous to the events in Chile during the Pinochet government. These circumstances can happen anywhere, in any country, to anyone.

In Widows, time is also depicted as non-linear and ambiguous, which reinforces the universal appeal of the story. This is clear from beginning of the novel when Sophia Angelos first questions the captain about the body of her father: “The voice of the old woman came to them from some other time, some other throat, as if she were repeating something that had been expressed already to no purpose, that she or someone else would have to establish again some unknown day, in this country or another” (28). Sophia’s voice represents the multiple voices throughout all ages and all societies who are victims of human rights abuses and suppressed by authorities. The arrest and disappearance of individuals persecuted by unjust governments has
happened before and will happen again. What matters is the present moment and how the present dilemma is resolved. In another example, the Captain discusses the situation of the dead bodies with the Lieutenant: “Yesterday I would have given a peremptory order to clear the site and bury the body without thinking twice . . . Tomorrow perhaps I’ll have the pleasure of giving that order again . . . But today? Today we have to proceed calmly and shrewdly, disarming our adversaries, foiling their plans” (47). The passage suggests that this case of the dead bodies of los desaparecidos washing up on the banks of the river has occurred before. And it will occur again. As long as violent forms of oppression continue to occur, unclaimed bodies will continue to appear. Widows speculates that the present moment is the only moment unaccounted for and suggests that human suffering at the hands of the powerful is an infinite cycle. But, it also insists that even small acts of resistance can disrupt the system of suppression.

*Of Love and Shadows* can be read in a similar vein. In order to make an impact on her readership, Allende made the deliberate choice to not specify time and place in her text: “By not specifying time and place, more people could identify with my story. These crimes could have occurred in Greece during the era of the colonels, in Central Europe, in Argentina and Uruguay during the dirty war, in any country in Central America” (59). The reader is aware that the setting is Latin America, but the country Chile is never mentioned. Likewise, dates are left out of the narrative. We are aware that these events parallel Allende’s own life and the lives of countless Chileans, and that the crime of Los Riscos was directly inspired by the sequence of events that transpired when the bodies of los desaparecidos were uncovered at Lonquén in 1978. But never once does Allende mention specific names or dates within the narrative. In order to gain the widest possible audience, she must narrate her nation’s horror from a perspective that recognizes that similar abuses happen all over the globe.

The nonlinear structure of the novel embodies its inherent political nature. Allende’s focus on personal histories, the love story between Irene and Francisco, and her representation of marginalized voices subverts the linear tradition of historical representation. While there is a general sense of forward movement through time, there is no concrete, chronological time line in the novel. Rather, according to Carrie Sheffield, “[t]ime is reliant upon a memory that focuses

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on events rather than dates” (34). The text transitions between various voices, perspectives, and personal stories. Evangelina’s abduction and disappearance are told by three different individuals: by Digna Ranquileo (Evangelina’s mother), by Pradelio Ranquileo (Evangelina’s brother), and by Sergeant Faustino Rivera. The military’s crime unfolds not through chronological narrative, but through the juxtaposition of fragmented stories that contradict as well as compliment one another.

Chronological time is further subverted by a narration that takes the reader from the present terrors of the junta to particular personal experiences that occurred earlier and which shaped the current sequence of events. For example, toward the end of the novel, Francisco searches for Pradelio Ranquileo who escaped from the military barracks after learning of his sister’s disappearance. He finds the cave where Pradelio has been hiding and begins leafing through Pradelio’s belongings. The narrative immediately reverts back to a memorable event in Francisco’s past: “Sitting in the cave, Francisco Leal remembered his own emotions the only time he had ever held a firearm in his hands” (201). We learn that at the age of sixteen Francisco had run away from home with eight friends to become a revolutionary. The ragtag group had stationed themselves in the mountains to hone their skills. Soon discovered by his father, Francisco willingly returned home but did not abandon his revolutionary ways. When the coup occurred, Francisco joined an underground network to help smuggle victims out of the country. Such personal histories unfold periodically throughout the text, embedded in the larger narrative. This narrative strategy mirrors the relationship between memory and testimony by suggesting that the present is only understood in terms of the past and vice-versa.

