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Betwixt and Between: Finding Home Again in Chilean Returnee Literature

Exile has historically been considered a temporary event that ends once the return home is realized, putting to an end the pain of living away from home with the restoration of feeling whole. Yet for many returnees, the return home fails to restore a sense of place and belonging. Although some exiles physically return to the place called home, they continue to imagine other spaces, cultures and languages, and are oftentimes unable to reemerge with their original community. They remain caught in a liminal phase, to utilize a term set forth by sociologist Arnold Van Gennep that describes rites of passage, where a person eludes or slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space (Turner 95). Transitional entities, returnees live caught betwixt and between the positions assigned by custom and convention. Yet it is from or within this very schism that some returnees move beyond the sentiments of loss and disappointment generally associated with exile and the return to render their dislocation as a positive space in which they can foster and explore new identities. Exemplified in Ariel Dorfman's memoir Heading South, Looking North (1997), Antonio Skármeta's novel Match Ball (1989), and Alberto Fuguet's work Mala onda (1991), these narratives demonstrate how ambiguity and displacement as influenced by the return from exile positively affect the (re)negotiation of belonging, location, and, most importantly, identity, and have consequently become characterizing and rejuvenating features of contemporary Chilean narrative.

The exploration of the construction of a new Chilean identity from or within the liminal position created by the experiences with exile and the return can be seen exemplified in the works of Dorfman and Skármeta, who both experienced the return to Chile after more than fifteen years in exile, and in Fuguet, who represents a generation of returnees who left Chile as infants or young children and therefore inherited the condition of exile and experienced the return as new discovery rather than recovery. In Heading South, Looking North, Dorfman reinterprets and redefines what home represents for an exile and returnee, as demonstrated by the narrator's acceptance of an ironic conception of nostalgia that celebrates rather than rejects the distance and fragmentation of a place balanced in-between the original community and away.[1] In Match Ball, Skármeta's protagonist turns his attention away from his adopted host-country and introspectively portrays and examines the characteristics of his other home, which was and will continue to be elsewhere, and in doing so venerates the phenomena of transnational migrants and international frontier conditions. The protagonist of Fuguet's novel, Mala onda, painstakingly explores yet ultimately embraces the expanding physical limits that historically have defined home and that now include diverse nations and languages existing in a heightened state of reality and movement. Unable to rejoin their original communities after their experiences away, the characters portrayed in these three narratives remain caught in a deterritorialized place. Nevertheless, they manage, in the end, to make the very place of dislocation their home, carving for themselves a new identity that lives on the threshold of something or along the way to somewhere else.

Displacement, as a by-product of the self-conscious attitude of an exile and returnee poised between cultures and languages, is a source for the thematic expression of

deterritorialization that characterizes Ariel Dorfman's autobiographical journal, Heading South, Looking North. Motivated by an expressed need to reinvent himself and accept his hybridity, Dorfman sets out in this memoir to explore the history of his labyrinthine existence.[2] Whereas Dorman's previous works written in exile and during the return process highlighted the breakdown of communication and language due to the effects of dislocation, as seen in Viudas (1981) and La muerte y la doncella (1991), Heading South takes the overall sentiment of displacement characterizing his portrayal of exile and return trips and shifts the imagery used in its representation from that of chaotic ambiguity to creative inspiration. In Heading South, Dorfman embraces the positive characteristics dislocation has had upon the formation of hybrid identities, specifically regarding the role of language. No longer bound by traditional, monolingual limits, language grows stronger as it acquires transfigurable and bilingual attributes. In this regard, the journal relates more than personal narratives of alienation and dislocation. Stylistically, Dorfman's autobiographical narrative interweaves personal oscillations among non-chronological events, multiple locations, and dual languages with general reflections on the nature of life-on-the-hyphen.

