

**Antonio Skármeta's Narratives of Ethnicity: Rewriting Chile's Discourses of Identity**

May Morpaw

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University of Ottawa

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of ethnic origins in Antonio Skármeta's fiction. My hypothesis is that exile in Europe and return to Chile led the author to rethink his Dalmatian-Croatian roots and his sense of self in response to prevailing discourses of national identity. I assess Chile's immigration history as well as the development of the idea of a homogeneous national identity. Blending concepts of ethnic narrative with theories of memory, identity, and literature, I trace Skármeta's literary shift towards reclaiming his roots and initiating a critical dialogue with established notions of Chilean identity. I further argue that he grounds himself in literary tradition to inscribe immigrant stories into two major foundational genres, the historical novel and the family romance. I also show that, instead of accepting the truth-telling claims of historical fiction, Skármeta employs historiographic metafiction and intertextuality to emphasize the literary nature of fictional discourse and the role of literary figures in inventing the nation. Finally, I contend that these narratives constitute literary *lieux de mémoire* (Pierre Nora), which incorporate a subjective memory into the evolving discourses on Chilean identity, thereby recognizing pluralism and fostering mutual understanding.

## Résumé

Cette dissertation examine la représentation d'origines ethniques dans la création littéraire d'Antonio Skármeta. Selon mon hypothèse, l'exil en Europe et le retour au Chili ont mené l'auteur à repenser ses racines dalmates/croates et son sens de soi en réponse aux discours prédominants en matière d'identité nationale. J'évalue autant l'histoire de l'immigration au Chili que le développement de l'idée d'une identité nationale homogène. Joignant des concepts de récits ethniques à des théories sur la mémoire, l'identité et la littérature, je trace l'évolution de

Skármeta vers la récupération littéraire de ses racines et l'amorce d'un dialogue critique avec les notions bien établies d'identité chilienne. De plus, j'argumente qu'il se fonde sur la tradition littéraire pour inscrire des histoires d'immigrants dans deux grands genres littéraires, le roman historique et la saga familiale. Je démontre également que, au lieu d'envisager le roman historique traditionnel comme une représentation de la vérité, Skármeta a recours à la métafiction historiographique et à l'intertextualité pour souligner la nature littéraire de ce genre de discours et le rôle de personnages littéraires dans l'invention de la nation. Finalement, je soutiens que ces récits constituent des *lieux de mémoire* (Pierre Nora) qui incorporent une mémoire subjective aux discours changeants sur l'identité chilienne, reconnaissant ainsi le pluralisme et favorisant la compréhension réciproque.

## Acknowledgments

As a tenth generation Canadian primarily of French descent, I have no obvious ties to immigration, exile, or the Hispanic world. Yet, some years ago I learned that my mother's paternal line descended from a man nicknamed *l'espagnol* born in Burgos into a French and Spanish family, who settled in the 1660s near Quebec City, where his only son was born.

Although the ties to Spain were long forgotten, my Ottawa high school teachers fostered my affinity for the Spanish language and its literature. This interest grew through my university years, studies in Caracas (Venezuela) and Guanajuato (Mexico), and several years spent on Spanish American projects for the Government of Canada, especially in Mexico, Chile and Peru.

In searching for a doctoral research topic, I became fascinated by the treatment of immigrant roots in two novels by prominent Chilean author Antonio Skármeta. Since the ethnic diversity of our population is openly reflected in our identity discourses and in award-winning fiction, I first found it intriguing that fiction from the Southern Cone was less often studied from an ethnic perspective, despite significant waves of immigration to the region. Second, I had spent time on the island of Brač, the birthplace of Skármeta's grandparents. Third, I was acutely aware of the exile of numerous Chilean intellectuals and artists after the 1973 military coup, since Canada had acted as a host country. These disparate elements combined to make me question how and why a well-known third-generation Chilean writer would translate his Dalmatian roots and the challenges of immigrant settlement into his post-exile fiction. I had found a subject that linked three very different nations—Canada, Chile and Croatia—in novel fashion.

I want to thank everyone who has supported me during my time in the graduate program at the University of Ottawa. First and foremost, I offer heartfelt thanks to my thesis co-directors Jorge Carlos Guerrero and Agatha Schwartz. From the outset, Professor Guerrero encouraged me

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## Introduction

This dissertation examines the representation of ethnicity and its significance in the post-exile narratives of Antonio Skármeta. My argument is that a lengthy exile in Europe and eventual return to Chile produced a noticeable shift in the author's thinking about his Chilean identity and the place of his ethnic roots within it, and that he explored this changed self-perception in post-exile fiction. I contend that the brief allusions to his ethnic heritage in the early stories of *El entusiasmo* (1967) and *Tiro libre* (1973) took form decades later in *La boda del poeta* (1999) and *La chica del trombón* (2001). I read these two novels as narratives of ethnicity that use traditional Spanish American genres to redirect Chile's discourse on national identity towards greater diversity on the cusp of a new century. In the end, the author, who has described himself as not a particularly Chilean writer, embedded his Dalmatian heritage fully within Chile's narrative tradition. He chose the familiar historical novel and family romance genres to preserve and transfer that memory to present and future generations, while stressing the continuity with Chile's literary past.

After setting the general context for this study, I begin with an explanation of key terms, major arguments, and scholarly responses to Skármeta's work, as well as the methodology and structure of the dissertation. The first chapter then studies immigration policies and patterns in relation to Chile's dominant identity discourses, and juxtaposes these discourses against contemporary theories of memory and diversity. The second chapter examines the Spanish American literary tradition and its major genres; the place of immigrant and ethnic narrative within that tradition; Skármeta's literary vision; and, finally, the representation of ethnic figures in his early stories. Based on these historical and literary elements, the third and fourth chapters

analyze each of the two selected novels as narratives of ethnicity told as historical novel and family romance, respectively.

Despite significant non-Hispanic European immigration to Chile in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century, immigrants and ethnicity have never figured prominently in discourses on either identity or the construction of the nation. Chile's literary canon lacks immigrant protagonists while few fictional characters bear names that reflect minority origins. Moreover, my research uncovered limited general or scholarly interest in immigrant or ethnic writing. Indeed, Chile does not possess either a recognized body of narratives of ethnicity, written by its minority immigrants or their descendants, or a history of critical study of this type of writing. Only in recent years have critics such as Rodrigo Cánovas and Jorge Scherman turned their attention to the writing of immigrant Jews and Arabs and their descendants. Other ethnic groups, primarily European (other than Spanish) and Asian, have not yet benefitted from similar scrutiny of their writing. As a result, there is ample scope to explore the depiction of ethnicity and the immigrant in both traditional and so-called minority/ethnic literature.

The Croatian community, one of Chile's larger ethnic groups, has produced several prominent writers, with Skármeta being the best-known. Since the late 1960s, his cosmopolitan voice has evolved in dialogue with major Western and Spanish American writers, whether his predecessors or his contemporaries. There were few notable Chilean models of creative immigrant fiction when Skármeta fictionally reconstructed his roots in the late 1990s. Published in between his two well-known novels, *Ardiente paciencia* (renamed *El cartero de Neruda*) (1985) and *El baile de la Victoria* (2003), *La boda del poeta* (1999) and *La chica del trombón*

(2001) take a significantly different path from his previous work.<sup>1</sup> Although they maintain his established approach to storytelling, they deviate from his usual tales of contemporary life.

What sets the novels apart, both individually and when read as a series that chronicles several generations in the life of a family, is their representation of the immigrant as protagonist, as well as the setting in the far and near past rather than the writer's present. Just as Skármeta had innovated by depicting the culture of young urban protagonists in his early work, he wove another strand into the national fabric by grafting onto it an immigrant and ethnic perspective. This approach adds diversity to Chile's imagined community, both limited and sovereign in keeping with Benedict Anderson's now standard phrase.<sup>2</sup> The novels constitute a significant marker in Chilean literature: they advance a renewed identity that permanently incorporates the fading memory of one of its leading minority communities.

That a generation of Chilean writers and thinkers lived in exile in the 1970s and 1980s after the 1973 military coup and the ensuing dictatorship cannot be forgotten. After studying at Columbia University in New York, Skármeta had returned to Chile to teach at the University of Chile (1967-73). In the aftermath of the coup, he lived in exile in Argentina for a short period and then resided in Berlin until his 1988 return to Chile. During his years in Berlin he also taught in Europe and the United States.

Life abroad inevitably transforms individuals and alters their horizons. Moreover, their sense of identity comes into question anew when they return to a country that is no longer the same one they had fled or imagined. In addition to renegotiating their identity, many returning

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<sup>1</sup> Skármeta had planned a trilogy. In a 1999 interview with Héctor González Jordán, he discusses the challenges he faced in writing the still unpublished third novel.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) looks at how nations emerged as communities of the mind in different parts of the world. While some experts challenge his theories about how nations as imagined communities came into existence in Spanish America, especially his focus on the role of the press, the role of an "imagined community" in the process of nation-building is widely accepted.

exiles either grappled with coming to terms with the trauma of dictatorship and exile, and the associated alienation, or else turned to the post-dictatorship world. Most studies of these exiled and returned authors have focused on the trauma conveyed in their writing, or the impacts felt on their return. Few analyze the effects on identity and its reflection in their writing. Skármeta's two novels, published more than a decade after his return, have not received much critical attention, and none of that attention has focused on their immigrant or ethnic dimensions.

This project explores the motivation underlying Skármeta's fictional treatment of ethnic memory. It asks whether his exile and return led him to recast his identity to incorporate his origins, and to then situate ethnicity within his writing and national discourses on identity. What interests me is how and why he emphasized ethnicity as part of identity discourse precisely when Chile was in the process of redefining itself.

In order to probe Skármeta's particular expressions of ethnicity I needed to understand the place of immigrants and their stories in a nation that once was as open as North America to European immigration. The limited study of ethnic literature in Chile contrasts with developments in Europe and especially in North America where immigration and the minority settlement experience are central to both the literary tradition and the perception of national identity. Over the last five decades literary critics on both northern continents have analyzed immigrant and ethnic writing extensively. In the process, this form of narrative has become a legitimate component of the literary mainstream, and ultimately the canon, and is no longer classified as minority writing. Given the changing attitude towards ethnic writing noted elsewhere, I wondered if Skármeta's initiative could portend a similar direction in Chile.

## Key Terms

As background to the analysis of Skármeta's novels of ethnicity and the study of this genre of writing in Chile, it is important to clarify key terms used in relation to geography, history, hybridity, ethnicity, and ethnic writing. Skármeta is a third-generation Chilean of Dalmatian/Croatian descent. I refer to his roots as Dalmatian, rather than Croatian, for geographical, historical and textual reasons. Most of the immigration to Chile from what became the Republic of Croatia in 1991 originated from the Adriatic island of Brač. Dalmatia encompasses parts of the Adriatic coast across from Italy, which includes cities with world-heritage sites such as Split and Dubrovnik, and a number of islands such as Brač, that became highly sought-after vacation destinations during and after the years of socialist Yugoslavia (1945-91).

Dalmatia's long history as the cradle of the medieval Croatian state, with Split as its major centre on the mainland, is associated with the Roman Empire, the Venetian Republic, the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary, and Austria-Hungary. Its population is ethnically either Croatian (Slavs) or descended from the Illyrians and the Romans. Throughout history however it was perceived separately from inland Croatia and its capital Zagreb, due to its proximity to and subjugation by Venice, or to being governed later as a distinct part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. It became (with the exception of Zadar and a few islands that were part of Italy) a component of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the two World Wars and of the Republic of Croatia within socialist Yugoslavia from after the Second World War

until 1991. This history justifies describing Skármeta's ethnic identity as Dalmatian within the larger Croatian and Balkan context.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the protagonists in the two key novels are "maliciosos" who hail from Gema, one of the islands of the imaginary state of Malicia. The latter is easily interpreted as Dalmatia and Gema as Brač since many geographical and historical references, especially in *La boda del poeta*, support this reading. On the other hand, the early immigrants to Chile were often referred to as Austrians (austriacos/austriacos) since the area was at that time under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Later they were designated as Yugoslavs (yugoslavos/ yugoeslavos/ slavos), and now they are known as Croats. The use of "maliciosos" in the novels avoids these distinctions yet evokes Dalmatia, a small identifiable geographic entity. This is not the case for the author's short stories which predate Croatian independence; in them, the references are to Yugoslavia or Dalmatia.

Given the author's family roots in Dalmatia and his birth in Chile, a predominantly *mestizo* nation, it is also necessary to define hybridity. An extensive body of work has been produced on this question since the colonial period. Taken from biology, the initial concept of a hybrid as the result of mixing two races was interpreted in both positive and negative/inferior terms. In colonial Spanish America the term *mestizo* was used to describe the offspring of Hispanic and indigenous unions. Initially it covered the children born of Spanish men and indigenous women in contrast with children born in the Americas to two Hispanic parents, who were described as *criollos*. Over time, the notion of *mestizaje* expanded to include multiracial and multiethnic mixing, notably with the addition of Africans.

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<sup>3</sup> *Croatia through History* (2007) by Branka Magaš offers a comprehensive historical introduction to the area, from Roman Dalmatia to 1992 and independence.

By racial hybridity or *mestizaje* I mean the mixing of two or more ethnic groups, as in the case of Chile, without implying cultural mixing. Identity discourses in Chile have revolved around the *criollo* elite and the *criollo*-indigenous *mestizo* sub-genres of the *roto* and the *huaso* figures which are discussed in the first chapter, with little scope for immigrants from outside Western Europe.

Although these concepts are presented later in more detail, “ethnicity,” “ethnic narratives” and “narratives of ethnicity” are helpful notions to keep in mind. They are relatively uncommon descriptors when applied to Chilean writing and even arguably across Spanish American narrative as a whole. From the compelling need to tell the immigrant story in memoirs, biographies and letters through to earnest and realistic fictional depictions of that experience, and then, to the acceptance of ethnic perspectives in the literary mainstream, ethnic writing has carved out a place for itself in the Western literary canon. This trajectory is especially evident in North America where it is now common to assert that everyone, other than indigenous peoples, is an immigrant. This view contrasts with the Spanish American approach to identity which emphasized the notion of *mestizaje*, the mixing of colonizers (*criollos*) and native peoples where Hispanic culture dominated, as well as the assimilation of non-Hispanic immigrants into this dominant model. As May Blest argues, in recent decades “Latin American literature and culture have been revised by critics to reflect the continent’s plural, heterogeneous and multifaceted society. Yet, to this day, little attention has been paid to the way in which immigrants fundamental to this revision have participated in the formation of modern Latin American identities” (1).

Since the genesis of the nation often plays out in its literature, it is important to clarify what is meant by ethnicity and narratives of ethnicity. While every individual is endowed with

ethnicity based on ancestry, whether single or multiple, “ethnicity” normally signifies a difference from the norm set by the imagined community. I define “ethnic” individuals as belonging to, or descending from a minority immigrant community, and able to be differentiated from other groups, although not necessarily by race, colour, language or religion. The words “ethnicity” and “ethnic” are used to describe groups who are not descended from Chile’s indigenous peoples or its early colonizers, namely the original Spanish or other sought-after partners like the French and British. Moreover, indigenous writing is generally studied as a separate stream in Chile and may be produced in an indigenous language.

I rely on Werner Sollors’ introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity* to ground my choice of terms. While Sollors describes ethnicity as “belonging and being perceived by others as belonging to an ethnic group” (iii), he draws on Anderson’s concept of imagined communities and Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of invented traditions to consider ethnicity as an invention that “signals an interpretation in a modern and postmodern context” (xix). Instead of taking the stability of ethnicity for granted, its continuing construction can be explored as a process that results from social interactions (xix). This construction is studied in American literature, for example in the depiction of African, Jewish, Irish, Italian, and Asian Americans. Here it will be applied to two Skármeta novels.

“Narrative of ethnicity” in turn offers the perspective or sensibility of an immigrant or member of a successor generation on a world represented in fiction. This broad category of narrative subsumes a range of genres, assuming no particular defined style or form. In brief, narratives of ethnicity are simply works in which authors “choose to feature the significance of ethnicity in their writings”, as proposed by John Reilly (“Criticism” 4). Scholars have more recently coined terms such as “interethnic” (Rody) and “multiethnic” (*MELUS*; Bona & Maini)

to describe this growing literary phenomenon. While terms like ethnic literature, ethnic fiction, ethnic narrative and narratives of ethnicity may be interchangeable, for consistency I will generally use “narrative of ethnicity” in the Chilean context.

One of the controversies over the place of this type of narrative in national canons in recent decades is whether popular and canonical authors could or should be defined as ethnic or whether the adjective applies solely to marginal and minority writers. Since only some of an author’s writing may cast what William Boelhower describes as an “ethnic gaze on the world” (*Through a Glass Darkly* 95), I apply the term to the texts and not to the writer.

For reasons of clarity, any other terms requiring explanation will be defined within their respective contexts.

## **Major Arguments**

This section sets out my approach and major arguments. First of all, that critics have by and large ignored two major novels by an internationally recognized author gave me reason to question the place of immigration and ethnicity in the idea of nation. It might be that, despite his Croatian surnames of Skármeta Vraničić, a white male was not perceived as belonging to a minority or an ethnic group. Therefore, when the author’s writing diverged from his established patterns by moulding traditional genres to atypical protagonists, critics marginalized it, focusing instead on his next novel, *El baile de la Victoria* (2003) and its portrayal of contemporary Chile. The two previous novels demanded a different and unexpected reading. Their genres also contested the nation’s identity discourses, with one challenging the accepted versions of history and heroes while the other reconciled an immigrant identity within the national family.

At the same time, Skármeta did not assert his claim to an ethnic identity until after his return. By then, he was clearly cognizant of his roots and motivated to explore them. The novels suggest that, a century or more after the initial waves of immigration, he sought to find a home for his roots in Chile's literary imagination and, consequently, in its sense of identity. This is why I wondered if both exile and return might have transformed his perspective on identity, and if this evolution then caused a shift in his literary vision. I concluded that when distant origins are reclaimed and re-imagined several generations later, reconstructed memories can enrich present and future projections of national identity.

This thinking about the importance of ethnic memory prompted me to want to understand the interplay between memory and Chilean identity discourse, especially as illustrated in its narrative. I was also interested in what the fusion of the two realms could mean for Chile, both as a nation imagined in literature and as transmitted through its public discourses.

My initial hypothesis is that the experience of living in exile had a profound effect on Skármeta's sense of self. My argument is that his time spent in Argentina and, more importantly, in the former West Germany were transformative for both him and his literary production. Life abroad sensitized him to the "outsider" experience and caused him to rethink his identity and his place in the world. Unlike most of his Croatian compatriots in Chile, he also spent time in Dalmatia. This return to the ancestral home while living in exile undoubtedly deepened his understanding of exodus, migration and roots. Life in Berlin combined with the opportunity to connect directly with his origins led him to rethink his grandparents' immigrant experience and the importance of roots to his own self-image. If Skármeta's exile years caused him to question his sense of identity, further thinking occurred after his return to Chile. His heightened awareness of his double identity led him to seek to reconcile his origins with his Chilean cultural heritage,

simultaneously reaching into his past while searching for his place in the changed Chilean environment.

I contend that Skármeta's awareness of culturally diverse societies combined with his growing consciousness of his own heritage made him question prevailing ideas of Chilean identity. Life in a democratic post-dictatorship Chile brought about a shift in his literary production, resulting in stories that reflect a more complex sense of identity. This self-awareness enabled the author to carve out a place for his origins and legacy within the imagined nation by means of a fictional working through of the past. This impulse was reinforced by the nation's own rethinking of its identity at a time of national and international transformations.

The literary challenge Skármeta faced was how to reflect an ethnic heritage in the literature of a nation without a plural tradition or aspirations in that regard. First of all, the physical landmarks of the homeland don't exist in the case of a diaspora permanently relocated in Chile. Second, the cultural touchstones fade as time passes. The loss of a heritage language, rituals, customs and traditions as well as the inaccessibility of now undecipherable archives compound the task of transmitting an ethnic memory. Furthermore, the descendants of the Catholic Dalmatian settlers differ from many historically displaced groups in that their lack of discernible "otherness," such as physical traits, and intermarriage make it easy to blend in and less likely that they will be acknowledged as a community possessing a distinct history and cultural memory.

Given the significant limitations on recovering what was increasingly forgotten or interred, Skármeta took on a daunting project in seeking to revive this heritage. The struggle not to forget could only be concretely or permanently honoured through the written or recorded Spanish word. In choosing to recall a past that was rapidly disintegrating with the death of his

grandparents' immigrant generation, Skármeta crafted an imaginative rather than a factual connection to his roots. He reconstituted the origins and experiences of his community through the type of sympathetic young characters that his readers had come to expect. Backgrounds and histories that had been transmitted within his community suddenly make their way into the nation's mainstream literature at the hand of a popular and credible public figure.

In my view, reframing the immigrant past in writing by drawing on both Dalmatian and Chilean roots creates, in Pierre Nora's terms, an enduring literary *lieu de mémoire* that persists as a bond across time and generations. These fictional sites of memory create a space for meditation within the wider discourses on national identity or *chilenidad*. In other words, the notion of nation is expanded by etching ordinary and neglected immigrant histories onto its fictional representation and, as a result, broadening the range of foundational images in its reference library. Three fundamental questions arise from this reading. First, what prompted this shift from writing about characters facing contemporary situations to writing about historical events such as immigration from a disguised Dalmatia to Chile? Second, how is the vision rendered in the novels of the corpus? And finally, how might the narratives be interpreted at the time of their publication and more generally?

The representation of protagonists with immigrant roots generates a circular pattern. The immigration legacy is a reality that is absorbed into literature, which takes on a more varied complexion—sometimes noted quite literally by Skármeta in blue eyes, fair skin and foreign accents. This narrative then compels the reader to take a new look at society and its discourses. It contributes to a post-dictatorship vision of Chile, where a fragile newly-recovered representative democracy needing to process the recent trauma while undergoing a challenging transition sought to redefine itself. Skármeta was re-inventing the history of Chile, albeit in the literary

sphere. The display of ethnic roots suggests a vision of pluralism that works in synchronicity with a globalizing world.

It is my position that Skármeta's narratives of ethnicity dialogue with early discourses on *chilenidad* and offer a variation on two of Spanish America's major literary genres. First is the historical romance novel which Doris Sommer so deftly analyzed as conflating marriage and patriotism to construct the idea of nation.<sup>4</sup> The second genre is the traditional historical fiction which came under attack when the new historical fiction began to critically, and often irreverently, re-examine national figures and events in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> In *La boda del poeta* Skármeta adds an unexpected twist to these genres by invoking an immigrant past largely absent from Chile's collective memory of presumed acculturation, assimilation, and full absorption into the social mainstream. Later, *La chica del trombón* proposes a diverse national identity through a contemporary family romance, building on the post-independence novel that equated love and marriage with modernity and national progress. Each novel adapts a traditional genre that glorified heroes and bridged class as well as political differences for an innovative purpose, namely the telling of humble immigrant stories as foundational moments. Finally, the novels will be compared with two of Chilean Alberto Blest Gana's national novels, *Martín Rivas* (1862) and *Durante la reconquista* (1897). The purpose is to show that *La chica del trombón* can be read as a rewriting of the family and nation found in *Martín Rivas*, the family romance prototype, while *La boda del poeta* constructs a historiographic metafiction that contrasts with the traditional historical fiction seen in *Durante la reconquista*.

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of the national novel or national romance has been extensively explored since Sommer first proposed it as the fundamental narrative form in post-independence Spanish America in *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991). The genre has figured prominently in literature and education across the region.

<sup>5</sup> I use "new historical fiction" rather than Seymour Menton's phrase "New Historical Novel" to designate this type of historical narrative both for consistency and to avoid linking it solely to Menton. In the relevant section I explore the characteristics that theorists and analysts introduced to the study of the genre and apply them to the novel.

Ultimately, I contend that the novels construct a new site of memory for Chile's Dalmatian heritage, by embedding it alongside the nation's defining fiction and leading literary figures. These figures, especially Nobel Prize winning poets Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, are depicted in the novels as the creators of the literary nation, the mother and father whom immigrants can trust. Mistral in particular is fictionalized in *La boda del poeta* as the consul, the mother-figure who facilitates the transatlantic passage to Chile, and the poet who draws them into the literary nation. The constituencies represented in the ideal or imagined nation are altered with the arrival of foreigners who are explicitly made welcome by the nation's literary parents.

### **Review of Scholarly Responses to Skármeta's Work**

Other than a sporadic interest in Skármeta's early short stories and in *Ardiente paciencia/ El cartero de Neruda* (1985), which has been popularized through film and opera versions, scholarly attention to his narrative is sparse. His first stories attracted serious interest. In the 1960s and 1970s authoritative Chilean critic Valente, the pseudonym of Father José Miguel Ibañez Langlois, strongly criticized them for their innovations. On the other hand, Skármeta's contemporaries such as Ariel Dorfman, Poli Délano and José Leandro Urbina admired his talent. Several critics regarded the stories as a breath of fresh air that introduced young urban protagonists and the intertwined worlds of sexual intimacy and socio-political awareness into Chilean literature. In particular, they praised the opening stories of the first two collections, "La Cenicienta en San Francisco" and "El ciclista del San Cristóbal."

*Del cuerpo a las palabras* (1983), the first scholarly book to examine Skármeta's prose, compiled articles written between 1973 and 1981 for a European audience. By then, Skármeta had published two novels in exile, *Soñé que la nieve ardía* (1975), set in a boarding house during

the years of the Salvador Allende administration, and *La Insurrección* (1982), about the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution.

Critics and professors from the author's circle contributed six of the seven articles in the book. Columbian Oscar Collazos, a member of the jury that awarded Skármeta the prestigious 1969 Casa de las Américas short story prize, was responsible for the seventh. This chronological study ends with an interview with Skármeta, followed by his frequently-cited article on his literary perspectives, "Al fin y al cabo."

Raúl Silva Cacéres's introduction states that the short stories had established Skármeta as an outstanding Post-Boom narrator, thanks to his uprooted and vagabond characters (12-13) and his ability to turn autobiography into fiction (29).<sup>6</sup> In the collection, both Grínor Rojo and Juan Armando Epple see *Soñé* as an updated version of *Martín Rivas*. Dorfman in turn interprets the hero of *La Insurrección* not as an individual but as the face of the entire Nicaraguan community, a broad canvas onto which Skármeta projected his dashed hopes for Chilean solidarity. Epple traces Skármeta's early context when he and other young writers sought to redefine their generation through the tangible spaces of everyday life instead of the Spanish American Boom's totalizing worldview.<sup>7</sup>

While a few articles and dissertations followed in Germany, Holland, and France, analysis in Europe was minimal. In addition, Skármeta's work did not circulate openly in Chile

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<sup>6</sup> While many authors' early writings are autobiographical, daily life has continued to be critical to Skármeta's literary vision. Although he objected to the Post Boom label, Skármeta is described as one of its earliest and most influential members.

<sup>7</sup> The Boom refers to both the explosion of interest in, and publishing success of, a group of authors led by Julio Cortazár, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. It moved away from copying European literary movements, adopted a mythical approach to history and introduced what we know as magical realism. The Post Boom in turn advocated greater realism through genres like historical fiction and testimonials. Donald Shaw's books, *Antonio Skármeta and the Post Boom* (1994) and *The Post-boom in Spanish American Fiction* (1998), deal with this shift. Since the spelling of Post Boom is inconsistent across the literature in both English and Spanish, I use Post Boom as a noun and Post-Boom as an adjective. However, I elected to keep "Post-boom" for Shaw's book since that was his choice.

during his exile years. However, noted critic Ángel Rama, author of *La ciudad letrada* (1984), included Skármeta among the promising young authors who would modernize the notion of the region's lettered or intellectual cities by constructing, within its tradition, an urban literature of realism ("Más allá de la ciudad letrada" 209). How this would occur when authors were living in exile without access to a national readership is unclear.

Constanza Lira later expanded her article in *Del cuerpo a las palabras*, which dealt with the stories of *Tiro libre* (1973), into an academic thesis titled *Skármeta: la inteligencia de los sentidos* (1985). It described Skármeta as an influential cosmopolitan and innovative writer who renewed Chilean literature through "una sensible apertura artística de inserción en la coyuntura histórica en que vive" (12). Lira argued that the stories broke with tradition by projecting a new world, with mass media, innovative themes, and street language in "un desafío a la búsqueda de un nuevo ser cultural más allá del estrecho ámbito académico, en las fuentes de la vida misma" (40).

Although *Ardiente paciencia* did attract a degree of international critical attention when it was published, it was examined more closely after the mid-1990s success of *Il Postino*, a film based on its storyline. Nonetheless, given that this is the best-known Skármeta novel and that it confers a major role on a fictionalized Neruda, scholarly analysis is relatively limited: four articles published between 1990 and 1993 and six more after the film version was distributed.

In *Narrativa de la liberación* (1991), Monique Lemaitre reviews all of Skármeta's fiction up to his next novel, *Match Ball* (1989). The protagonist of this novel, an American doctor imprisoned in Germany, is obsessed with a teenage tennis star. Lemaitre's introduction echoes other critics, describing the author as one of the most important Spanish American writers of his generation, one who overcame the Chilean tradition of depicting the bourgeoisie.

Gordana Yovanovich published three texts dealing specifically with *Match Ball*. A 1994 article read it as a postmodern novel. Her 1991 book *Play and the Picaresque: Lazarillo de Tormes, Libro de Manuel, and Match Ball* assesses the picaresque in all three texts. Her 2010 article studied the novel from a human rights perspective. Carlos Schwab on the other hand examined its postmodern imagery of assimilation through consumption, stressing the act of gobbling (fagocitar).

Interviews with Skármeta are much more numerous than scholarly articles. The earliest interview in English appears to be the one on Skármeta's film work that John Mosier published in the *New Orleans Review* in 1980.<sup>8</sup> George Woodyard's 1988 interview in *Chasqui* focused on his plays. Marcelo Coddou's interview on *Match Ball* appeared in 1990. Juan Andrés Piña's wide ranging interview published in *Conversaciones con la narrativa chilena* (1991) deals extensively with Skármeta's life and early reading habits, his education, his first attempts at writing, his literary inclinations, and his interest in sports and pop culture, both of which colour his fiction. Despite regular media interviews and books reviews, Spanish American critics have generally ignored Skármeta since 1990.

In *Líneas aéreas* (1999), Spanish academic Eduardo Becerra contested the opinion that Spanish American literature had been static from the Boom until the 1990s. His position was that during the years of dictatorship and exile Argentine authors as well as Chileans such as Skármeta had maintained high literary standards. Becerra also emphasized that by 1979 Skármeta had already underlined how his generation had forged a new form of realism akin to the everyday world. Becerra's comments suggest that critics had turned to younger writers who cast themselves against the Boom movement, neglecting the intervening generation.

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<sup>8</sup> Lira's bibliographical reference to "Apocalipsis y apogeo de la palabra" is in fact to this Mosier interview.

In a major 1999 English-language interview with Carol Mickett, Skármeta discussed his exile and politics, his successful weekly television program *El show de los libros* (1992-2002), Neruda and *Ardiente paciencia*. The interview covers familiar ground, particularly his predilection for a literature of *convivencia*, that is, for sharing a moment or a brief connection with a reader (81). In 2011 Eleanor Wachtel, host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's signature program *Writers and Company*, interviewed several Chilean writers. While the Skármeta interview introduced him to listeners, it did not break any new ground.

While Chilean academic Grínor Rojo continues to study Skármeta's writing in Spanish America, Donald Shaw was the most prolific English-speaking academic to write about him, producing a book, a book chapter and ten articles before his retirement. In *Antonio Skármeta and the Post Boom* (1994), the only full-length English-language study, Shaw reviews all the available critical essays and interviews published in both Spanish and English. It remains the best introduction and most extensive analysis of Skármeta and his influence on writers after the Boom period.<sup>9</sup> Shaw takes a close look at Skármeta's positioning between the Boom and Post Boom. He lays out the essence of Skármeta's early articles on writers such as Juan Rulfo, Vargas Llosa and Egon Wolff as well as of the essays which set out his literary vision. He assesses Skármeta's views on realism in literature and observed reality, as well as his notions of hyperrealism or *realismo poético*. The book also summarizes interviews that Jorge Ruffinelli, Soledad Bianchi, Jorge Lafforgue, Veronica Verlichak and others conducted, and refers to *Del cuerpo a las palabras* and related articles in addition to the Lira thesis. Individual chapters are devoted to the short story collections and each novel.

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<sup>9</sup> Shaw includes a comprehensive bibliography of articles, essays, and interviews, as well as an extensive list of critical sources, some provided by Skármeta. More sources are available on the *Memoria chilena* website.

Later, Shaw included a chapter on Skármeta in *The Post-boom in Spanish American Fiction* (1998) and published articles on specific texts, discussing primarily the depiction of sexuality or narrative technique. His last article, “La boda del poeta: Skármeta’s Parody of Post-Boom Themes” (2001), analyzes the novel from a technical and thematic perspective without addressing the immigrant or ethnic question. Since this is the major article dealing with the novel, the discussion on *La boda del poeta* will return to it as well as to Shaw’s views on Skármeta’s place in the literary tradition. Shaw did not write on *La chica del trombón*.

In 2002, Rojo in “Celebración de Antonio Skármeta” enthusiastically reviewed Skármeta’s body of work. After underlining the innovations of *El entusiasmo*, he traced a panorama of Skármeta’s texts up to *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón*. He described the former as a postmodern “novela de plenitud” (148) and *La chica del trombón* as a “bellísima novela” (148) that captured the spirit of an era and evoked Skármeta’s early short stories. He also hinted at *La chica*’s complexity as both a *bildungsroman* and a work about the art of writing, without focusing on its ethnic element. In the only other article on these two novels, “Claves de la novela fiesta” (2004), Carmen Cazorro García de la Quintana views them through a carnivalesque lens, sharing some elements with the Shaw article. In 2007 Reyna Hernández Haro completed a master’s thesis on the two narratives of ethnicity and the subsequent novel, *El baile de la Victoria*, focusing in part on their sales and popular reception.

Other articles have looked back at the short stories. Ángel Flores’ 1997 article on “Nupcias,” a short story from *El entusiasmo* set in a New York subway car, contrasts it to the skepticism and transcendence of Boom writing and compares it specifically to “El Sur” by Jorge Luis Borges. In 2002, Ignacio Ossa summarized and quoted from the short story collections. Elizabeth Díaz’s article, “La vuelta en el aire de Antonio Skármeta,” reviews the author’s work

before *La chica del trombón*, more as catalogue than analysis.<sup>10</sup> In *El debate cultural y la literatura chilena actual* (2007), Guillermo García-Corales introduces Skármeta as “el líder indiscutible de la Generación de 1960 (o Generación Novísima)” in Chile and “una de las figuras más prestigiosas y reconocidas del llamado posboom de la literatura latinoamericana” (77).

Finally, three articles in a 2009 issue of *Estudios Públicos* that Casa América in Madrid dedicated to a Skármeta retrospective recognize the impact of his stories on young writers in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>11</sup> While Skármeta’s presence helps to explain its laudatory spirit, the participants display genuine admiration and affection for him. Mexican Juan Villoro discusses how his search for a literary model led him to the stories and to *Soñé que la nieve ardía*: “(e)l mundo de Skármeta era el mío, el mundo de las calles, las bicicletas, el rock ... pero tenía algo más: llegaba poetizado con un sentido lúdico” (311-12). He also relates that in 1976 Roberto Bolaño commented “que esos cuentos eran tan potentes como la gran narrativa rusa” (313).<sup>12</sup> Argentine writer Rodrigo Fresán acknowledges the influence of the short stories of *Desnudo en el tejado* (*Estudios Públicos* 320) while Niall Binns argues that Skármeta’s stories inaugurated a change in voice, moving from the colourlessness of Chile’s 1960s narrative to vitality and enthusiasm (325). Binns describes Skármeta as fusing literary tradition with mass culture, underpinning his work with the influence of poetry, especially that of Neruda (327). In brief, these articles treat Skármeta as an important figure from a previous generation rather than a contemporary.

<sup>10</sup> “La vuelta en el aire,” a short story in *Tiro libre*, features a fictionalized Gabriela Mistral.

<sup>11</sup> For ease of reading and due to their length the full titles of each of the articles from the same volume of *Estudios Públicos* are omitted above. Alphabetically they are: Binns, “Skármeta el novelista y la moneda cotidiana de la poesía” (323-28); Fresán, “A las Arenas’ revisitado, o apuntes sobre la relectura de un cuento de Antonio Skármeta” (316-22); and, Villoro, “Elogio familiar de Antonio Skármeta” (310-15).

<sup>12</sup> Bolaño’s enthusiasm did not extend to Skármeta’s later work. He stated that, if forced to choose, he would award Chile’s *Premio Nacional de la Literatura* to Isabel Allende. Even though he is harsh in describing her writing as ranging from kitsch to pathetic, it is “muy superior a la literatura de funcionarios natos,” his characterization of Skármeta and Volodia Teitelboim. Indeed, “no los salva ni Dios” (“Sobre la literatura” 102).

There are book reviews and English translations of more recent fiction such as *El baile de la Victoria* (2003), *Los días del arcoíris* (2010) and *Un padre de película* (2010), but no critical study. *El baile* was made into a movie (2010), while the Pablo Larraín movie *No* (2012) is based on an unpublished play *Referendum/El plebiscito* that Skármeta himself delivers on stage as a performative reading, including in Toronto in June 2015. Finally, Skármeta has received many international awards and his work has been translated into dozens of languages. In 2014 he was awarded Chile's *Premio Nacional de la Literatura* for his lifetime contribution, another valid reason to take a serious look at his oeuvre.

The consensus around the significance and influence of Skármeta's early writing underscores the general disinterest in his end-of-century fiction. After years without access to his fiction in Chile, national and international interest turned to the younger generations. It may well be that the author's prominence in the media especially hosting *El show de los libros* in Chile and its Latin American counterpart *La torre de papel*, as well as his reworking of key ideas in multiple genres such as plays, television programs and opera, detracted from his reputation as an innovative novelist. However, while ideas from other fiction and plays were recycled for a broader audience, the stories in the two novels of ethnicity were never retold in other formats or translated into English. It is precisely the shift away from the author's usual subject matter to incorporate immigrant subjects into identity discourse and literary tradition and the lack of critical interest that makes them compelling objects of study. Given the lack of scholarly study of the two major novels of this corpus, the interview I conducted with Skármeta in November 2012 (Appendix 1) will help inform my analysis.

## Corpus, Methodology and Structure

My focus is on a select corpus of Skármeta's early stories and two novels. The chosen stories from *El entusiasmo* and *Tiro libre* refer, even if briefly, to the foreign origins of their protagonists. *Desnudo en el tejado* (1969), the middle collection, does not exhibit any ethnic references. The two lengthy novels with immigrant protagonists are *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón*. In addition, I take into account *Un padre de película* (2010), a novella in which the father's origins are French, and the children's story *Galletas chinas* (2009).

In terms of methodology, I ground Skármeta's narratives of ethnicity in the intellectual and immigrant history of Chile as well as in its literary history. I review national identity discourses over the last two centuries, source materials on immigration to Chile, and theories of memory. I focus on literary theory and criticism, especially on concepts related to relevant narrative genres prevalent in Spanish America such as the foundational or national novel, the historical genre, and the family romance, as well as notions of ethnic writing, mainly as it is discussed in North America. Discourses on identity known as *chilenidad* and theories of memory in relation to individual and collective identity serve as a foundation for the study of the corpus and for advancing proposals about the shift towards ethnicity in Skármeta's fiction. I draw on theories of collective, ethnic and cultural memory, and their role in the development of a sense of self and of belonging, in order to position and interpret the representation of identity in the novels. The importance of grief in working through traumatic memories and the need to recognize these memories in terms of understanding both the self and the nation are also incorporated. Finally, the notion of authenticity as key to individual identity and meaning as well as the recognition of national diversity justify placing the novels in an expanded literary canon.

With respect to organization, the first chapter examines the historical and intellectual context of the novels while presenting theories of memory and identity subsequently used in the interpretation of the narratives. It opens with the history of immigration and immigration policy in Chile before focusing on the arrivals from Dalmatia beginning late in the 1800s. It then contextualizes immigration flows and settlement within the dominant Chilean discourses on identity or *chilenidad* that began to circulate after independence from Spain. An analysis of the discrepancy between Chilean immigration policy and the rise of anti-immigrant views exposes the xenophobic convictions first articulated by intellectuals that spread in the early decades of the twentieth century. Discourses of *mestizaje* and national homogeneity with their implications of assimilation and acculturation and the enduring images of *chilenidad* that stem from the War of the Pacific (1879-83), or even earlier, are contrasted with the tenacity of immigrant memory and contemporary perceptions of identity. The survival of an ethnic sensibility is related to theories on the nature of collective, cultural and ethnic memory, on its multigenerational transmission, and the relationship of memory to identity. The section ends with a discussion of discourses of national identity and individual authenticity and of the notion of an authentic self as essential to contemporary multifaceted identity discourses.

The second chapter focuses on literary tradition in Chile, the absence of ethnic protagonists, and the marginalization of narratives of ethnicity. It assesses the recent rise of scholarly attention to Jewish and Arab writing as part of a wider trend across Spanish America, and takes up the suggestion of several Chilean academics recommending more critical study of ethnic representation in literature. It argues that the size of the Croatian community makes its narratives a valid choice, and that Skármeta, as its most well-known writer, warrants closer scrutiny. The analysis moves to Skármeta's views on the literary tradition and his place within it.

This leads to examining the influence of literary tradition on his vision and narrative, and his particular esteem for poets Neruda and Mistral. Finally, I probe his short stories in order to identify the earliest fictional treatment of ethnicity, before analyzing the key texts of the corpus.

The third chapter reads *La boda del poeta*, a novel that depicts the pre-First World War flight from Southern Europe due to military and political reasons, as concerned in equal measure with Chilean identity through its imagery, especially its literary references, as it is with the story of the protagonists. It examines how a foreign past told as a new historical novel or historiographic metafiction introduces elements of Balkan history into the Chilean literary world without the protagonist setting foot on Chilean soil until the concluding sentences. In the process, it scrutinizes the novel's technique of weaving Chilean life and literature into foreign history as a means of permanently integrating ethnic roots into contemporary Chile's literary tradition, while surrounding the unsuspecting characters with references that will later form part of their new world view. It also compares and contrasts the novel with *Durante la reconquista*, Blest Gana's historical novel about the struggle between royalist and independence forces in Chile. Theories of memory in relation to identity, nostalgia, and authenticity are used to defend reading the novel as a historiographic metafiction.

The fourth chapter interprets *La chica del trombón* as a family romance in which an unknown and unknowable foreign past prevents the immigrant protagonist from identifying with Chile and finding meaning in life until the future of the family and of the nation both seem clear and intertwined. It situates it within the tradition of the foundational novel, broadening its scope by bestowing on a female immigrant child the role of protagonist. In addition, it reflects on her reliance on the act of writing to create a past and an identity. The analysis calls on notions of memory and working through trauma to reach a point where the protagonist can live in the

present and believe in a future. This revitalized family romance is compared to *Martín Rivas*, Blest Gana's foundational novel, with the key question being whether it projects a new point of departure for the construction of family identity in the national imagination.

Finally, the concluding chapter argues that, while the author's references to his ethnicity were minimal in his early short stories, then absent from his writing for over three decades, the space that these reminiscences came to occupy in his fiction around the turn of the century commands a place for his roots in the imagined nation. The shift in approach towards telling the immigrant story enables Skármeta to project a Chilean identity that claims an ethnic heritage as part of his authentic self and seeks acknowledgment of that difference, both in public discourse and the literary imaginary of the nation. Read in Charles Taylor's terms ("The Politics of Recognition"), in addition to reflecting a commitment to being true to oneself, the novels invite the nation to recognize and value its cultural plurality. While policies of uniformity and assimilation may have been superficially successful, ethnicity and roots maintain a grip on identity that enriches the individual and the national fabric in ways that were not, and could not, be anticipated and that are now transforming the idea of nation as expressed in literature. Furthermore, this is a sign that literary fiction and the worlds it imagines are catching up to the diverse reality of the nation.

## Chapter 1

### Immigration, Identity Discourses, and Memory Theory in Identity Construction

Skármeta's fiction deals primarily with ordinary young adults bearing Hispanic names, who struggle in contemporary urban settings. Yet, through both his paternal and maternal lineage, the author belongs to one of Chile's larger ethnic groups, the descendants of Dalmatian immigrants from the Adriatic coast. Chile's Dalmatian/Croatian diaspora ranks fifth in the world, behind the United States, Canada, Australia and Argentina (Zlatar Montan, *De la Bura* 53). The original emigrants, mostly from the island of Brač, settled in the extreme north and south of Chile, isolated from the capital of Santiago or nearby centres along the Pacific coast. Today, up to thirty percent of the inhabitants of Punta Arenas in the south share these roots while the highest numbers of Dalmatians now reside in Santiago, far from the fractured political history of the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea.

My historical and psychological/sociological reading of some of Skármeta's work as constituting narratives of ethnicity situates these Dalmatian origins within Chile's discourses of identity, both past and present. Four interconnected lines frame my inquiry in this chapter: Chile's immigration policies and patterns, notably Dalmatian inflows; traditional and evolving discourses of national identity known as *chilenidad*, in view of the presence of ethnic minorities; key theories of memory, its intergenerational transmission, and its role in the construction of individual and collective identity; and finally, the contrast with contemporary notions of authenticity and plural identities.

## Immigration Policies and Patterns in Chile

“Chile viejo, Chile nuevo, siempre el mismo.” (1926 Slogan)

“Todo el mundo en Chile es chileno; es algo desesperante.” Juan Emar (*Miltín 1934*)

Early in the twentieth century, vanguard writer Juan Emar challenged the uniform image of his fellow Chileans with unconcealed derision, while popular and religious opinion celebrated the constancy of the nation. While not as European in heritage as Argentina, Chile has long envisaged itself as a stable, predominantly white, and relatively homogenous nation which successfully enfolded *araucano/mapuche* indigenous peoples and, later, non-Iberian immigrants into a dominant *criollo* base of Spanish colonizers.<sup>13</sup> This founding myth of *criollo-araucano mestizaje* tends to mask the presence of immigrant stock from outside Spain or Northern Europe in the national imaginary. It also runs counter to the persistence of a *criollo* elite and a hierarchical class structure, with studies showing that between a third to over half of Chileans describe themselves as white.<sup>14</sup>

With people of many different origins, although mostly Europeans, having sought safety and opportunity in Chile, primarily between 1870 and 1940, the country's society is undeniably multiethnic. While early French, Basque, English and German arrivals were prized for their enlightened and civilizing influence, later arrivals held much less influence in shaping the national discourse on identity. If, as we shall see, intellectuals and the general population relegated late nineteenth and early twentieth-century settlers to a category that fell outside the

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<sup>13</sup> The Spanish called the Mapuche peoples of central and southern Chile *araucanos*. Mapuche is a collective term for the peoples of south-central Chile and southeastern Argentina who speak Mapudungun. Today some eighty per cent of indigenous peoples in Chile are Mapuche.

<sup>14</sup> This includes reputable surveys such as those conducted regularly by *Latinobarómetro* and the *Encuesta Mundial de Valores* and the research of Javiera Barandiarán. *Latinobarómetro Corporación* is a private, non-profit organization funded by the European Union, the United Nations, the Organization for American States, and international development agencies. For over twenty years it has conducted an annual public opinion survey (twenty thousand interviews) in eighteen Spanish American countries, focusing on democratic and socio-economic issues.

ambit of the “civilizing” Western European heritage, their descendants are considered to have blended almost without trace into the dominant culture and its narrative of nation. In either case, minorities are invisible since the notion of a relatively homogeneous identity precluded admitting extraneous traits. The idea of *criollo-araucano mestizaje* allied with the pendulum swings between traditional and progressive social forces dampened the potential for other voices to be heard, let alone legitimized.

To date, there has been little comprehensive or horizontal study of the impact of immigrants and their descendants on the fabric of Chile as an imagined nation (Tijoux and Retamales; Pizarro). While social scientists have studied indigenous groups, they have rarely examined ethnicity, pluralism or the influence of minority immigrant communities.<sup>15</sup> As an exploration of immigrant histories and memories falls beyond the scope of this project, I centre my research on the general immigration history of Chile, the arrival of Dalmatian immigrants over a century ago, and the fictional recollection of that particular heritage.

Terms related to ethnicity and to multiculturalism tend to refer to very precise contexts in contemporary Chile. They normally denote the Mapuche peoples, or else Peruvian and Bolivian residents who are visibly indigenous or of mixed race. In other words, they designate the disadvantaged, the marginalized and unassimilated non-white “other.” At the same time, the national myth of homogeneity either assumes the integration or ignores the presence of non-indigenous minority groups such as Jews, Arabs and Asians. Even less conspicuous are the southern and Eastern European immigrants whose differences are less noticeable, especially those of Italian and Dalmatian descent whose ancestors contributed to whitening the population.

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<sup>15</sup> The summer 2015 issue of the *Latin American Research Review* contains an article by María Emilia Tijoux and Hugo Sir Retamales on racism towards Peruvians.

Since immigrants and especially their descendants are assumed to have acculturated, questions of where these now invisible “foreigners” came from, when, and why, or even how they ended up in Chile, are seldom probed. Nor is much attention paid to the treatment of the foreign arrivals or their potential influence on the national imagination.

It is easily forgotten that non-Hispanic immigration was a reality before Chilean independence and before the launch of formal initiatives to attract European settlers. The French began arriving at the end of the seventeenth century, later adding well-known surnames such as Pinochet, Letelier, Bachelet and Subercaseaux to the well-connected class. An important wave of Basque immigration, adding some ten thousand people between 1701 and 1810, contributed to economic expansion, formed the first urban middle class and, in some cases, joined the elite (Hojman 279). The Irish were welcomed early on, while the English had established themselves firmly in Valparaíso by the 1820s, lending their expertise to mining, banking and commerce.

Chile was a neglected colony, a stigma it fought to overcome after independence (Salazar 236-37). Founding fathers such as Juan Egaña and Bernardo O’Higgins sought European immigrants to settle and develop the new republic. With eighty percent of the population living in rural areas, political leaders envisioned immigration as a policy instrument to counterbalance the poor uneducated *mestizos*. Despite this outlook, Chile was far less aggressive throughout the nineteenth century than several of its neighbours in actively recruiting immigrants through either policy or action. Even as large groups of Europeans settled in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, Chile failed to attract similar numbers. This was largely due to its location, the difficulty of access, its small size and the lack of incentives.

According to Elizabeth Rosa Horan, “the 1809 census found only seventy-nine foreigners in Chile, and of those, only four non-Catholics” (126). The first proposals to cover transportation

costs for British and Irish immigrants in the 1820s and 1830s were never implemented. Only in the 1840s was the idea of attracting Germans actually put into motion. Although the government had declared the remote southern regions and the Magallanes area Chilean territories in the 1820s, it delayed possession until 1843. Concerned by Argentina's initiatives near the Magallanes area, it enacted the 1845 "Ley de inmigración selectiva" to attract Europeans to open up border regions with manual labour and commerce, endeavours that the urbanized *criollos* of Santiago spurned. By 1854 the census showed 20,000 foreigners, mostly Germans, working in agriculture (Salazar 239). Soon there were 30,000 in southern Valdivia and Puerto Montt.

By the latter part of the century, the largest foreign communities were the prosperous British and Germans who established their own schools, newspapers and social clubs. In 1860 the government decided to renew its economic development program through immigration, with the support of industrialists and mining groups interested in both skilled and unskilled European labour. It offered a range of enticements to attract workers for major infrastructure projects, such as railways and waterworks, and to settle the south. The elite expected "the European laborers to form a large, servile working class that would augment upper-class wealth but would not challenge the prevailing social hierarchy or distribution of economic power" (Solberg 8). In 1876, partly in response to renewed Argentine expansion in the border zones, novelist Alberto Blest Gana was tasked with finding French and Swiss settlers from his ministerial post in Paris. However, like those of his predecessors in France, his efforts were largely ineffectual.

In the 1880s the government once again sought immigrants to open the southern Araucania region. In 1882 it established the *Agencia General de Colonización* with offices in Bordeaux, Hamburg and Antwerp. This time it was relatively more successful. Up to the end of the century the influx of dozens of different nationalities comprised mostly young and

impoverished Spanish, French, Italian and Swiss males, often lacking the sought-after agricultural skills. On the other hand, these newcomers stimulated modernization through commercial and related urban endeavours (Blancpain, *Immigration* 214-15).

Until the 1880s, educated groups of immigrants had been readily integrated into the ruling *criollo* class, as an instrument of separating church and state, as well as emancipating the nation. As Jean-Pierre Blancpain writes,

les vieux principes du cosmopolitisme libéral et de la philosophie positive ont dicté à l'*intelligentsia* comme à l'administration une attitude tout à fait généreuse en matière d'octroi de la nationalité chilienne ... un tel état d'esprit, qui ne s'épargne aucun effort lyrique pour "européaniser" le Chili et l'émanciper d'une tradition créole jugée cléricale et "fanatique", donc funeste et rétrograde, fondée au plus, sur l'infériorité biologique et culturel de l'Indien et du métis. (*Le Chili et la France* 128)

Northern European immigrants were expected to ensure progress and development while Peruvians and Bolivians would provide the unskilled labour needed to exploit the nitrate mines (Solberg 28). This welcoming attitude began to reverse itself around the time that the number, source country, and background of immigrants shifted.

British economic success and German self-sufficiency had already aroused hostility. The government wanted to prevent the growth of any more ethnic colonies. Recruiter Nicolás Vega for example argued that German colonization had set bad examples since "la chilenización es el fin esencial del poblamiento y que hay que cuidar de no crear una colonización uninacional cerrada" (Peri Fagerstrom 91). However, official policy was unable to prevent the South Slavs

(‘Yugoslavs’) from Austria-Hungary from establishing similar enclaves in the far South and the North (Collier 172).

Immigrants, whose European genes were valued, were somehow meant to absorb Chilean identity in spite of residing far from the political and cultural centre of the nation. Authorities did not foresee that newcomers would harbour reciprocal expectations or eventually aspire to economic and social ascent. Open immigration functioned as an expedient short-term policy, seemingly without any thought given to the longer term, when workers and their descendants would expect to play a role in public life or conversely, when economic downturns would fuel anti-immigrant pressures.

While immigration policy was aimed at attracting select nationalities and excluding southern Europeans as well as Arabs, Jews and Asians, recruitment efforts produced unforeseen results. Although a few Swiss and Belgians did respond to the call for immigrants, so did Italians, Dalmatians, Jews and Christian Arabs from the Middle East, all of whom were counted among those deemed less industrious than northerners and, therefore, undesirable in the quest for progress.

A sizeable contingent of Italians arrived between 1880 and 1930, establishing themselves all over the country (Salazar 240). The first Jewish settlers from Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, and Arabic countries landed between 1890 and 1920 (Horan 127). The Jewish community grew during the Second World War and was estimated at 20,000 by its end. The 18,000 in Santiago by 1941 equated to one percent of its population (136).<sup>16</sup> Despite these numbers, Chilean historians have always pushed Jewishness out of public view (126).

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<sup>16</sup> While Chile maintained economic ties with the Nazis, it also accepted German Jews. Some twelve thousand refugees arrived between 1938 and 1943. After the 1970 election of Salvador Allende, many Jews emigrated from Chile, primarily due to concerns about economic and political stability. Remaining families were further divided when German pro-Nazi communities allied with Pinochet (Agosín *Passion* xxxi-xxxii).

Sociologists “have yet to study the ambiguous status of Jews in Chile’s hyperstratified class system” and there still exists an “absolute reluctance to accept Jews as equal citizens” (137-38). This may be due in large part to the classification of Jews as forming a religious rather than an ethnic group, in a nation with a strong Roman Catholic history.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of the Arabs and Asians who arrived between 1907 and 1952, “Chilean society largely rejected and discriminated against these new groups of immigrants, who were considered both culturally inferior and an economic threat to the ruling class” (Salazar 240). Christian Arabs arriving from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine suffered overt discrimination. They were all designated together as Turks, likely because they were born in the Ottoman Empire. *Turcophobia* was rampant: the *turcos* were ridiculed and marginalized, mocked in the streets, denigrated for their strong work ethic, and criticized by intellectuals. They prospered, especially in the banking and textile sectors. Today, Chile is home to the largest Palestinian diaspora outside the Middle East.<sup>18</sup>

In line with earlier expectations of assimilation, as recently as 1990 a study of the Arab community affirmed in laudatory terms that, “éstos no han producido verdaderos cambios ni trastocado costumbres, lengua, o un aspecto relevante de la sociedad chilena; han sido grupos pequeños al interior de la comunidad nacional y ellos se han adaptado o integrado a ésta ... a diferencia de otros países” (Olguín 11-12). The implicit assumption is that the Chilean model was both absolute and superior.

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<sup>17</sup> In Marjorie Agosín’s short story “Surnames” rich landholders denigrate an equally wealthy descendant of Jewish immigrants (Horan153).

<sup>18</sup> Mustafa Ustan covers this history of discrimination’s in *La inmigración árabe en América: Los árabes otomanos en Chile*. The Palestinian community includes prominent figures such as writer Diamela Eltit and writer/filmmaker Miguel Littín whose later works emphasized his hybrid Arab/Greek/Chilean identity.

Blancpain lends supports to this sweeping assertion of unqualified integration of immigrants in his study of immigration and nationalism in Chile between 1810 and 1925. Low levels of immigration and concerns about their sources were not perceived as challenging the existing social order. In his words,

pas d'entrées massives à redouter, incontrôlables et éventuellement  
dommageables à la stabilité de la République, rien à craindre qui puisse  
déséquilibrer la société traditionnelle, mettre en péril ses structures économiques  
et porter atteinte a une *chilenidad* forgée dans les combats multiséculaires entre  
Espagnols et Araucans; aucun danger de remettre en cause l'ordre social existant,  
l'unité nationale et l'héritage ibérique. (*Immigration* 18)

This statement confirms that, despite widespread xenophobia, two overarching assumptions guided Chilean discourse early in the last century. First, limited numbers of immigrants were not perceived as posing a threat to the existing social order to the same extent as indigenous peoples. Second, immigrants would not affect traditions and identity since there was no presumption of a two-way relationship. Immigrants, especially those in isolated communities without roads or railways, were expected to protect the borders of a nation that showed little interest in them.

Blancpain's conclusion that immigrants honoured "leurs pays d'accueil par une adhésion sans réserve à son histoire et par un comportement patriotique exemplaire" (*Immigration* 19) implies an absence of friction between immigrants and the native-born population. His statements ignore the eventual clash between immigrant and *criollo/mestizo* aspirations. Although immigrants were deemed "too few to disrupt the 'national character,' and no campaign took place to impose national values upon the foreigners" (Solberg 168), a look behind these

statements reveals significant tensions. For example, until the First World War, immigrants were deliberately prohibited from engaging in political activity.<sup>19</sup>

Success eventually worked against immigrant groups as economic downturns exacerbated chauvinistic sentiments. Unlike Argentina, where the debate played out primarily along cultural lines, the controversy in Chile centred on economic and labour market issues. Immigrants were perceived not as a threat to the national character, but rather to *mestizo* and middle class employment (Solberg 67).

Concerns about being overrun by foreigners overlooked their small numbers. From the mid-1800s to the 1920s, less than one percent of all European immigrants to Latin America settled in Chile. They numbered fewer than one hundred thousand at the end of the nineteenth century, most of them European-born. By way of contrast, Argentina alone received at least three million immigrants between 1860 and 1910, with two million arriving after 1888. This resulted in a dramatically different social, political, cultural and economic dynamic since, by 1914, some thirty percent of Argentina's residents were foreign-born (Lewis 6). However, just as in Argentina, the smaller numbers in Chile were subjected to racism and other forms of discrimination.

More than half a century after Chile initiated its immigration efforts and despite unremarkable results, young middle class intellectuals who had first associated European immigration with modernization, Social Darwinism, political stability and cultural development began to advocate nationalist policies, strongly opposing foreign control or domination of industry and commerce. Their nationalism "expressed the resentment the national middle class

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<sup>19</sup> The elites were concerned that allowing foreigners to engage in municipal politics would lead to demands for a role at the national level. As immigrants constituted about half the population of Punta Arenas, some of the elites even feared there might be pressure to create an independent state (Solberg 128-29).

held against the government's favouritism of the foreigner" (Solberg 171). While resentment among intellectuals was aimed at foreign industrialists and entrepreneurs, it spread across the population to all foreigners, including immigrant communities living in their own enclaves.

The strongest criticism was aimed at groups of immigrants that were perceived as different through language, religion or customs. The Chinese, Jewish, and Middle Eastern communities became the scapegoats for emerging urban problems such as poverty and disease (Solberg 69, 93, 104-16). Nevertheless, as immigrants and their descendants moved to the cities, the emergence of a new multiethnic middle class slowly began to alter social structures (49-63). Immigration from outside Spanish America declined after the Second World War. The 1952 migration law limited intake to a very few groups, targeted for economic purposes. During the military regime, the 1975 decree-law also designated particular groups, but by then the political landscape had made Chile a nation of emigrants rather than one attracting new immigrants.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Dalmatian Immigrants**

The Dalmatians initially arrived in very limited numbers. Mid-nineteenth century, a few males disembarked in Punta Arenas in southern Patagonia as well as in Antofagasta and Iquique in the north, leaving Austrian ships sailing up the coast to California. Noticeable Dalmatian inflows date to the 1880s up to the opening of the Panama Canal in 1912. Men found work in the nitrate mines of northern Antofagasta and Tarapacá after Chile's victory over Peru and Bolivia in the War of the Pacific (1879-83) had extended its northern boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> By the 1990s, sixty percent of immigrants to Chile were originating from within South America, mostly Peru and Argentina (Salazar 241). Over the last decade, with the rise in economic migrants from other nations of South America and the Caribbean the face of the nation has begun to shift.

<sup>21</sup> Post-independence borders in South America were not clearly delineated and territorial disputes linked to natural resources were common. In 1878 Bolivia imposed a tax on a Chilean mining company and then attempted to

Meanwhile, little more than two thousand residents inhabited the southern Magallanes area in 1885. Non-Chileans represented some fifteen different European nations, interspersed with North and Spanish Americans. The British, the Swiss, the French and the Germans outnumbered the very few, mostly male, Austro-Hungarians, Swedes, Norwegians and Italians.

Almost all of the “Austro-Hungarians” were in fact natives of the Dalmatian coast and its islands. Between 1830 and 1914 some twelve percent of the population of what is today Croatia emigrated, mostly from Dalmatia (Zlatar Montan, *De la Bura* 55). About twenty-five percent of the immigrants to South America landed in Chile, settling along its Pacific Coast, primarily in the southern extremes and the northern Atacama Desert.

Spurred on by the rush for gold, the first really sizable waves of immigration began in the 1890s. If there were only three hundred and sixty-five of these islanders in 1895, several thousand more had fled Austrian military recruiters by 1908-09 (Blancpain, *Immigration* 251). Of those that landed in Magallanes between 1890 and 1930, about eighty percent were natives of Brač. By 1914 the Dalmatians in the Magallanes region, “had become the largest and the second wealthiest national group in the flourishing territorial capital of Punta Arenas” (Solberg 41). By 1938, virtually all the Magallanes contingent hailed from Dalmatia, with seventy percent from Brač. Most wed Chilean women; a few sent home for brides and families.

The end of the First World War saw a further wave of Dalmatian immigrants, especially from Brač to Antofagasta in the north, with most seeking family reunification. In spite of their higher numbers in Punta Arenas, Antofagasta became the centre of Croatian political activism for the whole of the Southern Cone, not just Chile.

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confiscate the enterprise when payment was refused. Peru had a secret pact with Bolivia and a deep animosity towards Chile. When Peru refused to remain neutral, Chile declared war on both countries. Chile's victory turned Bolivia into a land-locked country, a matter of dispute to this day.

Blancpain's study refers only once to the Dalmatians. A footnote simply confirms their origins as fishermen from the islands of Brač and Hvar, placing them among the immigrant groups that achieved economic success in Chile. All immigrants stand as "de multiples exemples de réussite économique et d'ascension sociale généralement dès la seconde génération 'américaine'" (*Immigration* 251). There seems to have been remarkably little curiosity about why this group of people had abandoned the Adriatic coast to settle in remote areas so harsh and so unlike their homeland.

The Dalmatians were first characterized as Austrian or Austro-Hungarian subjects. They were described indistinctly and variously as males of Croatian, Dalmatian, Adriatic, and Yugoslav or South Slav origin, even though Yugoslavia did not exist as a nation until the 1920s. Over the centuries Dalmatia had fallen under the control of successive invaders, ending up as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1814. The Austrians eventually imposed their administrative systems and forcibly recruited young males into military service. In addition, the stony soil of the islands made agriculture demanding and unrewarding. Already harsh living conditions worsened when Austria stopped purchasing wine from Brač and *Phylloxera* disease soon destroyed the grapevines.<sup>22</sup> Faced with increasingly dire economic prospects and imminent Austrian military service, the Dalmatians left home with no expectation of return. Settling in areas that Chile's leaders had designated for development, they prospered. Those who became shop owners, builders, carpenters, and stone masons did not pose a threat to the established elites, as large landowners or industrialists might have done.

After the 1918 dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Dalmatians in Chile were divided among themselves between loyalty to the Austrian Crown and the idea of self-

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<sup>22</sup> Skármeta highlights these sobering facts in the opening paratexts of *La boda del poeta*.

determination. The 1918 creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, that became in 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, put an end to further emigration to Chile. The Dalmatians in Chile were acknowledged as Yugoslavs with roots in the newly created kingdom (Martinic Beros 59). They continued to be known as such after the Second World War when Dalmatia was folded as part of Croatia into the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia.

Before the Second World War, Chile had maintained both a legation in the Yugoslav/Serbian capital of Belgrade and a consulate in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. When Adolf Hitler attacked Yugoslavia in 1941 and Croatia seceded to collaborate with Nazi Germany under the Ustashe led by Ante Pavelic, Chile made no changes to either its legation or its consulate. It remained neutral until 1943, sensitive to the conflicting interests of its British and German populations.<sup>23</sup> Germany's profile remained high in southern Chile after the war through churches, subsidized schools and clubs. Jozip Broz Tito's rise to head the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia within the communist sphere of influence compounded the distancing of the Dalmatians from their homeland. After the 1991 creation of the independent Republic of Croatia, the "Yugoslavs" of Chile reasserted themselves as "Croats" and their institutions as "Croatian," while seeking closer links to the new European state.