Time is also deliberately convoluted in the narrative when the Leal’s exile from Spain is described. The Leal’s exile foreshadows Irene and Francisco’s exile which occurs later on in the story. During a family dinner at the Leal’s home, the narrative abruptly transitions to the story of Professor and Hilda Leal’s expulsion from Spain after the Spanish Civil War. Fighting on the side of the Republicans, Professor Leal participates in the war while his wife accompanies him behind the scenes of the battlefront. After giving birth to their first child, Hilda loses her memory when the impact from a bomb explosion fractures her skull. While she is recuperating, the family leaves Spain for France “along the roads of sorrow leading to exile” (94). Hilda eventually recovers her memory, although this recovery is selective:
Perhaps in that instant Hilda made up her mind to be selective in her memories, to lighten the ballast in the new journey they were undertaking, knowing intuitively that she must devote all her strength toward building their destiny as emigrants. It was better to erase the pain of nostalgia, homeland, family, and friends left behind, never to speak of them again. (95)

The selective recovery of memory can be viewed as a tactic conducive to the recollection of traumatic experience. Perhaps the individual blocks out painful memories in order to cope with the past and withstand the present. The selectivity of memory can also be applied to the tenuous relationship between the exile’s past and present. The exile must bridge the divide between the homeland and the present state of residence. Yet, we can view all past experience in this realm of exilic analysis. The passage of time is inevitable and nostalgia for the past figuratively displaces us from the present moment to past memories. The frequent transitions between present events and past experience dissolves the boundaries of time and space and stresses the relationship between exile, memory, and testimony.

The juxtaposition of the Leal’s exile and Irene’s and Francisco’s exile also emphasizes the cyclical nature of dominance and oppression. History repeats itself with these two exiles. This narrative choice highlights the cycle of oppressor and oppressed, and resistance and its repression. We can view the novel Of Love and Shadows as an instrument meant to promote an awareness of this cycle. Allende patterns these exiles as mirror images of one another. Although the circumstances differ, both the elderly couple and the young lovers are forced into exile because of their resistance to authority. Will the cycle ever end? As long as dictatorships and oppressive practices are resisted, the cycle will continue to be challenged. Testimonial literature is one outlet of resistance. Allende’s novel can be considered a critical response against abusive domination and subjugation. Her testimony joins the countless other testimonies written in exile which work to subvert tyranny and disrupt the cycle. Oppression and resistance are fundamental components of power relations, hence the need for testimonies from individuals who adamantly refuse to be coerced into silence.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Pinochet dictatorship gave birth to a profusion of Chilean testimonial literature written in exile. Chilean exile and writer Fernando Alegría comments on the direct relationship between the military coup and literature: “It was not until after the military coup that Chilean literature let loose, with its batteries overcharged; it came out angry, tormented, looking anxiously . . . for a way to confer aesthetic dignity on something which could, if one were not careful, be reduced to a mere explosion of creativity importance” (22). Writing their testimonies was an outlet for these writers to demand dignity abroad while their homeland was under attack by an internal enemy.

A considerable number of Chileans were displaced from their country when Pinochet came into power.27 Many Chilean writers published their testimonies from abroad for reasons of personal catharsis and social responsibility. Julio Cortazar has commented on the responsibility of Latin American writers in exile: “I believe that we writers in exile have the means to transcend the uprooting and separation imposed upon us by the dictatorships, to return in our own unique way the blows we suffer collectively each time another writer is exiled” (14). Testimonial literature written in exile seeks transcendence through liberating both the individual and the oppressed collective body. These writers struggle against dictatorships in a revolution which uses language and writing in lieu of weapons. Testimonios often function to liberate the oppressed through the telling of those human experiences which are otherwise conveniently left out of the official story. The Pinochet government, for example, flatly denied its participation in torture and murder, and refused to acknowledge its involvement with the disappearance of thousands of Chilean citizens. Therefore, this body of literature acts to liberate those people who were directly victimized by the unjust practices of the government. The process of retelling the

27 Between 1973 and 1988, roughly 200,000 men, women, and children were forced from Chile for political reasons. This was the equivalent of two percent of the Chilean population at that time.
testimony in a narrative form relies on the memory of the storyteller or narrator. Recording these memories ensures that the stories of the voiceless – the dead, the disappeared, the marginalized – are never forgotten. The act of writing then acts to preserve history.