An intense memoir on multiculturalism and bilingualism that utilizes both tragic and humorous examples from Dorfman's own life, Heading South constitutes a self-reflective and self-creative act. The narrator Dorfman proclaims in the dedication that his purpose is to tell "the story of my many exiles and my three countries and the two languages that raged for my throat during years and that now share me, the English and the Spanish that I have finally come to love [. . .]" (i). After 50 years of struggle, Dorfman portrays himself at the threshold of a new millennium and recognizes the

opportunity, one he had not distinguished until now, to acknowledge and embrace his hyphenated existence. Dorfman's journal is not a nostalgic work that stresses the quest to return to an imagined utopia. Instead, Heading South focuses upon the fragments, vacillations, and ironies that have always defined his hyphenated existence and graced his language and writing.

In Heading South's beginning, Dorfman interweaves his exile experiences as a child and as a young-adult with the dislocating situation into which he was born, a son of Jewish parents who escaped Eastern Europe and who met, via the Spanish language, in Argentina. Upon the family's first political flight to the United States in 1945, Dorfman reports that he became preoccupied with belonging. When he caught pneumonia during his first winter in New York and spent three weeks recovering in an English-speaking Manhattan hospital, Dorfman decided that he must belong to one country or the other, to English or Spanish, but not to both. "[. . .] I instinctively chose, the first time I was truly alone with myself and took control of the one thing that was entirely my own in the world, my language, I instinctively chose to refuse the multiple, complex, in-between person I would someday become [. . .]" (42). Since he no longer lived in Argentina and the world around him no longer spoke Spanish, he explains that he reinvented himself in order to survive:

> Just as I had been delivered in that Manhattan hospital. Because America whispered to me the same message, reinforced the same message I had whispered to myself so only I could hear it in that hospital: You can become someone else, you can give birth to your self all over again. You

> can reinvent yourself in an entirely new language in an entirely new land. (49)

Because the question of language had become ensnared in the question of nationality, and therefore of identity, Dorfman concluded that he must become an American. He chose the nation in which he would build his new home and disconcerted his parents by answering their questions in English. He closed the door to imagining that his birth-land and native-language could be part of his exile experience in the North.

According to Dorfman's account, he could not accept a hyphenated identity at this juncture in life. Preoccupied with finding a stable place, a place in which he could construct an emerging identity, he rejected his multinational and bilingual heritage, symbolized by changing his name upon leaving the hospital to Edward, or Eddie. Despite the young Dorfman's efforts to assimilate into the United States, his quest to remain in one place and speak one language ended in failure. Ten years after his family arrived, they were again forced to leave, this time under Senator Joseph McCarthy's political pressure. But with the perspective of time and distance, Dorfman recollects that this childhood defeat proved to be an incredible, blind act of fate because it took him back to Spanish and to the place he discovered as his "real" home, Chile.

Initiated by this second exile experience, the narrator ironically recalls that he began to consider his existence as a life defined by contradictions, and general reflections on multinational and bilingual identities in the narrative increase in frequency from this point forward. Dorfman recollects that although he did not first recognize or accept his dual heritage after his family's arrival in Chile, he did not reject it as he had previously done. As recalled through the lens of language, he grew to feel increasingly comfortable

in his other home in the South when Spanish made a come-back and became the language of his maturation:

> A day comes back to me—I must have been sixteen—the first time I realized that Spanish was beginning to speak me, had infiltrated my habits. It was in carpentry class and I had given a final clumsy band with a hammer to a monstruous misshapen contraption I had built and it broke, fell apart right there, so I turned to the carpentry teacher and "*Se rompió*," I said, shrugging my shoulders. His mouth twisted in anger. "*Se, se, se,*" he hissed. [. . .] And all of a sudden I was a Spanish speaker, I was being berated for having used that form of the language to hide behind, I had automatically used that ubiquitous, impersonal *se*, I had escaped into the language, *escapé lenguaje adentro*, merged with it. (114-115)

As Spanish fulfills his search for a linguistic home, it is also at this moment in time that previously defined spaces open into uncharted territories and Dorfman begins to accept that reincorporation to the whole, a true return home in the sense of reaggregration, will never be possible. Instead, Dorfman begins to embrace his place in the world as a fluid position in-between, a life situated on-the-hyphen, and as the merging structure of the memoir demonstrates, his initial attempts to (re)order life and transform loss into certainty slowly give way to accepting and embracing chaos.