Despite the distance, Dalmatian communities had sought to preserve their roots and express themselves. In the early days they established institutions such as libraries, choirs, sports centres, banks, and charitable organizations, as well as some thirty Croatian-language newspapers. Publications intended for settlers in the Magallanes region, Punta Arenas or Antofagasta offer valuable insight into their experiences and endeavours. However, these

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<sup>23</sup> Graeme Mount in *Chile and the Nazis* catalogues information on Nazis and Nazi sympathizers in Chile, not all of German descent.

newspapers disappeared in the early 1960s, while community newsletters and magazines carried less information about Dalmatia.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the Dalmatians were well ensconced in Chile. In the 1940s, historian Lucas Bonacic-Doric asserted that in the Magallanes region the “eslavos meridionales” (Southern Slavs) or “yugoeslavos” integrated without forgetting their origins. He depicts them as a branch of Croats, “una raza que acabó por fusionarse con la chilenidad y la idiosincracia de la vida nacional, con sus valiosos aportes constructivos y sanas y sobrias costumbres ligados indisolublemente a esta tierra, por los vínculos de la simpatía y la sangre” (5). Overlooking his ingratiating tone, it is clear that intermarriage ensured males would settle permanently and their children would acquire Chilean citizenship and identity, without any anticipated transmission to the *criollo* population of foreign traits other than a prized work ethic and sober habits.

As was the case generally for immigrants to Chile, Dalmatians were expected to conform to the dominant culture, becoming “buenos chilenos.” Mateo Martinic Beros, another ethnic Dalmatian, echoes Bonacic-Doric in underscoring the rapidly-acquired albeit abstract *chilenidad* of these newcomers: “después de 1920 pasó a ser voz común la ejemplar condición de acatamiento y aceptación de la chilenidad—en todo cuanto ella significaba—que manifestaban los yugoeslavos y que tenía tal vez su mejor expresión en la rápida fusión que se advertía con quienes eran de origen netamente nacional” (49). The meaning of *chilenidad* is not made explicit but it clearly requires blending into the mainstream. While both Martinic Beros and Bonacic-Doric underscore that the community in the south quickly acquired *chilenidad*, their rhetorical statements fail to define or explain the term itself, beyond implying citizenship and loyalty to

Chile. They also skirt discussion of any sense of attachment to other origins either immediately post-war or in the Cold War environment.

On the other hand, economic success and intermarriage led to broad social acceptance and integration for Dalmatians. After both World Wars, more of them migrated to urban centres, especially to Santiago, in search of education and employment. From their start in commerce and farming, successive generations branched out to establish themselves in all sectors of economic activity, blending into Chilean society. Success in business, the professions, academia, politics and the military followed. Today, few descendants of the first immigrants speak Croatian while their ethnic roots are most evident in surnames and occasional folklore celebrations. Beyond these echoes, members of the third generation, like Skármeta, displayed little connection to Dalmatia outside the home and gathering places like Santiago's *Estadio croata* (Croatian stadium). As generations died and memory faded, the homeland became a foreign place, largely unconnected to the sense of self of younger generations.<sup>24</sup>

Increasing socio-economic mobility compounded this emotional, intellectual and political distancing. In the 1950s and 1960s, men and women of Skármeta's generation became the first non-elite group to attend Chile's newly expanding universities. Committed to social and political change, these young people largely embraced the 1970 election of Salvador Allende's *Unidad Popular* government. Then the 1973 military coup crushed their hopes of reform. Over the years

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<sup>24</sup> Social clubs offer the most obvious reminders of Croatian roots. For example, Santiago's *Estadio Croata* organizes courses on culture and history. Overall, "(c)on el propósito de preservar la identidad croata, se prefiere poner el acento sobre la música tradicional y el folklore. Hay muy poco interés en libros en la lengua croata porque pocos dominan la lengua. No hay publicaciones en la lengua croata en Chile, pero las colectividades croatas de Punta Arenas, Iquique y Antofagasta publican boletines periódicos. Dos programas radiales con temática croata se transmiten en Punta Arenas. Últimamente en Santiago se ha observado una fuerte actividad de la asociación central de emigrantes croatas, "El Estadio Croata", y la diversidad de sus acciones se nota en las páginas web ([www.estadocroata.cl](http://www.estadocroata.cl)). En Chile existe un gran número de asociaciones croatas, entre las cuales destacamos: el "Estadio Croata" de Santiago, "El Club Croata" de Punta Arenas, la Sociedad Croata de Socorros Mutuos de Antofagasta y el Club Croata de Iquique" (<http://hrvatskimigracije.es.tl/Diaspora-Croata.htm>).

that followed, the regime's pursuit of economic goals as well as its traditional patriarchal and religious discourse quashed any public hints of non-conformity, such as pluralism in identity.

Chile's 1990s transition to democracy coincided with the emergence of an independent Croatia eager to reach out to its diaspora, creating a reciprocal opportunity to build bridges across time and space.<sup>25</sup> Antofagasta and Punta Arenas were paired as sister cities with Split, the historic city of Diocletian on the Dalmatian coast. If the timing was favourable for the revival of the Croatian/Dalmatian story in Chile, the questions were whether this memory would be reinvigorated and why, who would be in a position to attempt it, and what shape it could take within the national narrative.

After a century in Chile, Dalmatians had no pressing compulsion to stress their ethnicity. Absorbed into the mainstream, they served as proof of the success of the assimilation model. The southern regions of Chile in particular had produced many different combinations of ethnicities given the multiple origins of its early settlers. International cultural and educational initiatives, which are normally aimed at the descendants of a minority community, offered a targeted response to the interest in Dalmatian roots. Something different would be required to interest Chileans at large and to invade the national imaginary.

In summary, immigrants arriving in Chile in the second half of the nineteenth century and onward settled in a nation that had been moulding its own unique discourses of identity in order to distinguish itself from its neighbours since achieving independence. A detailed examination of these discourses of identity in relation to immigrants is needed to contextualize the analysis of Skármeta's narratives of ethnicity.

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<sup>25</sup> A dedicated website ([Domovina.cl/inmigrantes](http://Domovina.cl/inmigrantes)) established in 2007 promotes the traditions of the community. "Domovina" means homeland.

## **The Discourses Surrounding *Chilenidad***

I understand the concept of national identity as consisting of two essential facets of institutional and related discourses: on the one hand, the internal narrative of a nation as it tells itself a never-completed story in order to foster strong bonds at home, and, on the other, the united front it chooses to present to the outside world through externally-focused discourses. That coherent external image generally rests on an internal narrative foundation of shared history, values and beliefs.

Identity, understood today as a continuing construction and reconstruction, is a far more complicated concept for both individuals and nations than the visions that proliferated when the newly independent nations of Spanish America sought to define, burnish and assert what they thought of as their national character, in an effort to distance themselves from Spain and their regional neighbours. It is also far removed from the deterministic views and stereotypes that proliferated around the turn of the twentieth century and whose traces survived in both the Chilean state and the church. Finally, the attempts of the Pinochet regime (1973-89) to reassert conservative traditional values were at odds with the notion of an ever-evolving narrative of identity.

In order to compare past and present discourses on national identity I begin by assessing select official discourses from the early years of the twenty-first century. Then I reach back to the beginning of Chilean identity narratives. I approach discussions of *chilenidad* from its essentialist origins, by examining first, the composition of the Chilean people, and second, how identity was projected in terms of elites, stereotypes and national character. I then review the intellectual development of the idea of Chilean identity through the views of contemporary

theorists who contrast early projections of exceptionalism to the complexities of identity construction in a globalizing world.

Almost a century after the main influx of non-Hispanic immigrants to Chile, the desire to redefine or reset its image was a fundamental aspect of Chile's transition to democracy in the 1990s. Given the animosity between pro- and anti-Pinochet factions, the high levels of emigration and exile, the longstanding neglect of indigenous peoples, persistent racism, especially towards Peruvians and Bolivians, and little acknowledgment of non-Hispanic ethnic minorities, the government struggled with its identity discourse. It fell back on century-old habits, promoting the country as being similar to Britain, the United States and France on the economic front through a "triumphant discourse on modernity and regional exceptionalism" (Salazar 242). By 2000 it had begun to soften this discourse by stressing "the Latin American character of Chile, focusing on themes such as solidarity and concern for the welfare of the region" (242).

In 2007, after research indicated that people outside the country could not picture a Chilean, the government of then President Michele Bachelet embarked on a national branding exercise called *Proyecto Chile—Imagen País*. Given a blank canvass in terms of global awareness, the goal was to tell the nation's story in a way that would capture international interest. This vision was not to rely on tradition, heritage, values, identity or politics, or even on how Chileans saw themselves. It focused solely on trade and the economy: wine, olives and energy would feature in interactions with the world (Aronczyk 137-39). The initiative was successful in that today most of the world beyond South America sees Chilean exports like wine as a major point of reference.

The stated aim of *Proyecto Chile—Imagen País* was to “further develop the image of Chile’s role as a member of the globalized world, first focused on the USA, but afterwards broadened its scope to include Europe (specifically Spain and the UK)” (Salazar 242). The discourse was economic, responding to the redefinition of the world order and its alleged erosion of the nation. Claudia Bucciferro underlines this economic orientation when she declares that globalization “is not tied to an acceptance of cultural diversity in Chile, but to an increased involvement with the trends of predominantly white countries in the developed North” (*For-get: Identity, Media and Democracy in Chile* 128). In her opinion, the *Proyecto Bicentenario*, including the *Proyecto Chile—Imagen País*, celebrated the nation’s heritage by focusing strictly on economic growth and images of a sophisticated cosmopolitan nation (310).<sup>26</sup>

In 2008, the year that marked the beginning of a global economic crisis, the *Fundación Imagen de Chile* was created to promote “coordination of all activities involving Chile’s image, both at home and abroad” (Salazar 242). When Chile became the first South American country admitted to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2010, it adopted the double-pronged slogan “*Chile hace bien*” to reflect the incorporation of non-economic objectives, linking it to the bicentennial of the nation.

This particular approach to image-building, based on emphasizing trade and adopting a low-key approach to social issues, suggests that internal divisions were so pervasive that consensus around a suitable image was impossible, with the past best left buried or forgotten. It

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<sup>26</sup> The *Proyecto Bicentenario* also commissioned writing projects on the nation’s history. In the introduction to the volumes on the nineteenth century, editors Gabriel Cid and Alejandro San Francisco note that most compilations of this type ignore Chile. They attribute this gap in part to a deliberate avoidance of the relationship between nationalism, conservatism and militarism, especially under Pinochet (*Nacionalismo e identidad nacional* (1: xii-xiii)). Chile barely figures for example in *Beyond Imagined Communities* (Castro-Klarén and Chasteen), which adds nuances to the notion of imagined community developed by B. Anderson, or in *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America* (Foote and Goebel 2014).

hints at wanting to avoid self-scrutiny at home in favour of carving out a niche in the developed world. It also repeats two central ideas about national character that had emerged in the early days of nation-building: Chilean exceptionalism in Spanish America and the primary importance of the economy.

Exceptionalism and the connection to economically developed countries of the north are mirrored in the perception of skin colour in Chile. Around 1900 the Chilean population was still approximately sixty-five percent white according to Luis Thayer Ojeda (quoted in Subercaseaux, “Razón y nación” 69), with Jews and Arabs historically considered as white. A century later, a 2005 survey reported that “37 percent of Chileans identified as white; 55 percent as Hispanic; 5 percent as native and/or indigenous; and the rest responded with ‘don’t know’” (Barandiarán 166-67). With the nebulous Hispanic category identifying *mestizos*, the classification leaves no space for non-white non-*mestizo* individuals. After reviewing a number of studies, Barandiarán concludes that race and surname still figure prominently in Chilean identity as the preference for fair skin and European traits is deeply embedded in social and labour market practices.

A 2011 public opinion survey by Santiago-based *Latinobarómetro* supports this propensity to prefer European traits. Some fifty-nine percent of respondents identified themselves as white, twenty-five percent as *mestizo* and eight percent as indigenous. Other studies confirm that Chileans believe that “their country is culturally and ethnically homogenous,” with a white European ancestry and segregation of social classes (Sirlopú and Van Oudenhoven 740). Óscar Contardo quotes an even higher number of individuals claiming white roots, from the 2006 World Values Survey: sixty-one percent of Chileans consider themselves white, twenty-seven percent *mestizo* and six percent indigenous, in contrast with official records of a seventy percent *mestizo* population (*Siútico* 69).

Contardo is biting in regards to the lengths to which Chileans will go to avoid being perceived as *mestizo*. He writes that darker skin is “algo exótico, misterioso y salvaje” (63) and that a Chilean will pretend that “sus raíces culturales son más cercanas al platinado de Greta y Marilyn que al sombrero frutal de Carmen Miranda y los bamboleos de Shakira” (63-64). This proclivity to espouse a white identity akin to Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe has its origins in colonialism and *criollo* elitism, evidence of an internal orientalist attitude.<sup>27</sup>

Typically, an embryonic characterization of national identity expresses a belief in common origins and the sense of a shared political destiny within a recognizable geographical area. In the nineteenth century Ernest Renan argued that a nation does not need to share race or language, but rather a grounding in the past and the present, “a rich legacy of memories” and “the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in undivided form” (82). A heroic past and the cult of the ancestors, taken together, form “the social capital upon which one bases a national idea” (82). Without such a common history, individual Spanish American republics faced the challenge of fusing a variety of heritages into a shared idea of nationhood.

When colonial rule was shed in favour of European and American models of republican government, the new nations did not possess the individual histories that Renan’s theories suppose. Their history as Spanish colonies sharing a common religion and language, as well as peninsular literary and legal traditions, was the cornerstone on which to build the nation. These forces inevitably continued to shape the socio-political framework of the emerging nation-state.

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<sup>27</sup> Carlos Franz underscores the persistence of this colour code in his novel *El desierto* (2005). In a lengthy passage placed in the 1990s, the wily *mestizo* elder condemns “the law of the skin” which determines success, regardless of merit or education. Unflattering descriptions emphasize his “otherness” and that his dreams “estarían siempre prohibidos por una ley no escrita y sin embargo más fuerte que los códigos: la ley de la piel” and “siempre, el pigmento de su piel lo derrotaría. La raza, la raza era su deuda impagable que jamás podría enterrar” (332).

With the *criollo* elite having already laid down these common markers of identity, governments and intellectuals envisaged the affirmation of a shared identity as a central role of the state. This daunting challenge was deeply embedded in public and political discourse. Elites and intellectuals dedicated themselves to projecting and defending a coherent view of a perceived “national character” to accompany the tangible symbols of nationhood such as the flag, the constitution, the national anthem, and the nation’s currency. Later in the century, concerns about the effects and perceived threats of modernity, economic liberalism and globalization deepened the emphasis on distinctive national traits.

As part of the creation of a common origin, the new racially-mixed man was celebrated even before Simón Bolívar legitimized the notion in his 1815 *Carta de Jamaica* and other statements. Subsequent discourses tempered or eliminated internal differences through the conceptualization of a new hybrid race of people in the Americas. Cuban José Martí’ with “el hombre nuevo de América” (“Nuestra América” 1891), Mexican José Vasconcelos with a “raza cósmica” (*La Raza Cósmica* 1925) and Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña with his “hombre universal” (*La utopía de América* 1925) extolled the blending of European, African and Native American races into a new *mestizo* man.<sup>28</sup> Against shared traits such as language, religion and a legal tradition, nations were distinguished by the degree and types of *mestizaje* they exhibited. Each state elaborated its own vision of identity, based on the origins and prevalence of its constituent populations. However, even as *mestizaje* increased, the ties to Spain, defined as *hispanismo*, were always more highly valued than *indigenismo*.

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<sup>28</sup> A Cuban national hero and revered literary figure, Martí (1835-95) lived much of his life in exile, fighting for Spanish American intellectual freedom and Cuban political independence. Vasconcelos (1882-1959) was an outstanding figure of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath, playing key roles in education, philosophy, politics and culture. His essay refuting white superiority imagined a fifth race that melded all colours and ethnicities, as well as a new civilization. Henríquez Ureña (1884-1946), who lived for long periods in Mexico, the United States and Argentina, was intent on expressing the innovative spirit of Spanish America.

With racial mixing less prevalent in “whiter” Southern Cone nations such as Argentina, Uruguay, and, to some extent, Chile, the term “pigmentocracy,” credited to Estonian-born, German-educated and Chilean-naturalized scientist Alejandro Lipschütz Friedmann, colourfully captures the racism and discrimination exhibited towards the non-white. This preference also underpinned immigration policies that favoured northern Europeans based on colour as much as on perceived attributes such as industriousness, with little regard to historical or cultural differences.<sup>29</sup>

In Chile, Camilo Henríquez, one of the earliest proponents of republican and liberal ideas, used his newspaper, *La Aurora de Chile* (1812-13), to foster a national consciousness, encouraging the search for an independent identity. Manuel de Salas and Francisco Bilbao reflected the concomitant desire for intellectual emancipation (Larraín, *Identity and Modernity* 75-77). Yet, once independence was achieved, French and English culture supplanted the Iberian tradition. The ruling oligarchy constructed “a separate class identity in which fashion, refinement, conspicuous consumption, lavish architecture and the privatization of public spaces became the main symbols that segregated the ruling elite from the rest” (*Identity* 78). In this environment, identity was predicated on reproducing European *mores* within a closed circle.

Two liberal figures played major roles in shaping the debate in Chile later in the century: historian Diego Barros Arana (1830-1907) and reformer José Victorino Lastarria (1817-88). An influential educator, Barros Arana oversaw the establishment of the still prestigious *Instituto Nacional*, which offers a secular secondary education under the auspices of the University of Chile. He defended the interests of the elites as those of the nation as a whole and described the

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<sup>29</sup> Somewhat dubiously in my view, given how Chilean recruitment efforts were specifically targeted at northern Europe as well as the widespread view that race still matters, Jorge Larraín states that the skin colour of immigrants was never as important as the need to increase the population in the south (*Identidad chilena* 94).

national character as “rational, deliberate, and pragmatic.” In his opinion, unlike other Spanish Americans, Chileans were respectful of “legal procedure and parliamentary practice,” solving “national problems through debate and compromise” (Matyoka Yeager xiv). In his *Historia jeneral de Chile* Barros Arana set out to prove a natural superiority, with comparisons to the British model of successful coalition government (Matyoka Yeager 72).<sup>30</sup> He criticized Hispanic values and dismissed the indigenous peoples as uncivilized and lazy, contributing nothing to the national character (72). It was therefore, he argued, incumbent on the nation to educate the masses for a better future.

Conversely, it was France and not England that inspired Lastarria’s cultural and intellectual development. Like many well-to-do Chileans, he had studied and lived in Paris. Among his many endeavours, this prolific if intransigent figure—who later returned permanently to Paris—established a literary society “to define, describe, and explain the uniqueness of Chile’s social, cultural, and even physical characteristics” (Wood 156). Like Barros Arana, he was dismissive of indigenous peoples, as was most of the *criollo* population which avoided mixing with the *mestizos*. Yet Lastarria was extremely critical of the church and the elites, accusing the latter of egotism as well as hypocrisy, character assassination, disdain for others, a sense of superiority and opposition to much needed reforms. Above all, he cited envy as “la primera virtud chilena.” In his words: “el chileno tiene un enemigo más implacable que es el chileno mismo. Cada uno de ellos es enemigo de todos, i todos son enemigo de cada uno” (“El

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<sup>30</sup>The *Historia* “was to instill a sense of nationalism, of national collective consciousness and to identify liberals as the proper custodians of common national interests. The book is introduced by an effort to define the patria, in a sense to grasp the Chilean national character and to trace its geographical and historical origins. National glorification was of special importance for Chileans who, throughout the colonial and early national periods, were regarded by their neighbours as bumptious provincials” (Matyoka Yeager 71-72).

manuscrito del diablo” 301). Such alleged defects scarcely constitute worthy national traits compatible with solidarity and progress.

At the same time, the belief in Chilean superiority was so firmly entrenched that it generated isolationism in addition to indifference and disinterest in the well-being of the rest of the continent (San Francisco, “La excepción honrosa” 73). Developed by Argentine politician and thinker Juan Bautista Alberdi, in Chile the idea of exceptionalism “se constituyó en una de las ideas-fuerza en torno a la cual se articularon los discursos sobre lo nacional, especialmente desde la segunda mitad del siglo, aspectos constitutivos del imaginario nacional” (Cid and San Francisco, *Nación y nacionalismo* 1: xxi-xxii). This view derived from Chile’s avoidance of coups and civil war between 1830 and 1890, as well as its perceived strengths of order, moderation, seriousness, balance, and pragmatism, and its military discipline. The country was pictured as superior to its immediate neighbours, whether immigrant-dominated Argentina or largely indigenous Peru, a conviction that even coloured external press views of Chile.

It is difficult to ascertain how this idea of Chile as an exceptional imagined community was disseminated and how quickly a genuine sense of belonging spread beyond the educated circle (Collier 40). In an 1859 article pointing out the hypocrisy of the *criollo* class, Alberto Blest Gana wrote that despite landowners’ cruelty to their workers and voter coercion, as well as their differences of views on foreigners, religion and other major concerns, in the end, “todos somos buenos chilenos” (“Los banquetes patrióticos” 182).<sup>31</sup> Clearly, this concept of “todos” had a very limited span. The population at large consisted mostly of poor and illiterate rural dwellers.

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<sup>31</sup> I first encountered the phrase “We are all good Chileans” in Collier’s *Chile: The Making of a Republic*. The original Blest Gana article is available on the internet.

In fact, from the 1830s to the 1860s eighty percent of the population, excluding the independent Mapuche south of the Bio-Bio River, worked as illiterate tenant-labourers, peasants or casual labourers, tied to conservative landowners. It seems reasonable to ask how “esa constelación desperdigada de peones miserables, inquilinos, artesanos de estancia, obreros de la mina, traficantes de alcohol y abigeos de la frontera indígena hubiera podido percibirse a sí misma de manera relativamente clara y uniforme como parte de un conjunto territorial y político llamado Chile” (Daza 15). In the simplest of geographical and political terms, whatever their perceptions, the entire population had been swept into a single nation-state projected into existence by the privileged few.

The intellectual and emotional notion of a *raza chilena*, a distinct “race” in biological or psychological terms, dates to the mid-to-late nineteenth century (Cid, “A la nación” 69-70). The question is how this notion came to be recognized and accepted. The creation of a sovereign state demanded “la producción de una ideología, de una mitología y de un simbolismo identitarios adaptados al orden político republicano” (Daza 14). *Mestizos* and indigenous peoples became de facto Chileans. Moreover, the racial dynamic in Chile evolved quite differently from elsewhere in the region since “la comunidad imaginada que se formaba fue armándose en lo hegemónico de la estructura cortesana y los valores de un grupo social que se quería europeo sobre el resto de la población” (Pizarro 105). Dominated by the bourgeoisie of the central valley, “(e)stá muy lejos la voz de Martí y sus ecos no alcanzan el finis terrae” (105). In short, whiteness and European imitation combined to trump *mestizaje*.

Africans were never significant in number. In 1810 an estimated ten to twelve thousand blacks and brown-skinned *pardos*, including many mulatto tailors and free blacks employed as artisans, served in urban militias (Wood 10). Yet Africans were rapidly assimilated after the

abolition of slavery in 1823: “References to race, let alone a social movement driven by concerns about slavery or racial discrimination, were extremely rare in postcolonial Santiago” (237). With African roots not allowed a place in fashioning the nation’s identity discourse, the direction was set. By 2012 less than one percent of the population identified as being of African descent, in contrast with an indigenous population of about ten percent (Telles 26).

Almost from the outset Chile exhibited a predominantly biracial rather than a multiracial mixing. The term *mestizaje* came to designate the mix of indigenous and European races, primarily the *criollos* descended from Chile’s Spanish colonizers. Immigration and boundary adjustments, especially when the War of the Pacific altered the geographical and demographic reality of Chile through the annexation of northern and southern indigenous communities, had little effect on *criollo* perceptions or discourses.

Whether liberal or conservative, the elite and the *gente decente*, defined as the prosperous families of European blood and culture (Chasteen A2), took pride in modelling their behaviour on Western Europe. The elite also welcomed the early French, British and Germans into the *criollo* class.<sup>32</sup> After independence, the initial thrust lay in projecting an image inherently different from that of the colonial era. Leaders defined the nation as an association of equals between the *criollo* and the heroic *araucano/mapuche* warrior. Officially, Chile honoured the memory of Lautaro and Caupolicán, the noble *araucano* “savages” who had resisted the first Spanish invasions. Co-existence with their descendants in separate geographical areas was central to the post-independence concept of nation. This first imagined community of two halves dissolved in the second part of the nineteenth century. The Mapuche were no longer connected to

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<sup>32</sup> Although the German education system replaced the French one in the 1880s, French art and literature continued to exert a strong influence on the elite and the intelligentsia until 1914 (Blancpain, *La France* 103). The Germans wielded a lasting influence on education and the military until well after the Second World War.

the heroic figures that Spanish conqueror Juan de Ercilla had depicted in his epic poem *La araucana* (1569).<sup>33</sup> The decision to populate the south led to casting the Mapuche as an internal “other” that must now be conquered and civilized in the national interest and for the sake of progress.

In addition, the nation rested on an internal contradiction. The idea of *mestizaje* between *criollos* and indigenous peoples was the founding myth, despite a lack of racial mixing at the higher levels of society. The national anthem portrayed the country as a paradise (“copia fiel del Edén”) which the elite envisioned at various points as a replica of England, Switzerland or France. Elite Santiago-dwellers and large landowners considered themselves cosmopolitan figures benefitting from the civilizing influence of enlightened European immigrants. Until the advent of the railway in the late 1850s, the rich and powerful, mostly in and around Santiago, controlled the discourse of nation based on ideas of liberalism and republicanism.

On the one hand, Spanish men and indigenous women had created a distinctive ethnic and cultural mix. On the other, the educated elite cast the nation in *criollo* terms. In effect, Larraín’s view of Latin America’s elite applies to Chile:

se propuso construir un estado y un aparato jurídico de corte republicano y democrático, pero, obviamente, construyó un estado y un sistema jurídico que restringió la participación política y económica a los miembros de la alianza dominante, y además mantuvo en sus latifundios y haciendas relaciones de producción semiserviles que favorecían un incremento rápido de la producción para la exportación. Se creó así una distancia importante entre los principios

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<sup>33</sup> This poem in three parts (1569, 1578 and 1589) depicts the Spanish conquest of the Mapuche peoples of central and southern Chile known as *araucanos*.

liberales proclamados y la realidad de exclusión y explotación semifeudal de las mayorías campesinas.” (*Modernidad, Razón e Identidad* 146)

An interest in modernity and economic progress played out alongside stereotypes that reflected a traditional rural way of life.

Two different *mestizo* figures gradually emerged to represent and rally Chileans: the *roto* and the *huaso*. The elite and the *gente decente* glorified the *roto*, the shabby ignorant and mostly urban *mestizo*, and the *huaso*, the rural cowboy, farmhand or small landowner. Although the image of the *roto* has evolved, it remains ambiguous even now. Before the War of the Pacific, the *gente decente* had characterized the poor *roto* as bringing shame on the nation and holding back progress. Military victory transformed the *roto* into an iconic figure, a *mestizo vizcaíno-araucano* warrior whose valour was credited with the success over the weaker Peruvians and Bolivians. The always-male *roto* was idealized as a mix of the descendants of the Spanish *godos* descended from the Visigoths and the brave *araucanos*. The supposedly inferior Peruvians and Bolivians were denigrated as *cholos* and *cuicos*.<sup>34</sup> When the war ended, the *rotos* despatched to fight in the south were soon cast as superior to the conquered Mapuche and to immigrants.

It was influential politician and author Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna who first proposed the *roto chileno*, the common labourer, as the symbol of the national hero.<sup>35</sup> He and other leaders imagined a symbolic, if anachronistic, bridge between the *araucanos* of the conquest period and the *rotos* (Cid, “Un ícono funcional” 246). Then, in *Raza Chilena* (1918) Nicolás Palacios, an implacable opponent of the *criollo* aristocracy, branded the ruling class as racially degraded. He criticized cosmopolitanism, French styles and affectations, open immigration, and Italian

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<sup>34</sup> The historic antagonism dates to the 1836 creation of the Peru-Bolivian Confederation and its defeat by Chile at the 1839 battle of Yungay.

<sup>35</sup> Vicuña Mackenna, whose surnames indicate his Basque and Irish ancestry, was the son of General Juan Mackenna, a hero of the Chilean War of Independence.

immigrants who were among the most numerous. In their stead, he emphasized *mestizaje* between the “godos españoles” and the *araucanos*, as the basis of a brave Chilean character. The anti-Semitic Palacios argued strongly that since Spanish colonizers were of Teutonic origin, German immigrants were by far the most suitable and Latin races would not bring modernity.<sup>36</sup> Even celebrated avant-garde poet Vicente Huidobro called for recruiting two million *rubios* (blonds) from Northern Europe (Cid, “A la nación” 81).<sup>37</sup> These men were not exceptions. Their voices expressed widely held theories of white racial superiority as notions of Social Darwinism abounded across the Southern Cone in the early part of the twentieth century.

Palacios, Tancredo Pinochet with *La conquista de Chile en el siglo XX* (1909) and Francisco A. Encina, author of *Nuestra inferioridad económica, sus causas, sus consecuencias* (1912), were virulent in their denunciation of other foreigners. Encina in particular believed in white superiority and rejected Palacios’ idea of positive *mestizaje*. He also branded immigrants as useless parasites and imperialists (Blancpain, *Immigration* 237). T. Pinochet’s *La conquista de Chile* (1909) was “un appel à la reconquête d’un pays en proie au pillage de ses ressources par le capitalisme apatride et l’immigration indifférenciée qui font du Chilien un ilote sur sa propre terre” (Blancpain, *Immigration* 235). This claim was certainly unfounded since Chileans were never at the slightest risk of being outnumbered. Nevertheless, the obsession with opposing the civilized centre to the so-called barbarity or barbarism of the periphery, which originated with Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s classic essay on Argentine identity titled *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* (1845), heightened this perception.

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<sup>36</sup> Michela Coletta’s article “The Role of Degeneration Theory in Spanish American Public Discourse at the Fin de Siècle” discusses Chile and Argentina’s views on immigration in relation to modernity.

<sup>37</sup> Cid refers to an article titled “Las zonas secas y la raza” (1925) in *Vicente Huidobro: textos inéditos y dispersos*.

While the government had encouraged selective European immigration to combat the backwardness of the *roto*, influential thinkers condemned the immigrants who arrived for debasing the *raza chilena*. Prominent intellectuals wanted a selective immigration policy and decried the ease with which newcomers secured official documents. Anti-immigrant patriotic leagues sprang up, setting the glorified image of the *roto* against the allegedly weak Spanish blood of the Santiago aristocracy, the uncivilized Mapuche and lazy southern European immigrants.

In contrast with the *criollo* vision of the cosmopolitan centre and the central landowners' interior, the sense of history and community was noticeably different elsewhere in the nation. The north had a history of interaction with Peru and Bolivia before the large-scale arrival of Chileans, Europeans and Asians after the War of the Pacific. In the northern province of Tarapacá, over thirty nationalities were recorded in the 1907 census. Patriotism in the context of Chile's centennial celebrations led to imposing uniformity on an area where many nationalities, especially poor Peruvians, Bolivians and Chileans, were used to intermarrying and living in harmony (González Miranda 68-73). Animosity had usually been directed at the English owners of the nitrate mines, but tensions among workers grew after the military massacred over 2,000 Chilean, Peruvian and Bolivian miners and their families at Santa María de Iquique in 1907 (88). While many Peruvians and Bolivians left afterwards, many more of them and many immigrants were forced out by the 1929 economic crisis. Since, among the "(c)hinos cantoneses, croatas, españoles, chilenos, bolivianos, peruanos, no había diferencia étnicas" (González Miranda 101), employment prospects rather than race were the determining factor.

In the south on the other hand Mapuche interactions with the centre and with settlers, whether *criollo* or immigrant, were not as harmonious. According to Epple, heterogeneity in the

south exacerbated the mistreatment of the Mapuche. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards “se fueron asentando comunidades de origen francés, italiano, alemán, inglés y yugoslavo, las que facilitaron una superposición de ascendencias y pautas culturales de raigambre diversificada, pero a costa de la desmembración social y cultural tanto de Arauco como de las comunidades indígenas australes” (*Arte de recordar* 91-92). Pinto Rodríguez echoes this view. Instead of a shared vision, “la atomización social ... se produjo cuando el Estado no logró fundir en un crisol lo que se había propuesto: forjar una nueva chilenidad basada en la unión del mapuche, el colono nacional y el colono extranjero” (201-02). The Mapuche, the colonizers and the centre each held separate perspectives on the idea of the nation and its future.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, Chile was a multiethnic society. Yet, the centennial’s idealization of the past reinforced anti-immigrant sentiment generally and aroused hostility towards Peruvians in particular, giving the advantage to the *roto*. After the centennial celebrations and decades after the *roto* first embodied the notion of a distinctive Chilean race, a different figure, the *huaso*, came to symbolize the urban picture of rural progress.

*Criollismo* or rural regionalism in literature emphasized the clash between modernity and the rural tradition by celebrating the *huaso*.<sup>38</sup> The spotlight turned to *huaso* horsemanship and the *cueca*, the national dance.<sup>39</sup> The middle class promoted “los elementos de chilenidad y autenticidad, puestos en el centro de la atención pública por los criollistas. El idealismo rural y las representaciones culturales de la vida campesina, avalados por el estado, se convirtieron en componentes oficiales de la identidad nacional chilena” (Barr-Melej 121).

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<sup>38</sup> *Criollismo* refers to a form of literary realism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which, in an effort to capture the essence of national identity, highlighted nature, rural characters and cultural traditions. In Chile authors such as Mariano Latorre shifted the literary focus from the urban elite to life in the countryside.

<sup>39</sup> *Cueca* refers to a group of dance and music forms common to Argentina, Bolivia and Chile. It represents a courtship ritual between a rooster and a hen in which the Chilean male is traditionally dressed in *huaso* costume.

This elevation of the *huaso* was often accompanied by ridicule aimed at the upper echelons of society and dislike of immigrants. For example, in a widely-read 1935 article in *La Nación* prominent writer Joaquín Edwards Bello decried the decrease in white immigration combined with the increase in Arabs and Jews, “morenos” whose focus on trade rather than development did not, in his opinion, enhance national productivity. Edwards Bello, who had fictionalized urban suffering in *El roto* (1920), was especially critical of the government’s laissez-faire attitude towards immigration. His *La chica del Crillón* (1935) parodied the hypocrisy of the well-to-do and praised *huaso* virtues.

Later, both Allende and Pinochet called on the rural imagery of *mestizaje* and the *huaso* figure in their respective political visions (Barr-Melej 130). The military regime proclaimed the status of the *huaso* as national symbol by official decree in 1979 (Gutiérrez 137). The *cueca* was named the national dance that same year. Coincidentally, Palacios’ *Raza Chilena* was republished and became a bestseller (125).

Historians and other social scientists continue to reflect on the significance of these two iconic figures, especially the elusive *roto*. In “Un ícono funcional: La invención del *roto* como símbolo nacional, 1870-1888,” Gabriel Cid traces the construction of the *roto* through his transformation from socially, economically, geographically, and morally marginalized “other” completely ignored in the national imaginary, to warrior hero and soul of the nation that both the elites and the popular classes welcomed. The search for tradition linked *roto* heroism back to the independence wars and especially to the 1839 victory over the Peruvians and Bolivians at Yungay, without reliable historical evidence. This linkage nonetheless lent legitimacy to the figure of the *roto*, “otorgándole un mayor espesor histórico a una figura claramente funcional y

contingente” (252). Commemorated annually since 1889, by the early twentieth century this figure represented the quintessence of *chilenidad*.

Other contemporary insights complement Cid’s perspective. Hugo Maureira argues that Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest fostered the idea that racial superiority won the War of the Pacific, since the *raza chilena* was exceptional and more European than the Peruvians (5-11). Herbert Spencer’s ideas of social evolution buttressed this sense of superiority, especially in terms of the indigenous or *mestizo* Peruvians who were deemed further compromised by Chinese and African genes (21-22).<sup>40</sup>

Chileans deliberately exaggerated their Basque ancestry in order to prove that they had escaped the stigma of Iberian backwardness and indolence.<sup>41</sup> This heritage was reputed to have given them genes superior to those of the Slavic and Latin Europeans, while the Peruvian elite descended from lazy and pretentious Castilian and Andalusian families (Maureira 28-29). Sharing the Cid perspective, Maureira concludes that Palacios’s *Raza Chilena* became the core statement of Chile’s racial heritage with the hardworking *roto* an idealized version of the patriot (37). Early in the twentieth century, the policy of “chileanization” imposed more changes on the north, especially through the schools (Skuban 44; González Miranda 92). William Skuban argues that Anderson’s definition of a nation as a socially constructed or imagined community by people who see themselves as belonging to a common group fails to account for what the idea of nation might mean to people of diverse social, regional, racial and cultural descriptions sharing a border area. Peruvians were divided in their response and “*chileneros*—as they would come to be

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<sup>40</sup> In *Guerreros civilizadores: Política, sociedad y cultura en Chile durante la Guerra del Pacífico*, Carmen McEvoy examines how politicians, state bureaucracies and the church nourished the growth of this self-aggrandizement in relation to Peru.

<sup>41</sup> Hojman warns that “it is dangerous to exaggerate the positive Basque influence or incorrectly extrapolate it far beyond 1850” since most never became rich and Basque values declined as the descendants became Chilean (280).

called—were scorned by those who remained loyal to Peru” (Skuban xix-xx). The predicted integration over successive generations was not in fact forthcoming in the north.

Horacio Gutiérrez in turn traces how the *roto* was reappraised and transformed in the wake of the centennial. In his opinion the invented tradition of the *roto* filled the void that European racial ideas had created. The intellectual construction of a homogenous identity was incompatible with ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity (124). Although the *roto* figure eventually lost some ground to the *huaso*, it has continued to thrive and to polarize (136). María Helena Rolim Capelato compares the stereotypical figures of Latin America, using the Gutiérrez article as her point of reference for Chile. She underlines the binary and Manichean racist positions derived from scientific racism that dominated and the ambivalent views of the *roto* that still endure.

Gutiérrez’s final reflections on the invention of national figures are worth reiterating. He concludes that both the nineteenth century rejection, as well as the twentieth century ennobling of the *mestizo* reveal the difficulty of addressing diversity as part of identity. In both centuries, the underlying principle was that Chilean identity required homogeneity, including racial hybridity (137). Lack of success caused the debate to shift to the theoretical plane.

En el siglo XIX la homogeneización fue propuesta e intentada con diversas medidas. ... En el siglo XX se restringirían mucho las posibilidades de proponer o implementar medidas de este tipo, principalmente las más radicales, y la homogeneización racial habría sido promovida menos por la práctica, y más por la teoría: se crearían personajes mestizos representativos de lo nacional, tipos-síntesis de la nación; en el caso de Chile, el *roto* y el *huaso*, uno de origen urbano,

el otro rural. O sea, en la época de la exaltación del mestizo, la idea de la necesidad de homogeneidad racial habría permanecido en vigor. (137-38)

Gutiérrez concludes that the idea of a plural society displaying racial and cultural diversity in Chile as well as in Spanish America generally is a relatively recent idea. Moreover, the construction of a national identity compatible with racial democracy remains a challenge (138).

The notion of a superior *raza chilena* was deeply ingrained by the time small waves of immigrants arrived from Central and Southern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The animosity of Chileans conferred the image of the threatening “other” on the self-selected newcomers. In *La boda del poeta* immigrants seem to arrive in Antofagasta at the height of the idealization of the *roto* after the War of the Pacific and in the context of the massacre at Santa María de Iquique. The protagonist of *La chica del trombón* lands in the same city during the Second World War at the height of *criollismo* and the cult of the *huaso*. The protagonists of both novels leave an imaginary if identifiable island for a real city and a country that exists as an imagined community that excludes them.

In contrast with traditional discourses of identity focused on purported national characteristics and iconic figures, contemporary theories of identity shed new light on the construction of these discourses. Cultural identity refers to “those aspects of our identities which arise from our ‘belonging’ to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and, above all, national cultures” (Hall, “Modernity and its futures” 274). These constructed identities produce meanings about “the nation” through stories and memories which rely on images of the past (293). Group identity slowly evolves towards imagined communities, with inherent differences between nations. A national image is thus founded on memories of the past, a desire to live

together, and the preservation of a specific heritage (296). Every heritage is unique in that it rests on narratives about origins and on selected binding traditions, to the exclusion of others.

The drive for conformity to a national ideal is intense. Despite individual differences “in terms of class, gender, or race, a national culture seeks to unify them into one cultural identity, to represent them as belonging to the same great national family” (Hall, “Modernity” 296). In effect, the nation-building impulse is to suppress diversity and eliminate differentiating traits or behaviours, in order to ensure internal cohesion. This explains how the foundation of language, religion, culture and social structure enabled the Chilean elite to fashion the notion of a unique *raza chilena*, albeit one that imposed significant constraints on ways of thinking the nation.

Elements common to this manufactured consensus are usually: first, the narrative of the nation related in histories, literature, the media and popular culture; second, the emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness; third, the invention of tradition; fourth, foundational myth; and fifth, the idea of a pure, original people (293-95). This consensus shares little with the new nations of the Americas, as pictured by Bolívar. Given its enduring attraction, I quote extensively from his key essay, the *Carta de Jamaica*.

Nosotros somos un pequeño género humano; poseemos un mundo aparte, cercado por dilatados mares; nuevos en casi todas las artes y ciencias, aunque en cierto modo viejos en los usos de la sociedad civil. Yo considero el estado actual de América, como cuando desplomado el imperio romano cada desmembración formó un sistema político, conforme a sus intereses y situación, o siguiendo la ambición particular de algunos jefes, familias o corporaciones, con esta notable diferencia, que aquellos miembros dispersos volvían a restablecer sus antiguas naciones con las alteraciones que exigían las cosas o los sucesos; mas nosotros,

que apenas conservamos vestigios de lo que en otro tiempo fue, y que por otra parte no somos indios, ni europeos, sino una especie media entre los legítimos propietarios del país y los usurpadores españoles; en suma, siendo nosotros americanos por nacimiento, y nuestros derechos los de Europa, tenemos que disputar a éstos a los del país, y que mantenernos en él contra la invasión de los invasores; así nos hallemos en el caso más extraordinario y complicado.

It is obvious from these lines that critical elements of Hall's categorization never existed in Spanish America, namely shared origins and traditions or a founding myth of a pure original people possessing a unique identity. Instead, indigenous peoples and colonizers held opposing views of the past and their initial interactions. Given that the European arrivals disrupted the region's continuity while mixed unions reconfigured origins, the founding narrative of harmonious *mestizaje* was adopted as the mantle of a new identity.

Eric Hobsbawm's argument that traditions are invented helps explain how a newly constituted state can shape an identity without its people sharing either origins or a common appreciation of their past. Traditions are "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (271). This reconstructed "suitable historic past" (271) may create a superficial impression of unity. In late nineteenth-century Chile, nation-building efforts relied on political discourse, public affairs, newspapers and literature to associate *mestizo* identity with progress and with exorcising the colonial past. All were expected to honour this invented tradition philosophically and politically, if not necessarily in practice. A rallying figure such as the glorified *roto* shored up the notion of privileged origins and uniqueness. Yet, in spite of the official discourse on new

beginnings and democratic ideals, both indigenous peoples and immigrants experienced xenophobia, racism, and exclusion.

It is easy to agree with Marilyn Miller that the idea of *mestizaje* has been interpreted in multiple ways, to the point of losing its implication of white superiority or the sense that white civilization was meant to be dominant.<sup>42</sup> The term evolved from characterizing race or colour to signify intercultural manifestations devoid of racial reference and ideas of cultural blending through concepts such as transculturation (Ortiz; Rama) and heterogeneity (Cornejo Polar).<sup>43</sup> These abstract notions were lauded while the response to the daily reality of both *mestizaje* and immigration was ambivalent.

Miller does not discuss the case of Chile, where, according to social scientists, whiteness remains a key to both identity and status. Instead, Hall's thinking about the "other" is useful in considering the identity of immigrant groups and their descendants in Chile. He advances two different approaches with respect to the black "other" in the Caribbean. The first is the common experience of people sharing an ancestry and history, an imagined coherence that must be recovered, despite the wide range of African and Asian origins of people spread across the Caribbean. While this notion may not be as relevant to white immigrants, his second proposal recognizes the discontinuity between the separation from origins and relocation, namely the position within the present for the future, or "what we have become" ("Cultural Identities and Diaspora" 225). In a new location, the past is reconstructed through "memory, fantasy, narrative,

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<sup>42</sup> Miller offers a comprehensive treatment of the many facets and contradictions of the *mestizaje* model. Of special note is her argument that Vasconcelos soon retreated from his early position to end up defending white superiority.

<sup>43</sup> In 1982 Rama applied to narrative the ideas of anthropologist Fernando Ortiz about the merging of cultures to form a new culture as opposed to the assimilation implied by acculturation. Transculturation was evident in writing about American themes by American authors influenced by European literary techniques. Antonio Cornejo Polar in 1995 decried that transculturation was similar if not identical to *mestizaje* and that heterogeneity in literature was a better theoretical concept for Spanish American writing, with its discontinuous and conflictive discourses.

and myth” (226). In other words, it is tailored to fit altered circumstances as memories adapt over the course of generations.

This assessment applies to the descendants of non-Hispanic immigrants to the Americas just as much as to those who share the Caribbean history of slavery and racism. Their multiple origins, racial backgrounds and histories cannot be consolidated or dismissed. The past they imagine is at odds with the *mestizaje* story as well as with the present and future of their lost nations of origin since it can only be constructed through the lens of their lives in Chile.

Inevitably, separation from or assimilation into the dominant community varies from one immigrant group to another over time, in response to both overt and covert social pressures. Non-Hispanic whites seem to have been readily assimilated in European-dominated countries like Chile. On the other hand, all immigrants, exiles and refugees arrive with their respective memories of origins and traditions. They may harbour an unconscious or unquestioned expectation of preserving their heritage and identity or they may be eager to distance themselves from the past. Whether or not they retain their earlier attachments, their place within a nation erected on an overarching invented tradition of a *criollo-araucano mestizo* identity remains in question.

Jorge Larraín and Bernardo Subercaseaux have written extensively on modernity and identity discourse in Chile. Larraín has argued that the pendulum in Latin America oscillates between espousing modernity in times of expansion and clinging to notions of identity in times of crisis. He adds that this unresolved dialectic is the major characteristic of the region’s culture (*Identity and Modernity* 207). With respect to Chile, his thesis is that its path to modernity was marked by alternating periods of expansion and crisis that shaped a complex identity from the interplay rather than the opposition of identity discourses (*Identidad Chilena* 11; 16). Instead of

being mutually exclusive, modernity and identity were interwoven: “El mismo proceso histórico de construcción de identidad, es, desde la independencia, un proceso de construcción de la modernidad” (78-79). This unresolved dichotomy between economic modernity and traditional values still constitutes “un rasgo importante de la cultura chilena” (137).

Despite Larraín’s argument that the relationship is dynamic, forward movement has been slow. Overall, in the first half of the twentieth century conservative writers and historians tried to revive “una vieja identidad perdida, un sentido de originalidad” (108). The tendency to suppress non-conformity in order to preserve allegedly Hispanic values persisted. The 1940s witnessed more efforts to reaffirm “nuestra verdadera identidad basada en los valores medievales españoles” (78). Despite its relatively recent nineteenth-century origins, the “national character” was already perceived as anchored in the past, almost immutable rather than being fluid or adaptable. As the state concentrated on economic development, employment and globalization after the Second World War, Catholic traditionalists viewed cultural modernization as a European imposition incompatible with true Chilean identity (78). Unlike in Argentina, it was difficult for the middle classes to penetrate the political system (Larraín, *Modernity and Identity* 93). Major social movements such as *indigenismo* and *hispanismo* never gained a strong foothold in Chile.

Subercaseaux in turn has been critical of underlying aspects of *chilenidad*. He believes that the Hispanic foundation constrained the development of an independent cultural voice. The idea of “lo chileno” arose as a core value even before any tangible basis for *chilenidad* existed (“Espesor” 15). Unfortunately, “las ideas tienden a transformarse en esquemas absolutos con respuestas para todas las inquietudes, y los idearios cristalizados pasan a ocupar el lugar que deberían ocupar los procesos de expresión de un espesor cultural propio de creación de símbolos

e ideas a partir de él” (15). In sum, a lack of creativity in response to Spanish rule generated what he describes as a continuing “déficit de espesor cultural” and a closed view of what does and can constitute cultural expression.

For Subercaseaux, this defensive or reactive approach spawned an inability to adapt and a reliance on the *status quo*. The emergence of the middle classes as a political force in the late 1930s merely linked elite culture to popular cultural expressions. This nurtured “un espesor que suplía la pobreza de aportes culturales demográficos y étnicos, y que hacía más soportable la levedad del ser” (“Espesor” 18). Meanwhile, ethnic perspectives continued to be excluded at both elite and popular levels.

Larraín attributes the lack of cultural depth to the rejection of Spain and colonial culture. Spanish America found itself “in the paradoxical situation of having to found a culture of its own on the basis of foreign elements taken from France and Britain, which could only interest a tiny elite and did not represent vast social sectors” (*Identity and Modernity in Latin America* 90). Larraín highlights six complementary discourses on which Chile based its identity: a military-racial perspective stemming from the War of the Pacific, the psycho-social approach, the postmodern entrepreneurial approach, and the lens of popular culture, as well as the traditional filters of *hispanismo* and religion (*Identidad chilena* 226-55). These essentialist versions, which tend to be mutually reinforcing, further constrain the scope for innovation or diversity.

From O’Higgins to Pinochet, military generals who became presidents played a central role in nation-building efforts. In the 1970s and 1980s the military regime favoured a disciplined, conformist view which is macho, racist, authoritarian, intolerant and anti-intellectual (*Identidad chilena* 226-33). These ingrained notions extend to the postmodern economic and technological image, linking neo-liberalism to deeply conservative social values. The military past combined

with the influence of the Catholic Church and the emphasis on traditional family life all play a decisive role in shaping identity discourse, including shortcomings with respect to democracy and human rights (221-26) and the malaise (“malestar”) of culture (253-55). Racism, prejudice and discrimination linger, widespread if covert (231-33). In the wake of the transition to democracy and concomitant policies of national reconciliation, these discourses persisted as the urban elite still largely controlled cultural expression.

Although cognizant of these constraints, Larraín shares with Hall the sense that identity is a dynamic process. However, he contends that Hall simplifies too much with respect to the postmodern fragmentation of the subject (*Modernidad, Razón e Identidad* 111-12). While the idea of nation may have diminished and be subject to change, the individual subject is not fragmented or unstable (113-14). In discussing how national identity is articulated as public discourses open to change, Larraín disagrees with both the purely essentialist and purely constructivist approaches, proposing instead a dynamic balance (34-38). He expresses his historical-structural approach as follows:

On the one hand it conceives of cultural identity as something constructed and reconstructed within new historical contexts and situations, as something in respect of which it can never be said that it is finally resolved or definitively constructed as a fixed set of values and common experiences. On the other hand it does not conceive of the construction of identity as a mere process of public discourse, but considers also the practices and meanings accumulated in the daily life of people. The historical-structural version conceives of identity as a dynamic interrelation of the public and private poles, the two necessary moments of a circular process of mutual interaction. (38)

Using this approach Larraín dismisses the argument that there is a trend to dissolving national, regional and local identities: “The more profound the universalizing tendencies are, the more particular people, ethnic groups or sections of society seek to reaffirm their difference and the more they become attached to their locality” (41). Furthermore, although globalization offers greater scope for self-definition, there are in fact boundaries rather than a complete freedom to fashion one’s identity at will (42). For Larraín the pendulum continues to swing between progress and old notions of identity, creating the potential for change. He asks whether the time has come to shed the poorly veiled sense of superiority, based on a long ago military victory, in favour of building bridges through cultural and trade ties with neighbouring countries (*Identidad chilena* 232).

In that regard, David Hojman notes some change in Chile since the mid-1980s, including an increasing level of tolerance for diversity. Chileans have become “more open toward the rest of the world, although not necessarily toward other Latin American countries, and openly acknowledge the contribution of pre-Hispanic cultures” (Hojman 283). Tolerance at home and abroad, without a leap to acceptance, is perceptible, although the attitude towards neighbouring nations signals that the old sense of superiority remains.

With respect to multiculturalism, in the 1990s the notion was applied to the Mapuche. However, the measures elicited controversy about both the need and the results. Moreover, Epple writes that while the indigenous heritage is idealized in monuments and school texts, it is still “negado o segregado en la cotidianidad social, o en el mejor de los casos objeto de un reconocimiento paternalista.” For him, “el pueblo mapuche no ha tenido un acceso distinto a los proyectos de nación postulados en Chile por las distintas corrientes sociales e ideológicas” (*El*

*arte 92*). Epple concludes that it is time to re-evaluate the place of indigenous peoples in the imagined or projected nation.<sup>44</sup>

Subercaseaux also argues that cultural diversity and modernization must begin to work together to allow individuals to express themselves in a modern nation (“*Chile, ¿un país moderno?*” 36-63). Otherwise, the nation cannot overcome its cultural deficit. Subercaseaux, who initially targeted indigenous peoples, has since reflected further on the immigrant heritage. He advances diversity of expression as a way to overcome the perceived lack of cultural depth. His *Nación y Cultura en América Latina* (2002) begins with a general statement that underlines Latin America’s untapped diversity and its “espesor cultural de origen étnico o demográfico” (16). Subercaseaux sees this “espesor” as something that colours “el mapa de la diversidad cultural del continente y tiene una función de argamasa: constituye a la vez un fenómeno de cohesión social y de apelación identitaria” (16). It is hard to disagree with his assessment of the value of tapping into diversity in an increasingly interconnected world.

In the same vein as Larraín, Subercaseaux firmly rejects the perspective on globalism and the ensuing loss of a sense of national identity and culture that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri present in *Empire* (2000), as well as similar views held by Spanish American intellectuals. In particular, he distinguishes between cultural traditions and global mass culture in terms of self-image and historical self-awareness, disagreeing with Beatriz Sarlo’s affirmations that difference and multiculturalism are irrelevant notions for Spanish America (cited by Subercaseaux in *Nación y Cultura* 26-28).<sup>45</sup> Rather than rallying to Sarlo’s position that it poses a threat,

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<sup>44</sup> In “Race in Latin America” Peter Wade places only the indigenous and black communities within official multiculturalism initiatives in Latin America. I would argue that rather than multiculturalism these are accommodation measures aimed at select marginalized groups and do not apply to Chile’s immigrant communities.

<sup>45</sup> Multiculturalism is “una ideología producida en los espacios académicos anglosajones y especialmente norteamericanos” which has had “una sorprendente capacidad persuasiva y de creación de escenarios llenos de

Subercaseaux maintains that by encouraging the expression of ideas, diversity corrects “el bagaje homogeneizador que tuvo en el pasado la matriz ilustrada” (30). Echoing Martí and Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui among others, he maintains that the socio-cultural diversity of “Nuestra América” could escape “la ciudadanía restringida de la elite ilustrada” to enrich the suppressed historical consciousness of nations in the region (30).<sup>46</sup> Recognizing diversity as a legitimate force would counteract the assimilation ideal since difference would no longer be perceived as an obstacle to the construction of republics that were “cultas y civilizadas” (31-32).

Although Chilean theorist Nelly Richard was not dealing with ethnicity, she has argued that diversity and plurality of perspectives returned only briefly to Chile, with the rainbow of “no” forces that brought the dictatorship to an end. The transition absorbed differences into a sterile consensus and standardized market tastes (*Cultural Residues* 145). Most importantly, her perspective extends the question of diversity to the realm of ideas, similarly to what happened to the notion of *mestizaje*.

Subercaseaux emphasizes the lack of intercultural initiatives in Chile, contrasting the neglect of the Mapuche with initiatives in countries such as Paraguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and Brazil (*Nación y Cultura* 33). For him, cultural diversity, however utopian, is connected to the deepening of democracy and the sense of belonging and fulfillment beyond the political arena (39-40). Greater decentralization would demonstrate tolerance and respect for other traditions and notably help overcome racism towards Peruvians (51-53). Finally, Subercaseaux

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promesas.” As a form of cultural relativism, it affirms “el lugar de la diferencia no sólo como espacio que debe ser respetado en términos democráticos sino como máquina productora de lo mejor que pueden ofrecer las sociedades posmodernas: es relativamente optimista frente a la fragmentación de lo social y de la resistencia en el despliegue de las diferencias culturales, incluso de aquellas que están sostenidas por la desigualdad simbólica” (Sarlo 28-29).

<sup>46</sup> Author and activist Mariátegui (1894-1930) defended the role and rights of indigenous peoples and workers.

sees a need to reduce prejudice through education, dialogue and respect for the rights of ethnic groups and minorities (55).

Along the lines of Subercaseaux, Martín Hopenhayn raises the need to think in terms of possible utopias as an “orienting horizon.” He writes that it is “an imaginary construction, it’s the expression of a desire, not just any desire, but a collective desire for a collective order. Just as it bestows meaning, it sets limits on what is desired” (151). Therefore, a way to proceed “would be to assume a mestizaje capable of *negating the negation of the other*, and to open the repressed abundance of intercultural riches inscribed in our history. Between literature, landscape, culture, the partial rationalization of life, and the certain dream of democratic coalitions, utopia can and must be produced” (153). Hopenhayn imagines a diverse future, projecting it in utopian terms that could be tied back to the Chilean national anthem’s vision of a faithful copy of Eden.

Ana Pizarro has also emphasized the perception of homogeneity and the neglect of ethnic roots in Chile. She argues that national thinking has not considered the “país discriminatorio” such as the bias against the Jewish community during the Pinochet years. Furthermore, with respect to the Arabs she writes that “(n)unca nadie se preguntó por esas culturas milenarias, por su perfil, por su riqueza, por las historias de origen de estos señores de bigote y traje oscuro sentados en la entrada de tiendas de tela o mercería” (108). Nor was anyone interested in the history of the poor Europeans, unlike in Argentina where “la estructura social está marcada por capas superpuestas o adosadas de inmigrantes de distintos orígenes, armenios, alemanes, rusos, italianos etc., que afirman su procedencia en la vida cotidiana además de su pertenencia al estado nacional” (108). In Chile “la nación los absorbe con mayor fuerza y el origen se desvanece con rapidez en el espacio cultural de la nación y su cultura hegemónica” (108). If Pizarro decries past discrimination and the assimilation of immigrants as impoverishing national culture, she goes on

to claim that the current treatment of Spanish American, Korean, and Indian migrants is even worse (108). Nonetheless she concludes on a hopeful note, writing that “(l)a tensión está presente en la actualidad frente a la concepción monolítica del chileno como sujeto integrado, con una ascendencia discernible y una filiación única. La noción de diversidad no está generalizada, pero ha ganado terreno” (110). The question is whether this line of thought can replace or bypass the master narrative.

In a series of conversations with Ana María Stueven published in 2007 a number of prominent figures including Larraín discussed topics such as Chilean identity. In the prologue Stueven writes that they do not believe in an essentialist vision of national identity, that there exists a receptiveness to diversity, and that homogeneity never existed (14). On the other hand, several participants comment on racism and whiteness. Spanish-born theologian Antonio Bentué states that while Mapuche references may look good on paper, a negative side of Chilean identity is that “el chileno que se siente menos raíz mapuche se siente mejor” (40). For prominent architect Emile Duhart, “A los chilenos les encanta decir que Chile es único, eso tiene raíces en la Colonia, porque Chile fue un país de blancos. Eso creó una especie de soberbia con respeto a Perú, por ejemplo” (56). Novelist José Manuel Vergara adds that “(n)o hay historia más inventada que la de Chile. ... Hay que considerar que más del noventa por ciento de Chile es mestizo. Chile no es un país de blancos, y por eso es estéril, porque no lo ve. Se niega a si mismo” (76). According to the late poet Gonzalo Rojas, “(s)omos mestizos: eso es lo que la gente no quiere ver, o no sabe o no vive” (76). Overall, the participants share a consciousness of the *mestizo* roots of Chile as well as recognize that it is generally unacknowledged because it is perceived as a sign of inferiority.

Chilean novelist Isabel Allende, who began to make annual trips to Chile after the military regime ended, commented that she would find it difficult to live there given its traditional ways and its lack of diversity. In *My Invented Country* (2003) Allende compares life in the United States, which “has allowed me to be myself, or any version of self it has occurred to me to create” with Chile, where “diversity is not yet appreciated” (196). She described the latter as a class-conscious racist society that denies having a race problem (33-34), ignores its African stock (38), and is anti-Semitic (98).

Nevertheless, social scientist Hojman believes that there are some signs of change. He emphasizes three points about contemporary Chilean culture that sum up the situation. It “is plagued by ambiguities, inconsistencies and contradictions;” “however defined, it changes over time, and has become substantially different in recent decades;” and “it has been ‘adopted,’ ‘accepted,’ ‘owned,’ or ‘shared’ to different degrees by different social classes, sectors, and groups” (268). As a result, “Chile is a complex society, riddled with cleavages, heterogeneities, and dramatic income and other inequalities” (269). Any contemporary discussion of *chilenidad* must reflect this heterogeneity.

As these contemporary perspectives indicate, a rethinking of what it means to be Chilean is underway. Historically the Chilean self-image glossed over ethnic and indigenous stories in favour of a homogenous model of identity or *chilenidad*. Elites were adept at identifying and repressing the “other:” while Argentina had too many immigrants and Peru and Bolivia had too many indigenous people, Chile quickly assimilated its urbanized immigrants into the middle classes, ending their “otherness” (Sznajder 212). If indigenous peoples are the obvious starting point of any discussion, there is scope to extend the reach to ethnic minorities. Even today, “(t)he rationality that underlies the Chilean political discourse regarding ethnic minorities does not

consider these immigrants of European or Asian origin that are settled in the country, but focuses mainly on the groups of indigenous origin” (Merino 113). Being absorbed into the middle class does not however ensure that ethnic memory has been permanently erased.<sup>47</sup>

If past policies and politics left little room for ethnic expression or heritage cultures on a regional or national level, one can argue that this reflected the spirit of the times. It is equally reasonable to expect a shift in approach today. The transition to democracy in the 1990s triggered a renewal of interest in identity, including pondering what being Chilean meant and what it might come to signify. Returning exiles such as Skármeta came home with a wider window on the world.

Since the first narratives that Skármeta published after his return deal with ethnic memory and Chilean identity, theories of memory are needed in order to fully develop a framework appropriate to their analysis as narratives of ethnicity. If we accept that thinking in terms of homogeneity prevented Chile from acknowledging its diversity and that a new approach is warranted, then a framework that encompasses plural memories and their role in identity formation is required.

### **Memory Theory and Identity Construction**

Plato’s philosophical notion of *anamnesis*, the idea that knowledge is transmitted from supposed previous lives, and that learning consists in retrieving this imprinted knowledge, is a reasonable point of entry into the spectrum of stand-alone and overlapping theories of memory.

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<sup>47</sup> Although minority ethnic groups in Chile may not mirror classic forms of diaspora, Clifford’s view that the cosmopolitan discourses of diaspora create tension with both the assimilation ideologies of the state and indigenous claims is relevant. Both ethnic groups and indigenous communities “challenge the hegemony of modern nation-states” (308) as the language of diaspora revives the ties to the former homeland (308-10).

Since Sigmund Freud first explored the fluid terrain of individual memory, it has been closely associated with processing past trauma. Freud opposed a circular and internalized melancholy to a productive mourning process which culminates in reconciliation with oneself as a result of working through loss and grief (“Mourning and Melancholia”). Until and unless an individual breaks the cycle of nostalgia and melancholy, the grieving process remains blocked or incomplete. Life cannot move forward. From this perspective, working through the experience and the recollection of trauma becomes a way of accepting and moving beyond the loss of loved ones and cherished objects in order to resume living. Writing offers an instrument of mourning as it processes grief, as many times and in as many ways as necessary.

Maurice Halbwachs applies this Freudian notion of individual memory and mourning to collective memory. In *La mémoire collective* he distinguishes between history as past and memory as present. Halbwachs postulates two different kinds of memory, an autobiographical one and another that is social or historical, and therefore collective. For him, collective memory spans three or four generations with anything more distant relegated to history. Nurtured by collective memories (social, religious, or political, for example), each individual memory also responds to its everyday environments. In other words, individual members of a group remember the same past differently, through different filters. Consequently, the significance of the collective memory depends on the consciousness of the living, evolving with each successive generation. Still, for Halbwachs

Although it reflects and is refracted through the lives and personalities of individual group members, the collective memory represents the group’s most stable and permanent element, and is sufficiently general and impersonal to retain

its meaning when individual members drop out of the group and are replaced.

(Whitehead 129)

Furthermore, according to Halbwachs, a child is immersed in a social environment that leaves profound imprints. It is “le cadre dans lequel sont pris ses souvenirs les plus personnels. C’est ce passé vécu, bien plus que le passé appris par l’histoire écrite, sur lequel pourra plus tard s’appuyer sa mémoire” (38). An awareness of these vestiges of the past provides the necessary foundation to recreate it, even if only fleetingly (35). In keeping with Halbwachs’ insistence on the past as lived experience, remembering becomes an act of rebuilding that borrows from the present as well as from previous reconstructions (38). This collective memory is necessarily limited to what is still alive or able to be relived in the consciousness of the group (46). Individual and collective memory are deeply related since “we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated” (47). In short, the continuity that helps create identity stems from both individual and collective memory. Moreover, physical and geographical space plays a major part in maintaining this memory since it structures and stabilizes social life (85).

Thinkers such as Jan Assmann have refined these concepts of collective memory. Assmann distinguishes between “communicative memory,” which focuses on the everyday, like Halbwach’s collective memory, and “cultural” memory that extends back beyond living memory, “a collective concept for knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (Olick et al. 212).