In this thesis, I have explored the works of two exilic writers, Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Allende, whose testimonial novels depict the violent repression and human rights abuses which occurred in Chile during the Pinochet era. *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows* counter official versions of history by providing alternate accounts of human experience. These narratives explore two cases of institutionalized disappearance by the Pinochet regime, and seek to liberate los desaparecidos, and the countless other victims who have suffered similar fates, through the telling of their stories. In writing their novels, both Dorfman and Allende were driven by a personal and political agenda to respond to the violently repressive actions of the Pinochet regime. Their literature speaks back to corrupt sources of power, and fights oppressive practices through the telling of personal testimonies. Furthermore, these narratives tell the stories of the countless Chileans tortured, murdered, and disappeared by the military. Personal testimonies are memorialized through the act of writing, which preserves marginalized histories, and works for liberation through the representation of human experience.

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined four distinct qualities which can be applied to testimonial narratives written in exile. I would like to briefly return to these points to solidify my analysis of *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows*: First, these texts provide a version of history which authoritative powers attempt to silence. The Pinochet government censored Chilean citizens through methods of fear and terror. Dorfman’s and Allende’s novels provide an outlet and voice for these personal experiences, which were ignored and delegitimized by the authorities.

Further, they urgently work to reclaim, or rewrite, past experience in an effort to record an alternative version of history that contradicts and thereby corrects official discourse. For example, both *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows* depict cases of Chileans who were disappeared and covertly murdered by the government. Typically, a murder will be surreptitious, with the body disposed of in such a way as to never be found. The person simply vanishes. The Pinochet government could deny these murders, as there is no body to show that the victim is actually dead. Furthermore, the perpetrators of disappearance often go to great lengths to obscure or eliminate all mention of the disappeared, by altering the historical record and encouraging the
silence of surviving relatives. Through their narratives, Dorfman and Allende contribute to discourse which undermines and challenges the government’s official story.

These narratives represent a collective group and therefore utilize multiple narrative voices. In their novels, both authors depict events experienced by Chilean people who were persecuted by the government. Several different accounts of historical experience are presented through various narrative voices and varying perspectives of otherwise related events. As analyzed in Chapter Three, the authors in Widows and Of Love and Shadows incorporate a range of stories from multiple individuals to assure that the peoples’ perspective is democratically represented. Furthermore, this multiplicity of voices is necessary in order to accurately represent the course of history.

Finally, in Widows and Of Love and Shadows, Dorfman and Allende record historical experience to preserve the past, assuring these events are never forgotten, or erased, from the collective memory. Dorfman and Allende memorialize human experience through literature in order to preserve records of past events. Chapter Four analyses the role of memory in these novels. Although subject to fragmentation due to the distance of exile and the passage of time, recording these memories asserts that certain experiences cannot be denied, dismissed, overwritten, or erased by official discourse. In Chapter Four, I further analyzed the techniques that Dorfman and Allende used to assure their narratives reached a wide audience. The universal representation of place and time is depicted in order to appeal to a readership who will gain an awareness of the human rights atrocities which occurred in Chile, and which continue to occur all over the world. The reader, then, shares the responsibility of preserving these memories.

**THE PERSPECTIVE OF EXILE**

The state of exile can be viewed as a critical lens through which writers can reflect on experiences endured in their homeland. Salman Rushdie lucidly explains this relationship between exile and perspective in his essay “Imaginary Homelands.” He states that Indian writers who have migrated away from India “are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of ‘whole sight’” (19). We can apply Rushdie’s analysis of exile from India to our current study. Because of their dichotomous backgrounds and experiences, writers in exile are able to recreate reality in a way that non-exilic
writers could possibly never do. Physical and psychological displacement from the homeland provides them with various angles to analyze and [re]create reality within their fictions.