At the end of Dorfman's memoir, the northern and the southern continents, the two interpretations of nostalgia, the past and the present, and the English and Spanish languages meet up and collide into a zone that is neither one nor the other but both. In 1973, the cumulative year presented in the memoir's structure, Pinochet's coup d'état

threw Dorfman into another experience with non-belonging. Yet again, his physical world imitated his linguistic vacillations. Multiple languages confronted and contradicted each other, and merged into deterritorialized zones that no longer represented the past or the present, the original or the exile community. Although Dorfman was cast into no-man's-land, first to Argentina, then Europe and the United States, it becomes evident that his struggle with cultures and languages was beginning to draw to a close. Boarding the plane that takes him from Santiago, Dorfman recalls that he was finally able to welcome the fact that he will forever live a dislocated life:

> [. . .] look at me with my two languages and my two cultures, look at me swearing to go back, look at me excited to have the world in front of me, look at me as those two myths of human existence dispute me, the myth that promised me that I would return for good, and the myth that whispered that I would wander forever, there I am, unable to divine which of these two contains the ultimate truth of my life. (276)

Although Dorfman's story about a search for home concludes with events that occurred over thirty years ago, the memoir itself demonstrates that he was ultimately able to address his multiple national and linguistic identities that, he argues, he had been much too vulnerable to previously face. Even though he had recognized his multinational and multilingual status upon his expulsion from Chile in 1973, he had not embraced nor celebrated the attributes of cross-fertilization until the creation of this text. In 1997, the quest to erase his hyphenated identity eventually gave way to the celebration of dislocation and the acceptance of its creative impact. With Heading South, Dorfman replaces the pursuit of the collective home with the acknowledgement of home's

ambiguous nature, lending focus to the creative, powerful attributes of hyphenated lifestyles and bilingual wanderings.

Similar to Heading South, Antonio Skármeta's novel Match Ball moves away from the nostalgic portrayal of a collective home and the representation of belonging to a particular location or place. But whereas Dorfman's autobiographical journal ultimately portrays exile and the return as locations unified at a place in-between, Match Ball symbolically represents the dislocating effects produced during and from the return by evoking the memory of the place called home and the place of exile as two distinct communities. Written during the period of transition between exile and the return home--but not published until after Skármeta's arrival in Chile with the intention to establish lasting residency--Match Ball explores the themes of expatriation and dislocation by presenting the adventures of the protagonist, Dr. Raymond Papst, and by charting the feelings, experiences, and locations of this man who lives in the world as a foreigner. Through fast-moving changes of scene, a cinematographic technique that mimics the game of tennis referenced in the novel's title, Papst's narrative underscores the themes of versatility and freedom encountered in movement. In this manner, Match Ball does not portray the image of home as a cohesive and unified place, but rather represents home as defined by diverse locations, cultures, and people characterized by experiences with transience, global market economies, expatriation, and the freedom inherent in rootlessness. By promoting versatility and freedom throughout the narrative style and thematic content, Match Ball pays homage to diverse cultures and heterogeneous locations of residency—that which the author may have feared loosing upon his return from exile.

Presenting residence as an indeterminate place created from the experiences of the diaspora, Match Ball begins with a prologue by a fictionalized narrator from an unnamed Latin American country who introduces Papst, a North American medical doctor living in West Germany and married to a wealthy German baroness. The majority of the text represents the confession of Papst, who distantly narrates the events leading up to his tragicomic circumstance—his incarceration in a London jail for attempting to murder the competition for his teenage girlfriend's affections. Although Papst occasionally invests himself emotionally in his narration and defends the pursuit of his goals, only long enough to recognize briefly the imprudence of his actions, he narrates the majority of events from a serenely detached position. Likewise, the reader remains distanced from Papst and his confession. Exemplified in his description of how he met his wife at an Ivy League cocktail party for foreign professionals, Papst's use of irony and candid, colloquial language in the relation of his tale heightens the comic nature of the novel:

> Para mi fortuna, esta mujer tenía una ligera mácula. Sabía italiano y francés, pero no dominaba el inglés. Con orgullo aristocrático, no estaba dispuesta a traficar en un idioma que no manejara a la perfección. Como se sabe, en Estados Unidos se divide a la gente entre quienes hablan inglés y los idiotas. Eso provocó que aquella mujer bellísima se exiliara en un rincón de penumbras a padecer nuestro *chablis* californiano. Me acerqué y le pregunté su nombre. Me contestó con dos frases. "Ana von Bamberg" y "No hablo inglés". Notando su acento, le dije en alemán: "Una virtud que celebro". Y al ver brillar sus generosos ojos verdes en

> aquel salón, por primera vez perdoné a mis padres que me hubieran mandado a la *Deutsche Schule* de Boston. (12)

Because the reader laughs at the character and his actions, s/he knows that neither he nor his crimes must have caused any serious harm. Although his tragicomic narration creates the impression of a life truly lived, Papst represents a character not to be taken too seriously.

In contrast to Skármeta's previous novels written in exile, such as Soné que la nieve ardía (1975) and La insurrección (1982), in which the narrator or narrators offered varied points of view that contributed to an overall cohesive and unified understanding, the narrative voice of Papst in Match Ball advances an atmosphere joviality but also of uncertainty. Although his retrospective, first-person narration follows a chronological temporal sequence with few interruptions, the protagonist filters his past experiences through his present situation, which further complicates the narration as this situation is not explained until the end of the novel. In this respect, two distinct Papsts focus the same events of the story: the protagonist who undergoes the experiences and he who recalls them later on. Alternating between these perspectives, Papst manages to displace blame for his previous actions and offhandedly attributes his current troubles to his desire to climb the social ladder and pursue a life of luxury. The other, however, recognizes the superficiality of these desires and states that his pursuit of comfort and luxury co-exist with the contradictory wish to find that which proves authentic.

Likewise contradictory for a novel written during the author's return to Chile, Match Ball displaces previously stressed Latin American centered socio-political themes and presents instead ironic and humorous adventures of the European social elite

traversing popular culture and experiencing the intrigues of international transience. Symbolized by the game of tennis, Papst's narration portrays the social atmosphere of the upper-middle class and the freedom provided by the jet-set. Papst recalls how he and his father-in-law increasingly encountered problems acquiring a court at the tennis club and often had to sit and watch others play. Because certain German nationals had entered the professional tennis circuit, namely the up-and-coming teenage tennis sensation, the talented fifteen-year old beauty Sophie Mass, the game had been growing in popularity. One day, caught spying on her during a practice session at the club, Papst quickly becomes obsessed with Sophie's ephemeral not to mention erotic characteristics. Sophie seemingly returns his affections and seduces the 52 year-old man experiencing a middle-age-crisis, convincing him to accompany her as her tour doctor. Her presence and advances turn his world upside-down and make him question his life and existence: "¿Cómo fue que, desde esta postura inicial, mi existencia se había ido convirtiendo en un procurar más poder, más dinero, más escalas que trepar, más ruido y menos nueces?" (60). Hence, without explanation or concern, Papst leaves his wife and her money, abandons his profession and reputation, and takes off to pursue the teenager in a quest for adventure.

The exit from home, instigated by the surprise arrival of Sophie in Papst's monotonous life, provides this middle-aged man with loss, but also with new opportunities and adventures in new lands. At first it seems that Sophie destroys Papst's known world and all that he had previously taken to be true. Her differences and her indecipherability invert everything, including the doctor's sense of morals. She, like the exile experience, shakes up his world, displaces his comfort, and makes him question

everthing: "¡Dios mío! Sophie Mass era inasible. Las contradicciones de su conducta me mareaban. Te ponía en un terreno pantanoso donde no era posible afirmarse en ninguna actitud frente a ella" (40). As a result, Papst, a once confident man, now swims in a sea of uncertainty. Papst becomes lost in the country he lives in, alienated from his surroundings, and out-of-control as if he were a teenager-in-love for the very first time. But Sophie, like the experience of exile, also represents more than a force that destroys. She also sets free. Sophie's destructive forces turn Papst into a different kind of expatriate, a person who wanders and moves about freely and at will. The inversion of his world brings Papst a long since absent feeling of exhilaration. Now released from his previously restrained life, Papst gains the freedom to belong anywhere and nowhere.