Although Halbwachs has been criticized for strictly separating history from memory, his notions of collective memory are useful in thinking about immigrant memory. If we accept his

view that collective memory is communicated through the oldest living members of the community, it may in fact only reach back three or four generations. Furthermore, the original geographical space no longer exists in the case of immigrants and their descendants who have relocated permanently at a considerable distance from their place of origin. Therefore, immigrants, whether individuals or as a community, assume a pivotal role in transmitting collective or communicative memory, as well as cultural memory, to their immediate descendants.<sup>48</sup>

While Halbwachs' notions are no longer as useful as they once were, he generated critical conversations about the importance of family, generational influence and space in the development of collective memory. Family configurations and theories of memory have evolved considerably. Nevertheless, the importance of family ties and the broader notion of a specific community as family both remain key to minority and ethnic memory.<sup>49</sup>

Extrapolating from Halbwachs, a basic issue is how the collective memory of an immigrant community is transformed once the last person directly tied to the home country and the circumstances that severed the geographical connections dies. A corollary issue is whether there exists an obligation to respect or preserve that collective memory through future iterations and how it influences the construction of identity.

Régine Robin has reflected on the various types of official and collective memory and concluded that no impermeable boundaries (*cloison étanche*) separate them. Their interwoven strands add complexity to any individual or group memory. In the end it is what she calls

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<sup>48</sup> Conversely, Halbwachs could not foresee the extent to which technology would facilitate preserving the past or the explosion of memory projects recording stories such as those of survivors of severe trauma. At the same time, the passage of time has dramatically altered the notion and role of family, the idea of identifiable generations, and the adherence to specific spaces, forcing notions of collective memory to evolve.

<sup>49</sup> Since Skármeta's roots in Chile begin with his immigrant grandparents, Halbwachs' focus on the role of the family social environment, including grandparents, in the development of memory is relevant.

*mémoire identitaire*, an aspect of memory that confers identity, and the imperative to recover this memory that matter. Both intellectual and affective, this type of reconstructed memory is always centred on its transmission to others (109-10).

Furthermore, Marie Vautier has argued that classifications of memory as national, collective and cultural cannot apply to countries that lack a master narrative on history and origins. Instead, the *mémoire identitaire* that looks at identity as a shifting construction generates in literature “an acceptance and a celebration of the indeterminacies and uncertainties of nation, culture, history and memory” (401). According to Vautier, “(b)ecause multifaceted, overlapping, and even contradictory versions of the past form an integral part of the appreciation of history in postcolonial settings, fiction works by mainstream writers can explore the complexities of ‘la mémoire identitaire’” (408). Extrapolating from her argument, fiction can challenge national identity discourses.

Both Robin and Vautier highlight the complexities of memory and the multiplicity of identity, in the everyday and in fiction. Other successors to Halbwachs have delved into the relationship between remembering and forgetting. Assmann in particular is concerned with the past as it is received and remembered. In his view, “the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present” (“Moses the Egyptian” 210). Stated differently, the past is processed in terms of its current relevance so that we are what we remember and simultaneously we also remember based on what we are or have become. At both the individual and the collective level the truth of memory “changes with every new identity and every new present” (210). Yet myths are “traditional narratives that play a very important role in the formation of ethnic identities (‘ethnogenesis’)” (211). This suggests a precarious balancing act

between preserving traditional myths in narratives and ensuring their relevance to a life lived elsewhere.

Based on the premise that collective memory dissipates over time, Assmann postulates that the transmission of collective meaning and shared knowledge as cultural memory requires institutions and organization (in canonized texts, for example), an obligation to respect its system of values and differentiations, and finally its reflexivity (“Collective Memory and Cultural Identity” 213-15). This type of knowledge cannot survive in a void, such as when descendants are no longer able to access specialized institutions, archives or texts.

If fiction can be read, as Assmann argues, as canonic texts that seek to transmit collective memory, they may also constitute a personal *travail de mémoire* in the Paul Ricoeur turn of phrase. In extensive studies recorded in *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* Ricoeur adopts Freud’s notion of the work of memory, linking history and memory to narrative and healing. The narrative of memory work can be shared with a broader readership. Yet stories are ambiguous as they set “the occasion for manipulation through reading and directing narratives, but also the place where a certain healing of memory may begin” (“Memory and Forgetting” 9).

Ricoeur proposes an obligation to remember which “consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in communicating the meaning of past events to the next generation” (“Memory” 9-10). Writing can honour this *travail de mémoire* and combat “the erosion of traces” (10). Narrative thus plays a critical role in preserving and cherishing a heritage to which one is indebted, as well as in safeguarding the memory of the deceased. With the passage of time, fond memories often accompany and overtake the initial shock and the grieving process.

Diverging from Ricoeur’s views on history, memory and the work involved in remembering, Pierre Nora underlines the duty to remember through a historical, physical and

heritage-based approach. In contrast with actual historical places, Nora's criticizes *lieux de mémoire* as selected commemorative sites dedicated to evoking memory, sites "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself" ("Between Memory and History" 7). He opposes them to *milieux de mémoire*, the physical locations where events occurred and memories first formed. The memory site arises after the fact, as a tribute or memorial to a fading past. On the other hand, the *lieux d'oubli* or places of forgetting/forgotten places are sites where important events transpired before being erased from collective memory.

According to Nora, the real environment of memory and its repository of collective memory no longer exist. Instead, memory has been relegated to commemorations and to places like museums, objects, archives and cemeteries that help organize the past as history, not as lived memory.<sup>50</sup> Nora describes real memory as one that evolves but maintains a link to those who came before, while history eradicates memory by crystallizing and consecrating the past. From this perspective, memory is specific while history belongs to all and, therefore, to none ("Between Memory" 8). The *lieux de mémoire* are "fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived" ("Between Memory" 12). Yet, Nora's views on the transition from historical collective memory to *lieux de mémoire* suggest an imperative, or at least a strong drive, to capture this awareness and appreciation for future generations, to hang on to what is threatened with oblivion. Otherwise, with the loss of individual and collective memory, events eventually solidify as irrelevant "ancient" history. This loss of immediacy forces every group, including ethnic, social and religious minorities, "to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history" (15). In effect, Nora argues that,

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<sup>50</sup> While Nora's studies were focused on France, they apply to many reconstructed places, such as historic sites listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for example the historic centres of Warsaw after the Second World War and Dubrovnik after the 1991 Serbian bombings.

unlike a *milieu de mémoire*, *lieux de mémoire* do not help people make sense of the past by undertaking the important work of memory.

Nora criticizes sites of memory as existing somewhere between life and death. In counterpoint to Assmann, he characterizes literature in particular as a site of memory that acts as a means to “express the exhausted capital of our collective memory” (“Between Memory” 24). For this reason he is skeptical of historical fiction, “the last stand of faltering fiction” and the “bereavement of literature” as well as a form of nostalgic mourning (24). From the historian’s perspective, the importance of collective memory is now exaggerated and its plural nature collides with the unitary nature of history, thereby weakening the concept of national unity. Given its capacity for transformation, the *lieu de mémoire* could stop time and the work of forgetting, endlessly metamorphosing meaning (“Between Memory” 19). It is the unpredictability and mutability of created memorials and historical fiction that trouble Nora, the loss of permanence. Yet it seems to me that the same concern applies to the interpretation of history and historical sites.

Despite Nora’s misgivings, I view the narrative *lieu de mémoire* as an invaluable way of establishing connections and retaining this memory when the *milieu de mémoire* itself is inaccessible or irretrievable. It can help make sense of the past. And it would seem to acquire a more significant role as international migration and mobility continue to increase distances from the actual *milieu de mémoire*, or when sites are destroyed.

It is debatable whether a single collective memory can influence a sense of national unity to the extent that Nora states. Rather, the preservation of minority memory through narrative offers a valid approach to building empathy and understanding within and across nations. The literary *lieu de mémoire* which draws on the *travail de mémoire* of both author and narrator, and

that subsequently engages the reader, is integral to this responsibility. However, without a critical mass of readers a shared vision remains utopian.

Twenty-five years after Nora's work was first published, he defended the duty towards history over memory. He states that history was once considered as reliable collective memory, while memory was private and subjective. Now, the separating line is blurred with history losing ground to memory and the meaning of memory being overturned. The idea of collectivities having memory has transformed "the status of individuals within society and of their relationship to the community at large. Therein lies the secret of that other mysterious shift which has occurred ... the shift in our understanding of *identity*, without which it is impossible to understand this *upsurge in memory*" ("Reasons for the Current Upsurge" 440).

Nora goes on to warn of the dangers associated with glorifying memory and its use as grounds for exclusion, war and murder ("Reasons" 441). His caveat can nonetheless be read in reverse. Both history and memory, if seen as diverse, can promote inclusion and plurality over uniformity, a valuable trait for increased understanding in complex societies and a globalizing world. Taking a different view than Nora on the balancing of history and memory, I tilt towards the importance of plural memory and away from forgetting the inaccessible historical *milieux de mémoire* in the case of immigrant identity discourses. I rely on the notion of artefacts as sites of memory exercising a positive force in evaluating my corpus of Skármeta's narrative and defend the interplay of multiple memories in constructing national discourses of identity.

While Nora insists on the duty to retrieve and reposition certain lost historical sites and events in memory, Avishai Margalit proposes instead an ethical approach to the duty to remember. The obligation to never forget in order to "never again" repeat the experience of the Holocaust is central to Jewish writing. When Margalit asks whether certain shared memories

should extend beyond groups directly affected to a broader moral community, his doubts can be projected onto other minorities. The issue is whether an ethnic minority alone or society as a whole has a duty to remember origins and past traumas.

The corollary to that question is what exactly constitutes appropriate loyalty to that past and “whether doctrines and attitudes that (unlike traditionalism) are oriented toward the future rather than the past can and should be concerned with the ethics of memory” (Margalit, “Ethics of Memory” 472). Using this notion in relation to Skármeta’s work leads to asking whether an ethics of memory can find a place in a society that has downplayed its diverse origins in favour of homogeneity and what that place might be, beyond nostalgia.

On that front, Anthony Smith has grappled with the potential for nostalgia in relation to immortality, posterity and the search for family roots. Nostalgia connects individuals to “persisting communities whose generations form indissoluble links in a chain of memories and identities” (233). Nostalgia is a rational response in ethnic groups since we only live on through posterity and collective tales. In Smith’s words, “our myths, memories and symbols must be constantly renewed and continually re-told, to ensure our survival” (236). For him, it is this transmission from generation to generation that creates the nation. Although Smith focuses on the ethnic cores on which nations are founded without touching on the changes that high levels of migration can produce, he does stress that creating the nation is an activity that befalls to each generation and the dialogue between its component groups, operating within a tradition (235).

While Smith notes that nostalgia and utopia are often linked, Svetlana Boym has delineated critical differences between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia attempts to reconstruct the lost home and its truth, a utopian task bound to fail, while reflective nostalgia dares to question while still cherishing shattered fragments of the past. If restorative

nostalgia is a serious endeavour, reflective nostalgia can be ironic and humorous, revealing that “longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, just as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment, or critical reflection” (“Nostalgia and its Discontents” 455-56). While Boym deals with exiles and immigrants who cannot return, their descendants, born like Skármeta in the new home nation, confront a different reality. Nonetheless, her notion of reflective nostalgia lends itself to my analysis.

With respect to contemporary notions of diaspora, nostalgia, and identity, James Clifford has argued that the reality of diaspora no longer matches the standard definitions of William Safran.<sup>51</sup> Not all displaced peoples long to return to their places of origin nor are they always segregated or treated as unequal in their new home. At the same time, they can remember and feel connected to another place, displaying a transnational identity (304-05). Transnational identity tends to be viewed in relation to people who have direct ties to two or more nations. The sense of connection continues to increase with the unprecedented availability of communications and information technology. However, despite the immediacy of technology, it is difficult to develop and maintain close bonds at a distance in the case of descendants or exiles. Transnational communications does not necessarily signify a sense of transnational identity.<sup>52</sup>

On a related theme, the exile’s memory as it pertains to identity will be different today than it was before the rise of instant communications. Now, it may be more in tune with the home country and less tinged with nostalgia. On the other hand, the identity of the returned exile will be questioned. For example, after perusing a photo of a mural in Chile that read “*Los*

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<sup>51</sup> For more on Safran see his article “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return.”

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of transnationalism and technology see *Growing Up Transnational* (2011) and *Click and Kin* (2016), both edited by May Freidman and Silvia Schultersmandl.

*retornados también son extranjeros,”* Ana Pizarro interpreted it as the worst possible kind of nationalism. This mural led her to reflect on how a returned exile adjusts and, in turn, is perceived. The individual who returns never shakes off the feeling of exclusion; instead, it comes into play differently once back on home soil. There is “un hiato en la memoria y en la experiencia concreta ... y éste es el de su ausencia. Tiene en cambio otros registros. ... ha comenzado a ver a su país desde fuera de él, con la distancia que anula al patriotismo vulgar y permite iniciar la crítica, develar los mitos” (110). The gap due to absence from everyday life during exile is compounded by a more critical perspective on the homeland. Life resumes in an in-between place, “en un espacio de negociación entre el pasado que lo destruyó y lo rehizo, y este presente que también está en su memoria histórica pero es diferente a las imágenes que ella conservaba” (110). The challenge is to find or create a new balance (110). In the end, if our sense of self comes from understanding our individual history and experiences, in concert with our situation in the present and our anticipated future directions, the identity we build comes together as a unified whole. The key to identity is to keep a reflexive narrative alive in a way that makes sense to the individual (Giddens 54).

In addition to these interconnected theories on memory and identity, philosopher Charles Taylor’s notions about authenticity in relation to pluralism, the hybridity of modern identities, and the need for a politics of recognition of plurality may help in reading Skármeta’s fiction as narratives of ethnicity. Taylor uses the word “authentic” in relation to debates on individualism and modernity rather than in absolute terms: to be “authentic” means being true to oneself and being free to find design in one’s life, rather than conforming unthinkingly to external demands (“Ethics” 67-68). Seeking to be free from unwarranted social and institutional norms would include for example established practices and expectations related to marriage, the place of

immigrants in society, or discrimination against groups and individuals. For Taylor, this quest for authenticity leads to a life that is at once more self-responsible and richer (74). Identity also takes shape in a dialogical relationship with the people we love, with conversations continuing even after their death (“Ethics” 33). Taylor postulates that our understanding of ourselves depends on dialogue and recognition (“Ethics” 48). Moreover, each individual’s unique way of being demands recognition by others, in contrast with a past insistence on conformity.

Political thinker Michael Ignatieff captures Taylor’s notions of recognition in these words: “To be recognized is to emerge from anonymity, to be seen and acknowledged for what you are,” instead of being dismissed or disregarded as a nobody (86). While recognition goes beyond equal rights to acknowledging distinctiveness, it is these rights that hold people together in the absence of common roots. Equality of rights “is the precondition for recognition, but it is not sufficient to ensure it. When individuals and groups seek recognition, they want their equality recognized, but they want their differences acknowledged as well. Beyond legal equality, groups seek acknowledgment of the value of their culture, heritage, and distinctive point of view” (86-87). Recognition also means reciprocity, a balance of mutual recognition (122). Among the messages that emanate from Ignatieff’s lectures is that majority interests must be balanced with minority interests and that immigration demands thoughtful responses, such as re-examining perceptions and discourses of national identity.

Without delving deeply into philosophical concepts of authenticity, it is important to underline that discourses identifying and propagating a belief in an authentic national identity were common across the Spanish American intelligentsia over the last two centuries. Writers were expected to “write like a Latin American” (Alonso 17) and reflect a cultural essence rather than an individual perspective. In a number of countries the conceptualization of this authentic

national identity revolved around the notion of *mestizaje* in terms that surpassed racial aspects, in order to focus on the spiritual, moral and religious, in ideas such as a *raza chilena*. Differences were suppressed in the search for a common denominator. In effect, leaders explored the nation's geography "not in order to give a voice to the pueblo; but to discover and synthesize popular elements in its construction of an authentic national identity" (Skurski 626).

In juxtaposition with this concerted search for a homogenous national identity is the need to be authentic and accountable on the individual level. Sharing Paul Ricoeur and Anthony Giddens' views of identity as narrative, Taylor writes that "making sense of one's life as a story is ... not an optional extra ... to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going" (*Sources of the Self* 47). In return, society also has obligations to its members. Taylor argues that in today's plural societies, the ethics of individual authenticity requires a fusing of the different horizons of social expectation. In order to satisfy these expectations and for the individual to be fully authentic, the recognition of the "other" must move beyond simple equality and tolerance and fully accept the many manifestations of difference. This overturns the idea of a uniform or common national identity.

If we accept Taylor's arguments, including that the cultural impacts of globalization make hybrids of everyone, adherence to a past ideal such as exceptionalism based on genealogy constitutes an inadequate response to the complexities of the contemporary world. Highly globalized democracies like Chile would instead recognize and welcome minorities as fundamental to the imagined nation. The depiction of the immigrant as either a foreign "other" or as a fully assimilated Chilean would yield to the recognition of difference as a legitimate element of individual and national identity. Reflecting this plural makeup would strengthen the narrative of nation since it would reflect Benedict Anderson's projection of an imagined

community whose members could not know every one of their compatriots, but could visualize a “communion” or collectivity regardless of socio-economic, cultural or other differences.

In brief, memory in its conflicting manifestations is a critical component of individual and collective identity. Identity is itself a complex and evolving construct that weaves disparate threads into individual patterns. Individual, group and national identities are all intertwined in the narrative of self. Art, including literary expression, is one of the visible places in which various heritages and identities can come to light. In Taylor’s view “(a)rtistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition” (“Politics of Recognition” 62). This notion that, in modern healthy democratic societies, individual authenticity and social recognition of diversity can culminate in a shared purpose aligns with contemporary Chilean arguments about democracy and fulfilment rather than the social fragmentation that Nora predicted.

In conclusion, immigration, identity discourse, and theories of memory will all three be instrumental in my analysis of Skármeta’s narrative. First, Chile’s immigration policies and its patterns, particularly minority immigration such as that of the Dalmatians, ground the discussion in the context in which the central characters of the two narratives of ethnicity evolve. Second, the key arguments found in Chile’s discourses of identity will serve to frame more closely the environment in which the immigrant characters must find their place. The predominance of the *criollo* elites and the glorification of figures like the *roto* and the *huaso* in the nation’s socio-political and literary history will be considered as limiting the scope for the depiction of minority communities as actors. International discourses on identity and memory will in turn enable me to show how non-hegemonic memory can dialogue with dominant discourses. This framework will buttress my contention that Skármeta delves into his ethnic past to recreate a genealogy and

incorporate its memory into Chilean identity discourses. I will further argue that his rewriting of key literary genres reflects his views on the legitimacy of plural democracies and the need for a recognition of individual identities that goes well beyond tolerance or acceptance.

Within this frame of reference of immigration, discourses of *chilenidad*, and theories of memory, identity and authenticity, I now focus on the literary tradition in Chile and Skármeta's position within it, to complete the analytical framework for the study of the corpus.

## Chapter 2

### Skármeta and the Literary Tradition

This chapter on Skármeta and his place within the literary tradition is divided into two sections. In the first, I focus on Chile's literary history and its canon within the broader Spanish American tradition. In the second part, I concentrate on Skármeta's own views on the literary tradition and his place within it, as well as his earliest fictional allusions to ethnicity, in order to later highlight the significance of his shift to ethnic narrative.

Within the first part on Chile's literary tradition, I discuss ethnic narrative as a distinct category of writing that has not yet been widely studied across Spanish America. Although writers have related immigrant and settlement stories in both fiction and non-fiction, the Chilean literary world has paid little attention to their work. Therefore, I consider theories associated with this type of narrative and introduce examples from Western literature before examining recent studies of ethnic narrative in Chile, primarily that written by Chilean Jews and Arabs. I conclude by finding that the multiethnic immigrant legacy warrants a place in the landscape of Chile as imagined in literary fiction and that *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* constitute interesting objects of study in this respect.

### Chile's Literary Canon

Since the independence proclamations of the Spanish American republics, debates have raged about the degree of foreign influence associated with the translation and imitation of European and Anglo-American writing styles and subjects. Authority figures stressed the need to produce a countervailing body of work that would establish and anchor the specificity of the region and each of its component nations. They envisaged both political writing and fiction as

key elements of the nation-building initiative and a necessary defence against both foreign models of literature and stereotypical depictions of the new states and their inhabitants.

Whether it be the foundational/historical novel of the nineteenth century, *criollismo* or the novel of the land in the early twentieth, the mid-century innovations of the cosmopolitan Boom novel, or Post-Boom fiction's revival of the historical and testimonial genres that rewrote key events and figures through a critical and ironic filter, at heart all these literary forms depict the unique history and geography of the individual nations that make up Spanish America. This insistence on the nation and the region meant that fiction devoted little space to the wider world or to other internal perspectives.

As for Chile, it was more isolated geographically and intellectually than nations facing the Atlantic Ocean. In the wake of Alonso de Ercilla's foundational epic *La Araucana*, Chile's literary reputation at home and abroad was founded on poetry. This emphasis was reinforced with the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Gabriela Mistral in 1945 and to Pablo Neruda in 1971. The poetry of Vicente Huidobro, Pablo de Rokha and Nicanor Parra, among others, is also well recognized, especially across the Spanish-speaking world.

However, some critics question this assumption of a literary nation composed primarily of poets at the expense of novelists. Ironically titled "Noticias de un país de novelistas," the introduction to *Albricia: la novela chilena del fin de siglo* argues that the belief in twentieth-century Chile as a land only of poets is in fact a myth (Cortínez 15). Chile had produced important works of fiction before the surge of writers best known to contemporary readers, such

as José Donoso, Jorge Edwards, Isabel Allende, Ariel Dorfman, Diamela Eltit, and Ramón Díaz Eterovic, as well as Skármeta and, more recently, Roberto Bolaño and Alejandro Zambra.<sup>53</sup>

Admittedly, narrative was slow to emerge in the immediate post-independence period. Only a few notable works of foundational fiction surfaced before Alberto Blest Gana marked the rise of the bourgeoisie with *Martín Rivas* (1862). However, throughout the twentieth century writers produced an evolving array of fiction. For the first half, these works generally depicted Chile's urban bourgeoisie or adopted the form of the realistic regional or *criollista* novel, the traditional narrative of identity that focused on the land. Despite some incursions into the more abstract spheres of *imaginismo* and surrealism that were more common in neighbouring countries, by the 1940s *neo-criollismo* drew the reader back to realism.

The canonic writers of the period include, for example, Eduardo Barrios (1884-1973) who wrote in the naturalist genre and the *costumbrista* style that highlighted local characters and customs. Manuel Rojas (1896-1973) maintained the penchant for realism while adding working-class characters and marginalized sectors. Joaquín Edwards Bello (1886-1968) wrote critically about urban life while María Luisa Bombal (1910-60), Chile's first widely-recognized female writer of fiction, touched on eroticism. A list of noteworthy fiction writers would also point to Francisco Coloane (1910-2002), Nicomedes Guzmán (1914-64), Enrique Lafourcade (1927), and Carlos Droguett (1912-96).

In the middle years of the century, the tradition of realism, now incorporating more universal themes, continued to define Chilean narrative even as innovative writing techniques such as magical realism spread across other parts of the region. The narrative of the Boom

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<sup>53</sup> As Doris Sommer noted in *Foundational Fictions*, the visibility of the Boom and its authors completely overshadowed the earlier literary production of Spanish America (1). A number of the authors mentioned hereafter are not widely known outside Chile today and few of their works are available in English.

period, which was characterized by the search for the universal and the mythical as well as a more nuanced view of the past, including the history of African and indigenous peoples, resonated to a lesser degree in Chile. In addition, it was difficult for Chilean writers to determine what their Spanish American contemporaries were creating until European publishers began distributing the work of Boom writers (Skármeta “Al fin y al cabo” 270-71). Both the conservative bourgeois tradition and the lack of regional awareness help to explain why members of Chile’s *Generación del 50* like Donoso, Edwards and Lafourcade paved the way from *criollismo* to urban realism when several of their neighbours were experimenting with more daring techniques and language. Donoso, who began in the *costumbrista* style of realism, relocated to Mexico before producing the only major Chilean Boom novel. The publication of his darkly existentialist *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* (1970) marked the end of the Boom period, while coinciding roughly with the young Skármeta’s first short stories and his call for a realism that favoured contemporary urban life over that of the bourgeoisie.

Ignacio Álvarez’s 2009 study of six major twentieth-century authors assesses Chilean literature through the lens of national identity, up to the military coup. He links the notion of imagined nation and national identity to narrative dating back to the days of José Victorino Lastarria and Blest Gana. Paralleling Doris Sommer’s argument in *Foundational Fictions* about love and marriage as metaphor for nation-building, Álvarez writes that until the military coup the purpose of narrative was “la creación de una literatura representativa de Chile en la misma medida en que significa la creación de Chile a través de su literatura (una paradoja perfecta)” (*Novela y nación* 40-41). Chile as a nation of the imagination was born from this circularity.

Álvarez also argues that, despite the predominance of literary realism, a succession of authors from the generations of 1927 (*la vanguardia*), 1942 (*neorealismo*) and 1957 (*irrealismo*)

*superrealismo*) effectively constructed a full cycle in the life of the imagined nation (50). From Juan Emar and Rojas's questioning of the subject, the cycle progressed through Guzmán and Droguett's experimentation with totalizing and metaphysical expressions of identity, until ending with Donoso and Edwards' depictions of the nation's fragmented identity and history (53). For Álvarez the literary century was cut short in the 1970s, since the military regime repressed the narrative of national identity. On the other hand, the shortened cycle illustrates that the nation was already struggling for expression beyond literary realism even before the dictatorship.

The military coup coincided with the emergence of the *Generación del 72*, including Skármeta, as well as Dorfman and Carlos Cerda, his schoolmates at the prestigious *Instituto Nacional*. Their urban sensibilities contrasted sharply with the regionalism of the generation of 1938 and the abstraction of the generation of 1950 (Epple, *Del cuerpo a las palabras* 111). They embodied the spirit of the times, notably a desire for greater personal and political freedom, which came up against conservatism and the military regime.

Skármeta, who had published his first collection of short stories in 1967, was teaching and writing when Salvador Allende's *Unidad Popular* government (1970-73) came to power. Along with a number of prominent and budding authors, he participated in several government initiatives designed to make literature more accessible and to promote cultural development, such as writers' workshops and affordable editions of classic and contemporary works. Actively engaged in social change, these writers were not however representing the Allende years in literature, since "no entendían lo que pasaba, que la gran literatura no se hacía en la urgencia, que faltaba perspectiva" (Piña "Interview" 177). They would need time and distance to fully process

and articulate their experience (Ruffinelli “Interview” 141). Despite this general statement, there were some immediate depictions of the Allende period.<sup>54</sup>

The coup brought these government-sponsored literary endeavours to a sudden halt (Cortínez 15). Dozens of artists were murdered or tortured; hundreds more fled the country. During the period of *apagón cultural* (cultural blackout) that followed, creativity was marginalized and repressed. Writers either recreated the era of the dictatorship and the experience of exile from abroad or resorted to non-linear or non-political works to escape censorship at home. The dispersal of writers and the impermanence of underground publications have created tremendous challenges for literary critics and historians interested in the period.<sup>55</sup>

The Post-Boom movement responded to the repressive climate in the Southern Cone, including Chile. Without falling back on the more conventional forms of the realistic novel, it revived linear structures, chronological progression, realistic settings, and causality. The novel of the dictator, the novel of exile and new forms of historical fiction, all of which are rooted in literary realism, flourished in the 1970s, as did testimonials. Many writers opted for a “*novela de la desacralización*” which enabled them to “denunciar, parodiar o satirizar situaciones y actitudes canonizadas” or represent themselves as chroniclers or witnesses to ensure that events would not

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<sup>54</sup> Among the narratives, Lafourcade, who had portrayed the hippie context of the 1960s and the politics of the 1970s, depicted the Allende period in *Palomita Blanca* (1971). *Salvador Allende* (1973), his polemical first-person novel which imagined Allende’s last day, was not published in Chile until 1990. His *El gran taimado* (1984), a parody of Pinochet, led to self-exile. Enrique Lihn’s comic book, *Batman en Chile* (1973), illustrated a CIA mission in Allende’s years. Guillermo Atías released a tabloid-novel *Y corría el billete* (1972), and Dorfman, his first novel, *Moros en la costa* (1973). Fernando Jerez’s undistributed novel, *El miedo es un negocio* (1973), with a prologue by Skármeta, related the financial panic that followed Allende’s victory. Later, Atías wrote *La Contracorriente/Le sang dans la rue* (1978) while Fernando Alegria wrote a fictionalized biography, *Allende: mi vecino el Presidente* (1989).

<sup>55</sup> Established writers like Droguett and Volodia Teitelboim fled as did Soledad Bianchi, Poli Délano, Dorfman, Mauricio Wacquez, as well as Leandro Urbina who landed in Canada. Edwards took refuge in West Berlin, Donoso and Cerda in East Germany. Another dozen moved to either East or West Germany (Cárdenas, “Literatura chilena del exilio”). Cultural magazines useful in tracking exile writing include *La Araucaria de Chile*, published in Paris from 1978 to 1984, and Madrid from 1984 to 1989, and *Literatura chilena del exilio*. Founded in Los Angeles in 1977, the latter was renamed *Literatura chilena: Creación y crítica*, and relocated to Madrid. Paula Thorrington Cronovich’s analysis of how the arts survived the dictatorship provides complementary information.

be forgotten (Promis 932-33). In line with this perspective, testimonials and fiction circulated outside Chile. Skármeta is credited with the first novel of exile (*Soñé que la nieve ardía* 1975). Hernán Valdés wrote one of the first testimonials, *Tejas verdes: Diario de un campo de concentración en Chile* (1974). Jerez penned *Un día con su excelencia* (1986), a novel of the dictator.

Internally, few major works of fiction openly explored the dictatorship for some time. Whether through traumatic abstractions or genre novels, writers sought to escape censorship or reprisals. Among the younger generation, Eltit wrote challenging novels of alienation as a form of resistance. Díaz Eterovic constructed a grim Santiago in a popular detective series. Beginning with *La ciudad está triste* (1987), he explored with his detective Heredia the violation of human rights and political corruption through recognizable archetypal figures (Pérez “Interview”). It was only shortly before the end of the military regime in the late 1980s that dissident texts began to circulate freely in Chile.<sup>56</sup>

After their return to Chile, Donoso and Skármeta led writing workshops aimed at the next generation. Nonetheless, just as little had been written about the Allende years as they unfolded, it was too soon to process the recent past into definitive narratives. Echoing his earlier opinion that it was not feasible to write about the Allende years while in their midst, Skármeta stated that in the 1990s it was still “todavía muy temprano para estudiar la relación entre la presión a la que estuvo sometido Chile durante la dictadura y la producción literaria” (Cortínez “Interview” 34). Some writers might not wish to delve deeply into the recent past, others would need time to reflect on its significance before writing about it, and others would focus elsewhere.

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<sup>56</sup> Later works include Diego Muñoz’s *Todo el amor en sus ojos* (1990); Jorge Calvo’s *La partida* (1991); Roberto Rivera’s *A fuego eterno condenados* (1994); Antonio Ostornol’s *Los años del serpiente* (1991), and Pedro Lemebel’s *Tengo miedo torero* (2001).

In any case, Grínor Rojo argues that, while forgetting became the major literary theme of the transition in the 1990s, healing would eventually demand the retrieval of history (“Casi veinte años” 70). His prediction has played out in that both writers with recollections of the dictatorship and a younger generation unfamiliar with its darkest years revisit it. For example, after his return, Cerda published a trilogy comprised of *Morir en Berlín* (1993), often cited as the definitive novel of exile, *Una casa vacía* (1996) and *Sombras que caminan* (1999), followed by *Escrito con L* (2001).

At the same time, the next generation did venture in new directions. Alberto Fuguet, Jaime Collyer, Gonzálo Contreras, and Arturo Fontaine Talavera, among others, often chose to depict the contemporary world. Built on the Post Boom, their *Nueva Narrativa Chilena* used a range of styles including *avant garde*, realist and historical novels and mass culture genres, as well as pastiche and parody, the social and the grotesque, journalistic reporting, clinical observation and television scripts (Epple in Ojeda and García-Corales xv).

A decade after the referendum rejecting Pinochet’s leadership, writers were divided as to whether they had a responsibility to recreate the past. In a roundtable gathering, five male writers, namely Cerda (1942-2001), Darío Oses (1949), Collyer (1955), Contreras (1958) and Franz (1959), discussed the role of the author. For Cerda, the oldest participant, the post-dictatorship generation of fiction writers had a duty to expose the wounds and scars since they were not being adequately scrutinized in fields such as journalism or public discourse (Cortínez 237). Collyer also felt obligated to do so since “los pueblos necesitan revisar su historia pasada, pagar sus culpas colectivas y revisar íntimamente las fuentes del autoritarismo” (232). On the other hand, Franz, the youngest participant, countered that the weight of having to bear witness had been lifted (238-39). He did not have to carry on with either “la literatura de anuncio que yo

identifico con los años 70 y con la creación novísima de Antonio Skármeta y el anuncio de una nueva época” or “la literatura de denuncia” (239). Writers were free to write as they wished.<sup>57</sup>

In a separate interview with Cortínez, Skármeta commended *Óxido de Carmen* by Ana María del Río (1986), Eltit’s *El cuarto mundo* (1988) and *La revuelta* by Sonia Montecino (1988), all of which depict a perverse and perverted closed world through “la inserción de la fantasía en un angustioso clamor por raíces, por un espacio sagrado de justicia, por la creación de novelas” (41). In other words, women writers who did not tackle the dictatorship in overtly realistic ways succeeded in condemning it through literature.

In summary, until the middle of the twentieth century fiction in Chile had traditionally represented the urban elites or offered *criollista* depictions of life. Popular and mass urban culture had begun to colour the literary landscape when the military coup decimated the artistic and intellectual community. Long after the transition, narrative about the military regime and its repercussions is still being written at the same time as authors tackle contemporary subjects in innovative styles.

Over the course of two centuries, narrative in Chile has tended to respect the bounds of traditional nation-building narrative. While life in exile became a literary topic, few nationally and internationally recognized authors grappled with the issue of emigration from elsewhere, settlement in Chile or the nation’s ethnic heritage, or wove this legacy into fiction about contemporary Chilean life. Until the 1990s ethnic identity and minority writing were not part of the discourses circulating widely in society. Since then, only a few critics have focused on texts by ethnic writers, whether immigrants or their descendants, in contrast with many Western nations where ethnic narrative occupies a growing space and demands critical attention.

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<sup>57</sup> In spite of his stated intention, Franz’s acclaimed novel *El desierto* (2005) revolves around the dictatorship.

## **Ethnic Narrative and Immigrants in Chilean Literature**

Critical approaches to ethnic narrative, especially in the French and Anglo-American spheres, have created new ways of viewing the representation of immigrants and their descendants in fiction and in the national imagination. In light of the lack of critical studies of narratives of ethnicity, either individually or as a genre, in Spanish America and notably in Chile, an exploration of the theory and practice associated with their study in North America underpins my contentions with respect to the treatment of immigrants in Chilean literature as well as Skármeta's writing in relation to contemporary identity discourses.

According to Alec Hargreaves, European powers mistakenly assumed that life in the colonies would not affect their transplanted cultures. Former colonies and their hybridity countered this perception, modifying the dominant discourse and traditional literary scholarship, especially in the Anglo-American world. Indeed, "While the ethnic dimensions of these changes have been embraced more readily by scholars in the Anglophone world, they are present in more camouflaged ways in Francophone studies and the logic of globalization is such that they appear destined to become ever more evident" (33). Nor are these shifts in scholarly focus limited to the study of majority or indigenous populations in former colonies. Scholars have also turned their attention to the writing of immigrant and ethnic populations.

Given that successive waves of diverse immigrants settled in both South and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth century, it is reasonable to expect that minority immigrant groups and their descendants on both continents would counter traditional identity discourses by writing about their places of origin, the settlement experience, and their perspective on the new world. While this type of narrative has been subjected to scholarly scrutiny in North America and Europe for several decades, there has been little similar study in

Spanish America, either as a distinct field or in terms of its relationship to traditional discourses of national identity. If, as Hargreaves predicts, scholarly interest in ethnic literature spreads in a globalizing world that values pluralism and diversity, it will eventually reach beyond the stories of formerly colonized *criollos* and *mestizos*, and their literary acculturation or transculturation. It will examine the stories of minority immigrant groups and their descendants regardless of how integrated they may appear to be. This interrogation has already begun with the study of Jewish and Arabic writing in Spanish America, including Chile.

It is important to recognize that the concept of ethnicity itself has evolved over the last few decades. In the past, the term was normally used to designate non-dominant groups in society, often signaling a different race, religion or language from the majority, whether native or immigrant. Absorption into the mainstream was expected to dilute the evidence of ethnicity or race over time. Belief in innate racial differences which often accompanied late nineteenth century discourses on nationalism continued well into the twentieth century. In Spanish America this belief dictated policies of whitening through immigration, without regard to the diverse ethnic and cultural traits of immigrants.

On the other hand, for Werner Sollors ethnicity is a process, a cultural construction, an invention linked to that early idea of nationalism. It “does not serve as a totalizing metaphor but simply as a perspective onto psychological, historical, social, and cultural forces” (*The Invention of Ethnicity* xx). Yet, racial and ethnic mixing cannot erase all ethnic differentiation (xix). In fact, ethnicity may be seen more as an asset than a liability in a globalized world (*Beyond Ethnicity* 33). The expectation of assimilation, as well as associated images such as a melting pot, has yielded to the idea of a diverse mosaic or a salad bowl or a patchwork quilt to describe many contemporary Western conceptions of nation. This approach to valuing ethnicity and

diversity is at odds with the century-old Southern Cone expectation of whitening the nation by assimilating immigrants into the dominant culture without regard to individual histories.

In addition, ethnicity is not a static trait that disappears within a generation or two. Instead, successive generations reshape a continuing discourse as part of their core identity. This “deeply rooted emotional component of identity” is “reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual ... not ... passed down from generation to generation, taught and learned, [but] something dynamic” (Fischer 195). Thus, each generation fashions its own version of ethnicity in relation to the present, with ample room for preserving a constantly reinvigorated identity. Literature offers a tangible instrument for transmitting and understanding ethnicity as a living force, beginning with the immigrant experience. Immigrant narratives relate how an individual or a group left one place and travelled to or settled in another, while experiencing nostalgia, solitude, alienation, xenophobia, and racism, and, eventual integration within the adopted nation.

In Europe and the Americas immigrant literature was initially catalogued as a minor, secondary or marginal genre, unrelated to the major discourses and the literature of national identity. It commonly designated for example Jewish and Arabic tales of displacement written in the adopted language. In other words, it was seen as preserving the past rather than aspiring to or creating a future. This static vision has evolved in response to the persistence and increase in ethnic narrative.

Critics began to focus more intently on “minor” literature by “outsiders” as a category in the 1970s when Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed a definition. In their words, “(a) minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (“Kafka”19). This type of literary production had three characteristics:

deterritorialization above all, followed by connection to the political present and collective enunciation (18). Deleuze and Guattari then concluded that “minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (18). While their attempt to circumscribe what makes some literature great, when compared to fiction in general, was both contentious and misinterpreted, it launched further discussion of how to define various types of what was considered minor literature and eventually ethnic literature.

Members of immigrant and ethnic communities are as prone to storytelling and writing narratives as anyone else. Even when writers self-identify as belonging to the dominant social group as a result of education and national integration, their roots may still permeate their world view. They may weave ethnic or foreign memory into the dominant imaginary or culture since there is “no simple ‘return’ or ‘recovery’ of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present: no base for creative enunciation in a simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by the technologies and identities of the present” (Hall, “New ethnicities” 449). In brief, there is no escaping the present by calling on the past or vice versa.

Furthermore, in the context of migration and globalization, a writer living anywhere can choose to work in a foreign or national language, a language of origin or of adoption, and can be in regular contact with former compatriots. In addition, the interplay of multiple ethnicities enters into the analysis, while deterritorialization from a geographical space does not seem to hold much power beyond the immigrant generation itself.

Ethnic writing may take the shape of either non-fiction, such as biography and memoir, or fiction, even though some critics tend to group these two genres together into a single

category. Immigrants write memoirs or autobiographies while descendants often base their texts on oral histories and family stories. Fictionalized biographies aim to capture and convey the actual immigrant experience, while family sagas and historical novels seek to represent it in more creative ways.

A variety of expressions attempt to describe this narrative universe. Terms such as immigrant, ethnic, multiethnic, interethnic, multicultural, intercultural, and, more recently, transnational describe works that deal with mixed or “other” origins. Philosophers and scholars have interpreted the terms multicultural and intercultural in diverse and conflicting ways, including whether the notion of multiculturalism implies that a dominant group tolerates other cultures, without being influenced by them. I have chosen not to focus on this discussion as it is clear that in Chile there exists a dominant discourse that is only recently admitting other cultural strands. Therefore, I use “ethnic” to identify anyone who is not of Hispanic, major Western European or indigenous descent. Within these limits, the following statements best match my understanding of ethnic narrative:

(It) is not so designated because of the authors’ race, color, creed, national origin or association ... what we designate ‘ethnic literature’ are the products of authors who choose to feature the significance of ethnicity in their writings.” (Reilly 4)

And

(E)thnic interpretation lives and dies with the single subject and his or her ethnic gaze; any sign can be read as ethnic if it is placed in an ethnic sign system.

(Boelhower, *Through a Glass Darkly* 105-106)

And

Ethnic writing is a choice and results from the author's own ethnic gaze inward, the reading of self as ethnic subject. (D. Franco)

A narrative categorized as ethnic adopts a particular gaze or leans towards a reading that takes ethnicity into account. It is not the origin of the author that is in question but the ethnic presence or sensibility that colours a specific text. While ethnicity itself may be lost or diluted through consent (marriage) or descent (succession) in Sollor's terms, a particular sensibility remains. It is not the culture itself that is different, but rather the attachment to it and its representation in imaginative texts (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 9-10).<sup>58</sup>

This focus on the approach rather than the artist has been evident since the 1980s. In England for example, Hall argued for shifting the debate away from the usual linking of ethnicity to race.

(W)e all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as 'ethnic artists' or film-makers. We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. But this is also a recognition that this a (sic) not an ethnicity which is doomed to survive, as Englishness was, only by marginalizing, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities. This precisely is the politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity" ("New ethnicities" 448).

While Hall was contemplating the situation of Africans in England, his ideas easily transfer to other groups. A politics of ethnicity would recognize and value difference over sameness and

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<sup>58</sup> Sollors refers to the revival of ethnic identity in the United States as predicted by Nathan Glazer and Patrick Moynihan in their groundbreaking 1963 study, *Beyond the Melting Pot: the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*. He argues that the authors' contention that ethnic identity would persist through generations carries over to literature.

challenge notions of innate superiority or exceptionalism that extend well beyond the question of race.

According to Wail Hassan's 2011 study of Arab American and Arab British texts, future generations do not need to negotiate and adjust in the same way as their immigrant parents did, while their attachment to the original culture will vary considerably. In his opinion, the Deleuze and Guattari model ignores the potential for rejection of the homeland, the desire for acceptance in the new one, and the ideological stances of immigrants ("Introduction"). As a result, immigrant narratives play a role "in reconceptualizing literary studies beyond the restrictive paradigm of the national canon" ("Conclusion"). In other words, these stories have the potential to augment or redirect the canon by dismantling literary boundaries.

Ethnic studies in the United States also tended to emphasize race until the 1970s, producing a significant bibliography on African-American, Asian and Latino fiction. However, some forty years ago the quarterly periodical *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US* adopted a more all-encompassing approach. The MELUS society defines multi-ethnic literature in the United States as that of "Asian-Americans, Afro-Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Latinos, and Americans of European extraction like Italians and the Polish, and, specifically, religious ethnic groups such as Jews who have been ignored, misread, or underrepresented in the past." Its stated goal continues to be "to expand the definition of new, more broadly conceived US literature through the study and teaching of Latino, Native American, African American, Asian and Pacific American, and ethnically specific Euro-

American literary works, their authors, and their cultural contexts” (melus.org). This stretches the discipline to cover groups such as Irish-American and Italian-American writers.<sup>59</sup>

Sollors contends that, since the arrival of English immigrants in the seventeenth century, ethnic literature has provided the central code of U.S. Americanness (*Beyond Ethnicity* 7-8). In fact, “a broader and more inclusive definition of ethnic literature that includes popular and major authors is helpful: works written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups” (243). This scenario even covers well-known writers such as Vladimir Nabokov (241-42).

Theories which saw modernization as overcoming ethnicity led to considering individuals as simply American writers, albeit with ethnic roots (241). This trend led to disregarding “the innovative aspects of ethnic writing, the invention of ethnic traditions, the syncretism and modernism that characterizes so many of the forms of ethnic culture in America” (240). Now, the double consciousness of ethnic writing is better recognized (245). As a result, a writer can act as an intermediary, introducing all readers to ethnic life as well as informing immigrants about American life (249-50).

In the 1980s, William Boelhower advocated moving from the study of individual ethnic texts to the genre and its sources. He considered that, since the novel stemmed from a pluricultural reality and the immigrant appeared as a historical protagonist, it called “into question a tradition of literary criticism that has excluded the presence of this genre” (“The Immigrant Novel” 3). In his view, the omission led “to an incomplete version of American literary history” (4). Simply stated, literary history would benefit from being revised.

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<sup>59</sup> In 2009 literary critic and Mexican Jewish immigrant Ilan Stavans, a MELUS contributor, edited *Becoming Americans: Four Centuries of Immigrant Writing*; in 2015 he created the Restless Books Prize for first-generation immigrants to identify “culture-straddling writing that addresses American identity in a global age.”

My argument is that a similar approach would be both valid and timely in terms of immigrant and ethnic literature produced in the Southern Cone, and in Chile in particular. The evolution in the critical study of Canadian and U.S. immigrant/ethnic literature offers insights and concepts that may be applicable to Chilean narratives of ethnicity. Admittedly, this type of narrative may not occupy as broad and deep a field as in North America, either historically or in the present. However, the stories do complete the version of the nation's history recognized in the literary tradition. Recovering these artefacts can bring a more diversified understanding of the evolving construction of the nation, an important contribution in an increasingly complex and integrated world. Major elements, such as those of Boelhower and Sollors, provide a point of departure for potential comparisons.

Boelhower developed a series of criteria for the ethnic novel. In it, the protagonist, who bears an ethnic name, embarks on a journey of discovery, displays foreign customs in the new environment, and must reconsider his or, much less frequently, her world view once in the new land. The novel "introduces into American literary history a new pluricultural world view and this world view, which is strictly related to the collective consciousness of immigrant groups, is, through a homological relationship, originally and dialectically responsible for the genesis of the genre's form" (10). Rather than interpreting the immigrant novel as either remembering what has been lost or moving towards assimilation, Boelhower sees it as allowing for a reciprocal process in which the foreign cosmovision influences the host nation. Thus, the genre enables the reader "to familiarize himself with new ethnic values and traditions and to naturalize these differences as an integral part of the American experience" (12). For Boelhower, this doubling and diversity

creates new American types, whether in autobiography or fiction. The reading experience generates knowledge or appreciation of what was previously unknown.<sup>60</sup>

Another Boelhower article proposes a three-stage analytical framework.<sup>61</sup> It also argues that immigrants or ethnic authors wrote most American trilogies in the 1920s and 1930s. These trilogies established trajectories of continuity, shifting the perspective from the old world to the new in the realist tradition, and through two cultural systems, history and genealogy (“Ethnic Trilogy” 160). The first stage of construction (a utopian *vouloir-faire*) begins in the old world and continues with the journey to the new. In the second stage of deconstruction (*pouvoir-faire*), as the parents die the ethnic world loses authority while the new world disenchant the next generation. In the third stage of reconstruction (*savoir-faire*), the principles of coherence and continuity are reclaimed. Writing becomes a project-memory, a new reading that questions the world of the fathers and reinterprets tradition while the present is enriched through ethnicity. By the final stage the descendants reinterpret history based on their inheritance (“Ethnic Trilogy” 163-75).<sup>62</sup>

And yet, despite this valuing of ethnic narrative, debates evocative of those of the 1980s still occur in the United States. The question was alive in the mid-1990s, with “some critics thinking that there is no need to consider them as different from mainstream American literature, and others insisting that ethnic literatures are ‘not quite’ American, that they belong to a different type of discourse. Other critics take a neutral position” (Leal 22). Almost two decades later the value of disseminating multiethnic literature continued to be questioned (Bona and Maini 17).

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<sup>60</sup> A subsequent Boelhower article makes similar points about immigrant autobiography “fighting for success in American literary history” and introducing “new types into the American pantheon of recognized versions of the self” (“Brave New World” 7-8). Caught between two worlds and two selves, immigrants are born into the new world in “a doubling, not an erasing process” (18).

<sup>61</sup> This is an enlarged version of Boelhower’s 1985 article on ethnic trilogy in *MELUS*.

<sup>62</sup> Although Skármeta intended to write a trilogy, as shown later, his two novels cover the three stages.

On the other hand, Caroline Rody, an expert in Asian American fiction, credits the novel with the necessary flexibility for ethnic purposes. In her view, the novel travelled successfully from the uniformity of nation to multiethnic realities and intercultural encounters. Ethnic literature is not “the facile celebration of hybridity to which we have become accustomed in mass consumer discourse and imagery. Rather, this literature registers an ironic consciousness of arising from a culture that is profoundly hybridized, yet still urgently in need of reparative cross-ethnic dialogue” (5). Stories about the “other” are now found inside stories of the self, the family, the relationship with the nation. Ultimately, “(t)he classic Americanization novel has become a novel of initiation into interethnicity” (9). This suggests that ethnic narrative has found a home, however disputed, within the American canon.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, Rody’s perspective translates well to Canada where the immigrant and ethnic experience is a common theme in literature. These types of narrative constitute critical components of Canadian literature and are well established within the canon. Indeed, many authors, whether first or later generations of immigrants from a panoply of different backgrounds, explore their country of origin and their immigrant experience in fiction that has garnered prestigious national and international awards. This writing is viewed as encouraging dialogue and connection, as well as recognizing ethnic communities and even promoting a sense of healing.<sup>64</sup> In fact, English Canadian fiction has evolved from the early emphasis on landscape and a shared imagining of history to the “increased attention to experiences outside the national mainstream but still clearly rooted *within* a national Canadian context” (Sugars and Ty 8).

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<sup>63</sup> Aparajita Nanda employs “ethnic literatures” in the title of a 2015 book that considers “the many types of borders that are evoked, considered, crossed, affirmed, and undone in ethnic literature” (*Ethnic Literatures and Transnationalism* xiv). The essays place transnational “ethnic literatures” on an equal footing with national ones.

<sup>64</sup> Narratives of ethnicity shape identity discourses as illustrated by such well-respected first generation writers as Kim Thuy, Ravi Hage, Rohinton Mistry and Michael Ondaatje, as well as generations born in Canada that include Wayson Choy, Esi Edeygan and Nino Ricci.

This perspective is not limited to Canadian academics. Igor Maver writes that Canada “largely expresses itself today in literary texts as an imagined community” whose diasporic writers demonstrate “a transnational post-ethnic diasporic identity” and “a dynamic and shifting global view” (21). His conclusion is that the “increasingly empowered voice and vision have pluralized and globalized contemporary Canadian literary production.” (21-22). In short, Canadian literature reflects the origins of a diverse population with globalized identities.

As the place of ethnicity in the literary tradition continues to be debated in the United States and, conversely, ethnicity is treated more as a basic literary premise in Canada, the question I consider is whether or not there is a more prominent place for ethnic writing, past and present, within Chile’s national canon. The lack of immigration to Chile from beyond neighbouring countries since the period immediately following the Second World War undoubtedly constrained the breadth of immigrant and ethnic narrative. Nonetheless, the traditional opposition between centre and periphery and between dominant and marginal memories has not escaped the pressures of globalization and democratization. Immigrant threads have begun to be stitched into the study of literature and identity discourses, as ethnic communities seek and find a voice.

I turn now to the treatment of immigrants in Chilean literature. In 2015, Chile had a population of almost 18 million people, including significant numbers from non-Hispanic or non-indigenous backgrounds. Overall, generations descended from northern Europeans, such as the British and the Germans, have integrated to the point where they have fused into the national imaginary. Five per cent of the population is of Arabic descent (some 900,000) and about two and a half percent is of Croatian origin (some 450,000), while there are approximately 16,000 Jewish residents, down from a peak of 20,000 during the Second World War. Jews and the so-

called “Turks,” mainly Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian Arabs, constitute two minorities with strong cultural traditions and identities. While significant in number, the Croatian minority is not as visibly distinct. Despite these numbers, the presence of minorities in the literary canon is rare.

Africans and their descendants, now identified as less than one percent of the population, are invisible in literature. Over the last decade Paulina Barrenechea Vergara has retrieved a few works depicting African characters. Fernando Santiván’s novel *El mulato Riquelme* (1951) is one of the few if not the only known literary text that portrays a *mulato* protagonist, while Salvador Sanfuentes’ *Leyendas nacionales* (1885) incorporated African and indigenous figures into verse, including *El bandido*, an African slave. Even today little or no thought is given to “la idea de incorporar a nuestro relato a quienes conforman nuestra tercera raíz, la africana” (Barrenechea Vergara, “*El mulato Riquelme*” 80).

In a second article (“El rostro más negro”) Barrenechea Vergara delves further into the representation of the *mulato*. In *Leyendas nacionales* the “bárbaro bandido” is defined as monstrous by his race alone, even after the abolition of slavery. The character moves up in society by repressing his inner self, as the “indígena o negro/mulato, en busca de un lugar dentro de una nación en formación que sólo los acepta cuando renuncia a su diferencia” (“El rostro” 209). People of African descent are viewed unfavourably in literature (204) and have been demonized, objectified and infantilized as a way of controlling or forgetting them (198). African protagonists are less likely to be female, let alone successful females. In a footnote Barrenechea Vergara identifies two exceptions, “obritas” by Justo Abel Rosales. In *La negra Rosalía o el Club de los picarones* (1896) the protagonist is an urban freewoman while in *Los amores del diablo en Alhué* (1882) the slave lives in the countryside (202). With these articles, Barrenechea Vergara has launched a new line of enquiry into the literature of the colonial period and its

depiction of the nation. In the end, since that literature ignored the African presence and there is scarcely a trace left today, diligent research would be needed to unearth whatever does exist. Still, historical documents are waiting to be discovered (“María Antonia, esclava y músico” 97).

Setting aside the lack of representation of people of African descent, there are two possible paths to identifying authors and texts produced by ethnic or racial groups: either immigrants or their descendants write about their communities, or else mainstream writers create immigrant figures. In the area of non-fiction, Lorena Amaro Castro has studied a corpus of memoirs and autobiographies produced in Chile between 1891 and 1925. She lists some sixty authors, with less than a handful bearing non-Hispanic names. She also notes that memoirs and autobiographies were generally self-published, with limited distribution and subject to social disapproval. This would severely curtail minority immigrant memoirs and autobiographies, whether in Spanish or a heritage language.

Similarly a review of the list of over a hundred authors on *Memoria chilena*, an official archival site, reveals very few non-Hispanic surnames. The *Diccionario de la literatura chilena* (Szmulewicz 1977) reinforces this observation, since only approximately two dozen non-Hispanic or non-northern European surnames appear among almost 800 entries. Ten are Croatian, including a young Skármeta. While mentioning Eltit and Skármeta, the 1997 *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* (V. Smith) makes no reference to Chile’s immigrant, ethnic or minority literature (195-222). Neither do the *Encyclopedia of Latin American and Caribbean Literature, 1900-2003* (Balderston and González 2004) or the 1994 issue of *Revista Iberoamericana*, which was devoted specifically to Chilean literature. The Chile index for the 2004 *Encyclopedia* lists dissident, exile, feminist, gay and women’s categories, but not ethnic or immigrant writing.

Carl Solberg's research offers further evidence of this neglect. In examining the interrelationship of century-old immigration policies and nationalism in Argentina and Chile, he underscored key differences in their respective histories and literatures. In spite of vocal debates, immigration never became a prominent theme in Chilean literature while Argentine writers probed the place of the immigrant in society (xi).

With respect to fiction by mainstream Chilean writers, immigrants were not imagined as protagonists while minor immigrant characters working in agriculture, industry or commerce were seldom cast in a positive light. Early in the twentieth century, detective stories published as newspaper serials countered the official view of immigration as a positive force: "Mientras la literatura galardonada propugnaba el blanqueamiento y el afrancesamiento, la narrativa policial publicada en los diarios negociaba simbólicamente el conflicto al revés, es decir, difundió el desprestigio del inmigrante y reclamaba un sitio para el *roto*" (Franken and Sepúlveda 51). Focused on poor and undesirable immigrants, these stories feature the socially unacceptable immigrant as both victim and offender (Franken and Sepúlveda 47). Those judged not to be contributing to the desired nation or failing to integrate were not worthy of being Chileans.<sup>65</sup>

A closer look at early detective stories confirms this negative characterization. Although the first such texts are usually attributed to Alberto Edwards who introduced detective Román Calvo in 1913, the actual precursor was Januario Espinosa's xenophobic *La muerte misteriosa de José Marini* (1912). The detective sets out to prove that Italians are perverse and reprehensible. He criticizes official immigration policy for fostering "una comunidad italiana cerrada, donde ni el cuerpo ni el dinero transitarán fuera de ellos de manera que tanto la idea del 'mejoramiento de

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<sup>65</sup> Argentina offers a useful point of comparison. Its naturalist novel played to the governing class, for example by lauding a cultural identity inspired by countries such as France and Great Britain (Moreau 104-05). Novels by writers belonging to the "generación del 80" such as Antonio Arberich and Eugenio Cambaceres were critical of undesirables such as Italians and Spaniards without workplace skills.

la raza' como la de apoyar a quienes incidirían en el levantamiento de empresas sería falsa. Queda entonces vacío el sitio de los inmigrantes” (276). The Italians, who constituted the country's second largest immigrant community after the Spaniards, served as a visible target for opponents of immigration. The detective story fuelled this view by depicting the immigrant as a suspect needing to be monitored (276). In literature as in life, large immigrant communities confined to their own enclaves aroused fear and loathing. In short, the official stance on immigration collided with popular opinion.

The negative portrayal of immigrants was not limited to detective stories. While Edwards Bello's *El roto* (1920) focuses on the indigenous and *mestizo* urban underclass, it also criticizes immigrants, even though they seldom appear as characters in the novel. Set mostly in a brothel and a gambling den, the story introduces poor prostitutes and brothel workers who have migrated to the city, and their children. The sombre naturalist descriptions highlight the depravity of the milieu, the misery of the *roto*, and the corruption of authority figures such as politicians and the police. The maid in the brothel bears “las facciones características de la mujer nacional” (49), with fleshy lips, passive bovine eyes, dark skin, thick curly hair, broad hands and waist, a heavy body and column-like legs (49). A filthy room displays the “suciedad sórdida y sin remedio ... la marca del roto” (77). Yet, the politician character considers the *roto* “superior a los plebeyos de otros países americanos por su astucia, pillería, resistencia para el trabajo y lealtad a los patrones” (71). These “matones de la peor especie, verdaderos bandidos capaces de todo” were invaluable to the political class during election campaigns (71).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> The novel also fictionalizes *El Mercurio*, the newspaper founded by a Spaniard but owned by “el millonario Edwards” (125). The author, who rejected his family, underlines class and race distinctions at the newspaper. The darkest *mestizos* try to look and act like whites: “Física y mentalmente asimilan rasgos duros y metódicos de los bancarios Edwards. El diario se ha tragado a Chile asimilando pura sangre chilena” (125). Young middle-class

At the same time, immigrants are consistently denigrated in the novel, except for the industrious Germans who imparted to the police the stereotype of “la disciplina prusiana” (75). The British in Valparaíso are unpatriotic, escaping as soon as they enrich themselves. Prostitutes mock a French woman for being scandalously underdressed. The “vascos” are criticized for operating pawn shops, despoiling Chile with “esos negocios perezosos y sórdidos” (88). The cheating croupier in the gambling den is from Madrid; another Spaniard skips town without settling his debts. When the brothel area is demolished, only foreigners profit: an Italian, a German, and an English company. Forced into the streets, the prostitutes entice clients to even filthier Chinese rooms, at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Even though the novel is about the *roto*, towards whom Edwards Bello was sympathetic, it fully reflects the anti-immigrant views of the period.<sup>67</sup>

While Chilean writers portrayed them negatively, if at all, early in the twentieth century, immigrants, and especially their descendants, eventually began to write and publish in Spanish. Over the last two decades, scholars have started to track and study ethnic narrative, especially that of writers of Jewish and Arabic origins, although the numbers are still limited. Lists or bibliographies of Jewish, Arabic and Dalmatian works produced by the communities themselves tend to recognize indiscriminately all types of writing, such as medical, scientific and educational materials.

With respect to Jewish writers, Leonardo Senkman included two expatriate Chileans, Ana Vázquez Bronfman and Marjorie Agosín, in an article in the special issue of *Revista Iberoamericana* in 2000 dedicated to Jewish writing in the Americas. In *Jewish Writers of Latin*

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reporters from small towns are the “defensores de la oligarquía” (126); the older editor “de origen humilde” has had his ideas of social equality quashed (172).

<sup>67</sup> The absence of Dalmatians could be due to their scarcity in the capital in their early years in Chile.

*America* (2013), Darrell Lockhart gathered 120 entries from ten countries, mostly Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, reflecting the demographic reality. He contends that only in the last fifteen years has Jewish writing evolved into a discipline with a Latin American discourse and more writers than he could include. However, not much of this writing has penetrated the literary canon and it survives on the fringes.

Of the total number in the Lockhart dictionary, there are only four Chilean entries, two men and two women. Sonia Guralnik and Efrain Szmulewicz were both born in the 1920s. Dorfman (1942) and Agosín (1955), who live in the United States, were raised but not born in Chile, although her parents were born there. Agosín herself edited a collection of articles about Jewish women authors in *Passion, Memory, and Identity: Twentieth-Century Latin American Jewish Women Writers* (1999). In addition, her memoirs, such as *Always from Somewhere Else: A Memoir of My Chilean Jewish Father* (2000) and *A Cross and a Star* (1994), cover her family's four generations in Chile.

During her childhood Agosín was always being asked to decide if she was a Jew or a Chilean, as if the two were indeed incompatible. This is apparently still a central question. She writes that in “the Chilean cultural imaginary it seems to be impossible to reconcile that a Jew can be fully Chilean. We were always subject to the fate and classifications of a religion that made it impossible for us to be citizens in the mainstream” (*Passion* x). This marginalization based solely on religion does not align with her own posture since, rather than simple acceptance of the dominant culture, “identity assumes a historical condition, but it is also a game of multiple projections and an invention of history” (xv). Ethnic discourse and the presence of a diaspora accompany the displacement (xx). However, the strength of Catholicism among Chile's elites in particular apparently constrained any ethnic/cultural expression within the mainstream.

Various authors in *Passion* examine Jewish women's writing "about their identity and their hybrid condition" as well as "their personal experiences vis-à-vis the national culture" (xiii). As to a definition of Jewish writing, Agosín quotes Wirth Neshet; it is "literature written by Jews and that is the most unsatisfactory definition" (xxi). Elizabeth Rosa Horan discusses two Chilean Jewish women writers, Agosín and Guralnik, who only began writing about her past against the official discourse of the Pinochet years. Horan also mentions a younger woman, Shlomit Beytelman, a Chile-Israel dual citizen. The post-Holocaust generations come of age with military dictatorships and the military as "the sole legitimate voice of national identity" (120-21). For Horan, the end of the military regime has allowed literary subcultures to proliferate, with new discourses on national identity.<sup>68</sup>

Within Chile, tales of Jewish emigration from Europe and the challenges of life in the new world received scant critical attention until Rodrigo Cánovas and Jorge Scherman focused on them in *Voces judías en la literatura chilena* (2010). The book jacket describes it as the first study of "narradores de origen mosaico en Chile," implying that there were no previous studies of writers from ethnic communities, either as a whole or individually. Cánovas followed up with *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos en Chile y México* (2011), as well as articles about Arab writers in Chile.

Cánovas and Scherman conclude that the Jewish and Arab communities produced the largest bodies of immigrant and ethnic writing. Much of it is biographical, relating personal histories and settlement. There were Jewish genealogical trees and family albums but very few historical novels. Jews wrote primarily about their uprooting and the loss of the homeland while

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<sup>68</sup> Some critics refer to Andrea Jeftanovic, whose background is Russian-Jewish and Serbo-Croatian, as a Jewish writer. Her stories of fleeing the Balkans (*Escenario de Guerra* 2000), terrorism (*Geografía de la lengua* 2007), and incest/child perversion in *No aceptes caramelos de extraños* (2011) are not narratives of ethnicity under my definition.

Arabs dwelled on their adaptation to life in Chile. Cánovas echoes Agosín and Horan, stating that the Jewish voice has only been heard since the transition to democracy, a time supposedly more tolerant of different sensibilities and open to diversity, while the Arabic voice has at last been extended to women (*Literatura de inmigrantes* 13-14). Through his investigation Cánovas found writing that ventured beyond “imágenes nacionales instaladas en la certidumbre de lo propio” (13). He experienced Chile from an unexpected angle, “otorgándonos de paso un testimonio de la experiencia de vernos a nosotros mismos desde fuera” (13). In other words, the writing was important for all Chileans in terms of their perceptions of identity.

According to Cánovas and Scherman, it is still exceedingly rare for non-Jewish writers to paint Jews as protagonists. Guillermo Blanco is the only Chilean, and possibly the only Spanish American non-Jew ever, to have published a historical novel with a Jewish protagonist (“*Camisa limpia y La gesta del marrano*” 27). Both Blanco’s *Camisa limpia* (1989) and *La gesta del marrano* (1991) by Argentine Marco Aguinis are relatively recent re-imaginings of the life of Francisco Maldonado da Silva, a Sephardic Jew born in Argentina who lived in Chile and was jailed in Lima where he was burned to death by the Inquisition. *Camisa limpia* calls for respect for diversity while allegorizing the fear and terror that marked the Pinochet military era (28).

The Arab population was equally neglected in fiction. Widespread “turcofobia” carried over in the occasional mention. José Santos González Vera’s *Aprendiz de hombre* (1960) stands out for its sympathetic view of Arabs, living piled together in miserable housing, without clothing, working and saving for a better future.