Dorfman and Allende both comment on a proposed objectivity made possible by their lives in exile. In a sense, the perspective gained through the exilic experience allows for newfound understandings of the events which occurred in their homeland. Allende directly comments on this relationship between exile and personal perspective:

> Exile is better for a writer, I think. Not for his life, but for his work—it’s best . . . if you must confront a situation you don’t understand and make sense of it through your work . . . somehow the turmoil and the upheaval in my life, and my role as an observer and exiled writer, have all contributed positively to my creative capacity. (235)\(^\text{28}\)

Referring to her personal exile, Allende further states:

> It has been hard, it has been painful very often, but it has been a very good experience. It has brought out a strength that I did not know was inside me. It has given me a broad vision of the world, of my reality. The fact that I have had to put distance between my country and myself has made my country clearer to me. (105)\(^\text{29}\)

Allende did not start writing fiction until she left Chile. She attributes the critical success of her novels to her role as both the active participant and exiled observer of Chilean affairs. Dorfman alludes to this same point when he explains that exile gave him the perspective and tools he needed to write *Widows*. His displacement from Chile, in fact, allowed him the freedom to openly write on the subject of the disappeared without being censored, and allotted him a wider readership through certain publication and circulation opportunities.

In *Heading South, Looking North*, Dorfman writes, “I discovered that writing – creating an alternate vision – could influence the way one lives one’s life” (131). As an author, Dorfman hopes that his books will create hope for the future. As writers of testimonial fictions, both Dorfman and Allende create alternate versions of reality. Their novels can be read as a call to action meant to promote hope and the awareness of human suffering at the hands of an unjust government. Just as writing influences the way Dorfman lives his life, reading also influences our perceptions of human rights violations which are occurring daily on a global scale. After

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reading these novels by Dorfman and Allende, we develop our own personal perspectives on the Chilean crisis, and share the collective responsibility of learning from, remembering, and retelling these testimonies.

**THE NOVEL AS TESTIMONY**

The novel is a critical form of testimony. Although *Widows* and *Of Love and Shadows* are rooted in fiction, they still communicate essential stories of human experience under the terror of a tyrannical government. Dorfman and Allende use the fictional form to express the horrors, sorrows, and intricate bonds that collectively joined Chilean individuals during the junta-years. Their testimonial fictions serve as forms of cultural opposition because they represent accounts of subtle resistance to institutional violence and repression. These fictions serve as alternate representations of the historical record during the Chilean crisis. In the introduction to this thesis, I used theoretical analyses by Hayden White and Michel Foucault to provide a framework for my argument regarding testimony and the fictional form. According to this line of reasoning, all history can be read from a literary perspective. According to White, both the novelist and the writer of history wish to provide a verbal image of “reality.” All human beings, not just the dominant factions of society (the dictatorship), play an active role in creating history. The Chilean dictatorship circulated their version of events by denying their involvement with torture, the disappeared, and murder. Likewise, *testimonios* present a rival perspective of history, based on viewpoints and truths of individuals persecuted by the government. Fictional *testimonios*, therefore, rewrite and revise official records and are a necessary component of the body of revolutionary literature devoted to social change and justice.
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
Alternative Representations of History: Rereading Sociopolitics through Chilean Testimonial Literature

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Latin American testimonio (testimonial narrative) develops critical insight into historical, social, and cultural conditions and can serve as a catalyst for social change. It provides the opportunity to engage in new readings of history and sociopolitics. Testimonio offers an alternative representation of history—it both denounces and challenges the official representation of historical events while serving as a sociopolitical tool in promoting truth and justice. Chilean testimonial narratives written in response to the Pinochet regime (1973-1990), explore and reflect social and human rights issues and challenge the official state of affairs. These alternative representations of history are often viewed as tools for political subversion, and many writers chose exile and freedom of expression over national residence and censorship.

This thesis will analyze alternative representations of the sociopolitical crisis in Chile by examining the relationship between history and corresponding literary phenomena. My analysis will focus on testimonial literature by exilic writers Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Allende, whose narratives reflect lived experiences and rewrite official history. Dorfman’s novel Widows and Allende’s novel Of Love and Shadows both depict cases of institutional disappearance by the Pinochet regime. Dorfman and Allende use the fictional form to express the horrors, sorrows, and intricate bonds that collectively joined Chilean individuals during the junta-years. Their testimonial fictions serve as forms of cultural opposition because they represent accounts of subtle resistance to institutional violence and repression. The Chilean dictatorship circulated their version of events by denying their involvement with torture, the disappeared, and murder. Likewise, testimonios present a rival perspective of history, based on viewpoints and truths of individuals persecuted by the government. Fictional testimonios, therefore, rewrite and revise official records and are a necessary component of the body of revolutionary literature devoted to social change and justice.