At this point, although the protagonist's narration began in West Germany, Match Ball becomes void of any singular, local specificity as it refers briefly to Latin American, the United States and Spain, and then quickly moves to the cities of Berlin, Paris and London. In each of these cities, the protagonist embodies the sojourner, a temporary resident who straddles hemispheres, living on the periphery and observing certain national characteristics of the people and places he visits on his way to somewhere else. From his external viewpoint as foreigner, further heightened by the image that he writes his memoirs isolated and removed from the world he writes about, Papst narrates the events leading up to his present circumstance. He reveals that he had been living in Berlin for some time, but continued to feel as an outsider despite his success as a physician and his marriage to a prominent citizen. Nevertheless, his estranged positioning had its advantages. The North American protagonist studied his wealthy, overweight patients and discovered a technique useful, not to mention lucrative, in this

culture devoid of physical contact. Ironically perpetuating national stereotypes that undermine the medicinal technique he employs, he had observed that:

> Nada estimula más a un alemán que lo premien por un esfuerzo. Un ejemplo de mi técnica: Si algún día me encontrara con Günter Grass no le diría: "Cuánto me gustó su novela *La rata*, sino "¡Le debe haber costado *años* escribir *La rata*!" (13).

Separated from the culture in which he lived, Papst saw how to exaggerate his patient's small achievements and, therefore, acquire an honorable size clientele and prestige.

The inexcitability of the Germans, in Papst's estimation, intensifies the cultural shock he experiences when he encounters the characteristics and culture of the next nation he travels to, the sensual land of the French. In what he portrays as an exquisitely detail oriented and sexually liberated country, where men and women receive the same amount of prize money for winning professional tennis tournaments (76), Papst's enthusiasm peaks when given the opportunity to work as Sophie's tour-doctor at the French Open and subsequently cavort with the Parisian elite. Papst becomes ecstatic with the possibility that he has been given a second chance to live a more authentic life than the one lived in West Germany. For Papst, authenticity, which he believes he sees in the teenager Sophie, represents more than the recovery of youth. The authentic includes all that symbolizes spontaneity, indecipherability, and the intensity of living. Spontaneous living, however, has indeterminate outcomes. In Berlin, Sophie resumes a romantic relationship with Pablo Braganza, a pale, intelligent, young Spanish romantic who also follows the tennis star's every move. Although Papst initially succeeds his competitor, she seemingly resumes her relationship with Pablo yet again after she travels to England

to play Wimbledon. Jealous and out-of-control, Papst shoots Pablo in a London hotel. Although Papst doesn't kill him, he is incarcerated for carrying and utilizing a weapon. Hence, Papst must listen to the remainder of Sophie's tennis matches on a radio from the English jail cell where he writes the confession we read.

Although incarcerated, Papst seems content and appears to accept his present condition. He casually reveals to the reader that his wife divorces him and marries his partner, that his father-in-law disinherits him, and that he will spend the next seven years in prison. Sophie travels the world, plays in international tournaments, and attends celebrity parties with Pablo that Papst reads about in the tabloids. She refuses to visit him, but sends him a tennis racket for Christmas and tells him to stay in shape, alluding to the possibility that upon his release, they may indeed share a future together: "Después que los presos despejan la cancha de básquetbol, bajo hacia ella impecablemente vestido de blanco, y juego a hacer rebotar una pelota contra el paredón usando la raqueta navideña, de Sophie, en absurdo remedo de un partido de tenis contra un fantasma" (203). Despite his incarceration, Papst will, and in essence does, have the freedom to choose the next step he will take. He closes his report, neither apologizing for his crimes nor alluding to the fact that he will not continue to pursue Sophie upon his release. It seems that he has no intention to return to his previous, monotonous life, but rather plans to continue his life of adventure and wanderings, and search for whatever proves to be "authentic." Although his mid-life experiences have been less than perfect, Papst has discovered exhilarating freedom in the most unlikely and indeterminate places. Living in the diaspora, a space defined as home in a paradoxical state, Papst remains a contradiction just as the experiences with exile and return foster a sense of rootlessness

and at the same time present new opportunities to expand the traditional and historical association people have with their place in the world. Symbolic of the space encountered upon the return from exile, home is an amalgamation of places that exist independent of each other in the realm of the beyond.