Just as there are few novels centred on Arabs by non-Arab Chileans, identified works by Arab Chileans seldom predate the 1950s and there are few known studies of them. Matías Rafide’s 1989 book on Chilean writers of Arab origins lists only two as “*destacados*,” Benedicto

Chauqui and essayist Moisés Mussa Battal. However, he mentions Diamela Eltit and Naím Nómez, both of whom achieved greater recognition after his book was published.

Like the Jews, Arabs have written biographies and memoirs of their immigrant experience. *Nahina: la larga historia de mi madre* (2004) by Edith Chahín and Reinaldo Sapag Chahín's *Mis raíces provienen de Siria* (2008) are recent endeavours.<sup>69</sup> Chief among the fictional texts from the second half of the last century are Chauqui's 1957 *Memorias de un emigrante* and Roberto Saráh's novel *Los turcos* (1961). More recent post-dictatorship novels are well-known filmmaker Miguel Littín's *El viajero de las cuatro estaciones* (1989), *El viajero de la alfombra mágica* (1991) by Walter Garib, and *Peregrino de los ojos brillantes* (1995) by Jaime Hales.<sup>70</sup> Six of the seven titles reflect the transmission of ethnic memory and its importance to identity.<sup>71</sup>

More recently, Lina Meruane explored her Palestinian roots in *Volverse Palestina* (2013). Her thoughts on travelling to Israel and Palestine are very clear about her dual affiliation. Border inspections were revealing since "irse desnudando, literal y metafóricamente, ante la policía, me reveló que debajo de mi chilenidad común y corriente estaba la marca de lo palestino. No sólo por mi apariencia física, sino sobre todo por mi apellido" (Ramírez "Interview"). This experience led Meruane to rethink her connection to her roots. Despite losses such as the language, other aspects survive within "la comunidad palestina más grande fuera del mundo árabe" which considers itself hyphenated as Chilean-Palestinian. Meruane opines that "la recuperación de la

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<sup>69</sup> María Olga Samamé B. has written about these specific works in "Transculturación, identidad y alteridad en novelas de la inmigración árabe hacia Chile."

<sup>70</sup> This is the only Garib novel that deals with his ancestors; his saga of the Arab experience in South America underlines the discrimination they encountered.

<sup>71</sup> Littín had a Palestinian father and a Greek mother. Like his contemporary Skármeta, in his mature years he revisited his roots, depicting Palestinians in film and written forms. Earlier, he belonged to the *Tercer cine* movement that revived interest in Chilean traditions, while demystifying the past. *El chacal de Nahueltoro* (1960), his most successful film, portrayed rural poverty. He made the documentary *Compañero presidente* (1971) and *La tierra prometida* (1973) which recreated the failed socialist government of 1932. After his return, *Los naufragos* (1994) dealt with the search to recover the dead and the disappeared (see Rinke 16-19).

identidad palestina se está dando por la vía de una toma de conciencia política hacia la situación de los palestinos en sus territorios. El compromiso político es contrario al estado desvalido de la melancolía” (Ramírez). The question is to what extent living in the United States has influenced Meruane’s sense of possessing a hyphenated identity.<sup>72</sup>

Summing up, there is a rediscovery of Arabic roots that a century or more of integration has not erased. In examining Arab-Chilean writing Cánovas concludes that it is not the fear of forgetting that motivates writers. Rather it is “compartir con los demás una experiencia inédita, que los hace distintos, y queribles. Un deseo de trascendencia, un reconocimiento simbólico que les integre desde una suma de saberes y sensibilidades. Y existe también el placer de los signos, el de inscribir en la cultura chilena un capítulo inédito, con una caligrafía distinta” (“Voces inmigrantes” 168). His idea of incorporating different aspects of history into Chilean memory and the value of a different calligraphy apply equally to the Skármeta novels.

Like Cánovas, Iván Carrasco encourages critics to engage in studying the writing of ethnic, and what he calls intercultural, groups. For this critic the past is never completely interred. Even as immigrant groups professed their intention of incorporating themselves into Chilean culture and to “hacerse plenamente chilenos,” they maintained “la vivencia de valores, costumbres y creencias aprendidas en sus países de origen y amalgamadas con los elementos culturales asimilados en la nueva sociedad” (“Literatura intercultural chilena” 80). Yet Carrasco confirms that literary expressions of this amalgamation are rarely noted or studied. The only novels by non-Hispanic authors that he identified within the canon are Eltit’s *Lumpérica* (1983) and Skármeta’s *Ardiente paciencia*, neither of which deal with immigrant roots.

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<sup>72</sup> Younger women writers attracting attention tend to be from ethnic communities, such as Jeftanovic and Meruane, just as Agosín and Eltit were in the previous generation. See for example Alexandru Lefter’s 2015 “Notes on Chilean Women Writers.”

Despite being excluded from the canon, most ethnic authors used its models. Even when their texts deal with the immigrant experience, they are considered undifferentiated Chileans (Carrasco “Literatura chilena” 47). In the 1970s they began to move from the periphery, inserting themselves into a shifting literary canon (47). There is now a significant opportunity to enlarge the area of study “en la apertura de un nuevo tiempo más tolerante de la exposición de sensibilidades particulares y el reconocimiento de la legitimidad de la diversidad” (“Cánovas, “Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos” 166-67). Increased analysis would require an adjustment to the canon through a more complex vision of both literature and reality “a partir de un conjunto de estrategias discursivas características, nuevos espacios étnicos, mayor variedad lingüística y temas poco explorados como las diferentes identidades del país y sus interrelaciones interculturales” (“Literatura intercultural chilena” 82). Carrasco is interested in how immigrant and ethnic writing interacts with Chilean culture, not simply in retrieving past writing.

In conclusion, there is an emerging perspective that the study of ethnic narrative in Chile has been undeservedly neglected. This creates ample scope for investigation, whether by retrieving older texts or focusing on recent ones, and broadening the notion of ethnic communities to include larger ones, such as the Italians and the Dalmatians.

### **The Dalmatian Presence in Chilean Literature**

A number of Dalmatians wrote in Spanish and in multiple genres. Unfortunately, the few bibliographies available contain little critical comment on their production. In 2012 Cedomil Goic published a bibliography of Chilean writers of Croatian heritage. His *Bibliografía de autores chilenos de ascendencia croata, 1881-2012* lists 170 individuals, whose fields range from literature to the professions and sciences, with diaries, memoirs and letters included. Some

76 names can be counted in the literary category, with Skármeta and Díaz Eterovic receiving the longest entries. Only a handful of others would be recognized today.<sup>73</sup>

Arturo Gigovich (1855-1905), who participated in the War of the Pacific, appears to have been the first published fiction writer of Croatian origin in Chile. He is reported to have been a descendant of a registered Croatian who married a Chilean after arriving in the seventeenth century on one of Sir Francis Drake's ships. Gigovich wrote several short stories and a historical novel, *El rigor de la corneta* (1888). His novel, which José Zamudio Zamora dismisses as possessing little literary value, is historically important for its descriptions of Lima and a Chilean officer's marriage to a Peruvian woman.

Dalmatian writers born in Chile include Francisco Berzović Radonić (Porvenir 1913), whose stories are set in the Magallanes region; Zlatko Brnčić Jurinić (Punta Arenas 1920) who wrote a surrealist novel and experimental plays; journalist and storyteller Simón Eterović Karelović (Punta Arenas 1912-73), journalist Lenka Franulić Zlatar (Antofagasta 1908-Santiago 1961); Cedomil Goic Goic (Antofagasta 1928); and, Nicolás Mihovilović Rajčević (Punta Arenas 1916-86). Roque Esteban Escarpa (1914-95), Ernesto Livacić Gazzano (1929-2007) and, in a later generation, Juan Mihovilovich Hernández (1951) all hail from the "barrio croata" in Punta Arenas.<sup>74</sup> Other authors with identifiable Croatian surnames are short story writers Mario Enrique Baníc Ilanes and Eugenio Mimica Barassi as well as playwright/scriptwriter Sergio Vodanović.<sup>75</sup> In addition to narrative writers, Punta Arenas has produced poets of Croatian

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<sup>73</sup> With respect to the spelling, I have used Croatian accents for the names of previous generations. For contemporary figures, I use them only if the writers do, either for themselves or their characters. Overall, the use of accents has disappeared, a general phenomenon in second and especially third generations.

<sup>74</sup> Mihovilović or Mihovilovich is a common surname in Punta Arenas. I have not been able to establish whether Juan is related to brothers Nicolás and Domingo who are mentioned below.

<sup>75</sup> *Studia croatica* ([studiacroatica.org](http://studiacroatica.org)), a Buenos Aires site which provides information on Croats in Spanish America, lists the earlier names.

ancestry such as Astrid Fugelle Gezan, and younger ones like Christian Formoso Babić, Jaime Bristilo Cañón, and finally, Oscar Barrientos Bradasić, who is also a novelist.

Many early narratives reflect the experience of settlers in Punta Arenas and Magallanes. N. Mihovilović for example wrote a trilogy about life in the Magallanes region. Beginning with *Desde lejos para siempre* (1966) it tells the stories of immigrants from Brač and the author's childhood. In his biographical sketch *Quién soy yo* (1978) Mihovilović proudly describes himself as “escritor, escritor chileno, además, pese a mi apellido. Es que soy criollo, magallánico, hijo de padres dálmatas de nacionalidad yugoslava y que otrora fueron austriacos o austríacos, como dicen los puristas” (10). Clearly, ethnicity was an integral component of his identity. His brother Domingo (1918-2014), better known as the actor Domingo Tessier, based his 1976 play *Luka Milic: Médico cirujano* on *Desde lejos para siempre*.

While well-known contemporary writers of mixed heritage such as Díaz Eterovic and J. Mihovilovich occasionally touch on life in the “barrio croata” of Punta Arenas, they do not explore the time before emigration.<sup>76</sup> For example, in Díaz Eterovic's *Correr tras el viento* (1997) the third person narrator tells the story of Rendic, who has lived in Chile for fifty years. The novel contains only two brief allusions to the island of Brač. The first has the protagonist fleeing from Austrian military service and being forcibly recruited to spy for the Germans at the start of the First World War. Sent to Punta Arenas, he lodges at the Pensión Dom, a Croatian word meaning home. There, Rendic meets “croatas que viajaban desde Brač con unos pocos objetos a cuesta y la esperanza de regresar a la brevedad a sus pueblos con los bolsillos colmados de dinero” (14). He soon recognizes that he cannot live like these men who bear Croatian

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<sup>76</sup> Mihovilovich dedicated *Sus pies desnudos sobre la nieve* (1990) “Al barrio Yugoslavo de Punta Arenas.”

surnames such as Bonačić, Vukasović and Franulić, nor dream like them of going “home” soon with full pockets.

In the second mention, the novel provides only a brief glimpse of the backbreaking labour expected of these early immigrants. Rendic does not relate to them since he “no estaba hecho para los rigores de la pobreza ni para trabajar de cara al viento o hundido hasta las rodillas en el lodo, como lo hacían los croatas que empedraban las calles, construían los puentes... o labraban en los astilleros ubicados al sur de la ciudad” (166). This passage does communicate the poverty and the hard labour building roads and bridges or working in the ship yards that the immigrants, who never returned to their native land, performed. Over fifty years later Rendic will still be there, on his death bed. This departure from Díaz Eterovic’s pattern of detective novels focuses more on the spy story and life in Chile than on the ethnic roots of the protagonist, yet it does inscribe the writer’s heritage into Chilean literature.<sup>77</sup>

Moving from fiction to its study, the only scholarly research that I encountered was the work of Željka Lovrenčić who spent five years in Chile (1995-2000), teaching in Punta Arenas and working at Croatia’s embassy in Santiago. Her 2011 doctoral thesis at the University of Zagreb, whose title translates as “Hyspanya Croatica: Three Generations of Chilean Writers of Croatian Origin” forms the basis of the literary section of her untranslated book, *Od pustinje do ledenjaka (From Desert to Glaciers)* (2014).<sup>78</sup> Lovrenčić lists some fifty writers from three generations and devotes a segment to a writer from each one, namely N. Mihovilović (1916-1986), Skármeta, and poet Andrés Morales Milohnic (1962). Overall, the book’s influence is limited since it requires a reader of Croatian. Morales Milohnic maintains a blog (croacia-

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<sup>77</sup> Rendic is the surname of several Chilean poets. Curiously, Díaz Eterovic also adds a slightly anachronistic reference to Lucila Godoy, a poet who arrives as a teacher in Punta Arenas (*Correr* 210). This cameo pays discrete homage to Godoy (Gabriela Mistral), who taught there after the First World War.

<sup>78</sup> Translations are from the website of the Croatian Heritage Foundation, *Hrvatska matica iseljenika*.

chile.blogspot.ca) which features translations into Spanish, generally by Lovrenčić, of contemporary Croatian writing, especially poetry.

There is a scarcity of catalogued fiction in Spanish that deals with the history, arrival or presence of Dalmatian immigrants or their descendants in Chile. Skármeta is the first prominent writer to have fictionalized both this pre-immigration history and a later generation's struggles to fit into contemporary Chilean society. As a result, he contributes to the "caligrafía distinta" that Cánovas suggests exploring.

Having identified the most noted fiction writers of Jewish, Arabic and Croatian heritage in Chile and the limited scholarly study of their texts to date, I now explore Skármeta's literary vision and the treatment of ethnicity in his fiction, other than the two narratives that I will subsequently examine at length.

### **Skármeta and the Spanish American Literary Tradition**

The Spanish American writer of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was expected to be the voice of the nation, and traditionally this was the voice of the social elites. Literature as a fundamental player in nation-building dominated Chile's educational system during Skármeta's school years. He later skewered the *criollista* opposition of civilization and barbarism taught by "carrasposos profesores de literatura" who bored their students with "amarillentos segundos sombras, selváticas vorágines y doñas bárbaras, desmayadas amalias, destripados echeverría's" ("Al fin y al cabo" 267).<sup>79</sup> These classic texts failed to appeal to a generation engrossed in

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<sup>79</sup> The references are to classic foundational novels *Don Segundo Sombra* (Argentine Ricardo Güiraldes, 1926), *La vorágine* (Colombian José Eustacio Rivera, 1924), *Doña Bárbara* (Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos, 1929), *Amalia* (Argentine José Mármol, 1851), and Argentine Esteban Echeverría's stories from the mid-1800s.

translations of classic and mostly contemporary foreign works.<sup>80</sup> While Skármeta admitted later that, as a professor of literature, he came to appreciate the *criollista* novel (268), he was not the first to admit that he did not feel compelled to follow in its path.

Earlier in the twentieth century, writers had begun to reject the perceived responsibility for nation-building. Argentine Jorge Luis Borges was perhaps the most vocal in objecting to its imposed or perceived limitations. He insisted instead on his right to appropriate all of western culture and beyond for his own purposes, and the freedom to set his stories anywhere (“El escritor argentino”). Confirming that this discussion is still alive, contemporary Mexican novelist Jorge Volpi has also felt forced to defend his choice of international subjects and his right to portray foreign figures and undertakings.<sup>81</sup> In two different eras, both Borges and Volpi have drawn from the wider world despite the criticism this has provoked, while most Spanish American writers still have opted until recently for national settings or characters. Skármeta, whose work is chronologically placed between Borges and Volpi, manifested convictions similar to theirs while aiming his spotlight at Chile.

In the 1960s, budding Chilean writers from diverse social backgrounds like Skármeta began to portray their own generation and environment, even though their protagonists were still mainly of *criollo* or *mestizo* origin. Skármeta is regularly cited by both writers and critics as the groundbreaking author who explicitly rejected Chile’s elitist literary tradition and the *criollista* novel of the land as well as the myth and magic realism of the Boom, in favour of a grounded contemporary urban realism. His first short story collection, *El entusiasmo* (1967), redirected literature to the streets (Epple, *Del cuerpo a las palabras* 111). It centred on modest young

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<sup>80</sup> Skármeta translated the stories of Herman Melville, Jack Kerouac, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Norman Mailer.

<sup>81</sup> See “El fin de la narrativa latinoamericana.” The 1990s Crack Generation in Mexico, including Volpi, continued in the patricidal tradition.

characters who encountered daunting circumstances over which they did not always triumph. First published in 1959 in the *Boletín del Instituto Nacional*, the short story “El joven con el cuento,” which anticipated his literary path, appeared in this collection.<sup>82</sup>

In fact, although he refused the term for himself, Skármeta is one of the earliest figures associated with the movement that became known as the Spanish American Post Boom. Shaw defined him as the quintessential Post-Boom figure whose writing exemplified urban realism and key characteristics such as the play with language and literary form, humour and parody. By portraying ordinary or average urban men or women rather than educated intellectuals, the Post Boom folded mass media, youth culture, sex and love into the search for individual and cultural identity (“*The Post-boom*” 19-20). And Skármeta was seen as one of the leading proponents of this shift.

Throughout his life Skármeta himself has been expansive in sharing his literary vision. In his words, by favouring a realistic urban focus he sought to distance himself from the traditional Chilean terrain and its “fuerte tradición literaria de o que aspira a la clase alta” (Lafforgue “Interview” 51). Indeed, when his first stories were published, he sensed that “todos me sintieron ... muy ajeno a la tradición literaria del país” (51).<sup>83</sup> Critics have consistently underlined the innovations in those first stories and his early literary declarations, without adequately considering the path taken as he matured. They overlook his expressed views on literature and his place as a writer, and the literary tradition embedded in his narrative. A careful reading of his statements and his fiction reconciles the apparent contradiction between his criticism of earlier generations of writers and his well-articulated inscription in the literary tradition.

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<sup>82</sup> Also in 1959, his short story “*El señor Ávila*” appeared in *Cuentistas de la Universidad*.

<sup>83</sup> The same sense of writing outside the tradition was evident in Dorfman and Cerda. These three members of Chile’s “Generación del 72” did not belong to the elite pool from which Chilean writers were normally drawn.

Skármeta's vision situates him squarely within the debate on the role of the author, specifically the divergent perspectives that poet T. S. Eliot and American critic Harold Bloom have come to represent. Eliot was convinced that individual talent was deeply rooted in tradition and that poets were inevitably indebted to their predecessors. In his words, "historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" ("Tradition and Individual Talent" 2). Conscious of their place within the tradition, writers relied on their individual talent to transform or enlighten the understanding of the past. The past in turn could inspire innovation in the present in a continuously nurturing cycle of reciprocity. Each writer expresses something eternal in a unique way, simultaneously propelling the tradition forward and altering future readings.

In *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973) Bloom also insists on the literary legacy. Yet, rather than assuming the preservation of a common heritage through successive generations, he emphasizes instead that writers struggle to surpass those who came before them and must destroy them in the process of innovation. Bloom also stresses that all writers experience a profound anxiety with respect to Shakespeare's work in particular (xviii).<sup>84</sup> At the same time he argues that authors must distance themselves from previous generations through a "voluntary misreading of earlier poets" (or *clinamen*). They will accept their predecessors only up to a point, then blaze their own trail, all the while condemning their precursors for not having done so themselves.

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<sup>84</sup> In Bloom's words: "(r)eal multiculturalists, all over the globe, accept Shakespeare as the one indispensable author ... Shakespeare ... quite simply not only is the Western canon; he is also the world canon" (xv).

Without siding with either the Eliot or the Bloom position with respect to tradition and innovation, I find Ángel Rama's views more nuanced and persuasive in terms of Spanish America. Like Eliot and Bloom, Rama posits that the region's writers learn from their predecessors. Like Bloom, he contends that writers live under the shadow of their literary fathers until they rise up and overthrow them ("Los maestros literarios" 53). Yet they do not operate in a vacuum. They turn to internationally recognized contemporary writers to inspire them in rewriting or transforming the work of their elders. Given that societies and institutions evolve and that the sources that nourished earlier writers dry up, according to Rama the change is in fact more moral than literary.

In this scenario, the links to the past are never fully obliterated, however innovative the writing ("Los maestros" 62). Thus, Rama insists that the past lives on in the present despite the toppling of the father figure, blending the Eliot and Bloom perspectives. In fact, William Faulkner's frequently-quoted phrase that "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (*Requiem for a Nun* 1951) aptly summarizes this vision of both the continuity and the transformative power of the literary process.

In my view, Skármeta's literary vision corresponds to Rama's thinking. He freely recognizes his debt to the entire Western canon, allying himself with Borges. He personifies Rama's notion that new generations of writers innovate without rejecting the past or obliterating its legacy. In return, the literary past survives and thrives in the present, in a constantly nurturing cycle of enrichment and cross-fertilization, reflecting Eliot's perspective. Rama's thinking captures Skármeta's position as an author immersed in tradition who consciously carries it forward, while distinguishing his writing from that of his predecessors, along the line that Bloom

argued. He communicates his experience of, and relationship to, the ever-changing world around him, without losing sight of the literary past.

For Rama, Boom authors inspired by European and Anglo-American innovations constructed a truly Spanish American narrative. He viewed the writing of Skármeta's generation not as a rejection of the Boom but rather as carrying on the tradition of incorporation and transformation that he called transculturation. Under the explicit heading "Los contestatarios del poder" he credits each generation with challenging the status quo. He writes:

cada nueva promoción surge dentro de un sistema ya establecido por los mayores, de mayor incidencia en la medida en que ha sido socializado ya. Nada de lo que ellos habían inventado les podía ser ajeno, aunque en cambio ya no les sonaba a invención sino a material consabido de la producción literaria, un orden de la escritura que se colectiviza vertiginosamente y por lo mismo pierde su punzante capacidad descubridora. Por otra parte surgieron dentro de una nueva inflexión de la cultura, que fijó pautas y problemas diferenciales, para los cuales no siempre servían los recursos literarios recibidos. (*Novísimos* 14)

What Rama understands as different in the new generation and that he notes in Skármeta's *Tiro libre* are the minimal distance between narrator and character, and the popular urban voice (27). In writing about themselves and the mass culture they imbibed, members of the new generation created an artistic testimonial to the authenticity of their lives (21). As Skármeta admitted, in the mid-1960s "mi proyecto literario era un proyecto de vida; quería ser el escritor que yo vivía" (Pina "Interview" 173).

Unlike the Boom period writers who claimed to be literary orphans without Spanish American forefathers and who rushed to bury their *criollista* predecessors, Skármeta openly

acknowledged his *criollista* and Boom precursors, even if irreverently. He also recognized the need to adapt in terms of setting, language, and cosmovision. Thus, he shared Rama's insight about the impact of social change and challenged his immediate precursors for failing to adjust to changed circumstances. His refusal to acknowledge them as patriarchs worthy of servile imitation did not deny or suppress the value of their contribution. In short, he took from them what he needed, a type of nourishing cannibalism, and connected it to contemporary reality.

At the same time, Skármeta has consistently emphasized in his essays and interviews the high regard in which he holds both the Hispanic tradition and his particular literary masters, whether Hispanic or international. And his fiction itself depicts the intersection of love and politics in keeping with the early Spanish American nation-building novels, as much as it resorts to touches of magic realism and to an intertextuality that echo the Boom period, both explicitly and implicitly. All these elements underscore his abiding regard for tradition within the originality of his own narrative.

Skármeta's early preoccupation with the form and role of literature extended to his opinion of his contemporaries and the next generation. In 1975 he described the strengths and weaknesses he discerned in their writing. On the one hand, he praised the innovative use of language and the adoption of new European techniques. On the other, he criticized the lack of historical context, such as daily life, heroic actions and social renewal, all of which were intrinsic to his own vision. In his opinion, writers had reached the end of the road in terms of "el relato de la descomposición de la burguesía, el sarcasmo frente a sus valores y la postulación de una marginalidad crítica frente al sistema capitalista" ("La novísima generación" 5). In rejecting pessimism and scepticism, he aspired to celebrate ordinary lives and social progress rather than attack the elites.

Through the 1970s Skármeta continued to ponder the place of new forms of narrative. An essay with a lengthy title excerpted from its last line became the most quoted reference to his literary vision. In “Al fin y al cabo, es su propia vida la cosa más cercana que cada escritor tiene para echar mano” he criticizes the abstraction and lack of social commitment of unnamed authors. The article proposes instead the depiction of daily life (la *cotidianidad*) with a type of realism Skármeta called “*hiperrealismo*” or “realismo lírico-poético.” He contended that his generation sought to fuse the concrete and the lyrical (269-70). Mass media, popular culture, sex, drugs, street life and adventure would replace the claustrophobic spaces imagined by writers like Edwards and Donoso, especially in his 1970 novel, *El obscuro pájaro de la noche* (270).

On a related note, Skármeta asserts that his generation did not recognize itself in Boom fiction which they read only after the 1959 Cuban Revolution when *Casa de las Américas* began distributing their texts. Despite this late discovery, Skármeta’s thesis on Argentine Julio Cortázar suggests that he was aware of the innovators. His early critical texts and interviews also testify to the importance he accorded to Mexican Juan Rulfo and key writers associated with the Boom.

Skármeta further claims that his contemporaries could no more follow in the Boom’s footsteps than align themselves with *criollismo*. They would never contemplate for example “la absolutización de un sistema alegórico donde el grotesco degrada la realidad, como en Donoso, ni la iluminación de la historia en la hipérbole mítica de García Márquez, ni la refundación literaria de América Latina como el ‘realismo mágico’ de Carpentier” (“Al fin y al cabo” 273). On the contrary, “donde ellos se distancian abarcadores, nosotros nos acercamos a la cotidianidad con la obsesión de un miope” (273). Rather than sharing the vision of his precursors, Skármeta was intent on portraying his world up close, replacing the Boom’s totalizing approach with what he described as myopic realism. Still, his critical references to

*criollista* and Boom novels actually serve to incorporate them into his literary development and the tradition reflected in his work, rather than burying them.

On the other hand, it would be misleading to interpret Skármeta's vision of realism as advocating a straightforward transposition of reality. He has always stressed that his writing renders a subjective experience of the world, his own reality, "esta realidad que por comodidad llamamos realidad" (Ruffinelli "Interview" 143) or "el rostro convencional de la realidad" (*Enciclopedia Labor* 758). In a 1999 interview he insists that "el mundo es una invención" (González Jordán), a significant clarification in the wake of his youthful pronouncements on literary realism.

In the second part of the "Al fin y al cabo" article Skármeta discusses his understanding of fiction as a need to reach beyond a bourgeois society wrapped up in "un espeso lenguaje retórico" (277). Rather than a distancing instrument literature needed to be "un acto de convivencia con el mundo y no una lección interpretativa sobre él" (278). The term "convivencia" is essential to reading Skármeta as it embodies his lasting literary creed and goal. It communicates the essence of his vision, a shared sense of life and a harmonious coexistence or consonance with the reader, in contrast with what he regarded as the closed words and worlds of his immediate predecessors.

Skármeta's irreverent description of his literary precursors, his commitment to the representation of ordinary urban life, his preference for Shakespeare and certain U.S. authors, and his reputation as a theorist and leading representative of the Post Boom, combined to solidify his reputation as a cosmopolitan writer indifferent to, or dismissive of, the Spanish American literary tradition. However, this superficial perspective is deeply flawed; his interviews, essays, and, most notably, his fiction manifest a significantly more complex approach.

First of all, Skármeta identifies profoundly with the Western literary tradition. He holds Shakespeare in the highest esteem, mirroring Bloom's insistence that the playwright is the most influential Western author of all time. Skármeta has repeatedly stated in interviews that Shakespeare has exercised the greatest and most lasting influence on his writing (García-Corales 115; Bush 86; Piña 174). However, he also acknowledges several Hispanic and classical sources of inspiration as well as modern ones: "Lope de Vega, la literatura medieval española, toda la literatura clásica y de allí, saltando violentamente, la nueva narrativa norteamericana y rusa" (García-Corales 115). The Western tradition, both classical and contemporary, combines with the Hispanic one to forge his literary foundation. It is precisely his receptiveness that leads him to break with the veneration of literary progenitors by aligning himself with the innovations of Ernest Hemingway, William Saroyan and Franz Kafka in a search for "contemporaneidad y cosmopolitismo" (Ruffinelli "Interview" 133-34). This reorientation does not repudiate or neglect past literary masters.<sup>85</sup>

Indeed Skármeta's narrative constantly dialogues with a wide range of literary masters. Many of his epigraphs are borrowed from the Hispanic canon, such as the works of Gonzalo de Berceo, Lope de Vega, San Juan de la Cruz and Jorge Manrique, thereby underlining the peninsular foundation of his education. The preponderance of students and young adult readers as characters in his fiction facilitates the inclusion of books and writers. Characters refer to classic texts they are reading, whether of poets from the Hispanic world or internationally recognized authors. For example, Manrique and Mistral's poetry are pivotal to *El baile de la Victoria* (2003), in addition to being alluded to in the early stories. Skármeta also reclaims

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<sup>85</sup> In 2008 Skármeta reiterated that he admired Shakespeare, Lope de Vega and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz as much as Walt Whitman and Ernest Hemingway (Galindo and Walsh interview).

Hispanic mysticism and magic realism for the contemporary world when an adolescent's thoughts save his gravely ill mother in "El ciclista del San Cristóbal" (*Desnudo en el tejado* 1969) and a young man wills his ailing girlfriend to survive in *El baile de la Victoria*. Moreover, Skármeta points out that *Los días del arcoíris* (2011) shows "una fuerte presencia en muchos niveles de Shakespeare y Aristóteles. Un autor del Siglo de Oro puede ser más contemporáneo que uno de nuestros días. La literatura no es una cosa de edades. Ninguna literatura supera a otra. ¡Conviven!" (Narea Freire "Interview"). In fact, his writing thoroughly interlaces his wide-ranging intellectual library with everyday words and situations.<sup>86</sup>

On the other hand, Skármeta's narrative frequently highlights Chile's major poets. Given his admiration for Neruda, Mistral, Huidobro and N. Parra, in all of whom he notes that "había una culta apropiación de la historia literaria que heredaban, acuñaban su originalidad en las forjas de la tradición" ("El español y el españolito"), it is not surprising that the author would embed these poets and their work in his writing in order to honour them and preserve their contribution among his readers. Allusions to Mistral and Neruda in particular proliferate across his narrative. His respect for Neruda culminated in his representation in *Ardiente Paciencia/El cartero de Neruda* (1985) while a fictionalized Mistral who inspires a young writer and dies in "Una vuelta en el aire" (*Desnudo en el tejado*) returns as the welcoming Chilean consul and poet in *La boda del poeta* and the maternal figure and poet in *La chica del trombón*.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> For example, in *Un padre de película* (2010), in which the absent father is French, the literary references are mainly to French figures. The protagonist teaches, however, at the Escuela Primaria Gabriela Mistral in a small town south of Concepción. *Los días del arcoíris* has multiple references to Shakespearean tragedies (*Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*) as well as mentions of Plato, Aristotle, Dante, Cervantes, the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*, R. L. Stevenson, Giacomo Leopardi, Neruda, García Márquez, J. D. Salinger. Playwrights Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Argentine Eduardo Pavlovsky are named, in addition to classical composers and elements of world culture. The overarching influence of Shakespeare and Neruda are conveyed in Spanish with the emphatic qualifier "Fucking Shakespeare" (169) and "Fucking Neruda" (224).

<sup>87</sup> In "Neruda, Skármeta, and *Ardiente paciencia*" Diane Conway carefully identifies the source text for the fictionalized Neruda's words throughout the novel.

Two of the author's statements on the relationship between life, writing and tradition offer apt self-assessments of his narrative production. In his words,

mi máxima aspiración como escritor, el proyecto de toda mi vida, es hacer que desde nuestras espontáneas y mínimas vidas nos apropiemos de la belleza y profundidad de la literatura de todos los tiempos. Me apasiona el contraste y la fusión entre lo mínimo y lo grande, entre la superficie y la profundidad, entre el deslumbramiento místico y el conocimiento racional, entre el cartero y el poeta” (Narea Freire “Interview”).

And,

Una vez más hay que insistir en la necesidad de dar potencia a la cultura que nos ha venido heredada de nuestros mayores. Eso tiene que formar parte de la cotidianidad de los seres humanos. (López Iglesias “Interview”)

Both affirmations underscore the importance Skármeta places on internalizing great literature and then projecting it in writing that envisages daily life as a testament to the literary past and an incubator of its future.

In short, a close reading of Skármeta's essays, interviews and fiction reveal a broad vision that encompasses the entire Western literary canon. Narrators and everyday characters engage openly with the Chilean, Hispanic and Western literary tradition. The combative statements of a young writer struggling to carve out his place in the literary world indicated a desire to surpass the previous generation, not stamp out the entire tradition. Skármeta acknowledges the value of preserving and promoting the past, while striving to innovate and supersede literary models. His argument for change is compelling: writers must recognize the rhythm of contemporary life while narrative should be accessible to today's reader at the same

time as it seeks inspiration in and sustains the tradition. He transforms what he absorbs as irrevocable legacy into a personal construct which connects great literature with readers through approachable and recognizable characters who appropriate and transmit this shared past in contemporary ways. His love of literature and his passion for transmitting it to future generations stand out.

From a young age, Skármeta was a reader and a storyteller, whether writing or embroidering verbally on radio melodramas for his Dalmatian grandmother (“Elogio del papel”). With his work in other media such as film, television and opera, he considers himself a wordsmith first and foremost (Pagni “Interview” 68). For him, books are the most influential form of writing since reading produces “el instante de más intimidad entre público y autor. El acto de la lectura es un acto único e individual, es un milagro irreplicable, y no hay ninguna otra atmosfera alrededor del lector que la de su propia piel y la de su propia fantasía” (68-69). Summing up, Skármeta has long been aware of the potential impact of writing on the reader.

### **Early Signs of Ethnicity in Skármeta’s Writing**

Skármeta transposed his awareness of the power of writing into narratives of contemporary life. Until his two narratives of ethnicity appeared, he had shown little connection to the Dalmatian past in either interviews or writing. Nonetheless, the few mentions of his roots, if peripheral to the themes of several early stories, hint at a deep attachment to origins.

Skármeta’s literary career began with three short story collections: *El entusiasmo* (1967), *Desnudo en el Tejado* (1969) and *Tiro libre* (1973). Set in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some twenty tales, many told in the first person, generally depict the aspirations of young males, life in Antofagasta and Santiago, the pop culture of the period, and, especially in the third collection,

Chile's tense political climate before the military coup.<sup>88</sup> A few stories are situated in the United States or Europe. Two longer stories, "La Cenicienta en San Francisco," which opens *El entusiasmo*, and "El ciclista de San Cristóbal," which begins the second collection, have received the most scholarly attention.

Many of the protagonists in these early stories bear a strong resemblance to the author, reconstructing his early life and his conviction from childhood that he was destined to be a writer, as first imagined in "El joven con el cuento" (*El entusiasmo*). The autobiographical information is sometimes relayed as auto-fiction, in which the author shares his name and biographical details with the narrator/protagonist.

A close reading reveals that only three stories reveal ethnic traces: "La Cenicienta" and "Días azules para un ancla" from *El entusiasmo* and "Pescado" from *Tiro libre*. "La Cenicienta" ("Cinderella") contains an accurate representation of the author's roots through a first-person narrator named Antonio. Although the narrator is older than those that figure in the other stories, this story appears to be strategically placed at the start of the collection since all the others can be read as leading up to it. Tales about schoolboys in Chile, a university graduate eager to sail away from his family and home, as well as a brief incident in a New York subway car provide the background to the sense of freedom that emanates from "La Cenicienta."

In the Cinderella story, the Chilean narrator contemplates his nationality and his family origins during a single night spent in the company of a young American named Abby in San Francisco. The woman and the reader discover his name only a third of the way into the tale. Unable to speak English, the only pieces of information that Antonio is able to share with his companion are his name and his nationality. Abby has trouble pronouncing his name and cannot

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<sup>88</sup> Published in Argentina just before the military coup, *Tiro Libre* circulated in Chile only after the regime ended.

locate the thin strip of Chile on the map he shows her. Their brief connection will be primarily physical.

Pointing out Chile on the map triggers nostalgia and reflections on life, love and roots. Antonio's silent recollections of his aunt's house in Santiago, his childhood in Antofagasta and a *mapuche* legend spell out his Chilean nationality and his ties to various parts of the country, but only to the reader. At the same time, his memories of his ethnic roots allow him to expose more than this one dimension of his inner self. He remembers his grandfather Esteban who had jumped into the Adriatic "desde un segundo piso en la isla de Brač, frente al puerto de Split en Yugoslavia" (19) and his great-grandfather Jorge who spoke foreign languages like German, as well as his mother and his maternal grandparents in Antofagasta.

In addition to family ties to Brač and Antofagasta, Skármeta confers on his protagonist his own exact biographical details, including his birth in Antofagasta in November of 1940 and the actual names of his paternal line, using Hispanic versions of their names, Jorge and Esteban.<sup>89</sup> Author and narrator share similar pasts: studies in Santiago's *Instituto Nacional*, names and surnames of friends and shared literary influences. Skármeta even credits his narrator with writing "Al trote," another story in his own collection.

I read this insertion of autobiography into the opening story as the way that the author found to introduce himself to the reader in an indirect and succinct fashion. He reveals his nationality, his ethnic origins, his life to date and his writing vocation. Yet he does not seem to ascribe any particular importance or value to these ethnic origins. It is simply part of who he is: a young author as keen to experience the world as was his grandfather who threw himself into the

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<sup>89</sup> Esteban is the name of the original immigrant in *La boda del poeta* and the grandfather in *La chica del trombón*. Jorge's story is told briefly in *La boda*. Unlike Boelhower's contention, Skármeta avoids ethnic names.

sea. The protagonist's encounter with Abby, who plays Cinderella in a travelling children's theatre company, captures a momentary sense of freedom and magic, while his invisible Dalmatian roots are revealed only to the reader.

In the same collection, "Días azules para un ancla" delivers childhood recollections and narrates events surrounding the protagonist's imminent departure from Chile. The thoughts of two brothers, one leaving (Rodrigo) and the other staying (Miguel), are represented through interior monologues, with Rodrigo dominating. A long opening relates Rodrigo's life to date, including childhood years spent in northern Chile with grandparents from Dalmatia, rather than Yugoslavia. Of the unnamed shop-owning grandfather, we learn, hyperbolically, that he crossed twenty seas (111). According to the narrator, his ancestor made a mistake since "más le hubiera valido estar sepultado en la Dalmacia" (111). The protagonist pines for a more adventurous life than that of his grandfather or his brother. Foreign family roots are later referred to indirectly when Rodrigo visualizes his grandfather among the Jews and Yugoslavs he spots at the race track.

Admittedly, these references in "Días azules" are sparse. They expand on the geography of "La Cenicienta" by reiterating Yugoslav origins, adding Dalmatia to the location of Brač and conflating Yugoslavs with Jews as being outsiders, somehow recognizably different from the norm. What is striking is that these foreign references are not essential to the story line. Instead, they project origins deeply embedded in the author's sense of self that surface spontaneously in his fiction.

In "Pescado," the first story in *Tiro libre*, the foreign origins again belong to the grandparents who are nestled at its centre. Their nameless grandson, one of Skármeta's youngest narrators, observes a domestic falling-out between the ailing grandparents and their daughter-in-

law. The grandmother speaks with “*erres yugoslavas*” (12) and talks in “yugoslavo” (17) to her husband, who used to be a shopkeeper in Antofagasta like the one in “Días azules.” She treasures her Czechoslovakian wedding plates, subtly underlining that the now former Czechoslovakia, like Croatia, had formed part of their Austro-Hungarian past. Once again, the ethnic origins are not essential to the development of the story, which leads to suspecting that they say more about the young author than his characters.

In three different stories, the narrators—a child, a young graduate eager for adventure abroad, and a budding author travelling in California—make explicit reference to immigrant grandparents from Yugoslavia or Dalmatia, and more specifically to a grandfather from Brač who crossed the sea to northern Chile. Dropped into the construction of the characters without elaboration, these references to a minority group do not allow for any insight into identity or expose any questioning of ethnic heritage. The author simply alludes to his life and ethnic heritage by casting characters taken from his own mould. These roots are internalized in thoughts, not expressed openly by the characters. In “La Cenicienta” for example the only outward identity is the Chilean nationality of the protagonist. There is no sign of any interest in visiting Dalmatia, a possible result of the real-world political situation there at that time. Nonetheless, these few traces suggest an awareness of roots and the potential to explore them in fiction. Even if the author’s interest in experiencing and representing the everyday world around him dominated his writing, the past was waiting in the wings.

On the other hand, in “Relaciones públicas,” another story from *El entusiasmo*, a Chilean schoolboy known only as *el chileno* while living in Argentina defends his *chilenidad* vigorously, without reference to a minority ethnic background. Cultural or ethnic difference is not acknowledged when defence of the Chilean identity is foremost. This same patriotism returns in

the novella *No pasó nada* (1980), titled *Chileno* in English, when a young boy nicknamed Lucho (also meaning I struggle) must find his place in Berlin where his family lives in exile after a military coup.<sup>90</sup>

All traces of Dalmatian origins disappear from Skármeta's fiction during his exile years. The political reality of Chile and the need for a united front likely eclipsed his ethnic roots. However, during that period he did visit Dalmatia, including the island of Brač, equipping himself with greater awareness, knowledge and understanding of family history.

However, the aspirations for social and political change evident in the short stories are what continued to dominate in the novels published in exile. Two of them recreate different moments of the Allende and Pinochet eras. *Soñé que la nieve ardía* (1975) replays the Allende years, and, most famously, *Ardiente paciencia*, later titled *El cartero de Neruda* (1985), ends under the oppression of the military regime. The darkness and perversion of the military regime are caricatured in "La mancha" (1978), a supposed children's story published in *Nueva Sociedad*. In contrast, the potential for resistance and revolutionary triumph played out in *La Insurrección* (1982), a novel about the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua.

Skármeta wanted to rally Chilean readers through his fiction. In his words,

Un libro leído por el pueblo de que está hecho es un acto comunitario, en él éste confirma su identidad, se mantiene en la conciencia la tensión hacia sueños e ideales, se valora la grandiosidad de la escena cotidiana en condiciones de riesgo.

A través del libro se imagina mejor, se comprende más, se problematiza no sólo la

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<sup>90</sup> Skármeta's family lived in Argentina for economic reasons for several years when he was a young boy and his older sons grew up in Berlin during his exile. This is reflected in both stories which are told in the first person.

realidad del mundo fabulado, sino que inspira la problematización de la difícil realidad en que el libro es leído.” (*Mensaje* unpaginated).

Yet none of the author’s works circulated in Chile for many years. Because reading leads to understanding for Skármeta, the distance from his community of readers had a profound and discouraging effect on him.

The first new novels to be published a decade after Skármeta returned to Chile in 1988 were *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón*.<sup>91</sup> By that time his interest in the question of displacement had grown, as shown in 2001 by his answer to a question about the refugee crisis during his time as Ambassador to Germany. He was deeply concerned about “todas las actitudes intolerantes que haya sobre gente tan necesitada, que anda emigrando de un lugar a otro en el mundo—inocentes completamente—buscando solamente un poco de pan y de paz” (*BBC Mundo*). While the two novels constituted a major shift in Skármeta’s narrative towards claiming and proclaiming his ethnic origins, he has since touched on intolerance and the diversity of the Chilean population in other narratives.

Some of Skármeta’s work returns to the military regime and the struggle for change. *La composición* (2000) relates the tension and the fear that marked the dictatorship years from a child’s point of view; *El baile de la Victoria* focuses on the young adult generation of the post-dictatorship within a culture of forgetting and impunity; and, *Los días del arcoíris* (2010) re-imagines the 1988 referendum campaign that culminated in the ousting of Pinochet. Other narratives feature different ethnic origins. For example, Jacques, the absent father in *Un padre de película* (2010), is French. The opening lines of the children’s story *Galletas chinas* (2009) state

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<sup>91</sup> The last novel of the exile period, *Match Ball* (1989) falls outside the scope of my study since the protagonist of the novel within a novel is an American doctor imprisoned in Germany for non-political reasons.

that most bakers in Chile are Mapuche, even if Chileans are largely unaware of it. The story highlights tolerance and acceptance when the Andalusian owner of the bakery invites the Mapuche bakers to a Chinese restaurant.

In summary, Skármeta embedded his ethnic origins in his first short stories, most especially in “La Cenicienta,” acknowledging them as part of his identity, within his broader Chilean sense of self. On the other hand, during the exile years his writing reflected his Chilean sensibility above all. Afterwards, he explored the plural dimensions of his identity in fiction and introduced other ethnicities into his narrative.

The examination in this chapter of Chile’s literary tradition confirms that the canon has mostly represented a homogeneous national identity from which immigrants were either absent or portrayed negatively. After setting out leading theories related to ethnic narrative that might be beneficial to the study of Chilean literature, I identified mainstream texts which depicted immigrants and concluded that the representations were few and discriminatory. In seeking texts written by immigrants or their descendants, I discovered that in spite of the pressures of assimilation, they had responded to the compulsion to tell their story. If the resulting works were omitted from the literary canon, a few scholars are endeavouring to remedy the gap. While Jewish and Arab writing were the first to attract serious study, I concluded that, beyond these specific communities, there was considerable scope to investigate whether ethnic narrative has contributed to imagining the nation or to fashioning its identity discourse. Having established that Dalmatia constituted one of the larger sources of immigrants to Chile, I scrutinized writing produced within that community and determined that Skármeta was a widely-recognized author whose neglected narratives of ethnicity offered significant potential for study. I argued that,

while he fits within the Spanish American tradition, its canon and its major genres, his first post-exile narratives built on traces of ethnicity found in some of his early stories.

In the first chapter I concluded that identity discourse in Chile revolved around a homogeneous national identity constructed on a *criollo-araucano mestizaje* that reflected the tension between the desire to be white and the emergence of a new hybrid man erected on a belief in exceptionalism. I juxtaposed assimilation policies and anti-immigration views related to this unitary identity discourse with the persistence of memory in constructing identity and underlined the importance of narrative in transmitting ethnic memory.

In this second chapter I confirmed a similar identity discourse in Chilean literature, one that stressed uniformity rather than diversity in nation-building. Centering my argument on theories surrounding ethnic narrative that have been accepted elsewhere, I advanced the notion that some of Skármeta's novels offered a productive field of study since they combine ethnic memory with literary tradition.

In short, I conclude that the identity discourses and immigration history analyzed in the first chapter are reproduced in the literary canon and the treatment of narratives of ethnicity examined in the second. The prevalent historical and literary discourses, together with theories of memory and identity, ground my analysis of *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* as narratives of ethnicity written in traditional Spanish American genres and reflecting the region's literary tradition, thereby etching additional facets onto Chile's identity discourses.

### Chapter 3

#### ***La boda del poeta: Inscribing an Immigrant Tale into Chile's Literary Tradition***

In *La boda del poeta* (1999) Antonio Skármeta rewrites one of the major Spanish American literary genres, the historical novel, by inscribing an immigrant story into Chile's literary tradition and, consequently, its discourses on *chilenidad*. In this chapter I argue that his highly sophisticated literary artefact is a postmodern tale of historiographic metafiction that incorporates one of Chile's largest minority ethnic groups into twenty-first century identity discourses.

*La boda del poeta* begins when an unnamed narrator, who shares precise and specific biographical traits with the author, introduces his novel. This third-generation Chilean narrator explicitly describes his internal novel, also titled *La boda del poeta*, not as an attempt to be faithful to history or to his immigrant grandfather's memory but instead, as a re-imagining of the story of Esteban Coppeta, an immigrant who belonged to his grandfather's generation. This entails relating why and how a group of young men who fled an Adriatic island on the eve of the First World War ended up in northern Chile.

The plot moves along two tracks which eventually join together. On a remote island under Austro-Hungarian control, Jerónimo Franck, a wealthy expatriate Austrian, is about to marry the local island beauty, Alia Emar, whom a young Esteban Coppeta also desires. At the same time as this love triangle plays out, Esteban's brother Reino hatches a plot to murder a contingent of young Austrians sent to recruit the islanders for military service. To avoid reprisals for the assassinations, Reino's band of young men, including his brother, escape to Italy in Jerónimo's newly-built boat on the wedding night. Accused of treason by the Austrian admiral Mollenhauer for facilitating the escape, Jerónimo commits suicide while Austrian troops rape his

wife. The novel ends when Esteban learns the fate of the bride and groom upon disembarking in Antofagasta.

The third-person omniscient narration is interspersed with occasional reports from two different journalist characters who witness the events. The various registers reflect the post-dictatorship sensibility of the narrator, with anachronisms and Chilean perspectives surfacing in an absolutely foreign context.

According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism attempts to be both accessible and effective in cultural terms (*The Politics of PostModernism* 24). Relying on Hutcheon's theory that historiographic metafiction openly plays with notions of historical truth and implicitly relates it to the present (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 294), I contend that the novel's references to historic events as well as to artistic and literary artefacts, combined with self-reflexivity, parody and irony, draw the reader's attention to it as an artefact. As such, it creates mythical origins rather than undertaking a realistic retelling of how a particular group immigrated to Chile.

In my reading, *La boda del poeta* confronts prevailing discourses on *chilenidad* with the story of poor Southern European immigrants told through a contemporary lens. In a tale that begins on an imaginary island modest characters respond to European historical events and interact with a major cultural figure from Chile in *roman à clé* fashion. The story exploits the potential of parody ("an imitation with critical distance" as defined by Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* 6) and intertextuality to launch a dialogue about Chile's homogenous identity discourses.

The parody operates at a critical distance from the traditional Spanish American historical novel, Chilean identity discourses and immigrant recollections of a foreign past.<sup>92</sup>

In order to read *La boda del poeta* as historiographic metafiction, I first assess the development of historical fiction in Spanish America and Chile. I highlight the characteristics of the genre using the example of Chile's first major historical novel, Alberto Blest Gana's *Durante la reconquista* (1897), which Jean Franco described as "one of the best examples of the nineteenth-century historical novel" (115).

A comparison of scholarly views on the new genre of historical fiction and its re-assessment of national figures and events complements this examination. After considering the structure of *La boda del poeta* and its critical reception, I analyze its use of parody and intertextuality to anchor an immigrant story within the Chilean literary imaginary. I conclude that, by rewriting earlier historical fiction such as *Durante la reconquista*, the novel carves out a place for ethnicity within the nation's self-perception and intellectual discourse.

### **Historical Fiction: Roots of the genre and implications for *La boda del poeta***

The historical novel first emerged in Spanish America after the wars of independence. The translated novels of writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas senior, and James Fennimore Cooper, as well as those of the Spanish Romantics, offered models for constructing a shared national past by transforming history into fiction. In newly-created republics striving to forge individual identities, pivotal events were reconstructed, often in the absence of reliable documentation, as a way of promoting a shared sense of national identity.

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<sup>92</sup> On parody, Hutcheon writes: "what is remarkable in modern parody is its range of intent—from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing. Parody, therefore, is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text ... repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (*A Theory of Parody* 6). Thus, parody need not provoke laughter.

In his prologue to *Soledad* (1847), Bartolomé Mitre, the future president of Argentina, expounded on reasons why the novel should grow deep roots in Spanish America. Mitre argued:

El pueblo ignora su historia, sus costumbres apenas formadas no han sido filosóficamente estudiadas, y las ideas y sentimientos modificados por el modo de ser político y social no han sido presentadas bajo formas vivas y animadas copiadas de la sociedad en que vivimos. La novela popularizaría nuestra historia echando mano de los sucesos de la conquista, de la época colonial, y de los recuerdos de la guerra de la independencia. (14)

From the beginning, the historical novel was meant to solidify the social and political foundation of the new nations. If the romantic plots and the protagonists were generally fictional, the depiction of historical events and heroic figures was intended to accurately reflect the past, bridging the distance between history and literature, and instill a shared sense of national pride. In short, verisimilitude and heroism were valued; intertextuality and critical assessment of the past were absent.

In the region's first historical/indigenous novel, *Xicoténcatl* (1826)—*Jicoténcatl* in the alternate spelling—an anonymous author relates the Mexican travels of Hernán Cortés, condemning both Moctezuma and Cortés while stressing a common history. From the mid-nineteenth until well into the twentieth century, historical novels depicting pre-Hispanic, independence or revolutionary heroes in either Romantic or Realist styles proliferated. However, the *criollista* novel of the land and, subsequently, the Boom novel eclipsed the historical novel in the middle decades of the century. When it re-emerged in the 1970s, the genre had split into a traditional stream and a new one that challenged the often didactic versions of history that nurtured a collective memory of unquestioned patriotism.

Arising in the 1970s as part of the Post Boom's *nueva narrativa latinoamericana*, the variation on the historical novel called into question the traditional genre's approach to the representation of history and its glorification of major figures and events. While the focus remained on historic moments, this discourse revolved around whether it was ever or even possible to actually know or reconstruct the truth of the past, given its complexity. This "new historical fiction" encompasses postmodern narrative, including the New Historical Novel as defined by Seymour Menton and historiographic metafiction as understood by Linda Hutcheon.<sup>93</sup>

In Chile, the birth of the historical genre dates to 1842 when José Victorino Lastarria encouraged writers to delve into historical themes. Although Francisco Nuñez de Piñeda y Bascañán may have been the first to write this type of fiction, his *El cautiverio feliz y razón de las dilatadas guerras del reino de Chile* was not published until 1864, several decades after his death. As a result, the Lastarria story, "El mendigo" (1843), which deals with key events, namely the 1813 siege of Chillán and the 1814 battle of Rancagua, is regarded as the true precursor of Chile's historical novel. Lastarria followed with "Rosa" (1847) and "Historia de 1612" or "El alferez Alonso Díaz de Guzmán" (1848). Manuel Bilbao's *El Inquisidor Mayor* (1852) is cited as the first novel, although publication in Peru limited its availability in Chile.<sup>94</sup>

Later in the century, three Blest Gana brothers rooted the genre in Chile. Guillermo wrote several historical narratives. Joaquín advocated the use of historical subject matter.<sup>95</sup> Alfredo authored both *Martín Rivas* (1862), the first major national novel, and the first significant

<sup>93</sup> For consistency, wherever possible I designate this narrative as "new historical fiction" to avoid linking it solely to Menton's work, which is discussed later. Menton's position was that the *New Historical Novel* was written only between 1979 and 1992.

<sup>94</sup> Early fictions include Daniel Riquelme's stories and Ramón Pacheco's novels about the conflict between the residents of the *ciudades salitreras* and the Peruvian authorities, such as *La chilena mártir o los revolucionarios del litoral* (1883). Pacheco also wrote *Las hijas de la noche* (1883); *La generala Buendía* (1885); and, *Los héroes del Pacífico o aventuras de la exgeneral Buendía* (1887).

<sup>95</sup> For his full argument see "Causas de la poca originalidad de la literatura chilena" (1848) which also promotes elevating the reading tastes of women and thereby changing their social role.

historical novel, *Durante la reconquista*. Published in Paris, the latter's two lengthy volumes relate events that transpired over the course of two years after royalist troops overturned the 1810 independence gains in Chile.

*Durante la reconquista* exemplifies the key features of the traditional historical novel. It presents a detailed chronological account of how the royalists resorted to violence and oppression to impose their authority while the patriots revived the fight for political independence. The fictional characters that drive the novel's love stories are associated with opposing sides of the political struggle. Sons and daughters belonging to families of elevated social standing who fall in love are doomed never to marry as long as the political struggle lasts. Powerful historical figures are portrayed as one-dimensional. Royalist Colonel Mariano Osorio is painted as indecisive, Captain Vicente San Bruno as bloodthirsty, vengeful and controlling; on the other hand, Manuel Rodríguez typifies the ideals of the resistance. The novel emphasizes repression, executions, the horrors of prison, and terror in order to glorify resistance to the Spanish Crown. The fight for independence acts as the rallying point in the foundation of the nation, even though the novel ends before forces arrive from Argentina to help secure victory.

In summary, the classic historical novel depicts heroic or idealized figures from a nation's past at decisive moments, glorifies their actions, and condemns their enemies. The circumstances are historical, events are described in a realistic or epic style, and the heroes of the struggle are larger than life. Designed to instill patriotism, the novel often ties the fate of idealized couples to the success or failure of political struggles as well as the future of the nation.

Across Spanish America, critical interest in the historical genre grew in the wake of György Lukács's seminal study, *The Historical Novel* (1947), with its ideological analysis of the fiction of Sir Walter Scott and his successors. In Chile, José Zamudio Zamora published *La*

*novela histórica en Chile* (1949, revised 1973). Since the 1990s, Fernando Aínsa, Fernando Moreno, Seymour Menton, Noé Jitrik, and María Cristina Pons have examined the evolution of the genre across Spanish America, focusing on new forms of historical fiction. More recently, Antonia Viu has studied its manifestations in Chile.

In the early 1990s, Aínsa plainly stated that the relationship between history and fiction had always been problematic, if not openly antagonistic. Historical fiction stretches this relationship (“Invención literaria y ‘reconstrucción’ histórica” 112-14). New historical fiction goes much further by fundamentally rereading history, overturning the “truth telling” goals of historical fiction. According to Aínsa, its distinguishing traits include reading history from multiple perspectives, demystifying it, and questioning the official point of view. It incorporates authentic texts, at times in exaggerated contexts, as well as invented documents; offers carnivalesque readings; and finally, uses techniques such as archaisms, pastiche, parody and humour (“La reescritura de la historia” 31).

Writing around the same time as Aínsa, Menton explored the roots and characteristics of what he termed the New Historical Novel. Emphasizing its distortion of history, he argued that the genre was a form of metafiction, a fiction about fiction, focused on ideas rather than the straightforward presentation of history. It favoured lesser figures or events over major ones. In addition to parody and the carnivalesque, the genre relied on intertextuality and dialogism (14-38). Overall, it used metafiction, revealing both its nature as art and its precursors.

Jitrik’s 1995 essay, *Historia e imaginación: las posibilidades de un género*, states that, at face value, the term “historical novel” constitutes an oxymoron since it combines the invented with the factual. By transforming information taken from sources such as archives, chronicles and newspapers, the historical genre rejects the conventional separation of fiction and history.

Explaining history is in effect its reason for being (9-12). Readers tend to approach a historical novel from their own knowledge and understanding of the past, in order to fill a perceived information gap or better understand, reinterpret or resignify the present (16).

However, Jitrik argues that fundamental differences separate Europe's traditional historical novel from its counterpart in Spanish America. In Europe, it depicted ordinary people at a time when literacy and democracy were expanding, especially after the French Revolution. With independence, Spanish American writers turned to the essay and the historical novel to construct the nation. They aimed to set out "qué quiere decir ser argentino, mexicano, peruano o lo que sea frente a identidades nacionales bien definidas" (41). As a consequence, they tended to project utopias and idealized historical figures rather than ordinary life (45). In other words, novelists undertook to shape national identity within the carefully circumscribed milieu of the governing and professional classes, rather than reflect the broader sectors of society. In contrast with this traditional literature, according to Jitrik the new historical fiction reconstructs the past differently, rather than just translating it or remedying perceived oversights.

One area of debate among scholars, albeit one of little consequence, is whether the new genre must depict periods that predate the lifetime of the writer. While Menton for example stipulates that the events reconstructed in the New Historical Novel must not coincide with the writer's lifetime, Jitrik takes an alternative approach, stressing the obstacles authors confront in separating their life experience from that of their contemporary characters, as occurs for example in Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La novela de Perón* (1985).

Recognizing that definitions tend to be both unsatisfactory and controversial, Pons endeavours to better circumscribe the new genre. She regards a degree of faithfulness to historical sources as a basic requirement of the traditional form, since it is derived from what is

written and what is inscribed in collective memory, in keeping with Hans Robert Jauss's concept of the "pre-understanding of the genre." While the traditional novel might differ from official history or fictionalize it, the individual character was subordinated to it. The private and the historical were co-dependent, with love stories acting as microcosms of official history, even if the cultural and ideological perspectives were not always faithful to the past (58-64). In short, the past itself was never in question.

Conversely, the newer form of historical fiction disputes the generally accepted view of the past, moving away from the foregrounding of the epic and the heroic. It resorts to invention, fantasy, and anachronisms as well as irony, parody, and the burlesque, to critically revisit and demystify the past. While its self-awareness draws attention to its fictional nature, this writing paints "una visión degradada e irreverente" of official history, forcing readers to engage actively in deciphering the past (17). Building on earlier critics, Pons emphasizes the use of anachronisms and the irreverent view of history, as well as the self-awareness of the text which demands an attentive reader.

All of these critics align in viewing the new historical fiction as marking a turning point for the genre, a move away from affirming or complementing the conventional or the *status quo*. Invented history, intertextuality, anachronisms, parody, irony, humour, and the carnivalesque combine to call into question the official or accepted version of history. In brief, the basic premise is that history and fiction are both stories we tell ourselves.

The traditional historical novel was as popular in Chile as elsewhere in the region, if not as critically acclaimed. Writing in 1973, Zamudio claimed that two themes dominated it, the independence struggle and the War of the Pacific (1879-83), with a third, the 1891 Revolution, revisited less frequently. At the same time he bemoaned "la pobreza con que se expresó" (58),

dismissing as “burdos novelones” (84) the stories circulating in *folletines* or newspaper serials. Still, the traditional genre thrived and newer forms of historical fiction were slow to emerge.

Francisco Simón Rivas’s *Martes tristes* (1985) is often cited as Chile’s first work of new historical fiction.<sup>96</sup> Menton, whose only reference to the New Historical Novel in Chile is to *Martes tristes*, attributes the scarcity of the genre to the nation’s recent political past and its traditional preference for realistic, contemporary settings (26). In retrospect, it was also a question of the timing of his study. Since then, Norberto Flores has postulated that the military regime was responsible for the delay in the rise of the more critical genre, a perspective shared by Eddie Morales Piña. Antonia Viu’s *Imaginar el pasado, decir el presente* (2007) benefits from a decade of hindsight after the Menton study.

In her work, Viu advises against generalizations and comparisons between fiction in Chile and the wider region’s renewed interest in the historical genre (“Poética” 175). Chilean novels tended to the traditional and the conservative until the 1980s (*Imaginar* 146). Modernism and indigenous writing had limited influence; the historical novel was not usually differentiated from other types of fiction (121-22). In addition, it is too soon to propose a general framework for new historical fiction in Chile (105).

While the traits of the new genre in Chile are generally consistent with those noted across the region, Viu flags some important differences. In her opinion, Menton’s focus on a narrow corpus, the carnivalesque, and the metafictional, as well as the philosophical and thematic links to the Boom novel, are too rigid to fit the Chilean experience. She sides instead with Aínsa’s argument that the essential trait is a complex form of parody that represents a profound

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<sup>96</sup> *Martes tristes* portrays the northern saltpetre mines and the destruction of the fictional town of Ricaventura on a Tuesday. It parodies historical figures and links the town’s destruction to the later death of Salvador Allende, on another sad Tuesday.

questioning of identity (“Poética” 170). Parody, not caricature, and the incorporation of the collective past into the individual imaginary are paramount.

Viu leans towards the Moreno approach to new historical fiction, emphasizing parody, irony, the grotesque, and the humorous; intertextuality and the self-awareness of the text; a presentation of historical characters that disputes their representation in the chronicles or places great importance on unknown characters; and finally, the reliance on historical documents (“Poética” 169). In addition, Viu refers to the theories of Roberto González Echevarría (*Mito y Archivo* 1990) on the intertextual use of fragmentary archives.<sup>97</sup> Drawing on Moreno’s view of the historical genre as a bridge between past and present, Viu also proposes six interpretive images, including the memorial, the inscription and the altarpiece (155-72). Inscription in particular attempts to imprint a disappearing trace or the diversity of the past onto history, including cultural views of origins. Dialogical in nature, in Chile the novels “no intentan reivindicar una figura para condenar a otra, sino que plantean un concepto de historia plural, en el que la tolerancia permita la diversidad” (162). In this way, Viu reiterates the need to recognize and value diversity, in line with contemporary Chilean thinkers, as discussed in the first chapter.

On the other hand, some of Viu’s criteria tend to the arbitrary. For example, she requires an observer who was not part of the imagined world and the retelling of circumstances from at least three decades earlier (*Imaginar* 67). Moreover, while she is not alone in stating that many contemporary writers turned to the tensions of the past precisely because it was too soon to deal with recent trauma (235), strictly speaking her criteria would exclude fiction dealing with the

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<sup>97</sup> Since González Echevarría’s categories, like “ficción de archivo” and “novela neobarroca,” as well as the “nueva novela histórica de la Independencia,” do not fit the Skármeta novel, I omit them here.

military regime until after 2018.<sup>98</sup> In addition to this restriction, Viu's rejection of the Menton approach as well as her skepticism towards Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction (98-105) constrain her range of analytical tools. Furthermore, while they re-examine official discourse, few of the novels in her selection are truly carnivalesque or metafictional. In the end, Viu defends her choices as maintaining continuity with Chile's tradition of historical narrative while co-existing with other forms of fiction (231).<sup>99</sup>

Both the topics of predilection for traditional fiction that Zamudio Zamora pinpointed and the Viu corpus indicate that the presence of immigrants or the exploration of minority memories were seldom at the forefront of Chilean historical narrative. Among the exceptions, in *Durante la reconquista* José Retamo recreates José Romero, a mulato who fought in the coloured (*pardo*) battalion of the royalists. Another rarity is Victor Domingo Silva's fictionalized biography *El mestizo Alejo* (1934). The only ethnic novel listed in Viu's compilation is Guillermo Blanco's *Camisa limpia* (1989), the tale of a Jew put to death in Peru. All three texts offer fictional versions of historical figures, not purely invented characters.

Some of the new historical fiction does deal with traumatic subject matter other than the major political and military struggles. Novels such as *Martes tristes* and Hernán Rivera Letelier's

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<sup>98</sup> Novels about the trauma related to the 1973-88 military dictatorship, such as Carlos Franz's *El desierto* (2005), would barely satisfy Viu's timeline criteria. Paradoxically, she includes novels about Allende such as *Un día con su excelencia* (1987) by Fernando Jérez and others with contemporary narrators writing about historical events.