Similar to the effects of Papst's and Sophie's jet-set lifestyle, many members of a generation of Chilean authors who inherited the experiences of exile and the return from their parents express new ways of thinking about and interpreting home due to their childhood experiences with transience and travel.[3] The narrators and characters in their works, as seen in Fuguet's novel Mala onda, represent the self-conscious attitudes of young adults who permanently live among multiple cultures of different nations. Young Chileans are humorously presented coming to terms with the consequences of broken homes, ruptured families, and a divided nation as affected by international movement. As consequences of intercontinental communities created by movement and globalization, the literature of the return exemplified by Mala onda promotes a new approach to thinking about home, one that endorses the expansion of the physical limits that have historically defined it to include diverse nations, languages, and cultures. Through ironic humor and colloquial language, Fuguet imparts a way exile and return experiences can be incorporated into the construction of post-Pinochet identities—by engaging in living in a globalized world connected beyond geography via satellites and the World Wide Web, and laughing at the absurdity of it all.

Fuguet's novel Mala onda presents Matías Vicuña, the 17-year-old narrator, who, the week before Chile's 1980 plebiscite, aimlessly wanders the city streets of Santiago. Narrating in first person, Matías recounts twelve days of personal struggles with family,

friends, sex, drugs, and the changing Chilean culture as they intertwine with the political events of a national plebiscite. Matías inward quest, the search for his identity and place within the world in a rapidly changing country and as a member of a dislocated generation, parallels the dilemmas that the country must also investigate during this period of transition: how to establish a new identity on volcanically unstable ground. Aided by youthful energy and an ironic sense of humor, Matías negotiates the problem of forging a Chilean identity outside the traditional definitions of residency and borders. In this vein, mobility dominates his adventures, determines his (in)ability to (re)integrate with home, defines his multidimensional reality, and underscores the seismically shifting ground upon which he attempts to construct a place of belonging.

In Mala onda's first chapter, which symbolically begins with the protagonist's return to Chile after a class trip to Brazil, Matías anxiously contemplates his surroundings and the pre-determined conditions that continue to shape his life experiences. As the school trip draws to a close, he will soon return to Chile, leave the warm beaches, and abandon the sensuous companionship of his new Brazilian girlfriend. A nauseous feeling swells in his throat as he considers his return and compares the political, economic, and sexual freedom experienced in Río de Janeiro with the politically charged and repressive economic and social conditions within Chile's capital. Stepping off the plane, Matías immediately mourns his return:

> Fue algo tenso, algo fuerte, prefiero ni recordarlo. Es como si hubiera pasado de todo y al final nada; como si todo el hueveo y la farra y esos días en Río con la Cassia y la playa y el trago y el jale y todo, se quebrasen. Como si, de puro volado, hubiera apretado *record* en vez de

> *play* y después cachara que mi cassette favorito se borró para siempre:
> quedan los recuerdos, seguro; hasta me sé la letra, pero nunca más volveré
> a escucharlo. Cagué. Estoy de vuelta, estoy en Chile (33).

Overcome by an involuntary wave of nausea underscored in the novel's title, Matías arrives home to a country consumed by an electoral process that he, among many others, neither understands nor in which he participates. Like those Chileans who inherited their exile and return experiences from their parents and elders, Matías is shaped and determined by the choices of his nation's adults and leaders. Frustrated by imposed temporal restrictions, confused by contradictory politics, and disillusioned with previous generations' solutions, Matías longs to escape back to Brazil or to any other place outside Chile.

His thwarted pursuit of freedom in combination with his self-professed ignorance and disassociation from the political situation of his country mirrors the novel's characterization of the national atmosphere and the sentiments of political apathy of Matías's generation. He finds no comfort in politics. For Matías, politics seem to damage his pursuit of a good time and interrupt his search for something authentic to which he can belong. He observes the frenzied atmosphere of his nation as it prepares for the plebiscite, and recognizes its hysterical and inconsequential movement. The kinetic yet restricted activity, the frantic behavior held in check by the government's imposed curfew, creates a cyclical movement that heightens Matías's nausea. Since his country's political situation only seems to enhance his feelings of isolation and loneliness, Matías turns to his family for a semblance of stability. Yet when he arrives home from the airport, he returns to a dysfunctional place where—as for the exiles who returned to

Chile—no one waits to greet him. His hypocritical family, in particular Matías's father, appears to be more concerned with their superficial obligations and maintenance of their status within high-society than with listening to Matías's journeys and adolescent preoccupations. Matías expresses through his black humor his disillusionment with them:

> Miro el techo pero no encuentro nada de interés, así que me tapo con la almohada. Pienso: la sola idea de juntarme con mi familia y la parentela hace que la palabra depresión quede corta. Me dan ganas de hurgar en la naranjísima libreta de teléfonos de mi vieja y buscar, en la lista de emergencia, a alguno de los varios psicólogos que han asisitido a mis hermanas. Me reprimo. Estoy cagado: no debí haber vuelto. Esa es mi conclusión final. Apenas un día acá y ya no lo aguanto. (42)

Estranged from his country, marginalized by politics, and alienated by the members of his own family, Matías reluctantly concludes that he will find no refuge at "home."

Although Matías initially believed that crossing national borders would solve his problems and restore the sense of freedom he had experienced in Brazil, he eventually decides after a few days at home that another voyage outside will not. Influenced by the political discrepancies of his friend Paz who he seeks in his parents' absence, annoyed by his generation's superficial reverence for all things North American, and confused by the hypocrisy and intolerance of his beautiful, charming and older mentor Flora, Matías eventually concludes that contradictions exist everywhere. The solutions to a meaningful existence, Matías bleakly yet optimistically surmises, must lie within himself and his rapidly changing country. Matías wanders alone into the depths of the streets of Santiago

and boards a bus headed into the poorest and most dangerous section of town. He crosses the invisible internal borders that divide his city, the divisions between the rich and poor, and in doing so, questions the definitions and restrictions that had previously limited his affluent world:

> Después no me acuerdo qué pasó. O sea, me acuerdo pero no lo entiendo. O mejor dicho: no sé por qué me dejé llevar por mi estado de ánimo. Poco a poco, la micro fue alejándose de los lugares más conocidos e internándose en barrios lenajos y ajenos. Cuando cruzamos Tobalaba y el Grange, pensé en bajarme, pero no me moví. [. . .] Ahí debí haberme bajado, pero no pude. Pensé: estoy lejos, mejor sigo y me bajo en el centro. Pero el centro nunca llegó y el recorrido de la micro continuó. (249)

Motivated and exhilarated by adventure and fear, Matías gets off the bus, wanders around the dark and violent streets of this unfamiliar neighborhood, and pushes the threshold of his known limits as the curfew hours draw near.

The next day, when Matías accidentally runs into his grandfather on the streets that have been taken over by anti-Pinochet protests and his grandfather takes him into his social club to escape the tear gas and violence, Matías again becomes aware of the discrepancies that make his survival possible. The high class Club de la Unión completely contradicts Matías's perceived sense of independence. He must put on a tie before entering the prestigious right-wing social club, where he feels as out-of-place as he does in his friend's Paz's bar. Matías recognizes that there are no definitive options remaining for his generation. Wandering among contradictions and slipping across

borders seem to be the only constants in his life, and are the dislocated spaces in which he ultimately finds refuge. As he stares at himself in the mirror at the Club while the barber neatly clips his hair, thinking that military police hold guns to other young men's heads, Matías finally recognizes that this is his world. Looking around him and the men that sit near him in the club, Matías's acknowledge his own ironies and those of his nation:

> El silencio era increíble y molesto. Cerca mío, bajo un gobelino eterno y desteñido, unos viejos muy reviejos tomaban té con una calma y un aburrimiento que revelaba con creces que no tenía la mas puta idea de lo que estaba pasando afuera.
>
> -- ¿Estás bien?
>
> -- Sí, ¿ Y Usted? (276-77).