<sup>99</sup> The Viu corpus consists of twenty novels by sixteen authors from the generations of 57, 72 and 87. Carlos Droguett's *100 gotas de sangre y 200 de sudor* (1961) with its "visión muy poco épica de la conquista, sus 'próceres' y su significado histórico" (*Imaginar* 146) is the genre's precursor while its first embodiment is *Martes tristes*. Viu closely examines Jorge Edwards' *El sueño de la historia* (2000), Marta Blanco's *La emperrada* (2001), Antonio Gil's *Cosa mentale* (1994) and Jorge Guzmán's *La ley del gallinero* (1998). In chronological order the other novels are: *Un día con su excelencia*; *Camisa limpia* (1989) by Guillermo Blanco; *Balmaceda, varón de una sola agua* (1991) by Virginia Vidal; *1891: entre el fulgor y la agonía* (1991) by Juan Gabriel Araya; *Maldita yo entre las mujeres* (1991) by Mercedes Valdivieso; *Hijo de mí* (1992) by Antonio Gil; *Ay mamá Inés* (1993) by Jorge Guzmán; *El viaducto* (1994) by Darío Osés; *Butamalón* (1997) by Eduardo Labarca; *Casa en el agua* (1997) by Guido Eytel; *Déjame que te cuente* (1997) by Juanita Gallardo; *Mezquina memoria* (1997) by Gil; *Memorial de la noche* (1998) by Patricio Manns; *Santa María de las flores negras* (2002) by Hernán Rivera Letelier; and, *Herencia de fuego* (2003) by Gallardo.

*Santa María de las flores negras* (2002) examine tragic events related to the industrial and political development of the nation, drawing attention to government and military actions that have been silenced or hidden from collective memory.<sup>100</sup> Novels such as *El sueño de la historia* and *El desierto* revolve around individual versus collective memory and responsibility. In the former, the exile returning after the dictatorship questions the relationship between his experience/identity and the history of the nation. The latter looks at individual and collective responsibility and the trauma of memory. In both cases the experience of exile colours the interpretation of history.

At first glance, *La boda del poeta* would not satisfy the criteria of the new genre since it does not deal explicitly with the history and heroes of Chile. While the genre has evolved to incorporate newer writing techniques and changes in vision from the patriotic nationalist to the questioning of the returned exile, Skármeta's novel goes much further in terms of both technique and setting. Unlike many texts in Viu's corpus, it is metafictional, with intensely parodic and intertextual elements, moving it towards the Menton and Hutcheon perspectives. However, Viu's position that the Chilean model links past to present by displaying a profound questioning of identity through parody, while inscribing respect for diversity into the literary world, does apply. If historiographic metafiction can imagine previously unexplored pasts such as those of women and slaves, it can surely do the same for immigrants and their progeny. Therefore, I read *La boda del poeta* as challenging the metanarrative of uniformity and conformity found in Chilean identity discourse, redirecting it from an undifferentiated *mestizo chilenidad* towards the recognition and celebration of multiple origins and hybrid identities. To paraphrase Hutcheon,

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<sup>100</sup> One aspect of these novels, which echo the earlier stories of Baldomero Lillo, invites future study: the ubiquity of foreign investors and poor immigrants of diverse origins in the north of Chile.

postmodern writing attempts both to close the gap between the past and the reader's present and to rewrite that past (*A Poetics* 118).

Historiographic metafiction works against the type of conciliatory national novel that readers were long conditioned to expect. Since the nineteenth century, Chilean historiography and literature had forged mutually reinforcing discourses of identity. These nation-building discourses ignored the immigrant back story, disparaged immigrants for their differences, and encouraged rapid assimilation. As time passed, immigrant "communicative memory," to use Assmann's term, faded (212). The lack of historical documents or archives made it difficult to reconstruct family and community history. To preserve their memories, first and second generations sometimes captured family histories in memoirs and biographies. Official historiography and identity discourses on the other hand ignored the history of minority immigrant groups and their concrete participation in the construction of the nation.

Historiographic metafiction offers an avenue to invent or revisit that past, in order to reconcile it with the present.

If, as Hutcheon argues, both historiography and fiction present events as embedded facts, historiographic metafiction breaks with the classic distinction between objective history and subjective fiction since it "shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured" (*A Poetics* 120). It challenges the prevailing identity discourse found in Chilean history and literature.

*La boda del poeta* ventures into the forever hazy territory of a foreign past, ignoring Chilean history in favour of building imaginatively on the "known" European historical framework preceding the First World War. Skármeta deliberately blurs the distinction between historical "truth" and fiction by having a narrator reconstruct an immigrant exodus from Europe

without historical sources or family records. The novel illustrates Hutcheon's contention that historiographic metafiction "both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge" (*A Poetics* 285-86). In other words, the contemporary narrator's subjectivity triumphs over the traditional notion of being able to truly know the past, and then preserve it through a realistic or factual depiction in literature.

### ***La boda del poeta: Story, structure and criticism***

*La boda del poeta* tells the story of a group of young men fleeing their Adriatic island who eventually land in Chile, after being refused entry to Argentina. The novel recreates a tumultuous period in Europe, when significant numbers of Dalmatians emigrated to the Southern Cone and most of the contingent from the island of Brač settled in Chile.<sup>101</sup>

In the prologue the Chilean narrator explicitly declares that his novel does not coincide with the words of his practical and laconic grandfather. He signals that he does not pretend to possess any real knowledge of the past. Since he cannot know the truth, the narrator assumes a point of view, in other words the subjective perspective of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 117-18).

On the opening page, the prologue sets the tale to come in the imaginary "Costas de Malicia," an Austrian-controlled area similar to the historical Dalmatia, while Brač is transformed into the "maliciosa" island of Gema. The conversion of "Dalmacia" into "Malicia" makes the island's inhabitants "maliciosos." This simple transposition, both irreverent and ironic in tone, illustrates Hutcheon's notion of parody. In addition to denoting an invented nationality,

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<sup>101</sup> While book jackets blurbs do not represent an author's intent, the text on the back cover of the novel states that it is, among other things, "una crónica de una estirpe de emigrantes que llegará (sic) a Chile a principios de siglo."

the word “malicioso” carries meanings that range from spiteful, vicious or malicious to mischievous. Mischievous or playful best conveys the intent here, inviting readers to play along with the story rather than expect a historical or realistic rendering.

Also titled *La boda del poeta*, the internal novel that the narrator introduces as his own work of fiction, centres around two events. A fiftyish expatriate Austrian shopkeeper, Jerónimo Franck, marries a teenaged “maliciosa” named Alia Emar; a dozen young men, including the groom’s young local rival Esteban Coppeta, murder a group of Austrian naval recruits and flee in fear of retribution.

The first strand of the story presents an ill-fated love triangle. Jerónimo marries Alia, in spite of the evident magnetism between her and Esteban. He also disregards the omen presented by the fatal outcome of a similar marriage between Marinakos, a Greek expatriate shopkeeper, and Marta, a “maliciosa,” two decades earlier. Jerónimo courts Alia with the arts of elite culture and introduces spectacular elements of modern culture, such as fireworks and moving pictures, to the islanders. The second strand dwells on the longstanding “malicioso” opposition to Austrian rule. When an Austrian ship approaches days before the wedding, a group of young “maliciosos” rallied by Esteban’s brother Reino execute the Austrian military recruits on board to avoid their own forced enlistment. On the wedding night, the young men flee to Italy as a second Austrian vessel commanded by Admiral Mollenhauer approaches to avenge the murders. The events of the wedding day and the following morning mark the high point of the novel. The romantic and patriotic strands fuse when Jerónimo unwillingly helps the “maliciosos” in their escape. The next morning, the admiral leaves the groom no choice but to commit suicide to atone for betraying his native Austria, while his troops publicly rape Alia.

The last fifth of the novel describes a rapid succession of events: the arrival in Italy of the “maliciosos”, the encounter with a Chilean consul who devises a collective visa to ease their passage, the transatlantic crossing, Reino’s decision to jump ship in the port of New York, and the rest of the group’s landing in desolate northern Chile. On disembarking, Esteban learns that the sailors—expressed euphemistically—“humiliated” Alia Emar. Having lost his country, his brother and now his love, in a dystopian conclusion he sinks to his knees and beseeches “Que haya Dios!” (307), expressing a heartfelt plea for a better future in the new world.

This story set on a far-away disguised island a century ago is intertwined with western intellectual history. In effect, the writing juxtaposes two contradictory perspectives: pre-World War One tensions in Europe versus late twentieth-century cultural and political knowledge which neither a Dalmatian nor a “malicioso” of the period could possess. These two perspectives come together in a Chilean-born narrator, a returned exile who invents and intervenes in a fanciful story based on the parsimonious details that his “malicioso” grandfather—Skármeta by name—supposedly shared with him.

In order to play along with *La boda del poeta*, the reader must eventually parse the apparently straightforward title which conceals a postmodern ambiguity with respect to the identity of both poet and bridegroom. Jerónimo and Esteban are branded as poets, however inept they prove in the practice of the art. Jerónimo’s father had called him a poet “irónicamente” (158), because of his lack of interest in business. In spite of being a voracious reader, it is as a shopkeeper that he succeeds on the island. Similarly, Esteban is dubbed “Poeta Esteban Coppeta” (163) after the local paper prints his not-so-anonymous love poem to Alia.

Just as neither man is a gifted poet, their identity as bridegroom is also open to speculation. After Esteban accidentally encounters Alia during a fitting for her wedding gown,

she entices him into a sexual encounter in the church tower minutes before her never-consummated religious union with Jerónimo. With Esteban symbolizing the passion and naiveté of youth, and Jerónimo maturity, wealth, knowledge and cosmopolitanism, Alia vacillates between the two men. Given the choice between staying with Jerónimo or leaving with Esteban, at the moment of decision Alia stands by her new husband since “Soy tu esposa” (231). Nevertheless, she whispers “Sálvame” (247) to Esteban and advises him to make this the first Spanish phrase he learns.

Words and deeds intimate that Alia had both a preference and an expectation. Yet, her name reflects her indecision given that the Latin phrase “inter alia” means “among others.” The name takes on different connotations depending on whether it is read as uniting her to both men, in either the sexual or matrimonial sense, or bridging the gap between high/urban/civilized and low/island/backward culture, or, more ominously, signaling her gang rape.

If Alia accepts that she is Jerónimo’s wife, his name and that of Paula, his wealthy class-conscious sister, suggest another interpretation of which man the title designates. Despite being an Austrian, the groom carries the name of Saint Jerome, who was reportedly born in Dalmatia in the fifth century. An important translator of the Bible from Hebrew to Latin, the saint was a specialist in Latin and Greek authors as well as a great reader, like Jerónimo. Paula bears the name of a Roman aristocrat who funded the saint’s work. Although they are parodies rather than replicas of the saint and his benefactor, Jerónimo is indeed sacrificing and learned, as well as an honorary Dalmatian, while Paula’s recent marriage to a German count makes her noble. During the wedding ceremony, the officiating priest takes the Christian image further, comparing Jerónimo to Christ, for bearing the cross of celibacy (213). Since Jerónimo does die celibate, the true bridegroom would then be the young “malicioso” due to his awkward

intimacy with the bride in the church bell tower. As neither male protagonist, nor the narrator, nor the reader is ever privy to Alia's thoughts on the subject, we are free, in open postmodern fashion, to choose one or both of the men as the poet bridegroom of the title.

Reading beyond the title, several paratexts anticipate the core story. A dedication to Skármeta's European-born wife and son, two brief excerpts from seemingly historical texts about Costas de Malicia and the island of Gema respectively, and an ominous German epigraph precede the narrator's prologue.<sup>102</sup> The first two chapters of the internal novel then serve as further introductions, relating events associated with the history of Gema. The story of Jerónimo, Alia and Esteban begins at last in the third chapter, after seven short introductory texts. "Veinte años después," the chapter title meaning twenty years after the previous fatal wedding, refers to the core story, the forty short chapters that follow.

The two opening paratexts attributed to the *Breve historia de Costas de Malicia* and *Historia de la isla de Gema* are purportedly written by Antun Damic, an invented historian. My research led to Antun Domić Bezić's *Breve Historia de la Isla de Brač* (1995) and *Breve Historia de Dalmacia* (2000) as the real sources. In subsequent editions and translations, a final author's note acknowledges and undermines the actual source of the information. Skármeta consulted and borrowed "malicieusement bien sûr" from Domić Bezić, "qui réside au Chili et que je remercie tout spécialement pour la mine d'informations que m'ont fournie ses deux excellents ouvrages (*La noce du poète*).<sup>103</sup> Skármeta openly and ironically admits to distorting history for literary purposes. By so doing, he has also pointed the way to his sources for those interested in reading the official history of Dalmatia.

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<sup>102</sup> Later editions and the French translation, *La noce du poète* (2003), shift and rename the prologue as epilogue.

<sup>103</sup> Domić Bezić's series of books on Dalmatian history and literature in Spanish benefit the immigrants' descendants who no longer master the ancestral language. The relevant ones are listed in the bibliography.

In *Breve historia de la isla de Brač*, Domic states that by the twelfth century the island was already a united territory. It had “su propia administración, su *župan* (prefecto), sus jueces y hermandades” (28). In addition, its inhabitants lived

completamente independientes, conscientes de su autonomía, con todos sus privilegios que les entregaban los sucesivos gobernantes, los reyes croato-húngaros o los dogos de San Marcos. A los isleños no les importaba gran cosa la forma de su dependencia externa. Lo que más les interesaba era que el nuevo gobernante los ratificara sus antiguos derechos, lo que sabían conseguir siempre.  
(28-29)

In the spirit of historiographic metafiction, Skármeta appropriated this history and transformed it into imaginary “malicioso” archives.

Dalmatian resistance to invasions since the first century, with successive control by the Romans, the Venetians, the Italians and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, are incorporated into “malicioso” history as is the phylloxera disease that decimated its vineyards. The second unpaginated paratext about Gema concludes that its residents would need to “buscar trabajo en tierras lejanas y extrañas,” projecting the historic emigration to Chile onto its imaginary counterpart. These paratexts illustrate Hutcheon’s argument that historiographic metafiction copies from historiography the practice of using historical sources, but then undermines their authority and objectivity (*A Poetics* 122-23). They mingle historical facts related to the Roman invasions of Illyria with the anonymity of their opponents, given that “los historiadores romanos y helenos no nos transmitieron sus nombres” (paratext 1). These details now implanted in the Chilean literary world enshrine the origins of an immigrant community.

Extracted from Heinrich von Kleist's play *Penthesilea* (1808), the epigraph that follows the paratexts hints that not only economic survival propels the characters to act. The words, "Cuántas cosas se agitan en el corazón de una mujer que no son para ser mostradas a la clara luz del día," point to an inscrutable female figure, a useful *mise en garde* since male characters dominate the novel and Alia's intentions are indecipherable. In the German play, Penthesilea is situated between two men, simultaneously seeking a great love affair and control over a chosen lover. When the narrator's prologue states that Alia is "el personaje decisivo en la ficción" (20), she, like Penthesilea, becomes the catalyst responsible for the fate that awaits both her and her suitors. Echoing the epigraph and faced with choosing between the men, Alia admits that what she lives for "No tiene nombre porque es un misterio" (251) and that confusion is "mi modo de pensar" (251). Even she is unable to read her heart. Her indecision or ambivalence triggers a decisive outcome for all three characters.

After the opening paratexts and the epigraph place the reader in a world of European history and culture, the nameless narrator roots his act of remembrance in Chile, his home nation, as opposed to the fictional European island. The narrator's grandfather and Esteban Coppeta emigrated from an island where Chile was described as an extraordinary land of icebergs that lay beyond the "indómito Atlántico."<sup>104</sup> At the same time, the narrator recalls his grandfather being suspicious of the tall tales that his compatriots told, these "delirios que nutren con frecuencia también la literatura de nuestros lares" (18). Connecting the extravagant "malicioso" stories to Chile's literature as well as Gema to Chile, "nuestros" hints that the reader should be as skeptical of the narrator's tale as his grandfather was of his compatriots' yarns. In addition, the choice of

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<sup>104</sup> These icebergs serve as an unmistakably anachronistic reference to the 85-ton iceberg that Chile exhibited at the 1992 World Expo in Seville, which marked the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus reaching the Americas. Analysts such as Nelly Richard and Tomás Moulián have mused on the implications of the iceberg's reverse voyage to Spain.

“lares” implicitly if fortuitously links back to the original “lares”, the Roman house spirits or deities that protected the inhabitants and defined their identity.<sup>105</sup> Thus, the narrator’s novel confronts the sacred depictions of identity found in Chilean literature.

In fact, readers are repeatedly informed that they are about to enter a land of make-believe rather than a historical reconstruction. When the implicit author refers through the narrator to summarizing only “lo que es pertinente a esta novela” for “el lector de estas páginas” (19) and “la ficción que aguarda la curiosidad de los lectores” (20), he reinforces the self-reflexivity of the text, its existence as art or artefact rather than factual record or reasonable historical recreation. Moreover, author, implied author and narrator are conflated. The grandfather’s Skármeta surname adds the dimension of potential autobiography or autobiographical fiction. Suspicion grows when the narrator volunteers details that coincide exactly with the life of the flesh and blood author. For example, during the 1970s, “la brutalidad de un ominoso dictador en mi patria, me hizo partir hacia Europa, recorriendo al revés el mismo itinerario de mi abuelo” (20). This image of an unnamed dictator transfers the author’s exile in Europe and his grandfather’s emigration to the narrator.<sup>106</sup> In turn, the latter’s dedication of his internal story to “malicioso” grandparents “muertos y enterrados en el norte de Chile” (22), renders fact into fiction, tying his grandparents, like Skármeta’s, eternally to Chile. The narrator acts as an alter ego of the author, with both being third-generation Chilean storytellers.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Aeneas in Virgil’s *Aeneid* carries the Trojan *lares* to the *lararium* or household shrine.

<sup>106</sup> The transformation of the prologue into an epilogue in subsequent editions makes the connection between narrator and author retrospective. It also postpones the link between the elderly Esteban Coppeta spotted in Antofagasta and the protagonist of the internal novel, altering the reading and delaying the connection to Chile.

<sup>107</sup> Without subscribing to Paul de Man’s postmodern view that every literary text is, to some extent, autobiographical and that autobiography is also fiction (70), I do note that Skármeta’s fiction draws on his own life experience, for example in the external narrator’s brief introduction to his novel. However, Skármeta would reject any suggestion that he wrote anything other than fiction.

Furthermore, the narrator possesses only a minimum of information ostensibly received from his grandfather. The island was poor and its vines were decimated. His grandfather wrote a letter to the newspaper that inclined Alia Emar favourably towards Jerónimo. The narrator even purports to have tried unsuccessfully to find archival traces of this letter while visiting Gema. In the end, the only event he can attest to is that he once observed his grandfather playing cards with a blue-eyed man named Esteban Coppeta in the Club Social Malicioso de Antofagasta. As he concedes, in truth, “lo único que puedo fehacientemente avalar del relato que sigue, es el vértigo de esa mirada azul, aún más indefinible que todas las aproximaciones que se intentan en mi ficción” (22). Everything other than the blue gaze, meaning how and why Esteban and his companions arrived in Antofagasta, is an invented immigrant history, thus a story.

Imaginary archives are introduced as touchstones intended to confirm the veracity of the story. For example, according to the narrator, his grandfather “con conciencia social vanguardista para la época” (18) had in his youth exhorted Jerónimo to remain on Gema rather than move to New York. Only an excerpt from Jerónimo’s allegedly lengthy response is supposedly replicated from the full text available “en los archivos isleños del Adriático, asequible en microfilm en la Biblioteca Pública de Ancona” (18-19). While there is a library in Ancona, a central Italian city across from Brač, the fictional archive is no more retrievable, in spite of the narrator’s mention of microfilm, than the “pieza literaria” (20) that his grandfather had supposedly submitted in response. Indeed, the narrator asserts he visited Costas de Malicia with the intent of finding “el artículo original de mi nono, en quien veía el último posible germen de mi vocación literaria” (20). This claim about a shared literary vocation is equally questionable given the grandfather’s allegedly taciturn nature. Moreover, the narrator does not indicate

whether he found the document, purporting instead to have examined Jerónimo's archived letter. His search for family roots led him instead to Jerónimo and Esteban.

In a final confirmation of the fictional nature of the core story, the implied author directly addresses his "experienced" readers who understand that "las imprecisiones se las arreglan para organizarse y constituir ese tiempo y espacio soberano de la novela" (22). Whether the text is read as the narrator's "obra" or the implied author's "novela," it is dedicated to deceased grandparents who "no pueden desmentir lo que aquí se cuenta" (22). It is not much of a stretch to extend the dedication to the author's grandparents.

Later, a few more elements add to the deliberate blurring between narrator and author, reinforcing the self-awareness of the fiction. After conferring his own middle name on Esteban Coppeta, Skármeta bestows his maternal surname of Vraničić on a minor character who briefly recounts an anecdote with his "lengua realista mágica" (33), an allusion to the fictional world of the Spanish American literary Boom. By extension, it could just as easily apply to the narrator. Later, the author attributes his parents' actual names of Antonio and Magdalena to Alia's parents (157). As a result of these name choices, readers are left wavering on the line between truth and fiction.

The internal novel begins at decisive moments in the history of Gema. As a counterpoint to the historically-based opening paratexts that appropriated conditions from the real island of Brač, the first two chapters conjure up events from "malicioso" history. The opening lines transport the reader to the realm of fairy tales, where "Érase una vez un tiempo pleno en una lejana isla de Costas de Malicia" (25). The chronology of the story further reinforces the need for a willing suspension of disbelief since the timelines are irreconcilable. For example, the Coppeta brothers are both twenty years old yet Reino is somehow older, although the siblings are not

depicted as twins.<sup>108</sup> The passage of time is equally fluid. The critical action occurs between Thursday and Sunday morning. The first Austrian ship arrives on Friday night but by Sunday morning the events of that night are reported to have taken place a week earlier. According to Admiral Mollenhauer, the recruits were assassinated a week ago, yet he accuses Torrentes, the newly-disembarked Spaniard, of having been involved. In addition, chapters alternating between different points of view sometimes move slightly back in time to recapture the same moments, an elasticity that intensifies the make-believe atmosphere.

In contrast with the uncertain time frame, invented newspaper articles, whether allegedly published or not, are inserted as proof of events. Two different reporters, Roque Pavlovic and his successor Gómez Stalker/Gómez Stark, file stories in two different registers. Pavlovic's Dalmatian surname may intimate a degree of credibility, while Gómez describes the wedding festivities in sensationalist tabloid style, and, as one of his surnames portends, later stalks the young men in Italy in the manner of modern *paparazzi*.

In summary, paratexts, the narrator's metafictional self-reflexivity, and invented sources and archives form the envelope within which parody and intertextuality are tightly interlaced. To decipher the intertexts, the novel demands a reader familiar with literary, musical, cinematic and historical elements to a greater degree than does Skármeta's earlier narrative. The author has noted that *La boda del poeta* has not been read as closely in Spanish America, and most especially in Chile, as he had hoped. He also emphatically rejects any suggestion that it is not a Spanish American novel, arguing that his sensibility and the ending set in Chile mark it as one. Of course, so does the nationality of the narrator. Skármeta asks instead whether its density and

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<sup>108</sup> At one point there is a reference to Esteban Reino (276), either a simple editing error or a fusion of the brothers. The French version reads Esteban Coppeta (317) which is the logical name in the context. In addition, the composer of the wedding dance, the "Turumba de la fruta" is also named Reino, adding to the confusion.

complexity act as deterrents (Hernández Haro “Interview” 140). That may be the case. As Hutcheon notes, “there exists a very real threat of elitism or lack of access in the use of parody in any art. This question of accessibility is undeniably part of the politics of postmodern representation” (*The Politics* 116). In *La boda del poeta* the parodic distortion and the intertexts are compounded by the author’s switch from contemporary realism to historiographic metafiction.

The reaction of a Peruvian-born and Chilean-raised reviewer to the novel at the time of its publication underlines this challenge. Patricio Navia wrote about Skármeta’s tale of an immigrant forefather (“suyo supongo, aunque no importa”): “¡Basta ya de historias de vascos, adriáticos, italianos y otros inmigrantes que llegan a Chile! ¡Aquí todos somos inmigrantes! Unos llegaron de Europa, otros del sur de Chile—a otros los van a enviar pronto—y todos tienen abuelitas que les contaron las épicas aventuras” (89).<sup>109</sup> Yet, according to Skármeta, Dalmatians in Chile and their descendants never read the novel from that immigrant perspective.

In reaction to the question of how immigrants read the novel, he responded:

Me estás preguntando tal vez cómo reciben los inmigrantes al mundo chileno este retrato que se hace de la inmigración. Yo diría que nunca la novela fue leída o vista o interpretada en estos términos. Simplemente la vieron como una obra de ficción. Y no se remitieron a la realidad que inspira esta obra. (Morpaw “Interview” 5)<sup>110</sup>

While Skármeta’s words convey the interplay between fiction as a work of the imagination and the factual aspect of historical narrative, Navia clearly read it as an immigrant

<sup>109</sup> A careful reader need not make this assumption since the narrator clearly distinguishes between his grandfather named Skármeta and Esteban Coppeta, and insists that his grandfather would not recognize or appreciate his tale.

<sup>110</sup> The full text of my November 2012 interview with Skármeta is attached as Appendix 1.

tale without valuing the underlying history or drawing contemporary parallels. Instead, he ridicules what he calls bourgeois writing about foreign roots, favouring the tradition of Manuel Rojas in *Hijo de ladrón* (1951), an anti-bourgeois stream-of-consciousness *bildungsroman*. In so doing, he implicitly rejects the novel's representation of historical diversity and ethnicity by valuing the traditional *criollo-araucano mestizaje* discourse.

This response recalls Jauss' notion of the pre-understanding of the genre mentioned by Pons and the limitations it imposes, as well as Jitrik's observations about how individual readers approach a historical novel from their own knowledge of the past. The reviewer does not acknowledge that the grandfather's failure to share his history/story might account for the narrator's invention of origins to fill the gap or that the author's literary return to his roots might have broader national implications.<sup>111</sup>

Reviewer Santiago Quer Antich expressed different if equally strong reservations about the novel and its crude sexuality, asking if Skármeta had lost his touch. He concluded that “nos sentimos profundamente desencantados y pensemos que ha tenido un traspie literario” (*El Mercurio* 2). These initial reviews and others did not convey the literary complexity of the novel. More significantly, *La boda del poeta* has received very limited critical attention to date. The only academic assessments are Grínor Rojo's two paragraphs in the 2002 retrospective of the author's work, Shaw's 2001 article titled “*La boda del poeta*: Skarmeta's Parody of Post-Boom Themes,” Carmen Cazorro García de la Quintana's “Claves de la novela fiesta” (2004), and a section of Reyna Guadalupe Hernández Haro's 2007 master's thesis which deals with three of Skármeta's novels.

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<sup>111</sup> Now an established political science and sociology professor in Chile and New York as well as a well-regarded columnist, Navia was then in the early stages of his career and is not a literature expert.

Rojo begins by commenting on the self-awareness of the implied author as puppet master in the opening chapters of the novel (“superávit perturbador de autoconciencia”) before concluding that “la sensación inicial, la de un abuso *blasé* de ingeniería literaria, desaparece” (“Celebración de Antonio Skármeta” 137). He highlights the strength of the dialogue and the masterful interweaving of many threads and meanings. In Rojo’s view this is a postmodern novel with multiple levels of significance. For example, it parodies a fable from the *commedia dell’arte*, specifically the old Polinchinela/Punch and the young lovers, Harlequin and Colombine. For Rojo, Skármeta achieves a lucid irony by representing life as it is, namely “ausente de heroicidad, no revolucionaria sino revoltosa, aunque no sin una dosis de nostalgia por todo aquello que pudo ser y no fue, tanto en el amor como en la guerra” (138). Focused on the novel as a fable about life, the passage recognizes its metafictional nature without addressing the implications of the disguised setting and immigrant history.

Shaw had concluded an earlier article “Skármeta: contexto e ideas literarias” with “No sabemos todavía cómo será la narrativa de Skármeta tras su vuelta a Chile” (1061). His premonition was clearly well founded since *La boda del poeta* opted for a completely new direction. Still, in Shaw’s opinion, Skármeta is not a fully postmodern writer since he has maintained that the world is more or less intelligible and that his writing is based on observing the world around him. On the other hand, Shaw catalogues this particular novel as postmodern, even if it lacks some of the complexities of the genre (275), as well as being “in a sense a historical novel” (268). Yet, he does not expand on the notion of historical novel.

Instead, Shaw analyzes *La boda del poeta* as a parody of Post-Boom narrative. He notes that in the Post-Boom novel, and especially in Skármeta’s fiction, love and current sociopolitical events are often intertwined. In his opinion, in this novel Skármeta parodies oppression and love,

seemingly abandoning love as a source of reconciliation with the human condition, “placing himself at a critical distance both from his own earlier work and from earlier post-boom fiction” (269). For Shaw, the reliance on farce and the carnivalesque to depict love and geopolitics suggests either a reversal or a transition in Skármeta’s literary trajectory.

Shaw interprets the geographical distance from Chile, the historical timeframe rather than the here and now, and the ideological distance from the Post Boom as evidence of a parody of both the Boom and the Post Boom. He views the young protagonists as distorted mirror-images of Skármeta’s earlier politically-engaged protagonists that reflect his disenchantment (269-270). This suggestion of a break with Skármeta’s earlier perspective is doubtful since the novel does not abandon the idea of love, but of its fulfillment. It interweaves love and political events in a distant time and place, while adopting a major Post-Boom genre, new historical fiction. By showing the impossibility of a happy ending for characters faced with an imminent war, it mirrors and carnivalizes foundational novels that could not end happily, such as *Durante la reconquista*. In either novel, better days ahead are not certain.

Shaw does not refer to the intertexts, including the critical depiction of poet Gabriela Mistral. Like Rojo, he alludes to *commedia dell’arte* and overlooks the implications of the intertexts and of the setting in terms of the author’s ethnic heritage. Instead, in a political reading, he associates *La boda del poeta* with the Chilean post-dictatorship climate, reading it as an allegory of 1970s Chile (270). The easily-led “maliciosos” are caricatures of the Chilean extreme left, while Admiral Mollenhauer and his troops mimic Pinochet and the Chilean armed forces, “overreacting ludicrously to a provocative situation” (270). According to Shaw, the novel does not sympathize with either side since Skármeta uses parody for self-exploration, to reflect critically on his own work and to break out of Post-Boom thematics (275). In my judgment, the

playful derision and the intertexts offer much more than either a post-dictatorship reading of the recent past or a transition away from the Post Boom. My reading exposes parallels to both the literary and historical milestones that have shaped Chilean culture and identity.

Along the same lines as Shaw, Cazorro García de la Quintana detects a new phase in Skármeta's writing, but interprets its direction differently. She describes *El cartero de Neruda*, *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* as *novelas-fiesta*. She associates the sexual orgies that follow the weddings in the first two novels and the explosion of jazz that precedes the young lovers' sexual initiation in the third to the classical roots of the orgy, Dionysius, the Greek god of wine and fertility, and the celebration of life. Her conclusion is that in keeping with Skármeta's habit of combining sex and vitality with ideas, the protagonists transcend through intimacy. In my view this is least apparent in *La boda del poeta*. Even though it describes an exaggerated orgy, the protagonists do not participate in it while the ending in Chile completely lacks transcendence.

Hernández Haro in turn emphasizes the reception of the novel, highlighting its foreign setting which deterred readers, the low level of sales compared to *El baile de la Victoria* (2003), the unenthusiastic Chilean media reviews, the lack of critical interest, and the fact that commentators seldom linked *La chica del trombón* back to this first book of the proposed trilogy. She does note the dichotomy between old and young as well as between high and low culture, without commenting on the intertexts other than to mention that Mistral is fictionalized. In Haro's view, *El baile de la Victoria*, which returned to the contemporary world of Santiago, restored the author to reader success.

In summary, Rojo's image of the puppet-master's strings reflects the self-awareness of metafiction while Shaw's characterization of the novel as postmodern is accurate, although his

opinion of it as a parody of Skármeta's previous work is debatable. The author's ironic perspective and his literary vision blending elite and mass culture do not seem to have shifted dramatically. Moreover, metafiction is one of the main traits of Menton's New Historical Novel, a key Post-Boom genre. In moving away from contemporary tales, Skármeta has tackled metafiction and the historical novel simultaneously. He critically engages prevailing discourses on *chilenidad* not by exploring the accepted versions of Chile's past based on persistent *mestizaje*, *roto*, *huaso* and military/militant images, but by opting for distortion and intertextuality to introduce an unverifiable immigrant history/story into Chile's literary tradition. To achieve this goal, the major characteristics of the historical novel, namely the search for verisimilitude, the close relationship between history and fiction, the recreation of location, chronology and historical figures, all in the interests of nation-building, are overturned in *La boda del poeta*.

### **History as Parody**

*La boda del poeta* never touches on the history of Chile, other than a single reference in the prologue to an exile caused by an unnamed dictator in the 1970s and brief references in the internal novel to the national anthem and dance. Yet it is through the Chilean narrator's post-dictatorship perspective that the distorted version of "malicioso" history is inscribed into Chile's intellectual tradition.

The novel parodies principal characteristics of the historical novel such as the respectful reconstruction of history, the idealization of historical figures, and the glorification of the nation. The faithful chronology and intended verisimilitude of the traditional novel, with its reification of national figures, are nowhere to be found. Events are observed through the eyes of minor

figures; a few major historical or cultural figures are fictionalized in lesser roles; and, the narrator is situated at a chronological and geographic distance from the narrated events. Much of the action is related through dialogue, from the perspective of minor figures whose views are mediated by the contemporary narrator. The focalization is primarily that of Jerónimo and the Coppeta brothers, and to a lesser degree, Paula, Admiral Mollenhauer, and the two journalists.

The devices of historiographic metafiction, namely invention, distortion, anachronism, parody and intertextuality, transform a foreign history that fed the conditions for immigration. My analysis delves into two aspects of the internal novel: first, the parodic shaping of history through invention and distortion, and second, intertextuality in relation to Western and Chilean intellectual history.

Although historical accuracy is abandoned in the novel, the setting is credible. In the lead-up to the First World War, the Austrian authorities envisage minor figures on the remote Adriatic island of Gema as pawns in their service. Gema and Costas de Malicia sit at a cosmopolitan crossroads in a multiethnic context. The native “malicioso” majority consists of poor farmers and fishermen. Jerónimo and his predecessor, Stamos Marinakos, enrich themselves as expatriate owners of *El Europeo*, a shop which brings the world to the island, and attempt to integrate through marriage.<sup>112</sup> Franz Pregel, the priest, is German. Bizarro, an Italian engineer, is employed by a shipbuilder headquartered in Copenhagen. Torrentes, a Spanish inventor whom Jerónimo had known in Salzburg, arrives from Austria bearing fireworks for the wedding festivities. An unnamed Hungarian pianist, a Hungarian violinist (Policzer) and a Czech pianist (Jan Parruda) each appear briefly. The wedding dance or “turumba” is composed by an

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<sup>112</sup> *El Europeo* offers a wide selection of goods, perhaps reminiscent of the Skármeta store in Antofagasta: “telas y abarrotes, licores o tabacos, repuestos para autos o bombines para bicicletas” (178). The automobile parts are suspect since there are no cars on Gema.

expatriate Portuguese man named Reino Acevedo whose music “la gente bien” criticize for being “grosera, picante, repulsiva, e idiotizante” (150). The separate arrivals of two elitist Austrians, Jerónimo’s sister Paula—who travels on the same ship as the Spaniard Torrentes—and Admiral Mollenhauer, disrupt island life.

While the presence of different nationalities on the island indicates ethnic diversity and “malicioso” tolerance rather than acceptance, it does not of itself make the novel an ethnic narrative. As Reilly states, the sensibility shown towards minority origins is the determining factor, for example the memory of exodus and of the challenges of resettlement. The contemporary Chilean narrator’s perspective and his reconstruction of the “malicioso” past mark the novel as ethnic narrative. In short, the “old world” is an image to engrave in the cultural memory of the Chilean descendants of the “malicioso” or Dalmatian immigrants and the Chilean community as a whole. Interestingly, the microcosm on Gema seems to be roughly reflective of Chile.

The Greek and Austrian bridegrooms on Gema illustrate the difficulties of fitting into a new place, foreshadowing the future of the “maliciosos” in Chile.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, in an ironic foretelling of what lies in store for the emigrants, Torrentes tells Jerónimo: “He perdido totalmente mi memoria. No recuerdo donde nací y rara vez hablo español” (118). The novel simultaneously highlights and combats this loss of memory by recording a version of it into Chile’s lettered culture. On the other hand, with the German priest Jerónimo speaks German, “una lengua común deliciosamente contaminada de expresiones maliciosas y arcaísmos” (48).

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<sup>113</sup> Both the Greek and the Austrian set up shop on Gema, as did Skármeta’s grandfather in Antofagasta and the immigrant grandfather in short stories such as “Pescado.” In Chile, part of the dislike of immigrants was precisely because they were involved in trade.

This practice may well mirror the use of Croatian found among early generations of Chilean Spanish-speakers of Dalmatian descent.

Regardless of the co-existence with various nationalities, anti-Semitic behaviour is depicted among the islanders as well as the Austrians. It surfaces in Salzburg in the will of Jerónimo's banker father and in the antagonism manifested towards the music of Jewish-Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg (1841-1951). Moreover, the banker orders the dismissal of all his Jewish employees because "la mayoría de nuestros clientes provienen de Baviera" (114), anticipating the future as the reader recalls that Hitler was Austrian-born and that Bavaria was predominantly Catholic and conservative like Chile, and perhaps also remembering that many Jews left Chile in the 1970s. With respect to Schoenberg, who fled to the United States in the 1930s, Paula and Alia's comments on the atonality of his music show conservatism in terms of musical appreciation as well as latent anti-Semitism since the Nazis would later characterize his compositions as degenerate.<sup>114</sup>

Anti-Semitism also exists on Gema. East, a Jewish tailor, is encouraged in an early chapter to go west, rather than marry a "maliciosa." Policzer, a visiting Hungarian violinist, typifies the image of the wandering Jew.<sup>115</sup> In general, Jewish figures are ostracized. The anti-Semitic attitudes of the characters evoke the antagonism that Jewish writers like Marjorie Agosín still discern in Chile.

However, another Austrian Jew referred to in the novel, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), is cast as an ambivalent figure. Jerónimo reflects a positive attitude towards Freud and his

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<sup>114</sup> Clive James's describes the situation of Jews in Austria in the early part of the twentieth century in the "Introduction" and "Overture: Vienna" sections of *Cultural Amnesia: Necessary Memories from History and the Arts*. Steven Beller writes about the Jews in *Vienna and the Jews: A Cultural History*.

<sup>115</sup> The surname seems deliberately chosen. The family of Hungarian Adam Policzer survived the Holocaust and moved to Chile in 1946. The architect, Skármeta's contemporary, moved to Vancouver in 1975 to escape the military regime.

understanding of war and the human psyche (180), but journalist Gómez refers to him ironically in terms of the sexualized dance, the “turumba” (35). Both comments are more significant in respect of the character traits attributed to Jerónimo and the reporter figure than they are of Freud.

The historical context of the novel in which these nationalities co-exist is the longstanding “malicioso” desire for political independence and the dire economic conditions on Gema. Circumstances described in the paratexts and introductory chapters are repeated within the core. Disease destroyed the vines on an island whose economy had been based on “vides, aceitunas, peces, algo de mármol, aceite, tantos productos naturales” (122) and whose history dated back to “mucho antes de que la filoxera esterilizara las plantas” (104). Yet this realistic picture is itself distorted by outsiders. For example, before his arrival, Jerónimo imagines the island as producing nothing of value, just barely “aceite de oliva, vino blanco de cepas francesas, basquetbolistas y bailarines de turumba” (110). In a single sentence, the reader travels from olive oil and rotting vines to the anachronism of basketball, and finally to an invented carnivalesque and lascivious dance, and therefore to an imagined world.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to the absence of any actual historical figures on “Costas de Malicia”, the novel does not evoke the colour of the local language or culture. Mirroring Torrentes who remembers only a few words of his native Spanish and unlike Jerónimo who uses a hybrid Spanish with the German priest, the Spanish-speaking narrator uses a bare minimum of Croatian words. The Austrian and “malicioso” names have been transformed into Hispanic ones. The only

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<sup>116</sup> The novel contains multiple references to basketball, as do other Skármeta fictions. Dr. James Naismith, a Canadian living in the United States, invented the game in 1891. It spread across Europe during the First World War, making it unlikely that it was played on Brač before that. The basketball image introduces a sport for which Croatians have become famous, in keeping with Skármeta’s literary vision of blending literature into everyday life.

recurring reference is to the plum brandy called *slivovitz*.<sup>117</sup> The lack of native names and vocabulary facilitates the reading of the novel, making the actors and circumstances less foreign to the Hispanic eye and ear.

In contrast with the absence of the usual touchstones like history, culture, language and food, the geographical references to the area are accurate, if obscure. For example, Agram, the major mainland centre of “Costas de Malicia,” is where the archbishop and the interpreters of sacred books live, and the newspaper, *La Lengua de Agram*, is published. Unlike the island of Gema, Agram is not an imaginary place. It is the historic Austro-German name for Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.<sup>118</sup> In a similar vein, the “conquista de Tergestre” (147) refers to the early nineteenth-century Austrian conquest of Trieste, a city located near today’s Italian border with northern Dalmatia. Aspalathon, where *La República*, another newspaper available on the island, is printed and in whose port some of the Austrian fleet sits, designates the coastal city of Spalato or Split. This second largest city in modern Croatia is the point of embarkation to islands like Brač. Curica is a variation of Krk, the largest Dalmatian island.<sup>119</sup> Like the “exegetas de Agram, expertos en metaforones” (47), the reader is expected to decode these geographical references which are being implanted in the lettered history of Chile.

Unlike the geographical accuracy, island history is constructed through invented archives and newspaper articles. None of the records can be trusted since the priest himself fabricated “un pergamino” (125) to confirm the provenance of the church bell. The first newspaper article

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<sup>117</sup> For *slivovitz* see pages 33, 34, 93, 94, 130, 158, 194, and 218. The word for a “malicioso” dish, *cepavici*, is followed by its description in Spanish, “los anticuchos de interiores” (164) and “los anticuchos de entrañas (165), a typical Chilean dish. However, neither the name nor its translation is accurate. The correct term *čevapčići*, shortened to *čevapi*, refers to a meat ball (lamb, pork or beef).

<sup>118</sup> The Agram 2000 submachine gun made in Croatia shows a modern use of the name.

<sup>119</sup> Curica also names places in both Spain and in Chile’s Bio-Bio region, indirectly connecting the two continents and cultures.

encountered is signed simply “Pavlovic, correspondent.” Without a first name or newspaper source indicated, its authenticity is immediately suspect, despite the Dalmatian surname.

Pavlovic and later Gómez write for *La República*, a preposterously subversive name for a paper in historical Split. The narrator further suggests the diligent reader could consult the newspaper archives in the “Museo Histórico de Aspalathon” (217). The never-published article about the wedding written for the fictional *La República* is allegedly preserved only because a minor unseen character, a curator named Lausic, accidentally discovered and archived it long afterwards.<sup>120</sup> A step beyond invented archives allegedly located in actual cities, recordings of songs such as the “turumba” are said to be conserved in the fictional “museo histórico de Costas de Malicia.”

The fictional archive describing the wedding is further distorted when the implied author intrudes to explain that the unpublished version “que aquí se ofrece está ligeramente escarmetado por razones literarias” (217). In true metafictional style, the reader is informed that the fictional archive itself has supposedly been altered to suit the plot. Furthermore, this exaggerated or “escarmetado” version plays openly on the Skármeta surname, reminding readers they are in the self-referential realm of the narrator/author. All these non-existent sources, including the story relating the visit with the Chilean consul in Italy that Gómez allegedly filed for *La Lengua de Agram*, are meant to assure the reader that the author has respected the traditional reliance of the historical novel on documentary sources, while discernibly subverting it.

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<sup>120</sup> Lausic is a Croatian surname with significance in Chile. Nothing in the novel indicates if this is the same Lucas Lausic from whom Jerónimo rented his house. However, the surname triggers memories when juxtaposed with Lucas. In the 1991 Informe Rettig which examined Chile’s military dictatorship, Cedomil Lucas Lausic Glasinovic is described as a militant of the guerilla organization MIR (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*). Tortured by the secret police (the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* or DINA), he died at the infamous Villa Grimaldi. Skármeta shows that the atrocities affected everyone, regardless of ethnic origin. In addition, in 2012 Sergio Laušić Glasinović, a Chilean historian and professor, published the first volume of a history of the Dalmatian immigrants, *Croatas en América del Sur: Inmigración de Dalmacia en el Cono Sur Americano*.

The island and the archives may be invented, but the multiple references to a terrible war looming ahead are founded. Paula, Mollenhauer and the German priest, as well as the press, all deem it to be imminent. In Paula's view, her brother should leave Gema for North America before it erupts (138). On her way to the wedding, Paula states that the Roman Catholic Pope has forecast a terrible war. Predicting that Austria would then join with Germany, she mistakenly asserts that their future empire would extend "hasta los países árabes" (206), unable to foresee that the Austro-Hungarian Empire would neither win nor survive the war.

On the other hand, despite references to the Austrian monarchy and nobility no historical Austrian leaders are fictionalized. Nor are any historical Austrians connected to the novel's distortion of history and the march to a seemingly inevitable war. Instead, it is left to the generic "prensa" to comment ironically on the nobility's desire to restore the nation's past glory squandered by an apathetic monarchy "desangrada por la desidia y la falta de imaginación" (137). Unprepared for war, the Austrian monarchy supposedly looks to "Costas de Malicia" for an easy symbolic victory while "la prensa se burlaba de los decadentes nobles nulos en política internacional, quienes con pedantería leguleya disparaban injurias al mundo que la flota y el ejército tenía que arreglar luego con balas reales" (200). Austrian power and authority, exercised with tragic results, are ridiculed rather than revered.

The distortion of the Austrian perspective continues with the portrayal of the admiral commanding the naval ship that sails to Gema. Mollenhauer is a pompous, sex-obsessed and ridiculously self-indulgent figure rather than the heroic commander of a powerful fighting fleet. Lacking in gravitas and empathy, he imagines the attack as *commedia del arte* or theatre performance rather than an act of deliberate aggression. In his words, "Austria no debería salir más vulnerable en esta guerra contra el Sur, y cierto histrionismo de *grand guignol* sin duda

impresionaría a los aliados alemanes algo reticentes a meterse en Costas de Malicia” (148-49).

His focus on using histrionics to motivate the Germans through the sacrifice of the “maliciosos” reduces war to spectacle or performance.

Jerónimo shows better instincts than the admiral, disparaging the show of force that sends a fleet “de gran magnitud para atacar a una isla tan insignificante” (230). For emphasis, the German passage he recalls from Freud is immediately followed by the Spanish in parentheses: “Somos los sucesores de un número interminable de asesinos. Llevamos las ansias de matar en la sangre. Sólo mediante la guerra dejamos caer las máscaras culturales y permitimos que las bestias primitivas muestren sus rostros” (180). Whether or not Freud spoke these or similar words about the beast within man, the trauma of war provided him with a grim field of study. Jerónimo’s recollection foreshadows Mollenhauer’s zeal in dropping his veneer of civilization in order to behave exactly as violently as Freud had predicted.

Unlike the absence of historical leadership figures from Austria or Dalmatia, the rendering of Pope Pius X, who acts as an unseen interlocutor, is accurate. When the Pope is enlisted to forestall the Austrian attack, the reader plays along with the fiction of minor characters being able to contact this powerful figure directly and without delay, using the telephone, an improbable instrument of modernity. While the telegraph was an established technology in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the presence of a telephone in the island’s telegraph office is questionable. Its invention dates to the 1870s and its use was not yet widespread at the turn of the century, even in Austria. Magically, it is Reino Coppeta and not the priest who knows the pope’s telephone number of 5550, an allusion to 555, known as the biblical

number for Christ.<sup>121</sup> The priest has strong reasons for agreeing to make the call. Like Paula, he is aware that the Pope has prophesied that “en 1914 estallará un gran conflicto” (189). He wonders if the anticipated Austrian attack might trigger this “gran guerra que el Papa anunció” (189). In that case, as a religious leader it is his duty to act in the interests of peace and the Pope.

To continue the mimicry, the conversation with the Pope can only be surmised through his subsequent exchange with Mollenhauer. The ship’s telegraph operator relays the interchange beginning each sentence with “Dígale al Papa” and each papal response with “El Papa dice,” “El Papa lo ruega” and mostly “Dice el Papa” (202-203). A crucial discussion intended to stave off a tragic confrontation is conveyed in a mediated sequence that undermines the Pope’s dignity by emphasizing the admiral’s perspective. The only authoritative figure in the novel taken from this key period in history is unseen, heard through an intermediary’s decryption of Morse code, and powerless in the face of a caricatured Austrian navy. The preposterous scene that creates a critical distance from events that precipitated one of the worst wars in history in terms of fatalities suggests a parallel with the historical Pope’s attempts to prevent the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia and the ensuing German attacks in Western Europe.

The admiral’s references to “el conservador Papa” (224), his birth in a small Italian town and Austria’s role in securing his election, which did in fact occur during the 1903 Papal Conclave, are all verifiable. So are the statements about the pope’s failing health, his deep concern about the impending conflict, and his peace efforts until his death, just weeks after the declaration of war. In the novel, these historical elements are turned to ridicule when the Pope and the admiral communicate through telegraph operators interpreting dashes and dots. A

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<sup>121</sup> Dialing one to reach the long distance operator, the priest recalls reading a joke in a novel about the complexity of the number one (190). One is traditionally God’s number.

Chilean narrator, whose understanding of the Great War would be mediated on several planes, places the historical Pope in an invented context, blending history and fiction to create parody.<sup>122</sup>

Summing up, blending the premonitions of war with invented characters and conversations provides very little rationale as to why the Dalmatians sail to Chile. The reader is left with the bare facts that the vines had failed and that economic migration was a viable path forward in the face of forced recruitment for an imminent war. In the end, it is the Dalmatian desire for freedom and the struggle against oppression that are paramount, motivations reflected in the Chilean national anthem, as later cited by Reino.

The juxtaposition of a European civilization disdainful of the unfamiliar against “malicioso” backwardness imitates a major characteristic of the early Spanish American novel, the trope of urban culture set against its rural opposite in the search for modernity and progress. The “maliciosos” are denigrated in language highly reminiscent of the Spanish American debate opposing civilization and *barbarie*. The conflict between civilized modernity and rural backwardness, which originated close to Dalmatia in Greece, is transferred back to Europe, with the Austrians depicted as class-conscious xenophobes and the unenlightened primitive islanders as distrustful of outsiders.

In addition to Mollenhauer’s characterization of the islanders as “galeotes” (51), with galley slaves being an apt naval image, and “indios” (240), several foreign characters emphasize the backwardness and insularity of Gema. The German priest for instance argues that “la lejanía ha castigado a Gema con la indiferencia por su historia, arte y cultura” (125). The implication is that the island does possess a history, art and culture, even if it is unrecognized. Others are

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<sup>122</sup> In keeping with Shaw’s reading, the passage could also be taken as a comment on the disempowered relationship of the Church with the Chilean state, especially during the early years of the Pinochet regime.

similarly condescending. Torrentes is critical of “esta isla desgajada del planeta” (154). The oarsman who ferries Jerónimo describes the island as “la más dejadita de la mano de Dios” (122) since not even barbarians or Turks were able to subjugate it. In his view, “la única manera, caballero, de establecer una cultura, una civilización como la austríaca, sería pasar a todos por las armas y repoblar la isla con gente de trabajo y esfuerzo: chinos, japoneses, protestantes ingleses” (123). These ideas can easily be transposed to the Southern Cone where indigenous peoples were often viewed as expendable, inconvenient and lazy. They hint at Chile’s isolation and its focus on attracting northern European immigrants manifesting a Protestant work ethic rather than South and Central Europeans. The mention of Chinese and Japanese reflects the modern composition of South America rather than that of the fictional Gema.

Despite his professed interest in human rights, Jerónimo is not immune from xenophobic affirmations. Like Mollenhauer, he describes Gema colourfully as “esa pequeña galera de galeotes feroces y xenófobos ... ese orzuelo purulento en el sur de Europa, aquel terruño infinitamente ignorado en el Nuevo Mundo, y definitivamente esa nada total y absoluta” (51).<sup>123</sup> Inverting the cartography, Chile is similarly ignored by the Old World. Later, Jerónimo continues to disparage the island as “sin relevancia en los mapas ni en la historia” (227). In a demonstration of total ambivalence, he accuses the “maliciosos” of being xenophobes for resisting marriage to outsiders, hopes his wedding will alter their views, and yet plans to take his local bride to New York, to evade their resentment and his own xenophobia.

While Jerónimo is caught between two worlds, his father, his sister Paula and Mollenhauer display a one-sided view of society. Even on his deathbed, the banker remains

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<sup>123</sup> Melding the Statue of Liberty and King Kong, Jerónimo contrasts Gema with a sketch of New York where on “la cima del rascacielos más alto del universo asomaba una mano haciendo un gesto de invitación a la urbe” (51).

obsessed with his social position, wondering if after death “se me reconocerá mi posición social” and “se discriminará entre gente como nosotros y los simples trabajadores (110).”<sup>124</sup> Like her father, Paula manifests an unquestioning sense of superiority allied with a preference for tradition. She accosts Torrentes with “la autoridad que le daba su riqueza y su nueva aristocracia” (139) acquired through her recent marriage to a German noble. In response, Torrentes feigns modesty and subservience, addressing her as “madame” and “doctora.” In contrast, when Paula suggests his inventions might be worthy of a Nobel Prize, Torrentes notes with admiration that Rabindranath Tagore had just won it for literature. Paula’s reply succinctly conveys her disapproval: the Nobel Prize is becoming “cada vez más exótico” (143). She decries this exotic “Other,” meaning foreign and uncivilized. Her attitude conflicts implicitly with Tagore’s opposition to cultural separation and his view that people could absorb different cultures in positive ways (Sen 118).

The distance between the two positions is compounded when Torrentes recites what he alleges to be Tagore’s verses, which are placed in quotation marks as though authentic. The sentiments about the pleasures of drinking and dancing expressed in this travesty of Tagore’s contemplative verses cannot undo the fact of his 1913 Nobel Prize and his place in the canon, which are brought to the attention of the reader. In effect, the discussion of Tagore and the Nobel Prize demonstrates that the question of civilization and privilege could no more be restricted to the “happy few” in literature than it could in society. And it slyly hints at other non-European

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<sup>124</sup> The banker represents the type of bourgeois that Skármeta criticized and professed to want to omit from his fiction. The reference is to German sociologist Max Weber’s 1905 essays on class and social status in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* which connect high status to worldliness while lower status groups such as workers aspire to salvation after death. The words are equally reminiscent of Chilean expressions that focus on the elite as *gente como nosotros* and *gente decente*, in distinction from the backwardness of the rest of the population.

poets winning the Nobel, namely Neruda and Mistral, two Chileans who took pride in their *mestizo* roots.<sup>125</sup>

In fact, around the time of the conversation between Paula and Torrentes, Mistral won the *Juegos Florales de Santiago* award for *Sonetos de la muerte*. Like Paula, the mother of vanguard poet Vicente Huidobro decried the choice of “una tal Gabriela Mistral,” “una rota escribiendo poemas.” According to Oscar Contardo, the older Chilean elite were outraged by the increasing participation of their inferiors in literary pursuits (*Siútico* 290). Voicing these concerns in a passage befitting a *roman à clé* Paula is at once the representative of the Austrian and the Chilean elites.<sup>126</sup>

As a privileged member of society, Paula reacts to Gema with the same disdain as she manifests towards Tagore. She describes it as uncivilized, seeing her world alone as modern. According to the narrator, “(e)l Sur era para Paula Franck ese potrero bárbaro que se extendía hasta las inútiles islas de Costas de Malicia” (137). Despite criticizing the backwardness of Salzburg, Paula juxtaposes the overall modernity of Europe with “estos arrabales del planeta” (150), the slums where “la gente rústica” (169) drink *slivovitz*, a “brebaje bárbaro” (161). Going a step further “(t)odo lo que no es Europa es bárbaro” (206). On Gema Paula has her prejudices reinforced. Her one positive comment is that at least the islanders have Christian names (157).

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<sup>125</sup> After Tagore’s texts in Bengali were translated into English, Spanish writers Juan Ramón Jiménez and his wife Zenobia Camprubí translated some of them into versions which influenced Mistral and Neruda. In *Desolación* (1922) Mistral published commentaries simply titled “Comentarios a poemas de Rabindranath Tagore.” When Neruda paraphrased and published Tagore’s verses, he was accused of plagiarism, notably in “En mi cielo al crepúsculo” (*Veinte poemas de amor* 1924), a poem condemned as an appropriation of Tagore’s “Tú eres la nube crepuscular” (Poem 30, *The Gardener* 1913). Tagore was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, while Mistral was the second from outside Europe or the United States. Finally, Tagore, who visited Argentina and was welcomed by Victoria Ocampo, remains a popular poet in the Hispanic world.

<sup>126</sup> Contardo cites as his source Chilean poet Teresa Calderón’s article “Escritores chilenos juzgan a la Mistral.” Huidobro’s mother, María Luisa Fernández Bascuñán who used the pseudonym Monna Lissa, wrote to him in Europe that “tienes que volver pronto. Aquí hay que poner orden: hay una rota, una pobre mujer que está escribiendo poemas.”

Her dismissive comments about the islanders, “sin tiempo ni espacio, sin energía para cambiar, sin talento para los negocios y sin gracia para las letras de sus canciones” (215), underline her conviction about civilized life in her part of Europe.

This prejudice is upheld when Paula visits Alia’s home in a futile attempt to prevent the wedding ceremony. Her suggestion that mixing with the Italians, the Turks and other races has contaminated the bloodlines of the island population points to northern European racial purity as well as the historical preference for white skin in the Southern Cone, including Chile. Paula moreover affirms that she has made a personal contribution to the future of her country and social progress, despite her loveless and sexless marriage. Her union was designed to “unir la prosperidad bancaria con la tradición terrateniente, es decir, consagrar la alianza del capital con la clase (sic) y engendrar esa modernidad que le hacía tanta falta a Salzburgo” (138). Yet, she has failed to meld the political future with love and family, unlike the protagonists of nation-building novels like *Martín Rivas* (1862) who unite the landholding elite and the business classes.

Like Paula, Admiral Mollenhauer paints the Costas de Malicia as uncivilized and impeding progress. Blind to the limitations imposed by enforcing conformity and submission, he sees Reino as a “delirante xenófobo” who “sublevaba a los maliciosos contra el progreso, la cultura, la espiritualidad que con buen talante les ofrecía el imperio” (200). Mollenhauer’s pronouncements as well as his plans for revenge (echoing the royalists in Chile) show him to be a true xenophobic patriot. His wishes that “En un minuto de artillería continua la cuna de terroristas quedaría abolida de la geografía y la historia” (234), recall Jerónimo’s oarsman’s words about the need to annihilate the “maliciosos” while generating thoughts of the Pinochet regime. Furthermore, the admiral’s disdain for the women of Gema surfaces when he explains to

Jerónimo that, although he does not like to “coger con indias,” his crew “no tendrán escrúpulos” (257). Just as in the Americas, rape of the native population is a fact of war and conquest. By calling the local women “indias,” Mollenhauer creates a parallel between the “maliciosas” and the indigenous population of the Americas who bore the children of Spanish men.

Overall, the response to perceived differences and lack of civilization manifests itself as xenophobia. It is doubly ironic that the only way that the “civilized” imagine overcoming what they perceive as backwardness is through their own barbaric behaviour, eliminating the “indio,” a language that resonates powerfully in the Spanish American context.

Just as Gema is at once the beloved home of the “maliciosos” and an uncivilized backwater to the Austrians, Chile is represented in the novel as an ambivalent destination, fluctuating between desirable and undesirable. Since the “maliciosos” only land in Chile in the final passage, it is imagined through the words and thoughts of the characters or the narrator. From both their perspectives, it is the geography and the resources rather than the history that emerge, in parallel with the geography and resources of “Costas de Malicia.” Instead of a proud nation with a glorious past in the tradition of the historical novel, the story envisions Chile from the often preposterous imaginings of uninformed outsiders.

Jerónimo perceives Chile from the position of a sophisticated European while the Coppeta brothers have only Gema as a point of reference. When examining a map, Jerónimo barely notes “una excentricidad flaca al final del mundo que se disolvía por los pies en una mancha de hielo polar incapaz, pensó, de estimular la rapiña de nadie” (109). He opts for Gema instead. The “maliciosos” have no better sense than Jerónimo of the distant land that awaits them. Esteban’s sense of geography is vague; Chile is somewhere “over there” (230). In order to persuade his brother of its marvels, Reino projects a grandiose vision of skyscrapers and cars as

well as “los grandes cines de Antofagasta” (246). On a more practical note, Reino perceives its advantages: Chile will take them in and it lies beyond the reach of the military (244). Esteban’s reaction, that there is no guarantee with respect to the military, is both prescient and ironic in terms of Chile’s recent history and the narrator’s exile during a dictatorship.

Yet, the “malicioso” escapees have no strong sense of Chile. They are simply seeking peace, distance and a basketball court, moving from the abstract to the concretely anachronistic. Their awareness is limited to the need to learn Spanish, without any reference to politics, history, culture or people. According to the Chilean consul who receives them in Italy, her compatriots reciprocate their ignorance of geography since in “mi pobre país ignoran a media Europa y a toda Asia” (264). Thus, “malicioso” history will be unknown and unappreciated in Chile where only Western Europe is recognized.

Bereft of reference points, the “maliciosos” dream of Chile as a paradise. On the ocean voyage, they imagine

un Chile frutal, donde los ríos cual dulces océanos animaban parras de uvas colosales, tersuras transparentes de sol y agua que reventaban de plenitud al mirarlas, y (de) un Chile mineral coronado con fértiles socavones mineros que les permitirían llenarse las manos de polvo de oro y untarse las narices y los dientes para lucir como dioses fosforescentes en un carnaval veneciano. (286)

As part of this wishful vision of prosperous vineyards and natural resources, Reino paraphrases Chile’s national anthem that describes it as “la copia feliz del paraíso. Es todo verde, está lleno de faisanes y pájaros, los ríos manan oro por todas partes, los lagos son transparentes y las chicas guapísimas” (296). The anthem does in fact proclaim that Chile is “la copia feliz del Edén” and

an asylum against oppression.<sup>127</sup> Unlike his brother, Esteban expresses skepticism: it seems to be “un lugar del cual no se vuelve” (296), which will be his fate. Like his prescience about the military, his pessimism is confirmed when he discovers the inhospitable conditions of Antofagasta

In summary, European history is distorted or parodied, so that its retelling is an almost completely unreliable guide to the past of Chile’s “malicioso” immigrants. Rather than the attempts at historical accuracy common to the traditional novel, the narrative does not recreate major historical figures or events. One of the most notable historical references is to Tagore winning the Nobel Prize, a literary rather than a political or military event. The only accurately portrayed figure is the powerless and unseen Pope whose words are relayed by others.

The Chilean narrator conceives “malicioso” and European history in Spanish American terms. Tropes such as those related to miscegenation and to “civilization” versus “barbarism” are transplanted to Gema. In effect, the history of Gema is told through a Chilean conception of its history and culture, while Chile in turn is imagined by characters absolutely unfamiliar with it. This reconstruction of the European past cannot mirror the original immigrant experience. The narrator uses different fragments of the immigrant story to construct a narrative that fits within the framework of his own experience and understanding of the world. In the end, the reader is left to conclude that, even though the past cannot be fully known or recaptured in the present, there is an urge to reconstruct it in order to make sense of it. Reinforcing the need to retrieve the past in the face of information presented as unreliable and the narrator’s admission that he wrote

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<sup>127</sup> The anthem begins: “Puro, Chile, es tu cielo azulado/Puras brisas te cruzan también/Y tu campo de flores bordado/Es la copia feliz del Edén/Majestuosa es la blanca montaña/Que te dio por baluarte el Señor (bis)/Y ese mar que tranquilo te baña/Te promete un futuro esplendor/.” The chorus adds “Dulce Patria, recibe los votos/Con que Chile en tus aras juró/Que o la tumba serás de los libres/O el asilo contra la opresión.” Verses added to glorify the military during the Pinochet years have been abandoned.

a fiction, is the fact that the need for written records and the consequences of their absence or bias is often underscored in the novel, mainly through untrustworthy characters like Paula and the journalists.

### **Writing as Theme**

In the absence of documents, reliable memory or family anecdotes, the Chilean narrator constructs a history for the “malicioso” immigrants. The insistence on writing as the only evidence of the past, the ubiquity of non-existent archives, and the references to imaginary newspapers create origins in the imagined literary world rather than a historical reconstruction. Dialogue and inner reflections, bad verse, lewd lyrics, a hidden diary, purported correspondence, news reports and official documents, as well as excerpts from celebrated poets, and even distortions of their verses constitute the different registers that complement the narrator’s voice. The novel emphasizes the potential of the written word to create and preserve historical and cultural memory and, at the same time, stresses its unreliability. Several passages underline that only what is written remains, most especially Paula’s dismissive retort to Alia’s father when he declares that his family is honourable: without a written history, there is only “una suma de recuerdos privados” (160). People die, memories fade and those who write control what is remembered. Inevitably, in this case, those who write or speak of writing are seldom the “maliciosos.”

Unlike the islanders, Jerónimo and Paula emphasize the written tradition and its potential for subjectivity and distortion. Jerónimo, the reader who understands the power of the written word, leaves no written traces other than the letter that the narrator alleges to have found in the archives. The only book that Jerónimo carries when he abandons his studies in Austria is a

*Manual de Derecho Internacional* (114).<sup>128</sup> On Gema he behaves in accordance with his legal training, seeking factual documents, closely examining his predecessor's secret journal, and consulting Alia's medical records. His analytical approach is highlighted when he evaluates Esteban's poem to Alia not in terms of intent or emotion, but of literary merit, while searching for clues to help identify its creator. Unlike the reader however, he does not perceive the verses' anachronistic resonances with Spanish poet Rafael Alberti's poem "El mar, la mar" from *Marinero en tierra* (1924), confirming his lack of poetic sensibility.