Since Matías cannot define and order a world of his own, he must accept the one he inhabits with all of its contradictions.

At the end of twelve days, Matías begins to accept and embrace the contradictions present in his political, economic, and social experiences. He takes in the results of the plebiscite, his parents' separation, his mother's escape to Argentina, and his father's continuing immaturity, and aided by wit and a dark sense of humor, dredges up enough courage and optimism to face the future and explore the limitlessness of his new reality:

> Empiezo a descender. La pendiente está brava y con cada pedaleo, más velocidad agarro. El viento es puro, tan helado que corta. Pero sigo, me gusta. Y mientras más desciendo, mientras más me acerco a mi casa, más fuerte me siento. Es como si el viento me purificara. Es como si tuviera

> ganas de llegar. De avanzar. De dejar atrás la mala onda, la duda, enfrentar lo que me espera allí abajo. Sobreviví, concluyo. Me salvé. Por ahora. (295)

In recognition of the drastic changes taking place in his nation as well as within his family and himself, Matías finally identifies with dislocation. Through detailed descriptions of popular culture anecdotes, colloquial dialogues, and ironic self-confessed contradictions, Matías narrates what it is like to grow up in Santiago, Chile in the 1980s. Exploring the repercussions and influences that borrowed exile and the return have upon contemporary Chilean consciousness and identity, Fuguet proposes new models that celebrate original and expanding limits. As portrayed by the protagonist in Mala onda, the answers for his generation appear to lie within a humorous approach to life lived on the threshold.

Although many literary studies have approached the expression of the Chilean exile experience, the return and return experiences as integral components of exile have been, for the most part, ignored. Although oftentimes exile is considered terminated when the physical return home is achieved, post-Pinochet literature written by authors who endured a physical separation from home, as illustrated in this study, continues to manifest the return with the same sentiments of non-belonging and dislocation that defined exile. For returnees, the joy of coming home quickly fades when confronted with the changes that have taken place, the reception they receive by those who stayed behind, and ironically, the nostalgic sentiments for the place they once considered their temporary home abroad. But as testified in the works of Dorfman, Skármeta and Fuguet, amidst sentiments of loss and uncertainty, the deterritorialized zone of the recovered

home is rendered as a positive space in which returnees are able to construct a new Chilean identity and place to call home.

Notes

[1] Two interpretations of the word nostalgia exist as based upon the etymological definition that originates from the Geek root, *nostos* (home) and *algia* (longing). As discussed by Svetlana Boym in "Estrangement as a Lifestyle" in Susan Rubin Suleiman's Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances, the interpretation of nostalgia that stresses *nostos* places greater emphasis on a return to a mythical place on the island of Utopia. This type of nostalgia is reconstructive and collective. The second type stresses *algia* and does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home. Enamoured with distance, this interpretation of nostalgia is ironic, fragmentary, and singular. "If utopian nostalgia sees exile, in all literal and metaphorical sense of the word, as a definite fall from grace that should be corrected, ironic nostalgia accepts (if it does not enjoy) the paradoxes of exile and displacement" (214).

[2] I use the terms "hybrid identities" and "life-in-the-hyphen" as presented by both Ilan Stavans and Gustavo Pérez Firmat in reference to the ambiguous position of "in-betweenness" that multiple spaces, cultures, languages, and homes produce.

[3] Other authors born between 1950 and 1964, and who experienced the 1973 coup during their adolescence are: Gonzalo Contreras, Jaime Collyer, Carlos Franz, Sergio Gómez, Luis Sepúlveda, Marcela Serrano, and Ana María del Río. For more information about this generation of writers, consult Novela chilena, nuevas generaciones: el abordaje de los huérfanos by Rodrigo Cánovas.

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