Instead, in keeping with his rational tendencies, Jerónimo professes to prefer straightforward language to the sensationalism of the newspaper *La República*. Instead of its "crónica roja" relating the previous bridal death, he would have preferred "una descripción fría, detallada, e imparcial de lo que ocurrió en esa noche de tragedia antes que la diarrea lírica de mitificantes exegetas" (47). The journal of Marinakos, the bridegroom, is no more helpful than the newspaper: the section shared with the reader simply states that the bride had been satisfied by the sexual union that provoked her death. Aware that this boasting could damage Marinakos' memory, Jerónimo attempts but fails to keep the story from the disreputable "cagatintas" (48) of *La República*. Instead, to commemorate Marinakos, Jerónimo plants seeds from a plum tree with "el docto instinto de crear memorias y raíces. Acaso conjuros" (178). He foreshadows his own death by reading under the tree in "la compañía de todo arte que se hubiera confrontado con el dolor, el misterio, la muerte" (178). The only future trace of both men will be the silent trees.

Jerónimo's sister also recognizes the lasting power of official documents. Paula acts decisively to destroy those that might harm her family's reputation and succeeds partially in

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<sup>128</sup> Gordana Yovanovich has shown how Skármeta focused on social and human rights in his previous novel, *Match Ball* (1989). Jerónimo reflects a similar interest in choosing to keep a treatise on international law, a legal area related to human rights of critical importance to exiled or stateless people.

expunging her brother's wedding from history by having the civil record purged. However, since the priest refuses a bribe to destroy the religious certificate, Paula is unable to subvert the church.

Esteban would also prefer there not be any historical record of the marriage between Jerónimo and Alia. He unknowingly adopts Paula's stance by noting that Pavlovic's departure means that the press will not report on the wedding, which equates to it never happening. Both Paula and Esteban would like the evidence to be obliterated from history, the former because the bride is not, in her view, worthy, and the latter because of his desire for her. Neither foresees that an outsider like Gómez, unfamiliar with local customs, will distort the event. Nor are characters in a novel positioned to anticipate that the narrator will allege to have retrieved the unpublished article from archives.

The narrator, who simultaneously reveals and decries the sensationalism of the article, both suggests and rejects the speculation about why it was never published. It was not because of the purple prose, the disparaging portrayal of Paula, or the deformation of the "turumba." The true explanation was quite mundane: no one staffed the telegraph office during the wedding revelry; the article was never despatched; and, it was eventually buried in the archives. Of course, his version is no more accurate than any other since he was not there on the wedding day.

Like Gómez, Pavlovic—the other journalist—produces his own versions of events. Prepared to compromise himself to ferret out the circumstances surrounding the murder of the Austrian recruits, he finds both Esteban and Reino to be easy prey. Pavlovic brazenly assures Reino that journalists record the facts for history: "Existen los hechos y la historia. Los hechos si no se cuentan, si no hay alguien que los muestre, carecen de sentido. Para esto estamos los periodistas" (61). While asserting that "quiero contar la historia porque estoy con ustedes" (61) and invoking "la patria" (62), he recognizes that his words sound like a "frase tan falsa y tan

cursi” (62). This “azucarada retórica” (62) suffices for the naive Reino to reveal the plan of attack. The reporter in fact places himself as being the first to capture the facts, thus the truth, a source that historians will later consult to analyze and interpret the past.

Pavlovic and Reino complement each other: the former needs a story and the latter an audience. Reino cannot resist boasting about his allegedly heroic deeds. The man of action, the leader who forgot to lead on the night of the attack on the Austrian recruits, relates his version of events for history because “tenía pavor al *anonimato*. Aunque defensor de hacer la historia, más que escribirla, con certeza había ya comprendido que si el acto es lo primordial, la historia *repite* el acto cada vez que encuentra un lector que busque entender los acontecimientos del mundo” (89, emphasis in the original).<sup>129</sup> Relating his version to the journalist becomes his way of creating a history. At the same time, this reinforces Paula’s words about needing to move beyond personal memories to create documents that produce an understanding of history.

Echoing Reino’s need to talk, Pavlovic can’t restrain himself from telling his version of the story even before it is printed: “había llegado la hora de su triunfo, la victoria del cronista sobre el poeta” (83). While journalism first trumps history and now literature for Pavlovic, the narrator offers a different reading. Like Jerónimo, he distrusts journalists, branding Pavlovic as a “cagatintas libresco y pedante” (39) and “el bastardo periodista” (148) whose story attracts the ire of Admiral Mollenhauer. And Mollenhauer predicts that Alia’s rape “rodeado de los faustos de la ceremonia nupcial, la fiesta apocalíptica, será mito por siglos, será historia” (259). In the end, this is the tale that the narrator, who reports having seen Gómez’s unpublished news story in the “malicioso” archives, tells.

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<sup>129</sup> In both novels Skármeta occasionally uses italics to draw the attention of the reader to specific passages, many of which deal with issues of identity or emotions.

Through his characters, the narrator makes the point that the past lives on only if it is written down and the writing is accessible. In the end, history is not an objective representation of the past, but a subjective perception, as Hayden White argued in stressing that historical discourse entails as much storytelling as do literature and other forms of narratives. Still, this story is clearly a fabrication rather than an attempt at establishing a truth. Like the narrator's prologue, the core novel presents writing as a version or a fiction in which much is suppressed, distorted or exaggerated. Even archives are not reliable indicators. Nor is the narrator a dispassionate observer since he comments and embroiders on the past in the present.

The carnivalesque representation of the "turumba," the "maliciosa" dance which is foreshadowed, rehearsed, and then performed at the wedding celebration, epitomizes the tendency of the press to exaggerate. According to the narrator, the islanders dance it on all major occasions, in one of two modes, either the proper "salon" version or a "brothel" version derived from the word for whore (*puta*). In the "turumputa," clothing is shed, women's undergarments are waved about, and copulation is simulated. The "turumba" is contrasted with South American mating dances in which women remain clothed and men wave white handkerchiefs rather than underwear, without a mention of Chile's national dance, the *cueca*.

The explicitly sexual "Turumba de la fruta" is the highlight of the wedding festivities. Paula scorns the new composition while the German priest initially threatens to excommunicate parishioners who dare to dance it.<sup>130</sup> Overcoming his initial disapproval, the priest eventually joins in the carnival spirit. Nevertheless, he remains in character by adhering to biblical imagery,

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<sup>130</sup> The priest threatens to act like "el papa Pío I con los herejes de Tunkún cuando éstos usaron las velas del templo con fines poco santos" (151). In the second century Pope Pius I did indeed excommunicate Gnostics, but not for the sexual behaviour suggested here. Like Pius the Tenth, he also advocated harmony over warfare.

connecting the sensual dance to the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve, and adding his own erotic images to the verses using religious references.

Jerónimo does briefly dance the "turumba" with Alia. According to Gómez, he initially leads her in the more sedate version then switches to formal European style by waltzing her away from the revelry, foreshadowing their unconsummated wedding night. In fact, public displays of sexuality are associated with minor characters rather than the wedding couple or the premarital union of Esteban and Alia. After the bride and groom leave, the "turumba" leads to sexual touching before culminating in intercourse on the beach between the young "maliciosos," now glorified as militants ("milicianos"), and their partners. Freud's name appears when Gómez reports that "se soltaron simultáneamente las libidos y los corsés en un espectáculo que habría hecho las delicias del lujurioso Freud" (218). Thus, the reporter ridicules both the dance and Freud's interest in understanding sexuality as part of human nature.

The ridicule extends to the names that Gómez confers on the dance: the "caramba" or "taramba," the "carumba de la fruta" or the "carimba de la fruta." The narrator for his part intervenes to defend the dance, condemning the "monstruosa imprecisión" of the journalist's "caramba," "carumba," "carimba" and even "carambras" to depict the "mundialmente afamada" "turumba" (224). Still, he compounds the exotic naming by adding "carambras" to the journalist's litany. The similarity to the common exclamation of surprise, "caramba," underlines the parody. In effect, this evocation of the dance as a carnivalesque moment serves to lampoon the uninformed journalist rather than the "maliciosos."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> These variations affiliate the "turumba" with dances of Spanish America, hinting at the tango, rumba, samba, and mambo, and even the bamba, a traditional wedding dance.

Even the dance has its intertextual origin, namely the *cueca* scene in the brothel described in Joaquín Edwards Bello's *El roto*. That novel portrays the dance as “una cosa para alarmar a cualquiera que no tuviera la costumbre” (59). While in *La boda del poeta* Gómez is the astonished observer, the narrator in *El roto* describes the scene as follows:

La cueca es una alegoría sexual y sanguinaria de la fusión guerrera de dos razas. Por eso se siente resonar el tambor de Castilla y el chivateo de Arauco; es la constante persecución del europeo a la india, que en la última figura de la danza se entrega bajando los ojos, simulando hasta el último una resistencia desgana y silvestre. El marinero bailaba con *La Choca* formalmente, como sintiendo el rito nupcial. América está siempre ávida de Adanes blancos. (59)<sup>132</sup>

In *La boda del poeta* the narrator links the dance to brothels by including “turumputa” and “prostibularia” in its names (79). The parody of Edwards Bello's description of the Chilean dance and the “rito nupcial” creates a parallel between the “maliciosos” and the Chileans. It might also shed light on Alia's decision to stay with Jerónimo, at least until Esteban can rescue her. The sailor's partner was “la Eva ocre ansiosa de mejorar la prole” (59). In other words, she was anxious to whiten future generations. Alia's instincts may have sought to add “civilized” genes to Gema, in concert with her cultural awakening, or at least that is how the contemporary narrator projects Chile's history of *mestizaje* onto Gema.

In Italy, Gómez returns in passing to the dance when the Chilean consul invites the “maliciosos” to sing. Fearing that “la inocente barbarie de mis personajes los condujera a la *Carambamba de la fruta*” (277) (emphasis in the original), he produces yet another playful

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<sup>132</sup> In *El roto*, the sailor's appearance explains “el sobrenombre de Marinera que tiene la cueca en algunas tierras adonde llegó sin duda a bordo de veleros coloniales” (59).

variant on the name of the dance, as distortion grows with distance and repetition. Once again, the islanders are labelled as barbarians. And finally the reporter refers to them as “mis personajes” leading to speculation about his credibility as a reporter of facts, while conflating him with the narrator.

To summarize, while writing serves to record traces of the past it cannot produce an accurate, reliable and unbiased picture. Even historical documents reflect a subjective perspective that results in only one version or interpretation of an event. Archives may be invented or tampered with. News stories are sensationalized and exaggerated. Records can be destroyed, erased, misplaced, forgotten or manipulated. The human compulsion to tell and to preserve stories is not a guarantee of historical truth but of a processing of events through fallible memory to make sense of life. With the passing of generations, the loss of memory, and the lack of official or family documents, the past is re-imagined in the present in order to ensure a sense of continuity. The imagination fills the void, as is the case for the narrator who knowingly invents a past for his grandfather’s entourage from a very few shreds of information. The historical truth is limited to the timeframe and reasons for immigration from Gema.

In the end, the exaggerated description of the invented ‘turumba’ and its many names call into question all the other documents and archives referred to in *La boda del poeta*. In contrast with the gaps, distortions and inventions of the imagined historical record, it is the literary and cultural intertexts that propel the story as well as simultaneously shape the characters and underline their fictional nature. As the narration is dominated by dialogue, these references are often spare and elusive, without explanation. A close analysis reveals the depth of the appropriation of the cultural tradition in the creation of the main characters. I begin my discussion with the only historical Chilean fictionalized in the novel, Gabriela Mistral.

### **Intertextuality: the Consul as Gabriela Mistral**

In discussing Skármeta and the literary tradition, I underlined his frequent references to canonic literature and authors. Skármeta acknowledges his debt to his precursors from Shakespeare through the Western European, Hispanic and Anglo-American canon. His experience of the world is as much cultural as historical. His fictional world is a lettered and musical realm. In it, Skármeta has consistently represented or cited Mistral and Neruda as the literary mother and father of Chile respectively, the guardians of the nation that he creates.

Instead of constructing a realistic historical context, *La boda del poeta* is indebted to the Western and Spanish American literary and cultural traditions. Narrator and characters display a rich awareness of cultural figures and artefacts that surpasses the references to historical figures and events. In Hutcheon's terms, there is a double coding since the reader is conscious of being within a fiction yet the narrator and the characters refer to actual literary figures and to the visual and musical arts, the tradition within which the author inscribes himself, his narrator and his characters. The intertextuality conveys both respect for the cultural tradition and a desire to secure a place for immigrants within it, even if their story must be invented. In effect, the novel requires a patient and informed reader to make the connections, beginning with Mistral.

The distortion that replaces the traditional mimetism in the retelling of history extends to the borrowing of biographical details to portray an unnamed but recognizable Mistral. Unlike the fictional encounters with the Austrians, the "malicioso" interaction with the unnamed Chilean consul in Italy broadly reflects specific elements of Mistral's life. What is not accurate is the timing since Mistral arrived in Italy half a century later.<sup>133</sup> Skármeta reinvents her as the

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<sup>133</sup> Born in 1889, Mistral was long estranged from Chile. Named Chile's consul in Naples in 1950, she lived in penury in Rapallo due to irregular payments of her remuneration.

benefactor of the “maliciosos,” first in a chapter that can be read as resembling a *roman a clé* and then, in an alleged news item.

In the chapter situated in Rapallo, the Chilean consul comments on the approaching war. In her words: “Aquí está a punto de comenzar una guerra y los militares le han puesto piedras en la boca a la gente. Ya están mudos. Ya llevan el nicho en las lenguas” (264). The reader might make the connection between the “nicho” or tomb and Mistral’s *Sonetos a la muerte* (1914) that begin with “Del nicho helado en que los hombres te pusieron.” More than the glory or fear of war expressed in European terms, the consul rephrases it in Chilean and personal terms. She anticipates having to “centuplicar su dedicación a la patria. ... Cientos o miles de exiliados, fugitivos, o refugiados, golpearían sus puertas” (269). This was as true later in the century for the historical Mistral in her diplomatic role as it was for the nations that welcomed Chileans during the 1970s.

In the most striking example of a scene borrowed from life, the consul channels Mistral when she criticizes the elegant Spaniards who founded her country, impregnating indigenous women while marrying “las señoritas que mandaron a buscar a Madrid” (265). The consul recalls the offensive words delivered in response: “(l)o que esta señora no sabe es que si allí los españoles tomaron a las indias fue porque no había monas” (265). The sentence, set off in quotation marks in the text, is almost identical to the offensive words that, according to Volodia Teitelboim in *Gabriela Mistral pública y secreta* (1991), were in fact spoken at a writers’ gathering held in Madrid to honour Mistral. Laura Rodig’s “Presencia de Gabriela Mistral: Notas de un cuaderno,” (1957) quotes: “esta señora no sabe que si los españoles tomaron indias, fue porque allí no había monas” (291, also cited by Teitelboim 218). Apparently no one in attendance, not even Miguel de Unamuno, defended her. Whatever his source, Skármeta is

familiar with the insult and deliberately reproduces it as a way of condemning both the Spaniards' disrespectful treatment of Mistral, and their racist and imperialist worldview. The fictional consul echoes the poet's criticism of past and present Spanish attitudes, without elaboration. Moreover, the Spaniards mirror the scornful and racist attitude of Mollenhauer towards the "indias" of Gema voiced just a few pages earlier.

Taken together, the words of Mollenhauer and of the Spaniard as reported by the consul can be read as criticism of the idealization of Spanish American miscegenation found in some of its traditional historical fiction and foundational novels. While Clorinda Matto's *Aves sin nido* (1889) comes to mind as an apt Peruvian example of the idealized result of sexual assaults by the clergy, it is worth highlighting as a Chilean response the passage in *El roto* which ironically suggests the prostitute dancing with the sailor is "la Eva ocre ansiosa de mejorar la prole" (59). Given the prevalence of rape and prostitution in colonial Spanish America and the reported rapes of Alia in the *Skármeta* novel, the passages underscore the idealization of forced miscegenation leading to *mestizaje*, in line with the parody of "civilization" and "*barbarie*."

In addition to highlighting the treatment that Mistral endured, the novel confers on the consul a series of images and words lifted directly from the poet's life and art. When the consul refers to burying her dead in Chile and in Brazil (267), the latter allusion is to the 1943-45 period when Mistral served as consul in Petropolis. Her friends and neighbours, Austrian author Stefan Zweig and his wife, committed suicide there in 1942 as did her teenaged nephew. Now, the consul treats Esteban as a son, evoking Mistral's dead nephew and her maternal persona. The image is reinforced when the consul embraces Esteban, calling him "hijo." Esteban and another "malicioso" in turn reinforce the motherly image by addressing her as "madonna" (264, 267), comparing her to the Virgin Mary. Through the consul, Mistral, as both mother of the Chilean

nation and motherless poet, enfolds the “maliciosos” into her created family. By providing them with a visa, the consul ushers them into a new world. The generosity of a consul who was herself living in exile and poorly treated by the Chilean elite legitimizes the immigrant story within the narrative of nation and identity.

The novel calls further attention to itself as a construction by adapting literary images associated with Mistral. Displaced from the sea to the consul’s bathtub, Esteban becomes her “marinero en tierra” (269), triggering memories of “un poeta español que le había prescrito un volumen con ese título” (269). This anachronistic allusion to Alberti’s *Marinero en tierra*, a post-World War One volume of poetry marked by longing for home, evokes Mistral’s nostalgia and the years of exile both she and Alberti endured.

When the narrator unexpectedly infuses the ailing consul with the strength needed to lift the unconscious Esteban from the bath, her action suggests both a baptism and a resurrection, a new life for Esteban. The identification with Mistral is unmistakable since the consul does so by inventing “una fuerza que sólo le concedía a los momentos más íntimos de su lírica” (269-70). While physical strength is transferred from the artistic plane to the everyday, its “invented” nature highlights the artificiality of the sequence.

The overlap between the consul and Mistral continues throughout the passage. The consul’s emphasis on the word “soledad,” stressing that “(e)l infierno entero cabe en esa palabra” (267), recalls Mistral’s celebrated poems such as “Yo no tengo soledad.” At dinner the consul dances the Chilean “cueca” while singing lyrics that conjure up Mistral’s verses. Finally, this symbolic figure offers Esteban a notebook, advising him to write down “todas sus angustias y padeceres” (286), as Mistral herself did. The time has come for him to begin recording his story.

In the larger sense Mistral, through the consul who feeds and counsels the dozen young men, acts as a figurative and literary mother as well as a guiding light for the future immigrants. Moreover, by comparing the “maliciosos” to the twelve apostles at the Last Supper with Christ, she converts them into faithful disciples. As the only historical female figure reflected in the intertexts, Mistral’s role as national poet and mother is intensified. For Skármeta,

Gabriela Mistral tiene el gran mérito de, siendo una mujer de un mundo muy pequeño, rural, insignificante geográficamente, una pobre maestra de escuela en un lugar perdido, tiene el mérito de haber entendido toda la poesía española, toda la tradición clásica y mística y haberla usado como instrumento para expresar una realidad regional muy agotada. Eso me parece a mí un gran mérito que la figura, el oficio, de poeta es inmensamente grande para mí porque es el que nos hace ver y que al mismo tiempo aquel que nos hace ver en todas direcciones, más que nada en la conquista de la tradición, del pasado ... en su visión humanística. (Morpaw “Interview” 321-22).

Even without the author or the narrator’s present-day hindsight, Gómez the journalist connects the consul directly to Mistral. According to his report, she left behind in Petropolis other unnamed “bienes” (275). He notes “su mirada de águila, su energía imprevista e improvisadora, su lenguaje fustigado por la ironía, y cierta tristeza que le venía de una viudez de señorita.” The consul is moreover an extraordinary being, “un personaje capaz de desembarcar en la luna o ganar un Nobel” (279). Through connections such as the loss of a lover at a young age and a future Nobel Prize Gómez reinforces the anachronistic doubling of Mistral.

Furthermore, the consul’s protection accompanies the young men across the Atlantic. Her signature on the single visa elicits praise and emotion from the border official who sheds a

“tierna lágrima” (304). Although the reader is not told what the signature is, the official declaims “piececitos de niños azulosos de frío,” the opening verse of Mistral’s poem “Piececitos” (*Ternura* 1924) which had not yet been composed. These moments of intertextuality nourish a maternal relationship for the “maliciosos” that extends beyond the consul/Mistral to Chile as they approach and disembark.

The consul’s intervention connects the “maliciosos” to literature and to rebirth. The official or historical narrative of immigration is replaced with a warm welcome into the national imagination and family through the celebrated if originally maligned poet. Since Mistral embodies poetry in a nation of poets, it is through poetic discourse that the immigrants are welcomed to the new world both as characters in the novel and through situating the novel within the highest level of the Chilean literary imaginary. As Skármeta affirmed, it is a privilege to live in the country of Mistral and Neruda. In his words,

Chile tiene muchas ventajas. Una de las grandes ventajas que tiene es realmente que ha sido la tierra o el espacio donde se originó una poesía magnífica. ¿Qué es lo que me atrae a mí en la figura de Neruda y de Gabriela Mistral? ¿Por qué son motivos recurrentes de mi obra? Encuentro que ellos son poetas fundacionales, es decir nos sugieren la base de una existencia que sea sensible a lo afincado que es la realidad y la historia. (Morpaw “Interview” 316)

Being associated with Mistral has a double significance for the “maliciosos”: it recognizes their shared humble origins and confers on them a rightful place within Chile’s literary world where poetry is the highest form of spiritual expression.

In brief, rather than revive foundational figures from European history, the novel dialogues with literary history and literary tradition in a historiographic metafiction about

immigration. While the major literary figure is that of the consul as Mistral, key characters in the novel are also presented through literary images.

### **Intertexts as Character Development**

The intertexts of *La boda del poeta* have not been studied before, other than the *commedia dell'arte* influence and a few mentions of the consul as a representation of Mistral. Indeed, the complexity of the novel has puzzled a few critics, while others have been perplexed by the author's shift in literary direction and the European setting.

As a starting point for the analysis of the intertexts it seems both fair and reasonable to ask why Skármeta would embark on the production of a complex artefact that engages so thoroughly with Chilean and world literature in order to tell the story of minor characters without access to literature. My basic thesis is that it reflects the author's vision for Chile. Given the number of intertexts and allusions, ranging all the way from Homer, the Old Testament and Central European cultural figures to Mistral and Neruda, I argue that with this novel Skármeta seeks to widen and deepen the nation's identity discourse. In other words, his aesthetics are designed to mirror the broad political vision of a returned exile reimagining his place and his nation's place in the world. The novel creates a nation engaged with the world through its characters and its cultural references, while remaining strongly rooted in its own history and traditions. By embracing immigration and immigrants within its literary universe, it projects a search for an internal equilibrium where immigrant roots are in balance with the national tradition.

How does this particular artefact compare to the traditional historical novel which is notably nationalistic and inward-looking? Skármeta's early writing was individualistic, national

and anchored in his observation of the world, what he called “realismo poético,” and never historical. Here, in an inversion of the historical novel, the national gives way to a cosmopolitan world view and a national literary history receptive to outside influences. Viewed from this angle, the intertexts lie at the heart of a literary artefact which both explicitly and implicitly marries a political and a literary vision. The immigrant story is fully inscribed within the nation’s origins, especially its European history and culture.

Skármeta’s own comments provide important insight. Although his words apply mostly to this novel, he has said in regards to it and *La chica del trombón* that he does not like the responsibility of being true to reality that the historical novel demands. Instead:

Me gusta justamente en la literatura todo aquello que distorsiona la realidad para poder crear un mundo propio, para pegar el mundo. El mundo puede ser una fuente de inspiración pero no puede la literatura servir a la realidad. No es eso el rol de la literatura. Lo que sucede, mi intención al escribir estas obras es desbordar mi infinidad, mis ansias de comprender quien soy, mirando el mundo contemporáneo en que estoy viviendo y el mundo contemporáneo incluye un dato muy fuerte, está hecho de inmigrantes, de fusiones, de intervenciones, en realidades distintas. Y eso era América Latina. Era una propuesta que me daba la realidad absolutamente estimulante. También había una voluntad algo pícara, de hacer algo distinto porque meterme yo como latinoamericano en el mundo europeo del pasado, de la pre-primera guerra mundial era un rasgo muy original de creación que consistía en algo así como *latinoamericanizar* la historia europea con una novela que es una novela que se desarrolla en Europa pero desde la experiencia de un autor latinoamericano... son personajes anfibios, contaminados

por el latinoamericanismo del autor. Muchos de estos personajes hablan como chilenos. Es un intento que podríamos llamar incluso un poco paródico de conquistar o de intervenir el pasado europeo desde una perspectiva marginal. (Morpaw “Interview” 6)

Skármeta expresses his position as a writer very clearly. Situated at a distance from his ethnic roots, he intentionally deviated from the factual historical novel, distorted history and adopted a parodic lens. He also sought to understand himself and the world around him, a world now filled with immigrants, just as it was a century ago. In admitting that his characters observe the world from a Chilean perspective, he acknowledges that the novel is rooted in the new world. This confers on it an ethnic perspective, as the narrator looks back on his immigrant origins.

However, the author’s vision also actively incorporates his own cultural foundations into his narrative: “mi literatura es una reacción muy espontánea a la vida personal que yo tengo y mi relación con la cultura que he heredado. Entonces yo intento fundir la espontaneidad de mi vida con los temas clásicos, los autores clásicos que me han deparado la cultura” (Morpaw “Interview” 2). Nonetheless, minor characters like the “maliciosos” do not generally express themselves through literary references. They reflect the vision of a plural Chile in terms of people, while other key players in the novel communicate the classic literary tradition, evening out the two components, the history of immigration and the literary tradition, that underpin Chile today.

It is worth underlining that the intertexts are intended as the creation of the Chilean narrator, a descendant of the “maliciosos” who possesses the classic culture they lacked and uses it to construct the characters in his novel. It is thus a culture that has been transferred to, and transformed in, Chile. Whether historically correct, anachronistic or even textually distorted, the

intertexts often act as guideposts to deciphering motivation and character. They construct and respect individual roles and vocations, whether bourgeois, military, maritime or religious.

First of all, the novel shows few traces of Croatian or Dalmatian culture. Vladimir Nazor (1876-1946), the most important and prolific writer born on Brač, is the only figure appropriated from Dalmatia's literary tradition. Nazor, who expressed himself in a variety of genres including poetry and fiction, is an esteemed figure, known for fostering a national consciousness. In 1945 he became the president of the Anti-fascist Council of the Federal Republic of Croatia and was named the first Speaker of the Croatian Parliament. He also introduced the historical genre to the region with *Loda the Shepherd* (1938) which covers the history of Brač. This explains the image of the "pastor" in Skármeta's passages that either use Nazor's name or disguise him as Nazar.<sup>134</sup> The statue erected in his memory at Bobonišće na Moru on Brač appears as an anachronism when attributed to Nazar in the core novel, further accentuating its fictional nature.<sup>135</sup>

In the prologue, the contemporary Chilean narrator introduces verses, purportedly written in his travel diary on a visit to Costas de Malicia during his exile. The lines recognize the poet Nazor who climbed "a la torre a pastar palabras" (21), thereby pointing to the parallel between Nazor and the narrator as poets. When the "maliciosos" flee in the night, Esteban glances back at "los calados de piedra de la mínima torre del poeta Nazar" (164). And, when Pavlovic leaves, he too is moved by a glimpse of the statue. In Italy, the "maliciosos" recite fictional verses to evoke Nazor's pastoral poems. The consul reciprocates sedately with "un baile y canto nacional que apodó como 'cueca'" (277). The authentic Chilean dance and song join with the alleged verses of

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<sup>134</sup> In *Breve exposición de la literatura croata* (2005), Antun Domic catalogues major literary movements in Croatia beginning from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance when the area was a strong humanist and cultural centre. Nazor's fame postdates the First World War and his writing is not widely known or translated into Spanish, English or French. His poetry and prose are translated into other languages such as Italian and German.

<sup>135</sup> Skármeta uses this type of light disguise (Nazar, Malicia) as a recourse in other narratives, such as *El baile de la Victoria* (Canteros/infamous security chief Contreras) and *Los días del arcoíris* (Olwyn/President Aylwin).

the esteemed “malicioso” poet to create ties across a linguistic and ethnic divide, sidestepping the distortion of the “turumba” recorded by Gómez, the uninformed outsider. The self-referential connection of the exile of the “maliciosos” and Pavlovic to the return visits of both the narrator and the author a century later through Nator is so subtle as to pass undetected.

In contrast with the fictionalization of Nator and Mistral and the mention of Tagore, the novel does not name the only Yugoslavian recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1975), Ivan (“Ivo”) Andric. Instead, the fictitious *Contra la guerra*, a “poemario pacifista de la poeta Maya Goñi” (185), compares the shape of Costas de Malicia to the wound beneath Christ’s heart, suggesting that Costas de Malicia was betrayed by attackers.

By selecting major figures and works mostly from the Western canon rather than the Dalmatian/Croatian tradition, the author ensures the intertextual references he uses as instruments in developing his characters are more widely discernible. Moreover, they are attributed to those most likely to be familiar with the classic works, namely journalists, wealthy Austrians and the Chilean consul, rather than the “maliciosos” themselves who refer only to Nator. The exception is Alia Emar whose limited conversation, primarily with Paula, reflects the wide range of classic books and recordings that Jerónimo bestowed on her.

The earliest intertexts in the novel refer to the origins of the Western cultural heritage. The first few pages lightly evoke the Old Testament, the tales of Homer, and the Enlightenment. Even as minor a creation as the Jewish tailor named East keeps in character by writing about the “sentido libertario de los Viejos Testamentos” (29).

The first chapter attributes to “el buen Descartes” the notion that nothing is as rare in the world as common sense (25). Although the exact reference might more accurately be tied to Voltaire than René Descartes, it intimates that the inhabitants of Gema are eminently reasonable

in their quest for independence and freedom while suggesting the opposite since the quote is mistaken.<sup>136</sup> At the same time as the words evoke Cartesian reason they elicit the opposing adage that “Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas” (Pascal *Pensées* 1669). This idea would seem to apply especially to Alia, when read in concert with the epigraph and her own words. The reader is called on to consider both reason and passion.

As the fairytale begins, the island is presented as a place where common sense and enlightenment do indeed prevail. Yet, when José Coppeta petitions the unnamed central government for independence, his request is openly granted but secretly thwarted. Sent back to the island, he unknowingly boards the Carontes, a death ship on a dangerous sea that “había cantado sin exageraciones Homero” (28). The references to Carontes, the ship of Hades, the ferryman of Greek mythology, and to Homer foretell the character’s death.

Of course, literary ships are not out of place in an island setting. Furthermore, all the references to them occur in maritime scenes. For instance, Jerónimo sails from Salzburg to Gema aboard the *Valeria Luperca*. Simply identified by name without elaboration like the Carontes, the ship commemorates a semi-mythological virgin who is saved from being sacrificed in *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch’s book of male biographies from the first century. Neither Jerónimo, who suggests that Alia accompany her lover on the boat, nor Esteban who does not invite her along, will be able to save the bride from multiple rapes, unlike the mythical rescue of Valeria Luperca.

Additional maritime images include the unmanned vessel carrying the murdered Austrian recruits. When a Czech named Jan Parruda describes it as “el buque fantasma” (82), both the name of the character and his words conjure up Neruda. Neruda, or Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí

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<sup>136</sup> Voltaire wrote “Le sens commun n’est pas si commun” in his *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (1764); conversely, for Descartes, “Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée” (*Discours de la méthode* 1637). Both texts build on Aristotle.

Reyes Basoalto, took his pseudonym from Paul Verlaine (Pablo) and Czech realist poet and writer Jan Neruda (1834-91) whom Skármeta recasts here as Jan Parruda. Parruda tellingly reports “un olor y un rumor de buque viejo, de podridas maderas y hierros averiados” and lamenting sounds of “agrias aguas sobre las agrias aguas, moviendo el viejo buque sobre las agrias aguas” (82). These lines are copied almost verbatim from Neruda’s poem “El fantasma del buque de carga,” (*Residencia en la tierra* [Libro 1] 1933).<sup>137</sup> Parruda then concludes with “cayó una niebla que envolvió la nave por todas partes. Imposible saber hacia dónde iba. Sólo el viejo demonio del mar lo sabrá” (83). The ship is unmistakably another death ship, this one carrying the young Austrians as cargo, in the hands of the old devil of the sea recorded in classical mythology and the Old Testament.

Complementing these connections to mythological origins and to Neruda, in the European context the lines also hint at Samuel Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797-98) and Richard Wagner’s opera *The Flying Dutchman/El buque fantasma* (1843) in which redemption is possible through love. In the Skármeta novel just as in the Coleridge poem, a Czech character tells a wedding guest the story of the phantom ship. Similarly, the image of the ship harkens back to the travel stories of Homer, layering the intertextual possibilities and adding depth to the reading from the Greek classics to Neruda’s poem, which was written decades after events allegedly occurred on the island.

In another literary image related to seafarers, Admiral Mollenhauer compares himself to “su colega Gulliver en Lilliput” (233). Expecting to encounter nothing more than tiny tin soldiers

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<sup>137</sup> Neruda’s verses read: “mascando lamentos, tragando y tragando distancias/haciendo un ruido de agrias aguas, moviendo el viejo buque sobre las viejas aguas.”

similar to those that Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift's sea captain did in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Mollenhauer misjudges the intelligence and ingenuity of the local "indios."

In addition to maritime comparisons, both Mollenhauer and Pavlovic rely on war-related images, such as ancient Troy, an Irish rebellion, and the principles of Nicolás Machiavelli. Well-versed in history, Pavlovic presses to uncover the details of the assassinations. This fictional character bears the surname and vocation of two of Skármeta's contemporaries, journalist and war correspondent Santiago Pavlovic and his sportscaster brother Pedro Pavlovic in an early fusion of "malicioso" and Chilean history, since the fictional Pavlovic eventually ends up in Antofagasta. The war connection justifies a reference to the popular image of the Trojan horse taken from Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Iliad*. Since "una vez con el caballo dentro de Troya se la podía conquistar entera" (89), Pavlovic rightly posits that a little ingenuity and deceit comparable to the subterfuge of the ancient Greeks will enable him to overcome Reino's reticence.<sup>138</sup>

Once he has gained Reino's confidence, Pavlovic's question is straightforward: "¿Héroe o traidor?" (92), an explicit reference to "Tema del héroe y del traidor" (1944). The Borges story, which involves an Irish revolutionary fighter named Fergus Kilpatrick, is itself an intertextual piece containing references to Julius Caesar and Shakespeare, blending history, literature and invented archives. Reino's reply is succinct: "Depende del cristal con que se mire" (92). Thus, the truth of what happened lies in the eye of the beholder, whether the storyteller or the listener, the victor or the loser. The ambivalent image is repeated when the young "maliciosos" prepare to depart. Reino declares Jerónimo "un verdadero patriota" (228) for

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<sup>138</sup> If we tie the two journalists (Pavlovic and Gómez Stalker/Stark) together as professional brothers, the former fittingly describes the events that precipitate war while the latter adds sports images to describe the "maliciosos."

enabling their escape from Gema; he responds that he is “un puto traidor a mi patria” (228). These conflicting positions are equally valid, depending on one’s point of view. In Jerónimo’s case the distinction between patriotic hero and traitor does not matter: either way the consequences will be fatal. And the link to the Borges story heightens the tension between the two possibilities and the impossibility of uncovering the whole truth.<sup>139</sup>

In keeping with the imagery of war, Pavlovic compares the attack strategy adopted by the young “maliciosos” to Machiavelli’s recommendation in *The Prince* (1513) to destroy an enemy completely. He warns that “hay que perdonarlos o destruirlos ferozmente, ya que si se les causa sólo una ofensa moral van a tomar venganza; en cambio, si se les causa un daño enorme, serán incapaces de replicar y así no habrá que tener de ellos el desquite” (135).<sup>140</sup> The young “maliciosos” did indeed attack impulsively, without sufficient thought to potentially greater repercussions, and must face the consequences.

Furthermore, Machiavellian advice colours the exchange between the Pope and Mollenhauer. The admiral, who pictures everything as staged performance, adopts the military stance, rejecting the Pope’s recommendation of a moral approach in favour of Machiavelli’s philosophy of death and destruction. When he discovers that the “maliciosos” have escaped, Mollenhauer compounds this reading by forecasting that his sailors will rape Alia in an “acto simbólico,” because “no es de los nuestros” (259). The rape of the “enemy” woman as retribution for the escape is real as well as symbolic.

Since the local German priest is not as well versed in classic literature as Pavlovic or Mollenhauer, his reference points tend to the religious, as happens in his interpretation of the

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<sup>139</sup> The narrator of *La boda del poeta* mirrors his counterpart in the Borges story which is framed by the great-grandson of Kilpatrick who is researching and writing a biography.

<sup>140</sup> Otherwise faithful to the original, the journalist adjusts Machiavelli’s notion of “minor” or “light” injuries (according to English translations) to “moral” ones.

dance and the reference to Pope Pius I. Yet the priest can be unwittingly literary. For example, he predicts that the “maliciosos” involved in the assassinations will spend “una temporada en el infierno, sin saber entonces que había un título genial de la literatura con ese nombre” (150). The narrator qualifies the expression with “sin saber,” transforming the religious connotation into an allusion to Dante’s fourteenth century *Inferno* and Arthur Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer* (1873). In addition, the text ironically projects a future when the priest will become aware of literary texts beyond the confines of the novel (“entonces”), just as the curious reader might.

The appearance of magical realism in the novel also revolves around the priest and his religious domain. Newcomers to the island consistently remark on the size, weight and position of the church bell which seems to defy the conventional laws of physics. In response, the priest manufactured a fake document, “un pergamino” (125), crediting Michelangelo for the miraculous position of the five-hundred-ton religious relic. Of course, the famous artist never visited the real island of Brač. Still, this invented origin eliminates the need for a reasonable explanation for the bell’s precarious position and its unearthly powers, while magical realism is connected to the miracles of the church.

The second instance of magical realism is also associated with the church bell. Shortly before the wedding day, the bell begins to mysteriously ring four times at odd hours. Only specific listeners hear it. Alia for example fears that it signals her impending death. Rushing to the church in the middle of the night she encounters Esteban who shares her premonition. The mysterious ringing recurs on the afternoon of the wedding when Reino, Esteban and Jerónimo each hear four unexpected chimes. Each one responds differently. Reino interprets it in religious terms: it is a sign to call the Pope who may be able to deter the Austrian revenge. Jerónimo simply smiles at the “caprichos del cura” (182), without realizing that other mysterious forces are

at play or that his future is at stake. Esteban and Alia in her wedding gown rush to the bell tower separately. There, she instigates their first and only intimate encounter. What Jerónimo offers in terms of culture and position is insufficient to sever “el hechizo interponiéndose entre ambos” (222). According to the narrator, Jerónimo is impotent in the face of this attraction (227). The bells play a critical role in bringing Alia and Esteban together within the tower, a sign that the church blesses their union minutes before her marriage to the older man.

Given Skármeta’s admiration for Hemingway, it is possible that the bells also function as a gesture of recognition to *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). The lines quoted in the epigraph of Hemingway’s novel are taken from John Donne’s “Meditation 17” (1624), ending with “ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.” Since a tolling bell, as opposed to a joyous pealing bell, signals death, it explains why Alia reacts so strongly to the sound. The Hemingway novel, which dwells on death and suicide, ends with the protagonist awaiting death during the Spanish civil war. Here the bell tolls for Jerónimo who failed to recognize the import. Ironically, the most literate of the protagonists is the one who failed to connect the bells to later literature or to interpret it as a call to action.

While the priest is portrayed as unfamiliar with literature, Jerónimo is projected as a great reader whose home on Gema is filled with books, recordings and paintings. Yet, neither literature nor art were in evidence in his Salzburg family home, except for one painting by “un joven de apellido Modigliani avecindado en Francia a quien le auguraban más futuro que presente” (111). Since Italian modernist painter Modigliani died in 1920 at age 35 the irony lies in that the family acquired the painting in repayment of a loan rather than as proof of artistic taste or foresight, in keeping with their bourgeois status. Since the painting is not named or described, its subject cannot apply to the novel.

Despite the lack of references to books in the description of his family home, Jerónimo uses a profusion of literary images. While sailing to Gema he recalls that a young French poet fled to Africa and soon stopped writing “a pesar de que el mismo Verlaine lo tuviera por un genio” (121). Jerónimo does not explicitly name Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine’s lover who fled to Africa. Like Rimbaud however, the Austrian left home in search of adventure, turned to trade, and gave up writing. Like the priest, he does not name Rimbaud; unlike the priest, he is familiar with the poet’s verses. The reader is thus able to make the connection that the priest cannot.

During his pre-wedding rest, Jerónimo, who is already connected to death through *Une saison en enfer*, situates his predecessor Marinakos within Greek tragedy, seeking “en los libros la relación entre Eros y Tánatos” (177) that doomed his predecessor’s marriage. Instead of dwelling on the parallel with his own situation or responding to the church bells, he reminisces about two novels, *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1923), and “la reciente traducción al malicioso de *La cabaña del tío Tom*” (181). Published after the First World War, Jaroslav Hašek’s *Schweik* is a tragicomic anti-war story about a Czech soldier serving in the Austro-Hungarian forces. It suggests the fate that awaits the “maliciosos” if they were to be recruited for that same war: “(n)os desgranar como choclos” (180). Here, the anachronistic image, which refers to removing kernels from corn cobs, springs from the Chilean narrator more than the European Jerónimo.

The reference to young soldiers going to their death and the anti-slavery theme of Harriett Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), a novel set in the United States before the Civil War, reflect the human rights issues that concern Jerónimo. While the reading of the 1923 *Schweik* novel before the First World War is an anachronism, the titles of both books underline his interest in issues other than love, in contrast with Esteban’s ode to Alia. Jerónimo’s world of trade and literature does not equip him to anticipate or confront the bellicose admiral.

Like her brother, Paula is fashioned with an awareness of the arts that spans from fairy tales to George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912), *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, painting and music. However, her association with literary, visual and musical expression is generally more focused on drawing parallels between Alia Emar and female figures in the arts. Despite her concerns about the purity of Alia's blood, Paula recognizes the qualities of the "novia de libro de hadas" (171). This description serves as a reminder that the story is deliberately designed as a fairy tale, except that Paula adds, "princesa se nace, y no se hace" (170). Thus, birth alone grants nobility.

Paula's words call to mind "El delantal blanco" (1956), a one-act play by a Chilean born in Dalmatia, Sergio Vodanović. Set on the beach at Viña del Mar near Santiago, the play revolves around two women similar to Paula and Alia. A wealthy young *señora* denigrates her *empleada* and mocks her for reading popular magazines before insisting on switching their clothing (bathing suit versus service uniform). Proposed as a game to see how the other views the beach scene, the clothing exchange precipitates a role reversal, despite the employer's conviction that their respective social positions and the treatment they command will continue unchanged after the switch. When the maid refuses to end the game, other characters react to the two women based solely on their appearance, disproving the statement that princesses are born, not made.<sup>141</sup>

At the same time, "esa ninfa" (171) would fit comfortably into *Desayuno en la hierba* (171). Paula does not name Édouard Manet, the painter of the 1872 representation of nude women and clothed men enjoying a picnic in a public park. The point is that indecorous public nudity runs counter to the modest behaviour expected of a truly royal princess or an ephemeral

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<sup>141</sup> With this image, Skármeta may be acknowledging a fellow writer of Dalmatian origins. Born in Split, Vodanović (1926-2001) moved to Chile as a child. He was a lawyer, journalist, academic, dramatist and writer of television serials. "El delantal blanco" appears in *Viña: Tres comedias en traje de baño* (1964), along with "La gente como nosotros" and "Las exiliadas." All deal with social class and identity.

fairylke creature. This ambiguous picture of Alia as simultaneously princess and fallen woman embodies the patriarchal binary in the representation of the feminine along the lines of “virgen” and/or “puta,” wrapping them together into one.

Not only Alia’s beauty but her unexpected appreciation of classical music challenge Paula’s bourgeois prejudices. Not at all rustic or unsophisticated, Alia distinguishes between Mozart’s quartets and Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*, understands the pain in Austrian Robert Schumann’s music, and shares Paula’s disdain for Schoenberg. Given this degree of refinement, Paula cannot dismiss the bride-to-be as easily as she had expected, echoing the outcome of “El delantal blanco.”

Faced with this dilemma, Paula borrows another literary image to reconcile the two conflicting images of woman: her brother resembles Professor Higgins in Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1912). In the play, which was made into the popular musical *My Fair Lady* (1956), a mature male teaches an uneducated young woman to speak and act like the upper class, in order to present her to society as a lady.<sup>142</sup> The reference to *Pygmalion* underscores Paula’s prejudices more than it justifies her attitudes, again contradicting the notion of being born rather than becoming a princess, and gives the credit to her brother rather than Alia.

In addition, Alia’s remarkable book collection holds the play in German and in “malicioso,” implying an almost immediate translation after its publication. The collection provides undeniable evidence of the spread of culture and modern technology beyond Paula’s privileged milieu. Because her brother, like Professor Higgins, has transformed “la rústica

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<sup>142</sup> Shaw took the title of *Pygmalion* from a Greek myth in which a sculptor falls in love with his creation which comes to life. The play, which exposes the playwright’s criticism of the class system, was in fact first produced in Vienna in German in 1912, rather than in London, so that Paula’s familiarity with it is plausible.

aldeana en una princesa” (172), she is very reluctantly forced to reconsider her initial presumption about Alia.

Like Paula, Jerónimo and Mollenhauer perceive the Spaniard Torrentes and his science through the arts. According to Jerónimo, Torrentes’ Salzburg workshop resembles “el gabinete del doctor Frankenstein” (117). Just like Victor Frankenstein, the eccentric scientist whose experiments led to the creation of a monster in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, Torrentes possesses a scientific mind. His interest in sound waves and electricity is established through his references to the surnames of Thomas Edison, Guglielmo Marconi and Croatian-born Serbian scientist Nikola Tesla. Like Shelley, he sees literature and science overlapping. He further links science to cultural purpose, by dreaming of hearing the London Philharmonic playing Mozart on the radio.<sup>143</sup>

In spite of accusing Torrentes of being complicit in the murder of the young Austrians, Mollenhauer also discusses music with him. After they agree on the mediocrity of the “Filarmónica de Salzburgo,” Torrentes rephrases what he has already told Jerónimo. He is working on a way to listen to the “orquesta Sinfónica Real de Londres” (238) in Salzburg. Torrentes reverses the terms “Symphony Orchestra” and “Philharmonic” from his discussion with Jerónimo, when he had referred to the London Philharmonic (117) and the “sinfónica de Salzburgo” (119). This confusion offers additional evidence that Torrentes’ memory is not reliable despite his brilliance.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, he does predict that acoustic waves might be

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<sup>143</sup> Torrentes and Jerónimo dislike the Salzburg Symphony and its director, Braille, whom they compare to Italian composer and Mozart rival Antonio Salieri, without explanation. Louis Braille (1809-52) was a blind teacher, musician and conductor who invented the Braille system for the blind and a system of musical notation. While Skármeta’s references can be obscure, they are usually authentic. This one remains inexplicable.

<sup>144</sup> The London Symphony was founded in 1904 while the London Philharmonic was established in 1931. In Salzburg, the Mozarteum Orchestra founded in 1841 is the recognized symphony while the Salzburg Philharmonic

transmitted wirelessly by 1925. Given that the British Broadcasting Corporation was operating by 1922 and reaching across to the continent by 1925, Torrentes makes accurate predictions based on the hindsight of the narrator.

Disregarding their shared love of music and admiration for Don Quijote, Mollenhauer pronounces Torrentes' death sentence, after the escape of the "maliciosos." In response, the Spaniard draws from his failing memory a final image from his roots: "por primera vez entiendo el efecto que quiso lograr Goya cuando abalanzó a los soldados a centímetros de la víctima" (240). Mollenhauer perceives the allusion as mocking his power. His command, "Fusílenlo" (240), produces an implicit re-enactment of Francisco de Goya's painting *El tres de mayo de 1808 en Madrid* (1814) in which Napoleon's forces shoot Spanish opponents. Like Hašek's *Schweik*, this powerful denunciation of war is transplanted to Gema where a haunting image recovered from the Spanish cultural tradition suggests the potential of the arts to prevent injustice through memory, even though it fails on this occasion just as the thought of *Schweik* or the bells did not alert Jerónimo to his own demise. Readers are left to ponder whether art might have this power.

In the same literary vein, the Hispanic backgrounds of Torrentes, the Chilean consul and Gómez make it credible for all three of them to allude to Miguel de Cervantes. Both the consul and Gómez refer to Rolando el Largo, a tall lanky "malicioso," as "Don Quijote" (266). Gómez describes the young man who supposedly played basketball in Spain as "una caricatura de Don Quijote que no usa sus brazos para embustir molinos y malandrines sino bellacas pelotas de basketball" (272). The comparison depends on Gómez. Because his grandfather was from

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was only created in 1998, possibly even too late for Skármeta's novel published in 1999, let alone for the setting of the novel.

Madrid, he can make the anachronistic basketball comparison, ushering Don Quijote into the everyday.

Although literary, musical and visual allusions to the Western canon abound in the novel, they are restricted to characters of higher social standing and the journalists. The only writers outside the Western canon surface in Jerónimo's reference to Hašek and the external narrator's mention of the poet Nator, fictionalized in his story as Nazar. The islanders as a whole are linked only to folklore, such as the "turumba." Esteban and Reino have little access to books or art of any kind. As a result, the brothers' ability to express themselves within the Western canon is limited. Still, the mentions of Hašek and Nazar hint at a more inclusive literary tradition.

On the other hand, life on Gema is not as backward as the outsiders suggest. The island has frequent visitors, telephone and telegraph services, and newspapers published in the major cities of Agram and Spalato. Jerónimo is the catalyst who imports new objects of everyday convenience. His abilities, transporting smuggled cars and refrigerators on modern launches, extend well beyond the believable, despite the narrator's affirmation to the contrary (180). According to the priest, the islanders are grateful to the Austrian for bringing "educación, piadosas dádivas, música, cine, mercaderías, y cosmopolitismo" (213). They are linked to the outside world, even if it is only one-way, and denied any influence beyond the island.

After his flight from Gema, Esteban will ask himself how he had allowed Jerónimo, Mozart, and literature to influence Alia. In truth, his shyness and naiveté were cast against the fascination of knowledge and culture. Stacks of novels and musical recordings contrast with the sorry state of Gema's municipal library. Its sparse holdings consist of "cerca de cien libros, la mayoría en alemán, cinco o seis en italiano, y unos veinte en malicioso" (183), most of them with their pages still uncut. The few dictionaries, encyclopedias and language manuals are in

poor condition. Only *Las memorias de una princesa rusa*, which my research indicates is an anonymous erotic novel published in several languages in 1890, is well-thumbed, however unlikely it was to be left sitting on the shelves of a library.

In the end, there is little to satisfy Reino's thirst for information about the island or his ancestors. In fact, the brief references he traces in the German and Italian reference texts relate his precursor's failure to liberate Costas de Malicia. There are no "malicioso" histories or fictions to provide a counter perspective. Nevertheless, the lack of literary and historical materials does not hinder Reino. Like Torrentes, he gravitates to emerging forms of expression. His fascination with cinema is born when he watches his first movie, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Engrossed in a silent film that is now considered the first narrative movie ever made, Reino forgets to lead the attack on the Austrian recruits. As the accompanist plays "esa *Heroica* a la Chaikovski" (64), Reino ironically proves himself to be less than heroic.<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, this discovery of cinematography foreshadows his future and allows him to project a welcoming Chile that preposterously includes "los grandes cines de Antofagasta" (246).

On the transatlantic crossing, Reino's character is developed as he begins to explore the world of moviemaking. He strikes up a conversation with Willis Obie who is making an animated film about dinosaurs while dreaming of producing a movie about a gorilla landing on a Manhattan skyscraper. Fictionalized but not named in full, Willis H. O'Brien (1886-1962) was the American special effects and animation pioneer who made *King Kong* (1933), as well as *The Dinosaur and the Missing Link* (1915). In *La boda del poeta*, Obie is returning from Europe after discussing animation techniques with the Lumière brothers as well as the collective unconscious

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<sup>145</sup> In fact, it was Beethoven who composed the *Eroica Symphony* (1804), which is played in the dramatic Tchaikovsky style popular at the time. Beethoven dedicated the symphony to Napoleon but later withdrew the homage. The second movement is a funeral march, appropriate to events unfolding on Gema that night.

with Jung. It is left to the curious reader to connect these names to O'Brien, the world's first filmmakers (the Lumière brothers) and to Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung (1875-1961), whose theory of the collective unconscious did indeed spark heated debates about the interpretation of *King Kong* following its release.

Furthermore, in a passing conversation with Obie, Reino barely mentions hearing of *Quo Vadis* (1912), a silent movie now recognized as the first blockbuster film ever produced. There have since been many movie versions of this story set in the era of Emperor Nero when a young Roman and a slave who fall in love are sent to face the lions. The movie title here marries the notion of "where are you going" to the biblical passage when Saint Peter encounters the resurrected Christ and finds his vocation as Reino does with Obie.

These references to the infant movie industry provide the motivation needed for Reino to jump ship in New York. Second, they allow for the incorporation of the cultural industries into the narrative alongside classical music and telecommunications, in line with Skármeta's contention that writers must represent the world around them. Third, they provide a brief history of the development of cinematography, with the groundbreaking contributions of the Lumière brothers. Led by the narrator, the reader familiar with the course of the industry can knit together the events that now make up its history. On the other hand, Reino and Obie can merely communicate early disconnected fragments. And finally, Skármeta underscores his own relationship with film throughout a career that has spanned various forms of storytelling, including moviemaking.

Just as Skármeta depicts the communications and cultural industries in fiction set in the contemporary world, in *La boda del poeta* he introduces their early twentieth-century equivalents of broadcasting and film. The references to classical music lend a cultural depth appropriate to

the period depicted in the same way that Skármeta fills his contemporary settings with pop music and jazz. He incorporates the inventors of the period, as well as advances such as the RCA Voice of the Master gramophone, the movie industry and mundane objects such as the Gillette razor blade. And sometimes he mixes the two time periods. For example, the live filming of the island wedding by “los voraces camarógrafos” (208) accompanied by the “portadores de llamas de magnesio para la filmación” (212), mixing images reminiscent of contemporary celebrations and *paparazzi* with turn-of-the-twentieth-century photographic techniques, imprint the narrator’s modern day perspective on the past.

In short, character is developed by linking protagonists with specific types of images and intertexts, religious, maritime or martial for instance. As an example, the Chilean consul is characterized by her resemblance to Mistral, through both literary and historical references. This type of double-reading also appears when Admiral Mollenhauer uses fictional maritime images (Gulliver) and quotes the military doctrine of Machiavelli in addition to mentioning Cervantes. Conversely, the consul and Mollenhauer are distinguished by the fact that the identification with Mistral allows the consul to look to the future while the Admiral is restricted to images from the past. Furthermore, the literariness of the educated characters operates in opposition to the depiction of the “maliciosos.” Although they are not represented through images from literature, some of them are nonetheless associated with the future, such as Reino’s discovery of the movie industry and Rolando’s passion for basketball. Esteban on the other hand is not tied to any particular cultural interest. In this respect, when he lands in Chile his future path is not clear.

In addition to character development, the multiplicity of intertexts performs several other critical functions in *La boda del poeta*. First and foremost, it constructs the novel within the cosmopolitan tradition. It incorporates references from the earliest texts such as the Bible and

Roman accounts through canonical writers such as Cervantes and poets such as Rimbaud and Neruda, as well as anachronistic figures such as Mistral. It is a fiction built on previous fictions and other forms of art that uses *roman à clé* devices to call on the detective skills of the reader to discern allusions to Mistral, Alberti, Neruda, and Borges, among others. At the same time Skármeta combats narrow definitions of “Western” culture by incorporating names from Croatian and Central European history and literature (Tesla, Hašek and Nazor).

Second, the author weaves historical and cultural references together so that the relationship between them becomes indissoluble, for example the relationship of Napoleon with music (the *Eroica*) and with painting (Goya). Third, the intertexts connect the novel directly to the apex of Chilean literature through the embodiment of Mistral and the paraphrasing of Neruda’s poetry. Fourth, they contribute to making the novel a historiographic metafiction that combines references to history and literature as though indistinguishable, and adds touches of magical realism that further distance it from the traditional historical novel. Fifth, the self-reflexivity of the narrator sustains the metafiction beyond the prologue into the core novel. References to his creations and his interventions in the novel impute notions of the value of writing in constructing or erasing historical records.

In summary, the intertexts place the immigrant story squarely within the intellectual tradition of Chile. By this I mean that the author chooses recourses from the Western literary and cultural tradition familiar to Chileans to insert the story of “malicioso” or Dalmatian immigration into the nation’s identity discourses. The weaving of the history, literature, and other art forms of the Western tradition, as well as Chile’s two major literary icons, into a historiographic metafiction about “malicioso” immigrants told through the voice of a descendant signals the blending of ethnicity into the conception of the nation. This reading implies that the traditional

assumption of assimilation and unity makes way for a polyethnic vision of the “invented” nation in its literature.

A close analysis of this parody of historical fiction and its construction of an immigrant tale through a proliferation of intertexts reveals the novel’s relevance to the cultural tradition in Chile. As I have explained, the traditional historical novel was a critical instrument in nineteenth century Spanish American nation-building. It sought to instill national pride by glorifying the past and its heroes. In Chile, this construction of the nation focused on the heroes and battles of independence and on subsequent conflicts with neighbouring nations such as the War of the Pacific. These decisive events occurred before the arrival of large waves of non-Hispanic immigrants who played no role in the traditional novel which sought to recreate foundational events as part of identity discourse and historical memory.

More recent forms of historical fiction in Spanish America have revisited major events with fresh eyes, often those of marginalized groups such as slaves, workers, and women. Since the 1990s transition to democracy a few Chilean historical novels have included Peruvians and Bolivians among the historical characters represented, for example *Santa María de las Flores Negras*. More tellingly, Ramón Díaz-Eterovic’s popular and literate detective Heredia comes face to face with contemporary discrimination against Peruvians in Santiago in *El color de la piel* (2003). Outside mainstream identity discourse, biographies, memoirs and fiction relating the history of immigrants tend to be realistic renderings of settlement, alienation and integration. The innovative approach I detect in *La boda del poeta* is precisely how the novel differs from the usual pattern of ethnic narrative. The author plays with history by incorporating ethnic origins into the complexities of the Western, Spanish American and Chilean cultural tradition and furthermore, he does so by adapting a traditional genre to this purpose.

Traditional historical fiction worked in harmony with the historical record. At the same time it adopted a point of view that favoured the Chilean position, as in the case of *Durante la reconquista*. New historical fiction shatters this pattern of mutual reinforcement between history and its fictional retelling. It regularly reminds the reader of the fictional nature of the narrative. This is important since Skármeta's earlier fiction had reconstructed the everyday world around him, one imbued with popular entertainments. Previously, his sole journey into the historical past had been in an early short story that dealt with the colonial period in Chile ("Mira donde va el lobo," *El entusiasmo*). In recreating the era of his grandparents, Skármeta ventured beyond his usual borders of known time and place.

Theorists such as Halbwachs have posited that a shared collective or communicative memory covers roughly three generations. As a member of the third generation, Skármeta had direct contact with the original immigrants and a close relationship with his grandparents in Antofagasta. One would expect that the combination of exile in Europe, evoking memories of his grandparents venturing in the opposite direction to Chile, and his visits to Dalmatia revived and strengthened the connection to ancestral roots. Given that the memory shared by the Dalmatian immigrants and the early generations of descendants was giving way to a new communicative memory (Assmann), an ethical memory carrying a duty to remember (Margalit) would explain the impulse to write a novel such as *La boda del poeta*. In order to rescue the past from the ethnic amnesia prevalent in Chile due to its policies of immigrant integration through assimilation, the author creates a narrator who reconstructs the past with contemporary sensibilities that broadly resemble his own.

Through his narrator, Skármeta weaves a foreign tale into the web of contemporary Chilean identity discourse. Since his vision combines Chilean identity and cultural discourses

with ethnic identification and immigration, the question he grappled with was how to marry the two in novel form. In the end, he and his narrator wear Chilean cultural lenses while delving into their respective imaginations to commemorate the heritage of the nation's Dalmatian community, inventing a form of ethnicity to use Sollors' expression.

Since the lack of historical knowledge thwarts the obligation to remember, the link to the past can only be made in the present of the author and ultimately his narrator. The contemporary narrator relates an invented version of his origins, about which he professes his grandfather told him very little. He construes the past in the context of his cultural touchstones in the Western humanities and of Chile in particular, rather than assuming the perspective of the "maliciosos." In other words, the past is remembered and interpreted within contemporary Chile.

What we read is the narrator's story of Esteban Coppeta, not the story as his Skármeta grandfather or Esteban himself might tell it. The narrator fabricates an immigrant history through a minimum of historical facts, invented archives, and his imagination. In contrast with the glorification of the "patria" and *chilenidad* found in the historical novel, the text does not exalt either "Costas de Malicia" or Chile.

As the voice of the present the narrator holds the key to interpreting the novel as an act of ethnic commemoration. Like the author, he has chosen to return from exile and to acknowledge the complexity of his identity. In fact, it is the narrator's decision to remember from his vantage point in the present that makes this an ethnic tale. He explicitly dedicates the internal novel to his grandparents, a clear indication of the search for ethnic ties. As an actor in the present, he can simultaneously invent "malicioso" history and anchor it in Western culture through a shared literary tradition that makes it accessible to very informed readers who decipher the many

references and allusions to different national cultures. Others may read it as an adventure story or an immigrant tale that simply makes them aware that there is a Dalmatian presence in Chile.

The compulsion to create a place in Chilean literature for his Dalmatian ancestors and heritage was evidently powerful since it motivated Skármeta to abandon his usual narrative settings. At first blush it may seem perverse to argue that he has carved out a niche for the Dalmatians within the Chilean hall of honourable ancestors since it is only in the final lines that the “malicioso” characters stand on the verge of new beginnings in Chile, filled with trepidation and doubt. The standard history of Chile centred on independence, *chilenidad* and immigrant integration is replaced by a different reading from the position of the immigrant. Instead of acting as outsiders on the margins of society, the immigrants are given a common past that precedes their arrival in Chile and a special introduction by a welcoming Mistral. They are transformed into newcomers to an ambivalent Chile, whose hospitable national anthem plays against the image of the cold and distant land that neglected the consul—and the real life Mistral—and ignored the rest of the world. Although the past will be remembered and re-imagined differently, the memory of their “malicioso” roots will survive entangled with the history and literary tradition of Chile.

Although an immigrant story in a foreign setting was unlikely to deal with Chilean historical figures or propose love and marriage as an allegory for the nation, traditional historical fiction might have offered a base for the construction of an ordinary immigrant story. That being said, traditional genres which promote homogeneity and unity are difficult to reconcile with ethnic identity and memory in a progressive nation. Historiographic metafiction on the other hand opened a different path, one based on the contemporary experience of the narrator/author and the distortion of history for literary purpose. The distorted or irreverent view of history that

Aínsa, Menton and Pons detect as marking the new historical fiction suits the playfulness that characterizes Skármeta's writing. Parody, invented sources and intertexts are conducive to imagining a past that has become less knowable over time. In a pronounced departure from the national content of the historical novel, whether traditional or new, the author grafts immigrant memory onto national identity. In a word, the novel inscribes ethnicity into the discourse on what constitutes *chilenidad* today, a tribute to the author's heritage and a celebration of Chile.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have demonstrated that Skármeta rewrites the Chilean genre of historical novel both in form and in content. With respect to form he uses parody, reflexivity, and intertextuality in the manner of historiographic metafiction. In terms of substance, he fabricates the history of the "malicioso" immigrants to Chile and inserts them into the Western canon and into the Chilean literary tradition. Mistral, the fictionalized mother figure and embodiment of poetry, shows them the way forward. The novel illustrates Viu's position that the Chilean model of new historical fiction links past to present by a profound questioning of identity through parody, while inscribing respect for diversity into the literary world.

Skármeta's creation of a permanent literary memorial to Chilean immigration in general and the Dalmatian heritage in particular may pave the way for more exploration of the nation's ethnic roots. According to Sergio Lausic Glasinovic, although they are anchored in Chile, some of the Dalmatian descendants may become:

los principales actores en la creación de futuro de la conducción y responsabilidad de tratar de vincularse a este ideal de acercamiento a una antigua patria que no se quiere olvidar, pero cuyo propio desarrollo y acontecer histórico escapará, en muchos, de la comprensión real y objetiva de los acontecimientos que allá se

sucedían. El ideal de patria entregado por sus antecesores se irá desperfilando en el tiempo y se transformará en solo una idea o añoranza lejana y nostálgica. (109)

And

Con todo, sigue prendida la idea de retomar los lazos y encontrarse con ese pasado que es una parte significativa de sus propias identidades personales y colectivas. Esta es una de las grandes oportunidades que se entregan, basadas en una importante población que busca sus pasados identitarios y con ello sus propias historias como herederos de los antiguos migrantes. Unir ambas historias, las de una patria lejana y ausente, con la historia de la actual y verdadera patria americana, es uno de los mayores desafíos que aparecen para estas nuevas generaciones descendientes de las antiguas diásporas croatas. (109)

*La boda del poeta* can be read as an invitation to a variety of ethnic groups to embark on this exploration. The story of emigration that concludes the first novel of the Skármeta series with the landing in Chile resumes with the challenges of building a new life two generations later in *La chica del trombón*.

## Chapter 4

### *La chica del trombón: Grafting Immigrant Roots onto the Family Romance*

The migrant's voice tells us what it is like to feel a stranger and yet at home, to live simultaneously inside and outside one's immediate situation, to be permanently on the run, to think of returning but to realize at the same time the impossibility of doing so, since the past is not only another country but also another time, out of the present. It tells of long-distance journeys and relocation, of losses, changes, conflicts, powerlessness, and of infinite sadnesses that severely test the migrant's emotional resolve. It tells of new visions and experiences of the familiar and unfamiliar. For those that come from elsewhere, and cannot go back, perhaps writing becomes a place to live. (King, Cornell, and White "Preface" xv)

Siento que el español es mi casa. Mi primera casa. Digamos que lo primero que hice al llegar a Berlín fue fundar una habitación lingüística. Y en ella he vivido. Esto durante mucho tiempo me separó del ambiente alemán. Me privé un poco de una problemática tan rica como la que hay acá, pero al mismo tiempo era una lucha un poco desenfrenada para mantener mi propia identidad. Y cuando me sentí más seguro estilísticamente, abrí las puertas a la sociedad alemana y ahora estoy en una etapa en que me siento integrado. (Skármeta, Pagni "Interview" 66)

In this chapter I sustain that Antonio Skármeta's reworking of the Spanish American family romance genre in *La chica del trombón* (2001) draws Chile's diverse immigrant past into its literary heritage as well as its national future. It broadens the nineteenth-century tradition that conflated mixed Hispanic-Indigenous unions with nation building and socio-economic progress by adopting the evolving perspective of a non-Hispanic female immigrant and thereby reinterpreting the consolidated ideal of family and nation that Doris Sommer first analyzed in *Foundational Fictions*.<sup>146</sup> By extension, it permanently grafts other origins onto the Chilean genealogical tree, in concert with progressive expectations for the nation. At the same time, the doubts of the external narrator allied with the crushing of those hopes shortly beyond the time frame of the novel call for a careful reading in both the historical and contemporary contexts.

My examination begins with a discussion of the novel's hybrid narrative genre and its structure, as well as a review of its limited critical study. I highlight the technique of the novel-within-a-novel, the internal narrator's use of the first person, and the writing as a deliberate act of self-creation through constructed memory. Relying on notions of family romance and on theories of memory and trauma, I show how the death of a loved one, the grieving process, and the struggle to recover an unknown past drive the search for identity through writing, and how this quest ties into the desire to escape a seemingly inhospitable Chile until family and nation are ultimately reconciled.

In addition, any study that proposes a contemporary text as a successor to the foundational novel demands a comparison to Chile's landmark work of this genre, namely Alberto Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* (1862). In this reading, I stress the continuity of Skármeta's

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<sup>146</sup> As discussed earlier, the concept of the national novel has been extensively explored since Sommer defined it as the fundamental form of Spanish American post-independence narrative.

novel with the family romance genre, comparing and contrasting it with *Martín Rivas*. Among the major points I make are both how its perspective contrasts with the traditional notion of *chilenidad* and how it adds a new dimension to the literary love matches that often define family and national identity. Within this inquiry, I also assess the literary tradition reflected in the novel, focusing specifically on the recurring allusions to poet Gabriela Mistral.

Moreover, the link to the literary tradition elicits fundamental questions about whether the family romance depicted correlates either with the state of the Chilean nation in the period represented or at the time of the novel's publication, a common cross-fertilization in the classic nation-building novel. Finally, the conclusion contends that the novel rewrites the family romance by expanding the portrayal of what it means to be Chilean at the turn of this century.

### **The Family Tree, Freudian Family Romance and Constructing Memory**

Since a number of its characters resurface in the second novel, familiarity with *La boda del poeta*—although not essential—enhances the reading of *La chica del trombón*. *La boda del poeta* deals with the generation of Skármeta's grandparents; *La chica del trombón* portrays his own, skipping the intermediate generation that one might expect to find in a classic immigrant trilogy. Family origins in the imaginary Costas de Malicia as well as the “malicioso” nationality first encountered in *La boda del poeta* justify a playful reading of the two novels.

*La boda del poeta* concluded with the arrival of Esteban Coppeta and the other “maliciosos” in Antofagasta. In *La chica del trombón*, the family saga resumes with the disembarkation of Alia, the alleged granddaughter of Esteban and Alia Emar, at the height of the

Second World War.<sup>147</sup> However, the novel itself opens with an aged “malicioso” journalist named Roque Pavlovic holding a “libro” also titled *La chica del trombón*, which he claims the “chica,” now an adult, has written. As he reminisces about her arrival in 1944 at the age of two, Pavlovic does not indicate what year it is. Nor does he call her text a memoir, fiction, or any other type of narrative. In the conclusion, he will describe it as a soon-to-be published manuscript of a novel and the time frame as just before a fictionalized Salvador Allende assumes the presidency.

The internal novel is written by Magdalena, who at age thirteen renames herself Alia Emar Coppeta in honour of her purported maternal grandparents. Her story, which ends the night of Allende’s 1970 election victory, covers her home, school and social life in Antofagasta and Santiago, especially her relationships with Esteban, her adoptive mother Jovana, her teacher Daniel Sepúlveda, her childhood friend and future husband Pedro Pablo Palacios, and Allende. Alia’s telling emphasizes her determination to leave Chile and her final shift in expectation towards a future there with Pedro Pablo and their son under an incoming Allende government.

The protagonist’s obsession with tracing her family history, her struggle for identity, and her need to write herself into being and into belonging in Chile dominate the novel. Her grief and alienation after Esteban’s death are slowly overcome, first as she fashions her identity through writing and finally, by constructing her own family. Alia’s story concludes with hybrid family formation in conjunction with a turning point in Chilean history, in the national novel’s style of new beginnings in interdependent spheres. However, the *Skármeta* novel gives the first and last word to the external narrator, a “viejo zorro malicioso,” who is sceptical of the rose-coloured

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<sup>147</sup> To avoid confusion, I refer to the protagonist of *La chica del trombón* as Alia or Alia Emar Coppeta and to her alleged grandmother as Alia Emar.

future projected in the internal “novela.” Nonetheless, Pavlovic leaves it to the critics to read the internal text “según sus gustos, sensibilidades e intereses” (303).

From this overview it is evident that the novel falls into a number of literary genres. It is a historical novel, a novel of immigration, an ethnic narrative, a *Bildungsroman* (a coming-of-age novel), a *Künstlerroman* (artist-as-protagonist novel) and the autobiographical fiction of a fictional character. The title also hints at a rewriting of Edwards Bello’s novel *La chica del Crillón* (1935) which deals with a young girl, an ailing father, and the search for authenticity. In response to the narrator’s final recommendation above, my reading treats it primarily as a family romance, while underscoring the complex interweaving of these categories.

In keeping with traditional historical fiction, *La chica del trombón* unfolds chronologically, with gaps of months and years between critical moments. The perspective of minor figures adds to the recreation of an important time period. Moreover, the novel fictionalizes past Chilean presidents such as Allende and Jorge Alessandri and refers to a range of historical and literary figures.

In distinction from the classic genre, the author does not set the story before his lifetime and the narrator enjoys the benefit of hindsight. The novel also employs techniques from newer types of historical fiction such as historiographic metafiction, using false archives, magical elements and intertextuality. European, North American and Chilean references are far more pervasive than the representation of the early 1900s in *La boda del poeta*. In order to represent the mid-century, the narrative evokes its socio-cultural environment with constant allusions to the political realm as well as to music, film and literature. Readers, especially those close to Skármeta’s generation, will readily grasp these intertexts since they relate primarily to the popular culture of a recent past.

Like much of Skármeta's fiction, the story also bears the traits of the novel of the writer, in which the narrator reflects on the process of writing the tale. Self-creation through fantasy and writing enables the protagonist to work through grief and estrangement towards a new life. In addition, her story can be construed as a female *Bildungsroman* that evolves from a dystopian and alienated view of life through a utopian quest that eventually culminates in an optimistic vision for the future. However, the first person narration inevitably generates doubts about the reliability of the narrator, which the views communicated in the brief external frame accentuate.

Alternatively, the heroine's journey, which closely mirrors the emotions identified in the epigraph on migration that heads this chapter, recalls the immigrant or ethnic novel. It also shares the alienation and nostalgia common to the novel of exile. To paraphrase John Reilly (4), a "malicioso" consciousness of difference colours the text. Caught between two worlds, the protagonist seeks to establish roots and secure her footing in a seemingly hostile culture, while clinging nostalgically to distant family origins as defining components of the self. Her "malicioso" awareness culminates in the incorporation of minority ethnic roots into the Chilean family. The second epigraph above that deals with Skármeta's slow adjustment to exile in Berlin provides a rough parallel to her situation.

Skármeta's own literary vision offers additional insight on how to approach the text. His deeply-held conviction that "es su propia vida la cosa más cercana que cada escritor tiene para echar mano" ("Al fin y al cabo" 285) hints at converting life experience into literary material, without adhering strictly to the facts. As the author says:

Es probable que yo no tenga mucha inclinación a hacer una crónica realista de la sociedad porque mi tendencia es escribir ficciones, pero no niego que tengo todos mis poros abiertos para recibir la realidad. Y con ella yo construyo fantasía.

Ahora bien, el enfoque y el sostenimiento de mi literatura creo que están en ese equilibrio entre lo real y lo fantástico, lo cotidiano o banal y lo trascendente, lo culto y lo subcultural, la cultura *pop* y la cultura enciclopédica. (García-Corales “Interview” 85)

This balancing of life experience with imagination and literary licence is especially evident in this novel where the socio-political scenario coincides with the author’s life span. Skármeta borrows from his own background, his family’s economic struggles and relocation to Santiago from Antofagasta, his university years, his political involvement, as well as his lifelong fascination with New York City to write a fiction with an autobiographical basis, although one told in a distancing female voice.

Harking back to the effervescence of the period leading to the election of Allende, Skármeta also re-imagines and re-kindles the ethos and the shattered aspirations of his generation. In several passages the sudden use of the first person plural communicates his views from his student days as much as it does the protagonist’s. For example, he stands with Alia and her generation by adopting “us” to combine their attitude: “nos revolvió la bilis Checoslovaquia, nos relamió los labios la revolución cubana, comentamos los premios Casa de las Américas y sembramos el caos de pequeños burgueses infatuados cuando en los partidos comunistas y socialistas le prendimos velas a los hippies y soñamos con Greenwich Village en vez de Moscú o la guillotina de la Revolución Francesa” (244). Blending popular political stances of the 1960s with hippie culture, this view surpasses the timeframe of the novel by projecting a retrospective vision, one that the author’s exile and experience tempered but did not extinguish.

Despite the expressive portrayal of a politically engaged generation that the military regime was soon to persecute, and unlike Spanish American novels of exile and novels of

dictatorship, *La chica del trombón* has received very little scholarly attention. To date, only three critics have taken up Pavlovic's invitation to interpret the novel: Grínor Rojo, Reyna Hernández Haro and Carmen Cazorro García de la Quintana.

For Rojo, the "bellísima novela" ("Celebración" 148) recalls Skármeta's short stories and captures the spirit of an era as it chronicles a generation eager to transform the world. His brief analysis hints at the complexity of the novel as a *tour de force*, a *bildungsroman*, and a work about the art of writing. He sums up its theme as "una mujer que nos informa sobre el proceso de su llegar a serlo" (148-49), in words that resonate with those of the author (Morpaw "Interview" 329). Rojo concludes that "se trata de una aceptación por parte de Skármeta del principio de realidad pero no sin una reivindicación simultánea de la pasión y el derroche, de la intuición que siempre, aun en la más espléndida de las circunstancias persiste, tiene que persistir, un lugar preferencial para el deseo" (149). In this view, the protagonist captures the optimism of the young Skármeta while the novel faces reality through the eyes of the older and wiser Pavlovic.

Like Rojo, Hernández Haro focuses on the protagonist's search for identity. She highlights that the principal female figures represented in both *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* transgress social norms in their respective quests for fulfilment (100). Her analysis also notes the symbolic importance of Neruda as well as of the cities depicted or mentioned in the novel. She writes that for Alia "Antofagasta es el origen incierto donde vive sus primeros años de infancia, Santiago se convierte en el escenario de la idealización juvenil y la esperanza política, en tanto Valparaíso es el refugio de amor. La ciudad idealizada... es New York" (101). This sequence points to New York as the locale for the proposed third novel of the trilogy (101).

Maintaining the same line of argument as she has with respect to *La boda del poeta*, Cazorro García de la Quintana focuses narrowly on the orgy as metaphor and the carnivalesque.

She highlights the liberating effects of the fusion of American and Latin jazz in the club scene with trombonist Yaksic that precedes Alia's sexual initiation with Pedro Pablo. In this critic's words, the music's effect on the protagonist corroborates "esa pérdida y recuperación del yo que se produce al remitirse a lo orgiástico (dionisiaco o báquico)" (379). She further contends that the two novels adopt the form of the classic travel novel to resolve their respective crises. While the journey is real in the first novel, in *La chica del trombón* the protagonist realizes that life demands that she act just like Reino Coppeta who had thrown himself into the sea and embark on her life in Chile. Since the geographical argument is debatable given that Alia never leaves, I would argue instead that travel as displacement is a key component of the novel of immigration or exile and that Alia keeps reliving her transatlantic journey. The critic's conclusion that the protagonist's "actuación y reflexión se dan como procesos conjuntos" (387) is indeed a fundamental aspect of the structure of the novel.

In brief, none of these critics analyze the novel as either family romance or immigration/narrative of ethnicity. Nor do they focus on the significance of the Mistral epigraph or the intertexts. My reading hones in on these questions after a discussion of the novel's structure.

*La chica del trombón* consists of an epigraph borrowed from Mistral followed by short opening and closing texts by "malicioso" journalist Roque Pavlovic which frame Alia's lengthy first-person tale. The novel simultaneously replicates and inverts the approach taken in *La boda del poeta*. The title of the latter is enigmatic in terms of the external reality, since the identity of the poet is deliberately ambiguous or even double. The opposite occurs with *La chica del trombón*. The girl to whom the title refers is unmistakable. It is her internal and external worlds that are in conflict, calling into question her reliability as a narrator.

In both novels, external narrators introduce core texts, which respectively bear the same title as Skármeta's outer novel. In *La boda del poeta*, a third-generation Chilean of "malicioso" descent specifically describes as fiction his third-person novel about the circumstances that led his grandfather's generation, especially Esteban Coppeta, to Chile. In *La chica del trombón*, Pavlovic, the elderly "malicioso" reporter who awaited Esteban on his arrival in Antofagasta and, decades later, witnessed Alia's landing, labels the text told in her voice as the "manuscrito de una novela" (302). In the concluding frame, he describes it as the "retrato que la obra hace de una generación" (303), placing it within a broader historical context. In this instance, the split of the external narrator's text between introduction and epilogue fosters a greater suspension of disbelief since the fictional nature of the internal tale is highlighted only in the epilogue. There, the repetition of the opening lines brings the reader full circle to the *incipit*. The final image is of a skeptical ninety-year-old Pavlovic, immediately before Allende assumes office, already holding a completed manuscript that ends on the night of the presidential victory.

In that text, Alia's storytelling is interspersed with six chapters in other registers that render her story believable. Omitting the multiple paratexts and prologues that provide context at the outset of *La boda del poeta*, Alia's story is interrupted by letters, newspaper articles and a radio program that parallel the journalists' interventions in the former novel. Two letters from Pavlovic, one to Alia and another to President Alessandri; two news items from Andrés Gómez Stark, one of the journalists introduced in the first novel; a play-by-play radio broadcast of a boxing match complete with commercial breaks; and, a letter from Pedro Pablo Palacios to Alia all add other social perspectives and flesh out the broader political context.

Despite the structural differences, both novels reflect primarily the third generation immigrant perspective, although from two different points in time. This focus is not immediately

obvious since a middle-aged man in *La boda del poeta* introduces his third-person novel about young “malicioso” men while the elderly “malicioso” in *La chica del trombón* presents a first-person text told by a young woman. In fact, the middle-aged grandson of the fictional Skármeta in his novel about Esteban Coppeta and the latter’s alleged granddaughter Alia in her narrative invent a past for Esteban and the “maliciosos” and therefore, themselves. This happens despite the silence or the scepticism of the immigrants, namely the Skármeta grandfather, Esteban Coppeta and Pavlovic. If we refer to Werner Sollors’ terms, as a representative of the third generation Skármeta works to balance ethnic descent and assimilation/consent through his own generational representatives as narrators (*Beyond Ethnicity* 9-10). This blending, which has already occurred in *La boda del poeta* for the Chilean narrator in post-dictatorship Chile, is only beginning for the younger female narrator when Allende is elected. In both cases, the version of the “malicioso” past is imagined, based on little reliable information. On the other hand, Chilean events familiar to the author and presumably to the narrators are presented as fact, whether the military coup in the external frame of the first novel or the events that preceded the election of Allende in the second.

The opening epigraph of *La chica del trombón* cites Mistral in verses that create a “family” bond between this maternal figure and a distant child while echoing the poet’s presence from the first novel. Verses excerpted from “Recado de nacimiento para Chile” (*Tala*) recall Mistral’s predominant themes of children, childhood and motherhood, in addition to alluding to her exile and estrangement. The reference to a girl named in Mistral’s honour (“le pusieron mi nombre”) also stresses the newborn’s innate ability to shape her own world (“mire el mundo tan familiarmente/como si ella lo hubiese creado”) and an identity that can be transmitted through a female lineage. Similarly but more emphatically, Alia will create her own fantasy world,

including deliberately renaming herself in honour of a distant yet inspirational female figure. The verses suggest that the two girls, Gabriela and Alia, whether native born/indigenous or immigrant, are equally legitimate creators of their respective identities and universes in Chile, while connected to previous generations of women.

Moving from the epigraph to the framing of the core novel, Pavlovic recalls that he witnessed the unexpected approach of a nameless trombone player speaking his native “malicioso” hand-in-hand with a little girl whom he delivers into Esteban’s care.<sup>148</sup> The reader must accept that the child did indeed arrive in Antofagasta in this way and that the narrator is holding her text. The internal novel that follows gradually reveals itself as an exercise in writing that Alia undertakes in order to define herself. The writing fluctuates between her perceptions and fantasies at different ages, and her adult hindsight.

Alia’s narrative brings to the fore Freudian concepts which suggest that a child uses magical thinking to invent a family story while imagining his or her place at the centre of it. Freud’s “family romance” theory posits that a child seeks to escape parental control through fantasies that imagine his or her true parents as better than the “adoptive” ones. Such playacting would lead children to develop identities distinct from those of their parents. However, this type of fantasy would apply differently to adopted children (“Family Romances” 74-78). Indeed, since the unknown parents do or did exist, the child’s parental lines would be explored in reality as well as in the imagination.

The protagonist’s family origins are distant, unexplained, unverifiable, and therefore endlessly compelling to her. Her only apparent family tie is Esteban. He is “mi abuelo” (13) and

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<sup>148</sup> Later we read that Yaksic the trombonist deposited Alia “como un cartero del océano,” invoking *El cartero de Neruda* (207).

“el nono” (15), grandfather and father to a “huerfanita” (15) who secures her family position by defiantly asserting herself as his grandchild. By also proclaiming “tu novia soy yo” (19), Alia demands exclusive possession of this father figure, dreaming of marrying him, aligning her with Freudian “family romance” interpretations. Esteban, who has waited all his life for the original Alia Emar, reinforces this incestuous fantasy by replying “¡Soy tu nono y tu novio!” (19).<sup>149</sup>

In spite of the absence of any proof that Esteban is her biological grandfather, the family bond is sealed since Esteban is “mío de una locura mía para la que no tenía palabras. Mío desde que supo sellar conmigo una alianza de sangre, no importa qué galopara en nuestras venas” (42). Alia reinforces her possessiveness by writing that “siempre tuve la sensación de que el nono era mío, y de que, junto con él, todas sus cosas me pertenecían” (47). After his death, his belongings, specifically his watch engraved with New York’s Empire State Building and his American-built Indian brand motorcycle, become the source of new fantasies, orienting Alia to a potential future in New York where Esteban’s brother, her great uncle Reino, may live.

Until then, Alia is jealous of any female who might jeopardize her status at the centre of her family. While some might construe Jovana as the real mother who is rejected in Alia’s Freudian family fantasy, this “maliciosa” immigrant is definitely portrayed as an adoptive or foster mother. Shortly after the “malicioso” doctor named Rendic diagnoses Esteban’s lung disease and suggests he find someone to care for Alia, a woman who speaks “malicioso” moves into a room which becomes the “dormitorio de mamá” (55). Although the doctor recommends that Esteban marry this “paisana suya” (300) for the sake of Alia, marriage never occurs.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> According to Pavlovic, Esteban has “preciosos ojos azules” that “sólo saben escrutar el horizonte desde donde debiera materializarse su novia de juventud” (137).

<sup>150</sup> Years later, the American consul states that Esteban is officially registered as single and that if Alia is in fact his grandchild, “esta filiación sería al margen de la ley” (261).

Fearful of losing her family position, Alia rebels when Esteban's illness is diagnosed and Jovana arrives. Immersing herself in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Alia imagines sailing to Europe or escaping to a tropical island where she would reunite with her real parents, as Freud's family romance suggests, and, "sabría agradecer a papá y a mamá su bondad" (36). She runs away and boards a ship, whether in her fantasy life or in her real world.<sup>151</sup> To underline her unhappiness after Esteban and Jovana "me habían robado *mi mar y mi Europa*" (emphasis in the original) she vows never to forgive Esteban for foiling her escape and subsequently acts out by putting rats in his bed, pulling wings off insects and committing similar acts of cruelty (36).

While Alia continues to fantasize about real parents in Europe, the relationship with Jovana is decidedly ambivalent. She often addresses her by her first name or resorts to the impersonal identifiers "ella" (29, 76), "mi apoderada" (94, 163), or "tutora" (95, 160). Maternal designations like "madre" and "mamá" surface only occasionally. The maternal and impersonal terms sometimes get jumbled together in a single sentence, for example when Alia changes her name from Magdalena. She writes: "Jovana acudió a la cita del profesor Sepúlveda a discutir la extravagancia de su hija y la epidemia en el colegio de cambiarse nombre por apellidos heroicos o geográficos. Cuando Jovana le aclaró que su niñita estaba bajo el trauma de la muerte de mi abuelo..." (93). Alia's insistence on emotional and familial distance from Jovana conveys her fear of losing her jealously guarded bond to her grandfather and thus to her parents. In other words, the adoptive mother rather than the real mother is repeatedly rejected, while the real parents Alia yearns to know remain beyond reach.

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<sup>151</sup> As Alia escapes, Esteban listens to his favourite record while looking at the dark spots on his lung x-rays. The verse "Decime quién sos vos, decime adónde vas, alegre mascarita" (30) are from Carlos Gardel's "Siga el corso." The double meaning of the lung disease and Alia as unexplained mysteries continues in the unstated later lines, "Yo soy la misteriosa mujercita que buscas."

Jovana's down-to-earth nature contrasts with Alia's flights of fantasy:

Cuando decidí ponerme el nombre de la nona, lo hice porque había un vacío vertiginoso bajo mis pies, y esas dos palabras, como dos piedras sagradas, me daban la ilusión de una certeza. Jovana nunca lo comprendió. Para ella el nombre era parte de una persona como los labios o los ojos. Nunca aceptó que despojara de su cuerpo a Magdalena. (205-06)

Yet, Alia is aware that the adopted name is a way of clinging to the past, of seeking an illusory stability, not a practical decision. Furthermore, she ignores female family members. When aunts and female cousins—nameless and without stated family connections to either Esteban or Jovana—attend Esteban's funeral, Alia immediately blocks their presence with escapist fantasies, excluding them from her internal world with its ties to Europe.

As for her parents, Alia asserts that the only certainty to stand the test of time (“que repetiría a los treinta” 47), is that when the Nazis invaded Gema, Pregel, the German priest, sent her to Santiago “sin consultar a mi padre, que se había dejado reclutar con entusiasmo por los partisanos para pelear contra los alemanes, ni a mi madre, que lo había seguido al frente” (48). Even this certainty is questionable since Alia landed in Antofagasta, not Santiago, and she would be under thirty at the end if we consider when the historical Allende was elected.

Moreover, Alia eventually admits to herself that her family name is neither Coppeta nor Franck, the name of her alleged grandmother's spouse. Her own father's name remains unknown. Her parents are presumed to have disappeared during the Second World War. The pragmatic “maliciosos” who sent her to Chile avoided using a family name. Pavlovic, who shares his memories of Esteban after his death, says nothing to Alia about her parents. Neither Esteban nor the other “maliciosos” in Chile reveal anything about her father. Yet, for unstated reasons,

Sepúlveda and United States' consul Daniel Morgan are able to confirm details of his wartime activities. According to the teacher, her father died fighting with the partisans against the Nazis (115). Despite refusing to pronounce his name and denying Alia a visa, Morgan uses almost the same words as Sepúlveda: “sabemos que su padre murió en Costas de Malicia luchando contra los Nazis” (263).<sup>152</sup> A German neighbour in Antofagasta also said her father had left home “con rencor y entusiasmo a enfrentar dentro de un grupo partisano la invasión nazi” (161). The repetition in three different voices corroborates the existence of a distant if dead father, instead of his being purely a figment of Alia's imagination. However, only Alia insists on a connection between her parents and Esteban, and it is through her maternal line.

In addition to keeping silent about Alia's parents, the “malicioso” chroniclers in Antofagasta vehemently deny that she has family ties to Esteban. By insisting that he never touched Alia Emar, they refute her attempts to build a family history and a bridge to Esteban through her parents. Unlike the reader, neither Pavlovic nor Alia know that the union was vividly portrayed as being consummated in *La boda del poeta*. Given the unconsummated marriage to Franck, the Austrian bridegroom, the reported multiple military rapes of his bride hint instead at “shameful,” “impure” and unascertainable roots for any child born as a result. The “maliciosos” frowningly call Alia “Austriaca” (48) rather than “maliciosa,” possibly implying that she may be descended from that rape. Her mother's name, Magdalena, taken from the repentant prostitute of the Bible, may also allude to such origins. Alia however imagines herself as the child of a daughter born to Alia Emar and Esteban. In changing her name, she alludes to a possible

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<sup>152</sup> According to Morgan, Alia's lack of a surname other than X makes her suspicious and comparable to American black activist Malcolm X. He denies the visa request on security grounds. In addition, Morgan's surname may not be coincidental: he shares it with an American military hero as well as an academic who published on Latin American security issues. Anachronistically, established only in 2014, the Daniel Morgan Academy named after the military hero is a graduate school in Washington that specializes in security issues.

relationship: “si efectivamente había hecho el amor con una chica de ese nombre en la isla de Gema, mi supuesta nona violada por el ejército enemigo” (83-84). This suggests that she knows it is all make believe, although plausible. Yet, she is convinced that Esteban is her grandfather and that her grandmother’s name is Alia Emar, even if she cannot explain why she knows.<sup>153</sup>

The explicit lack of family identity in Alia’s opening sentence plunges the reader into the Freudian “family romance” (“Lo primero que la gente te pregunta cuando no tienes papá ni mamá es cómo se llaman tus padres” and then “de dónde venía” (13)). The reader immediately senses the confusion of a child removed from the safety and security of home. She is out of her element from the very first day of school. Unlike the other children, she is without siblings and unable to name her parents or connect to a family tree. Esteban recommends simply saying she is from Europe, since at that point Gema “quedaba en un país o en otro” (13), an anachronism since the war had ended several years earlier. Alia can also argue that “no sabía hablar bien ningún idioma” because there are so many languages in Europe (13-14). Blond and blue-eyed as well as bigger and stronger than the other girls, her most ardent wish is to resemble them: “Como era diferente a las otras chicas, mi máxima aspiración era ser igual a ellas. En primer lugar quería que la piel se me oscureciera” (14). This contrasts with the usual national aspiration for whiter skin colour. Her second wish is to have parents or at least know their names (14-15). This need for family identity compels her to imagine a genealogical lineage.

The child has a blank slate on which to invent family relationships in which she is at the centre, in keeping with the Freudian model. At school, she acquires tools to combat her

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<sup>153</sup> When Alia unexpectedly calls Esteban “Tebi,” he is stunned since only his mother, his brother and Alia Emar ever addressed him that way. Esteban’s reaction is ironic in that “maliciosos” in Europe used the common Hispanic nickname while no one in Chile did. Alia’s use is logical: hating nicknames, she retaliates when Esteban calls her “nena” instead of Magdalena. She threatens not to tell him why she knows his nickname if he continues to call her “nena” and she never does tell. In Serbo-Croatian “tebi” is the dative case for the informal “you” (“ti” becomes “tebi”). Meaning “to you” or “for you,” it suggests that Alia and Esteban were meant for each other.

ignorance and insecurity about her roots. At first, her fantasies play out either in her head or in acting out film roles with her schoolmates. At age thirteen, when Esteban Coppeta dies, “no me imaginaba que alguna vez escribiría” (53). It is only later that she writes, from the double perspective of child and adult.

Given the adult reconstitution of the past, major time shifts accelerate the story. Prolepses that introduce chapters, such as “años después,” “el año siguiente,” “cerca de un mes más tarde” and “cierto caluroso fin de año,” underline the passage of years as well as the protagonist’s gradually maturing approach to her narrative. At first, the writing is confined to the limited milieu and registers of childhood. As the child’s circle and awareness widen, a type of journal replaces the initial statements of longing for parents and a stable identity. It evolves over time into a more literary and analytical form with recurring “memories” of a European past, especially to fill the void after Esteban’s death.

At once controlling and narcissistic, Alia is conscious of deliberately constructing her own identity when she decides to “empezar mi historia” (49) with a name change from Magdalena in response to Esteban’s death. Nothing about her past is certain, despite her obsessive retelling of it. What began, in Freudian terms, as a search for her “real” parents becomes her creation, what she later terms her “cuento de nunca acabar” or her “historia sobre mi nombre” (221). The need to explain her name highlights the search for roots to compensate for the loss of Esteban and her lack of a sense of belonging in Chile.

The narrator’s writing often contrasts “then” and “now.” This shifting between past and present is captured through a conscious and deliberate act of creation, with repeated circling back to speculation about origins. Recurring references to questionable recollections of infancy and childhood enable Alia to forge an identity through her growing narrative ability. In effect,

grieving for Esteban is tied to nostalgia for a mysterious family history that disappeared with his death, and an effort to recreate it in parallel with surviving in an adopted family and nation.

Adult reflections are interwoven with and eventually supersede childhood language and an early understanding of the world. Early thinking (“*entonces*”) is frequently contrasted with the moment of writing (“*ahora*”). These juxtapositions separate the confusion felt in earlier days from the apparent or willed clarity that emerges as recollections, reconstructions, or imaginings of events are later committed to paper. Still, the protagonist’s “memories” often get ahead of her ability to transcribe them, for example when she writes that “ahora que lo escribo estoy bastante más adelante de mis palabras” (175). The reader is constantly reminded that the author-narrator is unreliable, rewriting (“Retomo” and “Repitamos” 185) and polishing her story in a wilful effort to shape the recorded version in line with her developing personal vision. In her words, “(no) quiero que nada se desborde porque significaría que hay momentos que no dependen de mí, que son superiores a mí misma” (185). This self-absorption finally dissolves in her final chapter into the repetitive “hoy” and the collective “we” celebrating family, the diverse makeup of the nation and the future.

In addition to reflecting the Freudian notion of family romance, this conscious creation of self and family meets Manuel Alberca’s criteria for autofiction or fictional autobiography, elaborated in line with Serge Doubrovsky’s 1977 term autofiction or “autonovela” (Alberca 117), which derives from autobiography. However, here it is the fictional Alia rather than Skármeta who writes the autofiction. As Sylvia Molloy states, autobiography “is always a representation ... a retelling, since the life to which it supposedly refers is already a kind of narrative construct. Life is always, necessarily, a tale: we tell it to ourselves as subjects, through recollection” (5). Similarly, in autofiction the author functions as a constructed first-person

narrator and character, even when not cast in the role of protagonist. In this genre, which sits precariously between autobiography and autobiographical novel, the author-narrator selects and comments on the story as he or she relates it. Molloy's concept of subjectivity applies equally well to Skármeta and to his heroine. In this case, the author's autobiographical allusions move away from the pattern seen in some early short stories where the protagonist is ambiguously named Antonio. Here we read instead the fictionalized autobiography of a fictional character of the author's generation, a female alter ego who constructs her own immigrant history.

Still, Alia's affirmations of family connections to Alia Emar and Esteban rest on shaky foundations. She pointedly refuses to listen to Esteban tell his story in order to avoid facing the imminence of his death. Yet, the whole world told her "trozos de esa especie de idilio," the love story of Alia Emar and Esteban and the fate "que la arrojó a ella a la nada y la leyenda, y a él a un desierto de centavos y esperanzas inútiles" (56). She imagines a relationship to Alia Emar, building on her recollections of oral histories told by unreliable "maliciosos" or from unreadable found texts written in "malicioso." By embroidering on these sources of inspiration Alia develops a family history that revolves around her. This hybrid genre of autofiction makes it impossible to separate either the "real" or alleged fictional past from Alia's self-construction as individual and author. Indeed, her reconstruction of infancy and childhood simultaneously reinforces the Freudian reading as well as Alberca's view that childhood is the stage that best lends itself to poetic creativity (121). Inventing roots helps to overcome the confusion and anxiety that stem from the lack of clarity about her true origins.

Through this creative process the protagonist as writer expresses what she was incapable of communicating in childhood, since "entonces no lo sabía pero hoy puedo formularlo" (53). Only in writing and rewriting does she eventually recognize and acknowledge the depth of the

grief she experienced after Esteban died: “eso era la nada en mí: la presencia de una lejanía que hiere todas las cosas cuando falta el sentido y el fundamento” (59). The loss of her anchor, however tenuous or imagined the family ties, destroyed her fragile sense of belonging to a family, which she consciously attempts to renew first through childhood fantasy and later through writing.

Thus, the adult Alia grieves for Esteban by working through multiple iterations of the past, including her childhood fantasies. During the early stages of this process, her views are tentative and conditional. Sentences dealing with early adolescence often begin with “if” while her voice remains troubled and uncertain into young adulthood. Her words convey her self-awareness as a writer since “tal vez aún no manejo las palabras precisas a pesar de cierta práctica en rodear con palabras mis confusiones” (198). Although she may have yet to fully master the art, the recognition that words are invaluable in making sense of life intimates that writing will eventually come to shape her identity and her destiny.<sup>154</sup>

Writing becomes a way of processing fantasies and memories that may be false in order to complete the grieving, to survive and to move forward. Freud’s concepts in “Mourning and Melancholia” of “acting out” melancholy and “working through” trauma as a mourning process are reflected here in the obsessive rewriting which is essential to the healing process. Alia works through the trauma along with the powerlessness and confusion it creates by inventing versions of her past. In the end she defends and appropriates her hybrid roots, the genetic and historical ones from the Adriatic and the socio-cultural ones imbibed in Chile. She undertakes a complex assembly of fragments in order to negotiate and finally formulate her unique identity. Once

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<sup>154</sup> This instinct to find the right words is already apparent in Skármeta’s first short stories, such as “El joven con el cuento” (*El entusiasmo*) and “Primera preparatoria” in which the young protagonist forecasts that “cuando sea grande voy a saber que decir en estos casos; voy a tener la jeta llena de palabras” (*Tiro Libre* 106).

processed, the past is no longer a complete mystery; rather, she takes control of it so that it forms an essential part of her identity. Furthermore, through her writing she—and ultimately the author—turn readers into witnesses of this past, thereby preserving it.

Paul Ricoeur has elaborated on these notions of memory and trauma, opposing repletion-memory which involves a repetitive “acting out” to a critical recollection-memory which undertakes the working through. He cites Freud’s advice to work on oneself to overcome repetition and heal memory (Olick et al. 477-78). Alia alternatively acts out and works on herself through writing, until viable personal and national futures appear united on the horizon.

Historian and trauma scholar Dominick LaCapra in turn applies arguments on structural and historic trauma to literature. While LaCapra dwells on the differences between loss and absence he also recognizes that they can be conflated, as they are in the case of *La chica del trombón*. The heroine’s behaviour reflects the historian’s argument that in the case of traumatic loss, “acting out may well be a necessary condition of working through, at least for victims” (*Trauma* 70). Alia’s acting out recurs obsessively, first in fantasy and then in writing, until a new basis for identity becomes possible in tandem with evolving historical circumstances. Only then is she ready or able to move forward. La Capra writes that mourning the past “involves recognizing its difference from the present—simultaneously remembering and taking leave of or actively forgetting it, thereby allowing for critical judgment and a reinvestment in life, notably social and civil life with its demands, responsibilities, and norms” (70). This is the point which Alia finally reaches when she ceases musing about her family connections.

When a pregnant and maturing Alia begins to rejoice in a life with Pedro Pablo and opts for Chile over the United States, she finally assumes her identity and looks to the future. However, the power of “the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and working

through it may at best enable some distance or critical perspective that is acquired with extreme difficulty and not achieved once and for all” (70). While the trauma has been overcome to the extent that Alia contemplates a “normal” family life, her family history will never be fully captured. On the other hand, by transmitting her roots to her child she keeps her ethnicity alive within the confines of the story, while the novel preserves it within Chile’s literary tradition.

In terms of transcending loss by working through trauma, Cathy Caruth’s explanation of the need to revisit events repeatedly in order to complete the work of memory highlights the importance of narrative. For Caruth, traumatic memories are “the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it” (176). Since mental schemes develop and evolve as an individual matures, these memories can rarely be fully processed before adulthood. The traumatic experience is revived and relived until it can be integrated into the adult self. Then “the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality. Many traumatized persons, however, experience long periods of time in which they live, as it were, in two different worlds: the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current lives” (76). For Caruth, it is often “impossible to bridge these worlds” (76). Accordingly, Alia lives in two separate worlds until the closing passages when she appears to have successfully reconciled them. The loss of her grandfather and the weakening of her ethnic ties have a place in her life and her autobiography. She no longer depends on escapist fantasies. With the memory of foreign roots integrated into her Chilean identity, she is equipped to face the future.

In the final chapter of the internal novel, the loss of Esteban, the compulsion to trace her family, and the need to escape Chile cease to obsess the narrator and to dominate her writing. As her focus switches to the future, Alia repeatedly proclaims her intertwined hopes for her nuclear family of husband and child and for Chile as her chosen nation. However, the technique of the novel-within-a-novel lends itself to first constructing this family romance with a happy ending and then, unlike the traditional genre, questioning this unbridled optimism through an experienced external voice in the closing frame. An analysis of this family romance and its place within the literary tradition will show how the personal and the national intersect and interact.

### **A Contemporary Family Romance**

My interpretation of the family relationships depicted in the novel rests not only on the Freudian notion of “family romance” with its narcissistic imagining of idealized parents but also on the family romance genre in which family life parallels or anticipates national history. For this analysis I draw on Margarita Saona’s *Novelas familiares* which builds on Sommer’s *Foundational Fictions*. In her analysis of the nineteenth century Spanish American novel, Sommer emphasizes that marriage acts as an allegory for the construction of the idea of nation. The union of individuals from different backgrounds, often joining modern urban males to the daughters of traditional rural landowning families, reconciles social and political differences in the greater national interest (1-29). *Martín Rivas*, the best known Chilean foundational novel, offers a variation on the theme of family as nation by uniting an impoverished but progressive *criollo* figure with the daughter of a wealthy urban conservative *criollo*.

While Sommer analyzes how fiction fused the blending of *criollo* and *mestizo* families with political events and nation building, Saona perceptively expresses this comingling as family

romance where the shape “que el sujeto le da a la familia es de alguna manera también la forma en que concibe la nación” (12). In Saona’s view, long after the end of the foundational period family romances continue to produce families that mirror the foundation, rise or collapse of the nation. Saona argues that later twentieth-century novels continue to depict the family as a basic building block of the Spanish American nation as imagined community. Not surprisingly, the family configurations include protagonists who reject traditional social models as well as non-biological and blended families with a more complex view of the modern state in a globalizing world (25).

My reading makes the case that the “malicioso” story in *La chica del trombón* constitutes a compelling successor to this tradition by incorporating minority ethnic roots into the Chilean family. Building on Sommer and Saona, I argue that it presents a contemporary portrayal of the hybrid family as allegory for the nation. A protagonist who does not possess the clear and often noble bloodlines laid out in traditional Spanish American national fiction slowly forges a family life for herself in concert with a shift in national identity. Her story exemplifies the major traits of a traditional family romance: suffering, love, grief, overcoming obstacles, and finally founding a family with a place of its own in a nation on the eve of social and political transformation.

In the same vein as the narrative that Saona examines, this novel redefines both family and national identity by blending immigrants into the national mix. Instead of reconciling different races, classes or regions already present within the nation, it follows the journey of an urban immigrant female from alienation through education, community involvement, and family formation, within the nation that she projects for the future. Unlike the women depicted in most Spanish American foundational novels who occupy only the home front, Alia engages in the

political arena, campaigning nationally for Allende. The successive political battles that the fictionalized Allende fights play out in conjunction with Alia's struggles to overcome her losses in order to establish an identity, a family and a legitimate place in the nation. Indeed, she is aware of being the connector between politics and family/immigrant history:

El doctor Allende me pedía a mí, a Alia Emar Coppeta, una mínima y anónima colegiala, que hiciera campaña por él en las zonas del desierto, justo donde había desembarcado la melancolía y desesperanza de mi abuelo a comienzos de siglo, hecho el fantasma de una tragedia cuyo puzle yo aún no alcanzaba a componer” (141).

However, this link to the past is insufficient. The tradition of family romance demands a vision of the future, even if it is eventually thwarted. Family and political conflicts must be resolved jointly before a young couple can be harmoniously united in a forward-looking nation. In current terms, co-dependency becomes the ultimate goal.

Unlike the socio-political differences that often obstruct family romances, the most formidable obstacle that Alia faces is the lack of any family roots. She is also emotionally estranged from Chileans and Chile, a state of mind common to immigrants and exiles. This alienation is evident in her change of name. “Alia” conjures up otherness, distance and nostalgia while being “among others.” At the same time, the surname “Emar” evokes the sea (*el mar*) and its depths, a reminder of the transatlantic voyage and the immense void Alia longs to fill.<sup>155</sup> The ocean separates and distances her from her past, hinting at the amnesia commonly used to

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<sup>155</sup> Esteban's poem for the original Alia, with its echoes of Rafael Alberti's “El mar, la mar” referred to the sea. Its verses, “Alia Emar dice tu nombre/Más ‘a la mar’ quiero llamarte,” (*La boda del poeta* 55), play on the sounds of Emar/a la mar/llamar. Moreover, they may allude to Chilean writer Álvaro Yáñez Bianchi, who chose the pseudonym Juan Emar for its resemblance to the French expression *J'en ai marre* (I'm fed up), which is how Alia views Chile for most of the novel.

portray characters that wash up on foreign shores. Considering her very young age during the journey, the desire to establish roots and identity through parents in Europe reaches backwards across the ocean only with words and the imagination, not memories.

Because Alia is unable to identify with people of darker skin or with Chile as homeland, blue-eyed and blond American movie stars and the popular culture of the 1960s shape her self-image and drive her obsession with reuniting with family elsewhere, notably Reino in New York. The elusiveness of family history prolongs the search and the uncertainty well beyond childhood and impedes her movement to the future.

Even before Esteban dies, Alia begins to elaborate her family story on her own terms after stumbling on his hidden archives of photographs and news clippings, some of which are signed by reporters Pavlovic and Stark. She is unable to read the documents, although she deciphers the names of characters that the reader will recognize from *La boda del poeta* such as Jerónimo Franck, Reino, Esteban and José Coppeta, Rolando el Largo, Alamiro Torrentes—the Spanish inventor who lacked a first name in *La boda del poeta*—as well as Gabriela Mistral, who was never explicitly named in the preceding novel. Along with a photograph of a church bell tower bearing the untranslated words “Cetri Suoni” (29), these items serve as the basis for framing a “malicioso” family and history. The reader familiar with the earlier novel has an advantage over the protagonist in filling in the “malicioso” past.

Additional clues about the family come to light when photographs of Esteban and Alia Emar and other documents come to light after Esteban’s death. Yet the photographs also compound the mystery: Reino is nowhere to be seen in the one that Esteban labelled the “familia completa” (56). Similar but not completely identical to the earlier ones, the documents include an article from a “malicioso” newspaper in which the Coppeta surname is underlined and a letter in

Spanish to the ambassador of Costas de Malicia in Chile. There are “dos papeles manuscritos firmados por una señora Gabriela Mistral” and, instead of the photograph of the bell, “un poema cuyo título en malicioso era *Cetri Suoni*” (101), now translated as “Cuatro Campanadas.”

Pierre Nora’s concept of a collective memory that has shifted from actual historical locations to sites of memory such as libraries, archives, monuments or more abstractly to commemorative events helps in deciphering this discovery of historical artefacts (*Between Memory and History* 7-24). Lacking the locations, objects or events that Nora deemed essential to a collective *lieu de mémoire*, Alia relies on a few tangible fragments to create her own site of family memory through her writing.

In fact, the perspicacious Alia is unequivocal in rejecting the sterility and poverty of Esteban’s immigrant life in Chile for herself. Not rooted in either the old or the new world and unable to forget his lost love, Esteban had slowly come to define himself as a willing Chilean, namely “malicioso de nacimiento y chileno por adopción” (40). Still, he remains an unattached foreigner with no history either elsewhere or in his adopted land. As for what happened to the love he left behind on Gema, he has chosen to forget a traumatic past: “Es tan poco lo que sé, que no quiero creerlo. Y lo poco que no creo prefiero olvidarlo” (25). In Chile, he has spent “casi cuarenta años aquí y no pasa nada” (24). With neither past nor present, he is in a way still at sea, frozen in time and unable to move forward.

For Alia, Esteban is an incomplete man whose blue eyes are always focused inward or elsewhere (45). As a consequence, she is determined to abandon Chile as she reflects on his “enroque de nadas” (65), his futile chess-like move from Gema to Chile. Although it is too late for Esteban to alter his course, by affirming the ties to his homeland and his lost love Alia resuscitates the potential for the survival of his lineage in the new world.

In addition to Esteban, two other father figures, Christ and Chilean naval hero, Captain Arturo Prat, represent religion and militarism respectively, two of the fundamental authoritarian values of traditional *chilenidad* inculcated through the educational system. Through them, Alia combines her desire for family ties with her yearning for national belonging. Yet neither figure is strong enough to dampen Alia's immature plans to flee Chile. She tries first to escape to Europe and then twice to New York, always failing. On the first attempt, by running away and denying that she is either Chilean or related to Esteban, Alia knits her rejection of adopted family and adopted nation tightly together. Her forced return to the care of Esteban and Jovana keeps the emerging story of family and nation grounded in Chile.

The subsequent move inland from the coast to Santiago, which mimics the actual path of many Dalmatian immigrants, makes escape more difficult. It begins the transition to a more complex sense of identity, albeit through significant fantasizing. In the early years, Alia confers paternal roles on Prat. Occupying the same elevated status of potential husband as Esteban, Prat was "mi sueño. El único que ponía en el santoral junto al nono. Prat era mi ídolo favorito. Yo hubiera querido ser su viuda" (42). This leads to recurring dreams of Peruvian admiral Miguel Grau returning Prat's corpse to her care. Unlike forgetting her parents and her journey to Chile, this time she would know to "olvidar nada con memoria experta y minuciosa" (43). This repeated dream of remembering Prat in widowhood transfers to dreams of Esteban after his death. Later, her attention will shift from early male "national family" figures like Prat and fantasy romances to Pedro Pablo as a romantic partner and Allende as a political hero, moving the family romance from her dreams into her life.

Esteban's silence about the past and his death deepen Alia's fantasizing about her roots. Only once did he want to talk, dragging Alia from the escapism of the movies to "eso que por

comodidad llamábamos el mundo real” (41).<sup>156</sup> Later, she sees that this “insólito” behaviour was his way of preparing her for his death (45). Otherwise he would take to the grave his “silencio obstinado sobre mis orígenes” (47). But in the moment, Alia is torn between wanting to know and not wanting to lend credence to his approaching death by listening to him (50). Esteban had barely begun his story—“Hace muchas décadas zarpamos de Génova dos hermanos” (51)—when Alia escapes from reality by joining her friends to replay movie scenes.

Alia and Esteban claim each other as family right up to his last words—“Soy tu nono, ¿cierto?” (58). While the pact is sealed beyond death, its finality severs any family ties irrevocably. Obsessed with movies, on the day of the funeral Alia seeks to overturn death by visualizing Esteban’s favourite film. Nothing would keep her from seeing *King Kong* and “orar al gorila por la eternidad del alma de mi abuelo” (61). But this professed intention of praying to a movie figure again leads to fantasizing.

Until then, death was only another cinematographic event (45). To escape its reality as represented by the extended family of aunts and “mis primas” at graveside, Alia forces herself to “suprimir la realidad de mi cabeza filtrándola con el relato que me había hecho mil veces el nono” (64). She visualizes King Kong escaping from film canisters and advancing towards the cemetery, destroying Santiago rather than New York, as well as maiming her cousins (65). In the absence of a movie-style rescue, the irreversibility of death causes her to begin forging Esteban’s history: “Juré que, con o sin gorila, sería desde ese momento ineludible. Donde no hubiera vida iba a imaginarla con tantas ganas que en algún momento tendría que ser realidad” (66). After refusing to listen to Esteban’s story, Alia is free to fabricate her own version of it.

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<sup>156</sup> This wording is similar to Skármeta’s view on the world and realism as discussed in relation to his literary vision in Chapter 2. His perspective is consistent and reflected here through a protagonist with whom he shares key traits.

The need to hold on to a family connection drives Alia to formalize the bond to Esteban and his long lost love and, by extension, to her “malicioso” heritage. She changes her name on the day of the funeral and decides to “inaugurar para mí un nombre al cual juré en mi corazón permanecer fiel toda la vida, cualquiera fuese el rol que me tocara” (83). Renouncing the direct link to her mother, Magdalena is reborn as Alia (47).<sup>157</sup> Months later she writes that

El nono había dicho *adiós* y yo caía últimamente en bruscos abatimientos pues no había llorado lo bastante. Estaba en la fatalidad de la familia que no conociéramos a nuestros padres, y en nuestra locura que eligiéramos aquello que ellos no tuvieron robándoles sus nombres. Yo no había sabido ser Magdalena y por ningún motivo quería fracasar no siendo Alia Emar” (113).

Deciding that she has failed to honour the memory of her mother and of Esteban, Alia consciously assumes a self-created identity in order to gain a second chance at defining herself, since naming is “regalarle la identidad a una cosa o una persona” (160). This appropriation has a double purpose. It provides an illusion of certainty about her origins as well as an enduring bond to Esteban and Alia Emar. At the same time it circles back to the naming of the baby girl in Mistral’s honour in the poem cited in the epigraph.<sup>158</sup>

On the other hand, the Freudian model of father-daughter romance has been permanently disrupted. Instead, in the tradition of foundational fiction and literary family romance, a male romantic figure comes into Alia’s close social circle. Mirroring her initial delivery to Esteban,

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<sup>157</sup> Before Esteban’s death Alia writes “yo no me llamaba Alia Emar” (47) even if her baby’s bib bore the name. Later Alia says the bib read Magdalena (161). According to Jovana the protagonist shares that name with her biological mother; yet Esteban declares that the trombonist chose it. Meanwhile, Yaksic says: “Entonces se llamaba Magdalena, igual que su madre, y hoy se llama Alia Emar como su abuela” (207), implying he knew her parentage.

<sup>158</sup> It also counters the male “malicioso” habit of adopting Hispanic names. For example, trombonist Pachuco Yaksic has forgotten if his original name was Dragomir or Vladimiro. Pachuco signals a blending into his environment, while his forgetfulness recalls expatriate Torrentes in *La boda del poeta* whose memory eroded after he left Spain.

Pedro Pablo Palacios appears serendipitously on the day of the funeral, a gift apparently sent by “el nono” from beyond the grave. Since the adult writer reveals that the boy is “a quien tuve desde entonces como mi otra mitad de ese animal sucio e indivisible que seríamos” (84), the outcome of their relationship is revealed and not simply foreshadowed.

The long journey to that ending follows. As the first character to utter the narrator’s newly chosen name, Pedro Pablo legitimizes her identity through a form of secular baptism. This gives her confidence to imagine “robar en el Registro Civil la hoja de una cédula de identidad, fotografiarme en la plaza y fabricarme una credencial con mi nuevo nombre” (86), a wink to the group photo taken in an Italian square and the collective visa that enabled Esteban and his compatriots to enter Chile in *La boda del poeta*.

Despite their youth, the mutual understanding and attraction between Alia and Pedro Pablo anticipate marital union and family formation. Alia imagines Esteban counselling her to look to the future: “Si no tienes tu abuelo hazte tú tu abuelo, si careces de padre, sé tú mismo tu padre. Las raíces, mi amor, no están atrás tuyo, las tienes por delante” (86). She is free to build a family history and a future with Pedro Pablo.

However, the past blocks Alia’s path forward. The name change keeps her reliving the European past. Still, teacher Daniel Sepúlveda allows it because he recognizes Coppeta as “un prestigioso nombre en la enciclopedia de los mártires políticos en Europa” (93).<sup>159</sup> However, decrying her fixation with North American culture and her lack of “raíces latinoamericanas” (196), he attempts to steer Alia in the direction of national essentialism. In a letter Pavlovic also accepts the new name, recognizing her as Esteban’s granddaughter, unlike the other “malicioso”

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<sup>159</sup> Sepúlveda’s story of how José Coppeta “había sido descabezado en cierta emboscada en el barco Carontes por los imperialistas austrohúngaros, y su destino fue muy comparable al del irlandés Michael Collins” (93) is transposed from *La boda del poeta*. Suspension of disbelief is needed to accept that a Chilean teacher could be familiar with a mythical “malicioso” past and able to connect it to Borges’ story of the traitor/hero.

immigrants. He later toasts her effusively as a “hija dilecta del mar Adriático, una paisana de sangre rebelde, y la nieta de un muy querido amigo” (149). Yaksic, who has changed his own name to Pachuco, simply accepts her new one, based on what he knows of her history. Yet, childhood companions who interfere with Alia’s self-image continue to use Magdalena as does the American consul who thwarts her visa application. Her name and national identity are unsettled, unlike in the case of the heroines of classic foundational novels whose family and national origins are usually clearly ensconced in Spanish American nations.

Since the family romance genre demands that Alia’s ultimate fate lie in Chile, the improbable plans she devises to locate and reunite with Reino in New York, “mi norte, mi brújula, mi futuro, mi coronación” (92), must inevitably fail. When she is unable to locate Reino on her own, an unexpected outside figure brings the connection to life. The appearance on her doorstep of Wolf Michael Pretzlik, the Austrian military recruit whom Reino had supposedly killed in the ambush off the coast of Gema, marks a turning point in how Alia, now fourteen, interprets the Coppeta family history. Pretzlik arrives with a translation into Spanish from “malicioso” of the Pavlovic article “La noche doble” about the assassination, which he reads, before showing Alia the “crónica” that Gómez Stark wrote about the journey to Chile (165).<sup>160</sup> His presence proves that Pavlovic did not possess the truth when he wrote the article about Reino having murdered him. His use of Esteban’s nickname Tebi indicates that he heard Reino and Esteban speaking to each other on the Austrian ship (see *La boda del poeta* 71). Suddenly, there is proof of Esteban’s past and Reino’s right to be included in the family archives.

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<sup>160</sup> Both news items appear in *La boda del poeta*. The unpublished wedding article that *La boda del poeta*’s contemporary narrator retrieves while visiting the fictional Gema is not part of this archive or novel.

Pretzlik's gift of a luxury Chevrolet strengthens the protagonist's desire to locate Reino in New York. This powerful symbol of North American capitalism and culture signals the posthumous reconciliation of the Coppeta brothers since Reino did not commit a murder. Described as an "altar elevado a la memoria de mi nono, el símbolo de la fraternidad universal entre los hombres" (170-71), the car replaces Esteban's Indian motorcycle. It nurtures the vision of family reunification in the United States. On the other hand, it will bind family and nation together in Chile by facilitating Alia's sexual initiation with Pedro Pablo, in addition to transporting Allende during his election campaigns. In Chile the car fuses the two aspects of family romance, love and political direction. Like Esteban's words about the future, this ambiguous vehicle could lead to New York or Chile since Pedro Pablo also envisions his future in New York. Confusion about which nation commands loyalty contrasts with the normal assumptions of the foundational novel in which a single national allegiance was possible, even if internal political divisions had to be overcome. It also suggests a more complicated world in which an individual could legitimately identify with more than one nation or history.

While the early part of the novel focuses almost exclusively on childhood and family matters, the intertwining with nation that lies at the heart of family romance progresses when Sepúlveda, the teacher whom Alia describes as a doctrinaire Marxist activist, becomes intimately involved with her foster mother Jovana. By welcoming Allende into their home, Sepúlveda opens the door for Alia and Jovana to become committed Allende supporters. The two female immigrants join a growing Chilean "family" comprised of individuals from different backgrounds working together for a common political cause. Within this political "family," Allende is transformed into the honorary uncle, a father figure who sparks Alia's interest in politics. The tie between family and nation, between Alia and Allende, is made explicit when

Alia writes that her “‘tío’ Allende me ha inoculado al virus de la política” (177). This family bond to “tío Salvador” (153, 296) or “mi ‘tío’ el doctor” (300) will hold constant, in contrast with an intermittent interest in the absent “tío” Reino. Unlike King Kong, Salvador Allende acts as the saviour his name implies by drawing Alia into a “family” future in Chile.

Alia reorients her efforts to form a family in which she plays a central role when she lends Esteban’s boxing robe to Allende. The garment that Esteban supposedly inherited becomes a protective cover enveloping the family and the political father figure. Offering it to Allende represents “un gesto para Chile, una luz que se encendería en la tumba del nono tras décadas de navegar entre las sombras del recuerdo y la futilidad de las esperanzas” (141). Wrapping himself in a physical reminder of Esteban, whom he never knew, Allende is transformed into a fighting figure whose action confers on “el nono” a lasting place in Chile’s political struggle and future. Allende assumes the double role of father figure to Alia and the nation.

Despite these emerging ties to Chile, the lack of biological family and national identity continues to obsess Alia. The desire for political freedom, inherited from her “malicioso” family, allied with her love of American culture, two vital components of her sense of self and self-worth, co-exist. Allende presents an appealing vision for a future in Chile but fundamental elements of family romance are still missing from the composition. Alia, who sees herself as “fuerte como un tronco, mas sin raíces” (176), instinctively cannot commit to a nation in the absence of family roots. In fact, her dilemma conforms to the basic requirements of identity formation in the national novel which demands that the construction of nation and family overlap. However, since the family past lies outside the nation, family can only be projected into the future in Chile.

With the political side of the family romance taking shape, the family side of the equation reverts to Pedro Pablo and his return to Santiago, after the extended absences common to foundational fiction. After the Coppeta family move to Santiago had facilitated a romance outside the “malicioso” community, Pedro Pablo’s family left the capital in the wake of financial difficulties. During his absence, Alia pursued and rejected Richard, a potential or imagined partner whose Anglo-Saxon name and admiration of the Indian motorcycle suggest a preference for American culture. She also makes up a story about rejecting a suitor with “las *errres* del nono” (173) because she does not want to marry someone who sounds like family. In essence, romantic fantasies involving American images or “malicioso” males have no place in her Chilean future.<sup>161</sup>

The return of Pedro Pablo is “la encarnación del retrato a lápiz que mil veces dibujé” (179) and his telephone number replaces “la ficción de los meses anteriores” (192). As she writes: “*ahora* mi vida tendría sentido. Mi vida no sería algo para huir, sino para compartir” (194). At sixteen, Alia’s romantic awakening highlights for the first time the interdependence between love and nationhood as she explores Pedro Pablo’s heart with her fingertips “como si discerniera la geografía de un país al que sabes que vas a viajar” (197). The discovery of romantic love as a voyage of exploration into an unknown country then progresses in tandem with the discovery of the land through Allende’s national political campaigns.

Despite a deep-seated fear of loving and again losing a loved one—“esa terrible nostalgia anticipada” and “el olvido, como toda la historia de mis ancestros” (198)—Alia experiences a nascent sense of belonging to the world around her. Uttering the word “felicidad” (202) for the

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<sup>161</sup> Left unresolved is the issue of Pedro Pablo’s lineage. His father is a Spanish immigrant rather than Chilean born. His mother’s line is not mentioned.

first time she gives life to Esteban's dying wish that she find happiness. Achieving a sense of self and of belonging equates with happiness. No longer either "el borrador de una persona" or an incomplete project like Esteban, Alia comes to define herself through the relationship with Pedro Pablo ("Soy 'yo'" (206)). This new-found sense of self is also connected to her past through the reappearance of the trombonist, for the first time since the opening frame of the novel.

Yaksic's presence triggers memories of infancy. Alia relives her ocean voyage and remembers her parents, paradoxically given "la imposibilidad de olvidar a quienes no había conocido" (205). The need for a biological history continues to drive her search for identity. Since "la memoria mía, la isla y el anonimato de mis padres" (221) were lost forever beneath the waves, false or created memories compensate for the void. Yaksic acts as another father figure, a tie to the old world and the new one, integrated through music. Yet he too is an imperfect example since he has forgotten his birth name, a sign of amnesia akin to Esteban's willful forgetting of his past.

Nonetheless, the pendulum must swing to the future if the family romance is to come to fruition. Alia discovers with the help of Yaksic that there is more to life than her perpetual obsession with her origins (214). Yaksic's music was to be "el prólogo a una vida nueva, en la que había que juntar los pedazos de mi historia para que me dieran sentido. Sólo que esta vez no quería que nadie viviera vicariamente por mí; no permitiría que mis silencios se llenaran con sombras de celuloide" (214). In light of Yaksic's musical and symbolic "paternal" blessing, Alia vows to tell her story from this point on without resorting to fantasy.

The story turns to the present as the young couple have intercourse in the Chevrolet. A second intimate encounter, this time in Neruda's bed, builds on the symbolism of Valparaíso's name as an earthly paradise, thus suggesting that Chile is a desirable homeland. Pedro Pablo

assumes Neruda's mantle as poet and lover just as Allende had draped himself in Esteban's robe. With Allende acting as a magnet that pulls in the direction of a Chilean future, young love and political action are intimately linked in Alia's developing identification with Chile.

Although Alia's youth corresponds with that of many female heroines depicted in classic foundational novels, a sexual encounter does not signal that the traditional linkages of marriage and family to nation will immediately or necessarily ensue. Just as there is only one country for Alia, there is only one love. But just as she has not yet committed herself fully to Chile, she has reservations about tying down her first and only lover, "mi piel y mi casa" (243). The reference to home places Pedro Pablo at the centre of her future family even though she perceives love as a looming threat to the identity she is developing. Commitment could destroy the version of herself and her future that she has so carefully fabricated. This persona she has crafted through her writing is no longer completely in charge and fully empowered to "hacerme yo misma" (277). Instead, she fears relying on another person for her happiness and sense of self-worth.

¡Minuciosamente maldito amor! ¡Tener que tocarme a mí! ¡A una paria del océano, sin padres, ni tierra, ni memorias! ¡En vez de hacerme yo misma, como canté en las feroces jornadas de la plaza Brasil, ahora quería adherirme a la piel de un hombre! ¿Tenía el derecho de ser su parásita?" (277)

The relationship continues, with the couple studying and planning to move to New York while the protagonist works for social transformation. As she travels the country, the first person plural aligns her with the historical Allende campaigns: "Perdimos el 58" and "nos derrotaron en el 64" (243). Narrative time speeds up as years and events stream by, an indication that the narrator is no longer completely possessed by grief and fixated on discovering her personal history. When she becomes pregnant, she does not want to burden Pedro Pablo: "Un orgullo

malicioso me enerva y irriga de dignidad. No voy a ser el lastre que eche a tierra el vuelo de Pedro Pablo Palacios, evitaré inmiscuirme en su libertad” (275). Alia has worked through her grief and found a romantic relationship and a future for Chile. However, it is only the idea of a child that enables her to see her own future. Alia at last opts for Chile, filled with “alegría” (288), the happiness that had escaped Esteban but that he hoped she would discover.<sup>162</sup>

The key to happiness is family formation and the birth of a son, revealed to the reader during a family visit to the Casa Mistral on the day of Allende’s electoral victory. The convergence of family, literary heritage and political nation launches a new era. By linking the child who carries both Hispanic and “malicioso” genes to Mistral as mother figure and poet as well as to Allende as father of a reconfigured nation, Alia combines family roots, the literary nation and national identity. Still, the family unit adheres to the traditional patriarchal notion of a son who bears only the father’s surname.

As the crowds await Allende’s victory speech, the anaphoric use of “hoy” over a dozen times in rapid succession emphasizes the joy of the moment and new beginnings. “Hoy” the future lies in the combined hands of a child with hybrid roots and a newly elected president, at last uniting the personal to the political. Alia’s notion of family and nationhood “hoy” is now outward-looking as well as all-embracing. The range of freedom-seeking immigrants she lists includes “el alemán y el gringo, el malicioso y el andaluz, los refugiados del Winnipeg y los fugitivos brasileños, los italianos y los ingleses,” recognizing many of the foreigners who settled

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<sup>162</sup> The word “alegría” connects to the “no” campaign during the 1988 plebiscite. The slogan “Chile, ya viene la alegría” suggested a nation again on the verge of happiness. Both the 1970 election and the outcome of the 1988 plebiscite seemingly placed Chile on the verge of better days, encapsulated in the joy of profound “alegría.”

in Chile (291).<sup>163</sup> This vision of the Chilean nation encompasses a broad cross-section of economic and political migrants who have found a home and a role for themselves in it. It also reflects the actual immigration patterns rather than the established vision of *mestizo chilenidad*. Moreover, this acceptance and celebration of ethnic and national diversity contrasts with the uniform and uniformed national image, the insistence on tradition and the hostility towards outsiders that marked the Pinochet years.

This celebration of immigrants combines with flashbacks to the Chilean cultural manifestations of the 1960s, namely “la cosa cultural” identified with Victor Jara, los Quilapayún, Inti Illimani, Ángel Parra, Violeta Parra and Chabela Parra that complemented the political campaigning (295). And finally Allende’s victory is interpreted as a sign that Neruda will be awarded the Nobel Prize, joining political and literary success. Alia’s list memorializes many of the cultural groups and individuals that supported social and political change, drawing them into the victory celebration.

As the writing shifts back and forth between the celebrating crowd awaiting Allende’s appearance and thoughts of family, Alia’s expectations for her son contrast with her own childhood recollections of abandonment and alienation. In his case, “(t)ienes tu madre, tienes tu padre, tienes los amigos, tienes el pueblo, tienes tu país” (297). Loved and wanted, her son has everything she lacked and craved in terms of family, friends, community and nation, the components of collective identity, even though the child does not know “que le espera *la felicidad*” (emphasis in the original) (298). Signalling her awareness and acceptance of her future, Alia is finally capable of defining herself through both her nuclear family and a promising

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<sup>163</sup> The SS Winnipeg, a French ship, transported 2,200 refugees from the Spanish Civil War to Valparaíso in 1939. In *My Invented Country* Isabel Allende affirms that Neruda chartered the ship at the direction of the government to carry intellectuals, writers, artists, physicians, engineers and craftsmen from Marseille (43).

national future. Highlighting her discovery, she proclaims: “Gracias a Dios nos quedamos en Chile” (299). This acts as a direct response to Esteban’s final dark plea uttered at the end of *La boda del poeta*, “Que haya Dios” (307). Having reached the end of her quest she knows she belongs in Chile where “siendo madre y esposa me he hecho mis raíces” (300).<sup>164</sup> The struggle to establish family roots and national identity seems to have reached a traditional happy ending. Proud of her “malicioso” immigrant origins, even if her specific family ties remain obscure, Alia stands with her husband and their son, celebrating family formation, social integration and Allende’s victory as an interrelated and harmonious whole, while simultaneously looking to the future with unabated optimism. Through motherhood and political engagement she offers herself to the nation which is personified in Allende.

By willing and writing her new family into being Alia has established her individual, family, cultural and national identity within a nation that seems to echo her own life and aspirations. In the end, the wilful projection of a social and political family, an imagined community in which she has defiantly asserted her own position, leads to her sense of belonging at last to what had been a foreign place of imposed wartime refuge. Her immediate family is enveloped by Allende’s political win and the victory shouts of the crowd. “Victory” for Allende is the last word of Alia’s novel when all the obstacles appear to have been overcome and a promising future beckons. This final scene confirms Saona’s view that “[i]ndagar las formas que familia y nación adquieren en estas novelas permite descubrir cómo la literatura ha configurado los procesos por los que las sociedades latinoamericanas han pasado durante las últimas décadas” (25). The lengthy process that Chile experienced in rallying for and against Allende, the internal

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<sup>164</sup> Although the text uses “hecho” from the verb “hacer” (make), it sounds like “echar,” the verb normally used in “echar raíces,” growing roots to ground the connection to the nation.

divisions that split the nation, and the sense of victory that a generation experienced in 1970 are told through a family romance that portrays family and nation as indivisible.

In the end, Alia moves beyond grief and nostalgia to transplant her roots, whether real or imagined, to her adopted homeland. The story concludes with a son bearing a legitimate Hispanic name now placed at the centre of a new family. With the unverifiable and likely false line descending from Alia Emar and Esteban grafted onto a family tree that will grow in Chile, the narrator no longer needs to continue willing and writing a family past into existence. She has constructed her identity without obliterating her “malicioso” origins.

The immigrant alienation that stemmed from war, exile, family separation and loss, and the resulting search for identity in an unfamiliar culture, draws to a close. The need to belong that triggered an obsessive reliance on nostalgic memory and a future family reunification outside Chile, both evocative of Boym’s notion of restorative nostalgia, disappears. Tensions dissolve when the novel depicts a variation on the classic Spanish American family romance in which family life mirrors national vision. They are completely overcome when Alia comingles her family with the crowds supporting Allende and the mention of immigrant groups including the “maliciosos.”

Concretely, the birth of the protagonist’s son of mixed Hispanic and “malicioso” origins firmly roots the connection that *La boda del poeta* began in the Chilean family, social and political worlds. This happy union contrasts with previous mixed alliances on Gema which had resulted in tragedy in *La boda del poeta* and Esteban’s sterile immigrant life.

### **Casting Shadows on the Family Romance: An observer's prescient caveat**

A fundamental question that remains is whether this optimistic portrait truly illustrates the notion of family as metaphor for nation since Pavlovic has the last word in the framing text. Suspicious of Alia's overwhelming optimism, the external narrator is quick to undermine her enthusiasm. While Alia's personal quest for past and present roots appears successful, the jaded journalist offers a foreboding counterpoint to the expectation of a bright future. Fears about the inexperience of the incoming government and the likely result cloud the family story as metaphor for a united nation. Pavlovic retreats to the "malicioso" family in Antofagasta where few outsiders travel.

Interrupting Alia's tale, Pavlovic's letter of condolence and his later missive to President Alessandri show him as another patriarchal figure, the keeper of "malicioso" history in Chile, linking family and origins. His open letter to Alessandri weaves together the repeated conflicts of "malicioso" history and Chilean politics. His doubts about achieving national harmony counterbalance the heroine's naivety and inexperience. His deeply-rooted scepticism has grown over decades in "esa tierra de nadie que es el cuerpo de un inmigrante" (254). This elderly no man's land is the reverse of Pedro Pablo's young body, which Alia compares to the geography of the country. The history of Gema, an island long occupied by outsiders and invaders and now ruled by communists, makes Pavlovic deeply suspicious of a future under Allende. While Alia's story ignores the social tensions that the election of Allende intensified, Pavlovic's historical lens anticipates the social turbulence along with the family and political rifts that dominated Chile in the 1970s. Alia had predicted the negative reaction that the election results would generate among the "maliciosos." Pavlovic simply confirms her reading. Readers can draw their own conclusions.

The critical question is why and how this novel with its conflicting notes of optimism and scepticism resonates with readers. Clearly, its expression of personal loss and family division and the associated grief, trauma, and alienation recall the recent past including the election of Allende, the military coup, the Pinochet regime, and the exile or disappearance of family and friends. The yearning for an idealized or irretrievable past and the optimism of 1960s youth is easy to comprehend and share. Perhaps more importantly, the novel warns of the need to reconcile divergent interests when imagining a shared national identity, a painful lesson driven home by the social and political divisions that marked the twentieth century in Chile. Alia's family romance may idealize the 1960s but, by taking into account Pavlovic's wary perspective, Skármeta's novel can be read as an aspiration for harmony that demands consensus-building and compromise rather than either youthful optimism or cynical retrenchment. The hybrid family created in the novel does not of itself act as a metaphor for reconciling divergent political views and welcoming difference.

At one point Alia enumerates the different beliefs about Allende by ascribing them to various characters ("Según Pedro Pablo Palacios," "De acuerdo a Sepúlveda", "En opinión de Jovana", "Los amigos de Palacios," "Don Lorenzo" (231-33)). The diverse community that welcomes Allende after his win is still limited to a relatively narrow spectrum of political actors. In the end, the novel bridges some differences and brings the reader full circle to Skármeta's repeated emphasis in interviews on *convivencia*, which I highlighted in the second chapter.

The combined notions of foundational fiction and family romance are essential to my reading of *La chica del trombón* as Skármeta's vision of a hybrid Chilean family and a new *chilenidad* in a nation that acknowledges its plural composition. Esteban Coppeta and Roque Pavlovic represent integral elements of an immigrant past, the family and the history that help

colour a multifaceted present. For decades, journalists like Pavlovic kept the Dalmatians in Chile informed through Croatian-language newspapers and magazines. This type of direct communication is no longer viable for now integrated generations. Given the lack of physical sites to commemorate this immigrant past, Skármeta has constructed a literary *lieu de mémoire* that preserves the memory of ethnicity of one specific community for present and future generations, while reaching out to all immigrants through an imaginary “malicioso” nationality.<sup>165</sup>

The narrative form of a family romance reflects a valid and possibly one of the best contemporary means of communication for an immigrant community since it enables it to speak both to itself and to the nation. Ethnic newspapers no longer hold the same relevance for their communities that they enjoyed in the past. Indeed, they impede sharing the immigrant perspective with the wider population. Skármeta’s novel and the narrator’s internal novel combine to create a complex artefact intended for informed readers prepared to immerse themselves in both the immigrant and the national aspects of the story. In a genre familiar to readers, structure (form) and storyline (function) combine to create a forward-looking Chilean family romance that can be read in continuance of, or as a counterpoint to, *Martín Rivas*. The optimistic political vision can be tempered with full knowledge of the historical outcome. On the other hand, the existence of a more diverse population base and its implications in terms of national image and imaginary remain.

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<sup>165</sup> In practical terms it is important to remember that the Dalmatians settled in the far south and the far north, where their traces are more obvious than in Santiago.

### Rewriting the National Novel: *Martín Rivas*, *La chica del trombón*, and literary tradition

*La chica del trombón* revives the tradition of the foundational novel with its conflation of love and national harmony. Its representation of Chile's divisive political environment during the 1950s and 1960s echoes the conflicts of the 1830-50 decades that Alberto Blest Gana depicted in *Martín Rivas*. Key passages of both novels are set during times of intense conflict at the mid-point of each century, tensions which are replicated in the love story. As Sommer emphasized, politics do indeed matter in these types of romances where obstacles to personal happiness are associated with political crises and historical events. Just as Blest Gana anticipated social and political change in the *criollo* world through the rise of the business class and before the larger waves of immigration, *La chica del trombón* imagines Chile as a plural and more equal society a century later. In Skármeta's novel the focus has shifted to modest lives as well as female and non-Hispanic immigrant voices. *Martín Rivas* equates *criollo* marriage and family formation with national unity and progress. *La chica del trombón* rewrites this pattern of privileged success with a love story that crosses an ethnic divide for characters of limited financial resources. Both stories reflect hope for the nation's future, stopping before events dashed those expectations.

The world that Skármeta imagines presents a stark contrast to both the assimilationist model of immigration that characterized Chile's earlier national self-image and the authoritarian and patriarchal image of *chilenidad* espoused by the Pinochet military regime. The short decree issued on the day of the 1973 coup went directly to the point: the restoration of an idealized conservative past. The preamble to the September 11 *Decreto Ley No 1, Acta de Constitución de*

*la Junta de Gobierno* insists on the mandate of the armed forces to not only defend the nation from attack but also to protect its historic and cultural identity.<sup>166</sup> It states:

2°.- Que, por consiguiente, *su misión suprema es la de asegurar por sobre toda otra consideración, la supervivencia de dichas realidades y valores, que son los superiores y permanentes de la nacionalidad chilena, y*

3°.- Que Chile *se encuentra en un proceso de destrucción sistemática e integral de estos elementos constitutivos de su ser, por efecto de la intromisión de una ideología dogmática y excluyente, inspirada en los principios foráneos del marxismo-leninismo.* (The emphasis is mine.)

The leadership of the armed forces effectively took it upon itself to decide on and to impose, above all other considerations, what it considered to be the superior and permanent values of Chilean identity.

The decree then states that in order to carry out this urgent duty (“impostergable deber”) the Junta assumes power and appoints Pinochet as President,

*con el patriótico compromiso de restaurar la chilenidad, la justicia y la institucionalidad quebrantadas, conscientes de que ésta es la única forma de ser fieles a las tradiciones nacionales, al legado de los Padres de la Patria y a la Historia de Chile, y de permitir que la evolución y el progreso del país se encaucen vigorosamente por los caminos que la dinámica de los tiempos actuales exigen a Chile en el concierto de la comunidad internacional de que forma parte.*  
(The emphasis is mine.)

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<sup>166</sup> The decree begins by declaring that the state has created the “Fuerza Pública,” for “el resguardo y defensa de su integridad física y moral y de su identidad histórico-cultural.”

This commitment to the recovery and defence of a lost *chilenidad* as the only possible way to be loyal to tradition exemplifies a narrow masculine military model of national identity. It eliminates any notion of progress as well as the possibility of diversity or difference, fossilizing the notion of *chilenidad*.

*La chica del trombón* depicts a dramatically different sense of identity in the years before the coup. At the same time as Chile's history and cultural traditions are fundamental to the nation that the novel projects, it envisages an active role in a socially progressive country for a female immigrant whose heritage remains an essential component of her identity, albeit an identity constructed through traditional family (marriage and a male child) and commitment to the nation. In effect, after the return to democracy, Skármeta proposes recovering the pre-dictatorship spirit of freedom and adopting a complex model of integration that recognizes diversity and ethnic memory as part of national identity.

However, the relatively narrow beam of light that both Blest Gana and Skármeta shine on Chile, and especially on its capital city, fails to capture wider social pressures and deeply seated ideological divisions that cast doubt on life beyond either fictional happy ending. Each novel is therefore enriched by an understanding of its particular political climate and historical context. Among the common elements of both novels is the union of a young couple on the cusp of a promising shift in national direction. Unlike many other foundational novels, these are urban novels rather than ones centred on the land. Both Alia in *La chica del trombón* and Martín in *Martín Rivas* migrate from northern Chile to the capital of Santiago. After the death of a beloved father figure, each pursues a post-secondary education at a time when universities were growing in response to new directions in national policies. In the nineteenth century the University of Chile had only recently been founded while in the 1960s universities were expanding to attract

middle class students. The protagonists' respective backgrounds, expectations, political awareness and visions of the nation correspond to the changing world around them.

In terms of the story, obvious distinctions between the novels include an unreliable first person female narrator versus the all-knowing third person narration of a male protagonist's story, an alienated immigrant heroine instead of the son of an established if impoverished family as hero, as well as a milieu of struggling individuals, including recent immigrants, immersed in popular culture in contrast with elites focused primarily on commerce and wealth. These differences invite a closer look at the novels and the context in which they were produced in order to compare the two societies and their respective notions of *chilenidad*.

Across Spanish America, post-independence novels were frequently written by leading political thinkers and politicians as a vital component of nation-building efforts. Many were also intentionally didactic. Idealized characters and settings fictionalized an embryonic society in search of a distinct identity. Novels reflected nature and society as perceived or desired by the *criollos*, the educated white male descendants of Spanish colonizers. As industrialization, technology, and capitalism transformed life in Spanish America, narrative tended to represent either the new entrepreneurs and the bourgeoisie or rural life centred on the landowner.

In Chile, political essays such as Francisco Bilbao's *Sociabilidad chilena* (1844) and José Victorino Lastarria's *Investigaciones sobre la influencia social de la conquista del sistema colonial de los españoles en Chile* (1844) emphasized an embryonic Chilean character. Blest Gana is in some ways an unlikely father to the foundational novel. Born in Chile to an Irish father, he studied military engineering in France. His literary interests were overwhelmingly English (Dickens) and French (Balzac, Stendhal). After returning to Chile for a few years he spent most of his adult life abroad in diplomatic roles. On the other hand, his inaugural address

as professor of Chilean literature at the University of Santiago highlighted the civilizing mission of literature. He saw the need for a national novel that promoted notions along the lines of the Bilbao and Lastarria essays. Writers were to “llevar con escrupulosidad su tarea civilizadora” and provide “verdaderos servicios a la causa del progreso” while respecting morality (“Literatura chilena” 86, 91). In Blest Gana’s view, instead of producing unoriginal sentimental poetry for a limited public, Chilean authors should focus on “novelas de costumbres” that everyone could read for personal edification.

Blest Gana’s realist fiction reflected his desire to arouse national pride. His reputation and Chile’s early literary history rest on *La aritmética en el amor* (1860), along with *Martín Rivas* and *El ideal de una calavera* (1863). All three novels depict the economic, political, social and sentimental lives of Chile’s upper and middle classes. Blest Gana’s reputation as one of Chile’s earliest and greatest novelists rests largely on *Martín Rivas*. Its subtitle, “novela de costumbres político-sociales,” is quite explicit. First, it highlights contemporary customs rather than ideal projections of national character. Second, it reveals both the social and the political life of its hero and his entourage. From the outset, the social and the political are placed on an equal footing and intended to be inseparable. In this respect Blest Gana shares Skármeta’s goal of observing and translating reality into fiction. After first circulating in serial form, *Martín Rivas* became a standard text on the nation’s secondary school curriculum.

In the story, a respectable young man arrives in Santiago from northern Chile to study law and make his way in the world. He finds employment with a wealthy former business associate of his late father, a man who speculates in the mining sector. Martín falls in love with Leonor, the daughter of his employer, socializes with young liberal friends and becomes politically engaged. He appears to fail in both love and politics but ultimately marries Leonor.

His business roots are joined with her elite status and wealth in Santiago. Several other love stories that advance in parallel with the main plot meet with less felicitous outcomes or even death, in concert with political and social conflicts. In the end, Martín and the submissive Leonor form the ideal wealthy couple in an urban world.

Key aspects of this Chilean national romance differ significantly from other nationalist novels that Sommer examined in *Foundational Fictions*. In general, nation building romances unite young couples across race, class or geographical lines. In so doing they join the urban classes to their landholding counterparts while progress and modernity triumph over tradition and political differences. They forge a forward-looking spirit of national unity and a shared sense of identity. Even when the novels end without a happy marriage, they anticipate major social issues such as race and class questions.

With *Martín Rivas*, even though the desired love match ends in marriage, it is only the political differences within the elite itself that are reconciled. There is no question of matching urban and landholding families or *criollos* with *mestizos*, let alone with indigenous or immigrant characters, to form a new society. On the contrary, a privileged class consolidates its control of politics and society in the capital, even if internal rumblings between conservatives and liberals persist. In his introduction to a recent edition of the novel, Guillermo Araya argues that in Blest Gana's fiction money is everything, since "(s)ólo los protagonistas, muchas veces ejemplares respecto del dinero, son impermeables a su fuerte atractivo" (20). In *Martín Rivas*, every male other than the hero is indeed venal, obsessed with money or suffering from the lack of it. Although not driven solely by his own financial needs, Martín does realize that assets are needed to secure a good marriage. In the end he contributes his business sense to an established family by marrying upwards, unlike in *La chica del trombón* where considerations of money and status

hardly concern the protagonists. Martín's liberal political convictions ultimately take a back seat to his conjoined love and economic interests. In a sense, the novel confirms the general view that in Chile concern about market forces prevailed over issues such as social progress.

On the political front, *Martín Rivas* appears to combine the 1851 rebellion led by liberals in Santiago, later reinforced by peasants in the south, and the 1859 war in the north. It predates the 1879 War of the Pacific. According to Sommer, the novel ends at a juncture where consensus between conservative and liberal forces in the capital could be read into the marriage of Martín and Leonor (212-13). Just as love conquers all differences on the personal front, the defeated liberals were willing to work with the conservatives after they had overthrown their authoritarian leader. This selective portrayal of Chilean history safeguards the general perception that the nation had and would continue to benefit from a stable history of democratic government, unlike many of its restless neighbours. According to Sommer, this version helps "to embroider Chile's alleged historical continuity" (220). Blest Gana's novel, which consecrated the combination of love and patriotism in a harmonious and prosperous but strongly hierarchical society, became the model to which educated youth should aspire. Obviously, today it raises questions about a centralized nation where peace and progress relied on an economic model that disproportionately favoured the elites of Santiago, while national character or *chilenidad* was based on a presumption of military strength and *mestizaje* among the lower socio-economic levels.

How then does the Blest Gana novel fit with the history of Chile? It relates events leading up to the liberal-conservative elite coalition of 1850 that gave rise to Chile's longstanding reputation as a stable nation. But this stability was maintained at the expense of democracy. A small group controlled political life, mostly from Santiago. Before industrialization, less than ten percent of the male population had political citizenship, namely the right to choose its leaders.

By the late 1820s many urban artisans qualified to vote, at least constitutionally, but faced major constraints in trying to freely exercise their franchise. In addition, both the *criollo* elite and the artisans were divided internally in their allegiances between conservatives and liberals.

When the 1829-30 war ended in defeat for the liberals and constitutional government, the conservative government focused on restoring authoritarian measures and controls and reversing the move towards wider participation in governance. This is when the National Guard became a dominant symbol of nationhood. As Wood writes, in independence day celebrations “(t)he guardsmen’s re-enactment of the Chilean victory over Spain created a new type of social space in the city, a space that celebrated an inclusive sense of ‘chileanness’ while at the same time maintaining a rigid sense of social hierarchy” (90). Military celebrations in effect laid the groundwork for the construction of a disciplined social order that rested on hierarchy, masculinity, and a close association between the citizenry and the military. The obligation of free men to support the government in power both militarily and in elections blurred the lines between civilian and military roles (237).

Only in the 1840s was constitutional government restored, with a renewal of political ties between the liberal elite and the artisans, and the rise of a popular republican movement. However, the interests of these groups often came into conflict. The generation of 1842, the first generation of intellectuals born after independence, supported a popular republican movement but encountered opposition from the government and the church (152). In 1850 the situation reached a tipping point. The Society of Equality, a broad voluntary association that included elite families, liberals and students as well as artisans, called for “equal rights for all honorable men” (188). The political and religious powers in turn perceived the idea of equality as a threat to the stable hierarchical order they had managed to re-establish. In November 1850 the government

imposed a state of siege. With the defeat of the republican movement and progressive forces, the military and authoritarian version of *chilenidad* was firmly ensconced for generations to come.

*Martín Rivas* marks this centralization of the nation after 1850 and the rise of the Chilean bourgeoisie. Forty years later the fiction of Baldomero Lillo, who had observed firsthand the miserable lives of copper miners and their families, countered this limited national vision. The short stories of *Sub-terra* (1904) dwelt on the differences between the rich and the poor, foreign ownership and the inhumane exploitation of miners and child labour in stories that were “the first in Spanish-American literature to picture man as a victim of industrialisation” (Franco 181). Blest Gana and Lillo painted two radically different versions of Chile.

Few other fiction writers attempted the same type of broad social commentary in the ensuing decades. Until the middle of the twentieth century the *criollista* or regional novel of the land proliferated in Chile as it did elsewhere in the region. Critics continued to cite Blest Gana as the writer who had best captured the Chilean spirit. For some, this mantle passed to Skármeta in the late 1960s and 1970s. According to Juan Armando Epple, Skármeta’s first collection transported Chilean literature out of the comfortable bourgeois homes depicted by writers such as Eduardo Barrios and José Donoso and into the streets where the middle class lived (*Del cuerpo a las palabras* 111).

I submit that Skármeta modernizes the so-called social realist novel of Blest Gana in *La chica del trombón*. He revisits the notion of fusing marriage and family with politics and national identity in a new reading of a Chilean society facing a major transition. Blest Gana wrote about and for the small literate segment of society; Skármeta sought both a learned and a broad popular audience. In contrast with Blest Gana’s intent to create an exemplary national novel, Skármeta’s novel testifies to his commitment to “mirar los grandes acontecimientos de la historia desde

puntos de vista inusuales, y no desde la perspectiva de los personajes heroicos ni de los líderes intelectuales epopéyicos de la novela celebratoria” (Piña “Interview” 180). Each author trained his own distinctive lens on the social and political issues that shaped the nation.

As with *Blest Gana*, the political climate of the previous decades in Chile is a necessary prelude to the *Skármeta* novel. Chile’s political stability had continued throughout most of the twentieth century. Even though the deep-seated conservatism and elitism seen in *Blest Gana*’s fiction characterized the country’s democratic tradition, successive governments had attempted to respond to the growing pressures for broader participation and reform through the 1940s and 1950s. However, some factions sought restrictions on the vote and on democratic participation. In 1958, as we read in the novel, Salvador Allende’s socialist-communist coalition garnered almost a third of the presidential vote which conservative Jorge Alessandri won. In 1964, partly in response to Allende’s growing success, President Eduardo Frei Montalvo (1964-70) and the Christian Democratic government launched reforms that deepened the polarization. In 1970 Allende, in his fourth successive bid for the presidency, was legitimately though narrowly elected. With the support of Radomiro Tomić Romero, the Christian Democrat presidential candidate of paternal Croatian descent, Allende was able to form a coalition government, the *Unidad Popular*. Supporters at home and abroad imagined this government as a progressive and peaceful alternative to the Cuban Revolution, while the business and corporate sectors strongly opposed the proposed reforms. The 1973 military coup toppled the government.

In *La chica del trombón*, *Skármeta* recreates the divisive political climate from the 1940s up to the election of Allende, ending on the dawn of the Allende years just as the *Blest Gana* novel ends at a moment of hope before later uprisings. The political history of Chile depicted in the novel fictionalizes actual presidents and elections, and even mentions in passing

controversial figures such as Walter Rauf (165), a Nazi who lived in Chile from 1958 until his death in 1984 and whom Pinochet refused to extradite. The author also invents roles in Chilean history for “malicioso” characters such as boxer Oliver Tomic, an orphan whose father died at the infamous massacre at the school of Santa María de Iquique (144), and a “malicioso” from the original group of immigrants who lost his life during a recent strike (257).<sup>167</sup> Although politician Tomič Romero is not mentioned in the novel, boxer Tomic loses to an opponent who is aligned with Allende. In short, Skármeta finds ways to insert “maliciosos” into the working and political history as well as the literary imaginary of the nation.

Both Blest Gana and Skármeta adhere to the accepted versions of Chilean history to reconstruct two different periods of deep division and conclude with victories achieved through temporary alliances. In the first case, the distinguishing characteristic of Chile and *chilenidad* is a masculine culture of the urban elite that defends the *status quo*. Blest Gana does not represent the fusion of different worlds nor showcase the *mestizo* identity. A century later in the Skármeta version, a socially progressive and inclusive vision struggles against traditional *chilenidad*. The structured and ordered masculine world gives way to one where a politically-engaged female immigrant can put down roots with a hybrid family in an adopted nation. The two political visions are poles apart: the bourgeois world versus the hopes of ordinary citizens and the artistic community. Yet both capture a moment when the illusion of progress reigned.

Love, marriage and a sense of national belonging are at the core of the novels. In the end both family romances construct a socio-political vision of what it means to be Chilean. The Blest Gana novel is didactic in that only Martín and Leonor possess the necessary virtues to marry and

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<sup>167</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, on December 21, 1907, the Chilean Army, on orders from the government, shot at striking salpetre miners as well as their families and supporters assembled in the school of Santa María in Iquique in Chile’s far north. Over 2,000 individuals died. The strikers were seeking better working and living conditions from the English mine owners. Authorities covered up the massacre. Since 2007 Chile observes a national day of mourning.

prosper. In the *Skármeta* novel, Alia appears about to fail at uniting love and country if Pedro Pablo leaves for New York alone and she has an abortion. Just like Martín Rivas, she does succeed since Pedro Pablo stays and she bears the child. Alia and Pedro Pablo form the couple best suited to the future. But unlike what transpires in the *Blest Gana* novel, other family alliances also result. Jovana and Sepúlveda constitute a childless romantic union between a “maliciosa” woman and a Hispanic man. A less happy marriage unites two less educated people from Alia’s school days, but they love their children, even if one does not belong biologically to the husband. Different forms of family are welcomed on the verge of a new political era.

The earlier novel is limited in terms of scope and class representation while the second projects a future where plural voices interact. The outcomes are similar in that they reflect the political temper of their respective times, and join family and nation in a healing love match. On the other hand, neither novel projects a nation that includes the aboriginal or *mestizo* population, even though Alia specifically names a range of immigrant origins. The novels also have contradictory outcomes in that *Martín Rivas* is one-sided in adhering to the *status quo* while *La chica del trombón* projects both the idealism of the socialist dream and the looming challenges. Each novel revives the memory of a historic moment that could not be sustained. Beyond the scope of the *Skármeta* novel, the reformers of the 1960s and 1970s will be overturned just as their nineteenth century predecessors were.

Some critics have compared Skármeta’s first novel to *Martín Rivas*. *Soñé que la nieve ardía* (1975) focused on the period leading up to the 1973 military coup. Its title is taken from *¡Ay, ay, ay!*, a popular song by Chilean-born Osmán Pérez Freire subtitled *Reminiscencias cuyanas*. It continues “Soñé que el fuego se helaba/y por soñar imposibles/soñé que tú me querías.” After beginning with aspirations for the impossible, the verses move on to: “Mas mi

sueño se rompió/ como mi alma aquel día.” This is the heartbreaking course that the novel takes, the shattering of all hopes for love, success and social progress. In the main thread of the story, the young Arturo seeks fame as a soccer player and sexual experience while living in a boarding house inhabited mostly by Allende supporters. The novel begins with his trip to Santiago and ends with his return to the south after the coup, having lost both his physical and political virginity. Most of his housemates die as a result of the coup.

According to Rojo, *Soñé que la nieve ardía* was the first major novel about the Allende period, “el primer esfuerzo que se hace por recapitular, conjunta y literariamente, aquella poderosa experiencia” (“Una novela del proceso chileno” 48). For Rojo and Epple, it offered an updated socialist version of *Martín Rivas*. A generational consensus appears to have formed around this view as Skármeta accepted the suggestion, with some caveats. He viewed Arturo as an anti-hero, “un personaje adicto al machismo, al individualismo y al exitismo. Es una imagen fiel de un tipo de sociedad que Chile quiere, y que mira con desconfianza a ese bullicioso colectivo masivo que hay alrededor de él ... un antihéroe que resiste la idealización de un socialismo primitivo, lírico y retórico como el que el grupo le ofrece” (Lazzara “Interview” 247). Arturo, who defines himself as apolitical, is the opposite of his politically engaged housemates.

*Soñé que la nieve ardía* was written with the enthusiasm and the reversals of the 1970s still fresh in mind. According to Soledad Bianchi in an undated review for the *Revista de la UNAM*, one short passage best defines the novel. A non-resident named Antonio attends a social gathering at the boarding house. He is “el compañero escritor jurado en Casa de las Américas,” reminding the reader of Skármeta. Immediately after this phrase we read that “esa misma noche hablaron de que había que hacer talleres de creación en las poblaciones, que todo lo que iba pasando tenía que volver a pasar, recrearse y a reinventarse mil veces en la literatura, en cine, en

canciones” (*Soñé* 140). Bianchi concludes that this is the challenge that Skármeta tackled in his first novel: capturing the idealism of youth and the unstable climate in Chile before the coup.

That is the sole mention of a character named Antonio, an alter ego of the implied author.

In *La chica del trombón* Skármeta takes up the subject again. This time he recasts the period leading up to Allende’s election victory in more idealistic terms and from the perspective of a protagonist who shares more of his own student experience. *La chica del trombón* benefitted from distance and sober second thought. The protagonist’s optimistic outlook replaces the post-coup disillusion that overshadows both *El cartero de Neruda* and *Soñé que la nieve ardía*. The open ending links the pre- and post-dictatorship periods when freedom and democracy appear possible. For these reasons I suggest that *La chica del trombón* is a rewriting of Skármeta’s first novel, one that seeks to recapture and channel its idealism rather than the defeat that followed, thus more closely resembling *Martín Rivas*.

In addition to rewriting *Martín Rivas*, Skármeta incorporates major aspects of Chile’s literary tradition into *La chica del trombón*, especially the life and poetry of Gabriela Mistral. The poet plays a double role, having anachronistically enabled Esteban’s voyage to Chile as a consul in the first novel and then nourishing the cultural imaginary of key characters in the second novel. Even though the poet was never identified except as a Chilean consul in *La boda del poeta*, her name appears twice in Esteban’s personal archives. In the narrative present, Mistral is a thread linking several characters that refer to her life and her verses. Alia implicitly compares childhood re-enactments of movie scenes to the future projected in a poem from *Tala*: “Una poeta chilena acababa de escribir: ‘Todas íbamos a ser reinas.’ Nosotros, todos, íbamos a ser artistas de cine” (79). In his letter to Alia, Pedro Pablo writes that he is sitting near the house where Mistral was born. People in the area are familiar with her poems and know about her

Nobel Prize even though, from his perspective, she is “como extranjera y antigua para escribir” (156). He then quotes several verses beginning with “Ahora Cristo, bájame los párpados,” the opening lines from “Éxtasis,” a poem in *Desolación* (1922), as a prelude to confiding that his mother has died (157). Echoing Alia’s reference to the Mistral poem about being royalty, he goes on to assure her that “Seguro si vas a visitarla te trata como reina” (157). Pedro Pablo’s letter adds a number of details about Mistral: that her “novio” committed suicide, that she lives in New York, and that she wrote “Los sonetos de la muerte” (158). Thus, Mistral’s life and work influence the characters, incorporating the Chilean literary tradition into their sensibilities and sense of self.

However, it is the “malicioso” journalists now in Chile who make the direct connection between the poet and the Gabriela Mistral mentioned in Esteban’s documents. Pavlovic writes about “un pasaporte colectivo que les extendiera una cónsul poeta cuyos versos aprecio mucho más que los de don Picaflor Parra” (257), a critical reference to poet Nicanor Parra in keeping with the journalist’s conservative character. Gómez Stark names Mistral in his lengthy account of her funeral written for the *New York Times*. He is in Santiago on January 21, the eve of the funeral for “la poeta Gabriela Mistral, una dama que conocí en la pre-historia improvisando visas y pasaportes como cónsul en Italia y que ha tenido la indelicadeza de morirse hace unos días en New York” (181).<sup>168</sup> Gómez Stark has come to love the poet just as have the teachers who know the verses of “piecitos de niños,” another nod to *La boda del poeta* and who “hoy celebran a la difunta como una santa madre tierna y universal” (182). He then pays homage to Mistral by quoting verses from “Íntima” (*Desolación*): “Tú no oprimas mis manos: llegará el duradero

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<sup>168</sup> Mistral died in New York on January 10, 1957. Gómez Stark comments on opportunistic Chilean officials who “deciden traer el cadáver de la poeta a Santiago envuelta en la bandera chilena, y sacarle otra vez dividendos políticos al Premio Nobel de Literatura” (181). On another note, Skármeta’s short story “Una vuelta en el aire” had dealt with Mistral’s life and death in New York from the perspective of an aspiring writer.

tiempo de reposar con mucho polvo y sombra en los entretejidos dedos” (184). The two journalists declare their admiration for Mistral and their awareness of her creation of the collective passport.<sup>169</sup>

To echo Gómez Stark, in this novel Mistral is both poet and maternal figure, helping shape the identity of two motherless characters, Alia and Pedro Pablo, and the literary imagination of Chile. The connection between Pedro Pablo and Mistral as artists is made explicit when the young man later packs for his theatre studies in New York: “En la valija azul ... ha puesto *Lagar, Tala y Desolación* de la Mistral, más *Residencia en la tierra* de Neruda. Insiste en *Hijo de ladrón*. Aparta *El cielo cae con las hojas y Ángeles y gorriones* de Jorge Teillier. Se suman los dramas completos de García Lorca y *Deja que los perros ladren* de Vodanovic” (276). In other words, the tradition that includes both internationally acclaimed writers and Chileans such as Manuel Rojas (*Hijo de ladrón*) and Sergio Vodanovic will carry on with Pedro Pablo.<sup>170</sup>

The Chilean literary canon from *Martín Rivas* to Gabriela Mistral and beyond lives on through *La chica del trombón*. Skármeta’s novel diversifies the homogenous version of *chilenidad* found in *Martín Rivas* as well as the later images of the *roto* and the *huaso*. He folds mentions of “maliciosos,” Dalmatians and Croatians into the literary world’s depiction of what constitutes *chilenidad*. For example, he refers to “maliciosos” killed in Chile, inserts Croatian surnames, and mentions playwrights like Vodanovic among those that Pedro Pablo appreciates.

Despite the loss of language and customs combined with migration to major urban centres and intermarriage, Alia is portrayed as wanting and needing to preserve her ethnic

<sup>169</sup> The journalists also mirror Esteban and Reino: one living in Antofagasta and one in New York.

<sup>170</sup> Skármeta’s propensity to invoke the literary tradition is evident throughout the novel. Alia’s school agenda refers to “poemas acerca del Roto Chileno” (42) then she begins to read voraciously as a hospitalized child. Chilean writers Enrique Araya and Eduardo Barrios are mixed in with authors such as Pearl Buck and John Steinbeck. The list includes the Barrios novel *El niño que enloqueció de amor* (1915), which offers parallels to the protagonist’s story: an unknown father, love of an unattainable person, and advice to write a secret diary.

heritage as well as integrate it into Chile's broader social fabric through her son. Her memory of her grandfather is of a poor immigrant who spoke with an accent. On Sundays he wore clean starched shirts, a tie, a pocket scarf, and a light smile. He read, took good care of his books, listened to music, enjoyed going to the movies, and bought her ice cream. In short, "era pobre pero no mediocre" (64). His background and the tragedy of his life are to be remembered.

Through the "malicioso" characters Skármeta advances a broader foundation for Chile, a heterogeneous identity that is more open to the world and more inclusive of women, ethnic diversity and social difference than was normally conveyed in either national history or fiction. By projecting this diversity onto the nation, it becomes part of the public imagination, while anchoring the "malicioso" and Dalmatian communities in literature. In this way, Skármeta's novel exemplifies philosopher Charles Taylor's view that "(a)rtistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition" (*Ethics* 62). Both the protagonist and the author have been on a voyage of self-discovery involving recovery and creation that is now extended to the whole of the nation.

I conclude that Skármeta reinterprets the traditional family romance using recent subject matter and postmodern literary techniques. By reclaiming his ethnic heritage simultaneously within Chile's historical context and its literary tradition he broadens the portrayal of what it means to be Chilean. The family romance that ends in 1970 with optimism for the future can be read in relation to the past and the present. *Martín Rivas* symbolizes and preserves a defining period in the construction of the nation's identity. *La chica del trombón* reinvents that identity a century later. Since its writing and publication coincided with Chile's transition to democracy in the 1990s, it fits into the national debate about remembering or forgetting the trauma of the dictatorship and the need for redefinition in the global era.

## Conclusions

This investigation centred on the emergence of ethnicity in two of Antonio Skármeta's mid-life novels, *La boda del poeta* (1999) and *La chica del trombón* (2001). It examined how, on his return to Chile, the author—whose exile had altered his sense of identity—gravitated towards creating immigrant protagonists, thereby reclaiming and anchoring his Dalmatian origins within the Spanish American literary tradition of foundational novels, historical fiction and family romance. It also analyzed how his specific genealogical roots were embedded within Chile's imaginary as a way of engaging in a critical dialogue with established notions of identity.

In terms of methodology, I began by studying the context and evolution of identity discourses in Chile. Post-independence historical and literary discourses stressed nation-building and Chilean exceptionalism. Chileans were portrayed as either *criollo* or *criollo-araucano mestizo*, although Northern European immigrants were often integrated into the ranks of the elite and *gente decente*. I then contrasted traditional discourses about preserving *chilenidad* and about national character typologies with the depiction of immigrants from non-Hispanic nations as well as actual immigration numbers. As part of this research, I emphasized the arrival and settlement of the Dalmatian/Croatian community to which Skármeta belongs. I also stressed that traditional views and discourses on national identity and character are at odds with those of several current Chilean thinkers who argue in favour of embracing greater diversity.

My exposition of identity discourses culminated in a discussion of theories of collective and communicative memory, especially immigrant/ethnic memory, in concert with the traumatic effects of loss and nostalgia for the homeland on identity construction. I drew specifically on theories associated with the role of memory in the development of a sense of self and a sense of belonging. A broad framework of notions of constructed identity, *travail de mémoire, lieu de*

*mémoire*, and the obligation to remember specific pasts in an increasingly interactive world was set for the study of the novels. Finally, the notion of authenticity as key to individual identity and the recognition of diversity led to proposing an expanded notion of *chilenidad*.

In narrowing my focus to literary discourses, I found, not unexpectedly, that the tendencies inherent in foundational discourses were mirrored in literature. A review of the literary canon confirmed that minority immigrant characters were seldom represented and that, when they were, it was rarely as protagonists or in a positive light. In addition, immigrant memoirs, biographies or fictionalized histories tended not to be widely known or analyzed. Since writing about immigrant origins and settlement lacked a recognizable place in the nation's literary tradition, the immigrant role in the construction of the nation was not recognized in the community imagined in literature.

Given this evidence, I expanded my research to identify authors with minority ethnic backgrounds as well as literary analyses related to ethnicity. I established that writers from such backgrounds usually expressed themselves in traditional Spanish American genres. Second and third generation authors assimilated into the mainstream, writing about Chile without connection to the world beyond its borders or reference to their foreign origins. Meanwhile, literary critics had not devoted much space to immigrant or ethnic writing, in contrast with the rise of this type of narrative and its analysis in other major immigrant-receiving nations, especially those of North America. However, over the last decade Rodrigo Cánovas and Jorge Scherman have focused on writing by and about the Jewish and Arab communities. In addition to discerning a modest critical interest in narratives specifically related to Chile's Arab population, I found that Paulina Barrenechea Vergara had published several articles on fiction and non-fiction by and about the very small African-descended community in Chile. In assessing this limited study of

narratives of ethnicity, I observed that the presence of the Dalmatian/Croatian community in literature had not yet been explored. In particular, almost two decades after the publication of Skármeta's novels, neither one had been analyzed from an ethnic perspective.

As a result, my focus was primarily on how *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* were constructed as narratives of ethnicity within established Spanish American literary genres, as well as within Chilean and Western literary traditions. I studied how the author adapted the historical novel and the family romance to anchor his ethnic origins within his literary tradition. Since the tongue-in-cheek creation of "malicioso" characters enabled Skármeta to encompass both the Dalmatian immigrants specifically and, more generally, all "other" immigrants to Chile, I proceeded to demonstrate that the two narratives rewrote Chile's discourses of identity in response to an increasingly consolidating world.

Nonetheless, I also read the novels within their historical context in order to understand why Skármeta might have deviated from an earlier literary vision that concentrated primarily on young contemporary male characters. Although there are many studies of fiction produced in and about exile, writing by and about returned exiles is a relatively unexplored domain in Spanish America. In Chile the best-known example of a novel that did receive critical attention is *El sueño de la historia* (2000) by Jorge Edwards, a well-known Chilean author and diplomat. Published around the same time as the Skármeta novels, it tackled this post-exile questioning of individual and national identity. However, it does not have the additional complexity of an author or contemporary protagonists with minority immigrant roots.

Since the Skármeta novels were published more than a decade after the 1988 plebiscite campaign that defeated General Augusto Pinochet in his final bid to remain in power, I was interested in how they related to the overall process of re-integration of returned exiles during the

transition from dictatorship to democracy, with its evolving intellectual and literary discourses of identity. Many influential figures had returned with new visions and expectations just as immigrants had carried their aspirations to Chile's shores a century earlier. A number of them also played prominent roles in rebuilding a democratic state.

As part of the transition, the first government stressed the need for immediate national reconciliation. The official stance was that the dictatorship years and the associated trauma should be forgotten in order for the nation to unite and move forward. Meanwhile, Pinochet and several of his close collaborators retained their power and visibility as senators for life, making it impossible to overlook their history. On the other end of the spectrum stood those who argued that the past must be remembered and that impunity for those responsible for the atrocities that had been committed was not the best path to the future. In this divisive environment, the need for truth, mourning and healing was initially overridden. In addition, the decades that had preceded the military coup, including the Allende era, were largely eclipsed.

Skármeta had already explored this period in his fiction. In exile, he had traced the optimism of the left in the early 1970s and the bleak period that began with the 1973 military coup in *Soñé que la nieve ardía* (1975), *No pasó nada* (1980) and *Ardiente paciencia/El cartero de Neruda* (1985), as well as in several short stories. This fiction reflected his progressive socio-political position, through the voices of male characters of his generation who were usually Chilean, or, in the case of *La Insurrección* (1982), Nicaraguan. As Skármeta's time in exile lengthened, his alienation had ceded to a sense of being part of German life. *Matchball* (1989), a transition novel about a love triangle in Germany involving non-Chilean characters, could be set anywhere. Its external Chilean narrator, who introduces the American protagonist only very briefly, never re-appears. In effect, little in the author's narrative trajectory seemed to predispose

him on his return towards fictionalizing his roots through the invention of Dalmatians disguised as “maliciosos.”

Nevertheless, exile can intensify the memory of, and nostalgia for family and other close connections. The time that Skármeta spent as a child with his grandparents and among Antofagasta’s Dalmatians contributed to shaping his identity as belonging to a family line and a community, generating a sense of thick relations, to borrow Margalit’s term (7). Close family connections remained in the background as the author’s Chilean identity came to the fore, first through his activism in Chile and second, in solidarity with his compatriots during his exile. Conversely, Berlin provided Skármeta with the proximity and the opportunity to explore Dalmatia, including the island of Brač. Travelling in the Balkans undoubtedly strengthened his awareness of his grandparents’ origins and his attachment to previous generations, nurturing a perceived obligation or duty to remember his roots. This experience triggered a processing of what he had been told, had recollected or had imagined, an exercise which Freud and Ricoeur describe as a *travail de mémoire*.

In Chile, like many other returned exiles who had rebuilt their identity in exile, Skármeta was forced to adapt anew, this time to a dramatically changed nation. Moreover, he was no longer the exile working to defeat the military regime. Nor was he, at almost fifty, the young man who had fled Chile just as his writing was gaining wider recognition. His life experience, his awareness of his ethnic roots, his years of exile, and his growing sense of integration abroad had added new facets to his sense of who he was. Inevitably, he looked on his country and his place in it with different eyes and expectations.

In Santiago, Skármeta first re-established himself in the public sphere through well-received initiatives such as the weekly television program *El show de los libros*. While other

authors grappled with the trauma of the recent past, his writing took on a different complexion. Instead of resuming the pattern of telling contemporary tales, his first two post-exile novels reclaimed his foreign roots. He translated into fiction a duty or a compulsion to remember a rekindled family history, reconstructing his identity in the process. His fictional treatment of non-Hispanic immigration to Chile, alienation, and the slow and difficult process of integration all point to the recognition of origins as well as the construction of a more complex and nuanced personal identity.

Indeed, the “maliciosos” in the novels hail from a fictional island that can be read as Dalmatia from the geographical and historical references. At the same time, the figures are generic in that they are not shown to possess particular traits that belie their origins. Readers become familiar with the geographical and historical origins of Chile’s Dalmatian community without perceiving them as belonging to a completely foreign world since the texts are constructed within the Chilean literary tradition. The same can be said about the identity of the author who claims his ethnic roots as part of his identity without ascribing any differentiating traits to them. At the same time the “maliciosos” are double-coded both as Dalmatians and as generic immigrants.

In reconstructing the immigrant experience, Skármeta repurposed two major Spanish American genres: the historical novel and the family romance. My review of the development of the historical novel in Chile led to concluding that *La boda del poeta* rewrote the genre as historiographic metafiction in order to inscribe Dalmatian and other waves of immigration into the Chilean literary imaginary. Unlike the traditional historical novel which strives to capture the truth of the past, the novel invokes a foreign past that cannot be truly grasped in the present. A

comparison to Alberto Blest Gana's historical novel *Durante la reconquista* brought to light the rewriting with parody and intertextuality that plays with conventional notions of historical truth.

Furthermore, my analysis of *La chica del trombón* confirmed it as a rewriting of the family romance that grafts immigrant roots onto the Chilean genealogical tree. The novel combines an out-of-reach immigrant past with the depiction of life in Chile from the 1940s to the 1970 election of Allende. By repositioning the point of view from young males to a female protagonist of obscure origins combined with creative aspirations, Skármeta reformulates the Spanish American family romance in which female characters play a determining role in building the nation, metaphorically uniting family to nation. He builds on the genre by rewriting Blest Gana's foundational novel *Martín Rivas* through both form and story.

Two generations after the male "maliciosos" sailed, a single "maliciosa" struggles to define herself in Chile. By "working through" the loss of family and homeland in writing the protagonist finally reconciles her foreign roots with her growing attachment to, and identification with Chile. In contrast with the dystopian ending of *La boda del poeta*, her love story unites family and nation, although in a different configuration than the traditional resolution seen in *Martín Rivas*. Her *travail de mémoire* is a way of processing both the aspirations and the divisions reflected in the novel, in order to achieve family formation and a shared national future.

In keeping with Doris Sommer's argument that foundational novels present love matches as allegories for the construction of the nation, Skármeta reworks these allegories to suit contemporary circumstances. The story maintains the shifting instability in political and personal circumstances that must eventually be resolved jointly if nation and family are to progress in tandem. At the same time, the instability is mirrored through the narrator's writing and rewriting of her search for identity in the past rather than looking to the future.

In effect, the two Skármeta novels tackle defining moments in the building of the nation: first, the late nineteenth century waves of European immigration, and second, the global pressures for socio-economic and political change in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the numbers of non-traditional immigrants to Chile were relatively small in comparison to neighbouring countries like Argentina, they aroused suspicion and a backlash that was reflected in social and literary discourses a century ago. Fifty years later it was not the arrival of immigrants but of ideas about rethinking and rebuilding society that challenged Chilean identity discourses. By re-imagining these two moments, *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* insert the issues of openness, immigration, progress and plurality into identity discourse at another critical juncture in Chile. In the 1990s the nation was rethinking itself as the returned exiles were contributing to the remaking of the imagined community. The arrival of the novels' immigrant protagonists operates in parallel with the return of exiles to a changed, and therefore unfamiliar, national landscape. Both groups observe the nation with different eyes than the majority. Each contributes other experiences and sensibilities to Chile's future, while seeking to be accepted and recognized without burying or denying their pasts. In both instances public response plays a decisive role in their future.

While Skármeta's shift in narrative orientation intimates a re-alignment of his identity, autobiographical details and intratextual references had always linked him closely to his characters. In these novels he "works through" his family origins in Dalmatia and pre-exile life in Chile, blending family and Chilean history into a long view of the past that begins with the arrival of the "maliciosos" in Antofagasta. Post-exile, Skármeta re-introduces himself to Chile by exposing his roots and his cultural influences. In other words, he affirmed what mattered to him, as he worked to define himself anew against the dominant ethos.

Even if the “maliciosos” of *La boda del poeta* land in Chile only in the concluding paragraphs, knowing almost nothing about it, the novel is told from the perspective of the contemporary Chilean narrator who reflects the author’s experience of exile and return. *La chica del trombón* in turn relates an immigrant story that emphasizes the difficulty in adapting to changed circumstances and the search for roots. Both novels highlight “malicioso” and Chilean history through the eyes of Skármeta’s generation. They avoid the realistic retelling of journeys or preservation of traditional stories and myths. Instead they shape and preserve an ethnic or immigrant memory of oppression and roots within the imaginary of Chile, especially through repeated references connecting them to Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda. Chileanization does not eradicate ethnic memory. Ethnicity is reinvented through a genealogical and emotional attachment rather than the conservation of concrete traditions and rituals. In other words, it shows a resemblance to the type of ethnic affiliation found in North America and its literature, which I explored in the second chapter.

The contrast between the immigrant focus of these novels and the brief mentions of ethnicity found in the young Skármeta’s short stories, as well as the absence of any ethnic references in his writing while in exile, indicate a significant repositioning in his narrative trajectory. This “working through” an immigrant past becomes a way of constructing the self, the nation and one’s place in it. The incorporation of the contribution of immigrants from outside Western Europe into the social and intellectual constructs of the nation challenges the older discourses on *chilenidad* with their iconic *roto chileno* and *huaso* images, and the expectation of socio-cultural assimilation. It plays against the notion of types that emerged when there was a strong belief in the existence of a discernible national essence or character as well as against conservative calls to reinstate old values.

Skármeta seems fully conscious that he is redefining *chilenidad*. As he explained during my interview he wanted to focus on the question of European immigration to Spanish America.

The two novels explore

muy fuertemente el tema de la inmigración de Europa a América Latina, de buscar en los ancestros una respuesta a la vulnerabilidad, a la fragilidad del mundo, al mestizismo que es América Latina, a la mezcla, a lo heterogéneo. Estos entes que vienen de una plenitud natural, que pierden todo por una catástrofe y que se sienten en un nuevo mundo sin ser ellos parte de este mundo, o sea abandonar un mundo que ya no les pertenece y están en un mundo que todavía no conquistan. ... Ahora éste no es un tema nuevo en mi vida. Yo te recomiendo que prestes atención a lo que podría ser teóricamente mi primer cuento, “La Cenicienta en San Francisco”. ... Y entonces mi tema en *La boda del poeta* y *La chica del trombón* es ver eso, de dónde y cómo esas raíces cortadas han tenido que arreglárselas dramáticamente en una nueva costura. (325)

The author made the connection between “La Cenicienta en San Francisco” and the theme of immigrant roots and memory as a thread throughout his narrative. His words “en mi vida” rather than “en mi obra” confirm my hypothesis that his narrative reflects his evolving sense of identity. What had been a recognition of his grandparents’ roots in “La Cenicienta” is now integrated into his claimed identity.

At the same time, Skármeta was adamant that he would never write a traditional historical novel because of its specific demands on the writer:

una cosa que no me gusta de la novela histórica es la responsabilidad que marca al escritor para ser fiel a la realidad que lo vigila. Me gusta

justamente en la literatura todo aquello que distorsiona la realidad para poder crear un mundo propio, para pegar el mundo. El mundo puede ser una fuente de inspiración pero no puede la literatura servir a la realidad. No es eso el rol de la literatura. Lo que sucede, mi intención al escribir estas obras es desbordar mi infinidad, mis ansias de comprender quien soy, mirando el mundo contemporáneo en que estoy viviendo y el mundo contemporáneo incluye un dato muy fuerte, está hecho de inmigrantes, de fusiones, de intervenciones, en realidades distintas. Y eso era América Latina. (325)

While Skármeta does not use expressions like historiographic metafiction, he obviously understands distortion and irony as meaningful ways of portraying the challenges of immigration, settlement and the plural nature of identity.

The author was also aware of being innovative since his creation “consistía en algo así como *latinoamericanizar* la historia europea con una novela que es una novela que se desarrolla en Europa pero desde la experiencia de un autor latinoamericano. ... Es un intento que podríamos llamar incluso un poco paródico de conquistar o de intervenir el pasado europeo desde una perspectiva marginal” (326). In my view, an important aspect of this innovation is that it interprets the past from a Chilean point of view and sensibility, making it meaningful to the descendants of the immigrants and to Chileans generally.

Through the outside narrator of *La boda del poeta* and the self-fashioning of the female protagonist of *La chica del trombón* in particular, Skármeta undermines and rewrites the constructed nature of the nation’s essentialist discourses on identity and its authenticity. Rather than a fact-driven retelling of historic events, the external narrator of the first novel is completely

open about writing a fiction about his grandfather's generation. Having inherited the playfulness of the original "maliciosos," he inscribes their story into Chile's present in a postmodern way since the only way to make sense of the past is by incorporating it into familiar discourses.

The use of ambiguity, caricature, and irony is not a critical questioning of the "malicioso" past but of Chile's attitude towards it. This approach contains just enough history for Dalmatian descendants in Chile to recognize their origins. Their allegiance is not to specific details of the past but to the values and the spirit that drove their forebears, the quest for freedom with its parallels in Chile. While Skármeta has created a *lieu de mémoire* that inscribes immigrants into Chilean memory and discourse, the invention of a common "malicioso" history and the profusion of intertexts signal that this is a fiction built on other fictions rather than on historical fact. Without direct knowledge of the past, there exists only the potential to pay tribute to it through the historiographic metafiction which ties it to the present. Skármeta's art binds the newcomers and their progeny to Chile through cultural references, especially the figure of the consul who mirrors Mistral, while expanding the notion of Chilean identity.

This postmodern recreation of the past echoes the prologue to the first Spanish American historical novel, *Soledad* (1847), in which Bartolomé Mitre highlighted the need to know the past and, if it was not known, to imagine it in novels. Since the immigrant novel is necessarily a memory narrative, the lack of knowledge of a foreign past means it must be recreated rather than recovered. To reformulate Boym's terminology, the focus on creation rather than recovery serves as evidence of a reflective rather than a restorative nostalgia. Furthermore, the irony and humour that she highlights as potential elements of this reflective nostalgia are amply evident in Skármeta's fiction.

Under these circumstances, the author is free to create a version of the past built on his own reflections rather than seeking to accurately restore the past. Although the Dalmatian immigrants had their version of the journey to the new land, Skármeta and future generations will remake the story to support their own individual and group understanding of themselves and the world. The story will evolve, fitting traces of events to the present. As *La boda del poeta* illustrates, immigrant history lends itself well to historiographic metafiction. While the Dalmatian story is taken to fictional extremes through the “maliciosos,” the novel nonetheless affirms an ethnic past that Skármeta himself has claimed as part of his identity. Even Alia in *La chica del trombón* admits that she must remember what she never knew and will never know about her origins. In short, Mitre’s advice has been revived in new and unexpected iterations. From Lukács to Hutcheon, the historical novel retains its role of presenting history as conditioning the present, when read in and reconstructed in relation to the present. But reciprocally the present necessarily conditions the reading of the past.

As part of this postmodern reading I also categorized the two novels as *lieux de mémoire*, interpreting Pierre Nora’s term in a positive way. Since it is impossible for immigrants to point to either a *milieu* or a *lieu de mémoire* where historical events occurred, physical sites in an adopted nation and country, such as cultural centres, provide an institution or a gathering place separate from the dominant culture. However, cultural or community centres where memory can be preserved or communicated do not substitute for actual sites of memory where historic events took place or are commemorated. Immigrants make their own history and create new sites of memory that transform the original history. Such sites tend to be aimed at the ethnic community. On the other hand, a novel written in the national language of the new nation and read as a *lieu de mémoire* is a tangible artefact that constitutes an imaginary and permanent place of memory

that is available to the nation as a whole. It invites readers to enter the world of immigrants and their successors by “working through” ethnic memory as a critical component in identity construction in the interests of reconciling immigrant origins within Chile’s broader intellectual discourses. Indeed, according to Vautier, postcolonial fiction can focus on the contradictions and complexities of *la mémoire identitaire* (408).

In rewriting two major literary genres, Skármeta appropriated not only their form but also their purpose, namely imagining the nation through literature. In analyzing what propelled him to write novels that layer the “malicioso” heritage onto Chilean discourses of identity I ascribed his new direction to a need to be, and to be recognized as, “authentic,” along the lines that philosopher Charles Taylor has developed. I further maintained that Skármeta’s novels adhere to this notion of authenticity, meaning being true to oneself and being free to find design in one’s life (“Ethics” 67-68). In his narratives of ethnicity Skármeta seeks recognition in order to bridge the distance between his self-awareness, including his roots, and national discourses of identity. He exemplifies Taylor’s judgment that “artistic creation is a significant pathway to self-definition” (62). In fact, by insisting in separate 2011 interviews with Pedro Escribano and Teresa Peces that artists and works of the imagination can produce social change that reaches beyond the individual, Skármeta was recognizing that they do change the individual.

More broadly, I argued that the novels promote a politics of recognition of diversity and plurality in a nation whose strong tradition of assimilation and homogeneity continues to be reflected in national perspectives, for example in surveys on racial identification. They call for an acknowledgment of difference as the foundation of a cosmopolitan society. They also suggest

that recognizing difference and valuing diversity in both the political and literary worlds lead to greater social cohesion than the traditional discourses of uniformity.<sup>171</sup>

In her introduction to Taylor's work on multiculturalism, Amy Gutman summarizes what I have described at work in Skármeta's novels. She writes: "Part of the uniqueness of individuals results from the ways they integrate, reflect upon, and modify their own cultural heritage and that of other people with whom they come into contact" (7). For Skármeta, reflecting on his heritage after his exile meant widening the traditional Chilean lens of *chilenidad* to encompass a past in Eastern and Central Europe. He countered identity discourses of homogeneity and assimilation that failed to take into account that Chile is built on many different nationalities. As Pizarro says of the returned exile, he observes Chile "desde fuera de él, con la distancia que anula al patriotismo vulgar y permite iniciar la crítica, develar los mitos" (110).

Coming to terms with that diversity does matter in a world experiencing massive migrations and globalization. Skármeta's perspective challenges the traditional notions of identity reflected in iconic typologies such as the *roto* and the *huaso*. In fact, the juxtaposition of the novels with historical assessments underscores the movement away from a homogeneous national image towards difference and ethnic/individual affirmation.

After asserting his identity through fiction, Skármeta returned to the depiction of the contemporary world. Overlooking the years he lived outside the country, he turned his attention to the post-dictatorship period of the 1990s with *El baile de la Victoria* (2003), inventing a father figure named Vergara Grey and young protagonists shaped by the military regime. The

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<sup>171</sup> Michael Ignatieff has argued that "(t)he fundamental problem facing humanity is political: how to create stable political order among people of different religions, cultures and economic classes. As long as states can cohere as viable political communities, their problems can be managed. But if they cannot maintain order and freedom, they cannot solve any of them" (viii). The balance between order and freedom requires the recognition of individual and collective rights, the balancing of all legitimate interests. Skármeta's two novels of ethnicity tackle this basic issue.

transformation of Santiago disorients the older man who has just been released from prison. He does not feel “at home” in the fast-paced, unrecognizable, consumer-driven and unfriendly capital city. This repetition of the idea of the outsider—whether immigrant, returned exile or released prisoner—appraising Chile from a new perspective suggests that Skármeta continued to question himself in relation to the directions and discourses of the nation even as he returned to locating his narrative in the present. He also “worked through” the 1988 referendum in *Los días del arco iris* (2010) and his unpublished play *El Plebiscito*, the source text for the Pablo Larraín movie *No*. All three texts underscore his return to a literary vision of reflecting the contemporary world. Most recently, *Libertad de movimiento* (2015) brings together eleven short stories written over a long period of time. All of them present unsettled and uprooted characters, whether fleeing Chile or living elsewhere, and communicate a sense of life as precarious and unstable. The title of the new collection, as well as the stories themselves, underline an awareness of the wider world as part of Chilean identity.

Skármeta is one of the few prominent writers in Chile to have taken a temporary step back to non-Hispanic or *mestizo* origins, and he did so at mid-life as a returned exile. An appetite for recognition of other roots within the actual and the imagined community has been slow to emerge in Chile, in keeping with the enduring hegemonic discourses of *chilenidad*. The lack of scholarly interest in the two novels and especially in their ethnic dimension indicates that the subject still does not hold much appeal. By continuing to introduce immigrants and other foreign characters in his recent fiction, Skármeta is effectively redefining notions of *chilenidad* by highlighting the need for social cohesion and the integration of immigrants and their memories into the public and intellectual spheres rather than assimilation. The stories may mirror, however

unexpectedly, national efforts to emulate highly globalized democracies that recognize and welcome minorities as fundamental to the fabric of the nation.

Taking my conclusions into account, *La boda del poeta* and *La chica del trombón* offer a number of avenues for future study beyond the realm of immigrant memory and identity discourses. I divide these prospects between questions related specifically to Skármeta's body of fiction, and secondly, the place of narratives of ethnicity in Chile's identity discourses. With respect to the novels themselves, the first hurdle remains the lack of critical studies. The texts are highly sophisticated literary artefacts with prolific references, either direct or indirect, to both high and popular Western, Hispanic and Chilean cultures. Both require well informed readers to decode the abundance of cultural and historical allusions. In addition, many of the intertexts, especially in *La chica del trombón*, relate to mass culture which is often ephemeral or generational, making the texts ever more difficult to read as time passes.

Moreover, Skármeta had envisaged a trilogy, with a final volume set in New York. Many questions remain unanswered in the novels and the contradictions might have been resolved in a third volume. On the other hand, Boelhower's characterization of the ethnic trilogy as a continuum that shifts the perspective from one world to another through three stages describes the two published volumes. For Boelhower, the first stage is one of construction through the journey to the new world (a utopian *vouloir-faire*). In the second stage of deconstruction (*pouvoir-faire*), as the parents die the ethnic world loses authority while the new world disenchant the second generation. The third stage is one of reconstruction and coherence (*savoir-faire*). From this perspective, writing questions the world of the fathers and reinterprets tradition while the present is enriched through ethnicity. By the final stage the descendants reinterpret history based on their inheritance ("Ethnic trilogy" 160-75).

Unlike the classic immigrant trilogy, the second generation is completely absent from the two Skármeta novels. This gap is inevitable since the first generation had no descendants in Chile and it is an alleged grandchild who arrives unbidden in Antofagasta from Europe decades later. On the other hand, the novels progress through all three of the stages proposed by Boelhower. The second stage is recounted in the first part of *La chica del trombón* with the death of the grandfather and the granddaughter's mourning and search for identity. Indeed, there is no need for a third volume since the final stage of interpreting history based on ethnic and cultural inheritance has been reached. The immigrant saga is complete, with the three phases presented in two physical tomes, and the Skármeta goals of *convivencia* and *plenitud* fully realized for a moment.

Given my reading of the novels as narratives of ethnicity and the multiplication of stories that deal with Spanish Americans in the United States, a comparison of *La chica del trombón* with another recent immigrant novel could well yield useful insights. I find that Skármeta's text coincides with Caroline Rody's notion of the novel as an adaptable form that can deviate from the traditional vision of the nation to a multiethnic or interethnic depiction (9). In this way the Skármeta novel resembles the evolving North American narrative of ethnicity. Its similarities to *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Dominican-American Junot Díaz in terms of the multi-generational aspects of immigration, the use of popular cultural artefacts to define characters mingled with more traditional intertexts, and, the focus on writing as an on-going process shared by the narrators, immediately comes to mind as a subject for future investigation.

Finally, more study of the representation of immigration and ethnicity in Chilean fiction would be productive in terms of Chile's identity discourses and positioning at home and in the world through its literature. As recent immigration, particularly from the Caribbean, changes the

complexion of the nation and of Santiago in particular, it will be interesting to observe whether the presence of Peruvians, Bolivians and Caribbean newcomers is reflected in national and literary discourses in ways that reflect Taylor's politics of recognition and the plurality of cosmopolitanism. It is worth noting that Michael Goebel in his introduction to *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America* insists on the need to move away from the dichotomy between migration studies found in sociology and theories of nationalism located in disciplines such as history and political science and towards more nuanced interpretations. He laments that, in terms of studies of immigration and the construction of national identity, there continues to be a "dearth of historical scholarship on Latin America" (6) in comparison to other regions of the world.<sup>172</sup> I extend his plea to the study of Chilean literature in terms of its depiction of ethnicities and immigrants in historical and contemporary identity discourses.

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<sup>172</sup> In terms of studying the relationship between nationalism and immigration/ethnicity in the Southern Cone, Jeffrey Lesser has focused on Brazil (*Negotiating National Identity*) while May E. Blest has written about immigrants in literature in *Immigration and Acculturation in Brazil and Argentina: 1890-1929*. The 2014 series of case studies edited by Nicola Foote and Michael Goebel (*Immigration and National Identities in Latin America*) highlights Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and the Caribbean, as well as groups like the Germans, the Jews and the Arabs. There is no mention of Croatians. Chile receives little attention, except for passing mentions of the Germans in the south, the Chinese near the Peruvian border, and the Arabs. The extensive Foote and Goebel bibliography confirms the absence of Chile-specific studies and extremely limited inclusion of the country in multi-nation analyses.

## Appendix 1

### Interview with Antonio Skármeta

**MM.** ¿Cómo caracterizaría usted el medio literario actual en Chile?

**AS.** Un escritor es un escritor, no un comentarista ni un crítico de la vida de otros. Yo convivo con escritores pero no me gusta ordenarlos como lo hacen los periodistas, los comentaristas, los profesores o los críticos. Entonces me gusta más bien contestar aquellas preguntas que tienen que ver con mi trabajo, mi vida y que no tenga que ver con dar opiniones sobre otros colegas.

Sobre el medio de la literatura, el mundo literario, bueno, hay en Chile muchas universidades y todas estas universidades tienen departamento de literatura. Hace muchos años la profesión era bastante diferente porque antes del golpe no había lo que llamaría universidades privadas. Y ahora las universidades privadas son un buen negocio y se han creado muchas y cada una de ellas tiene departamentos literarios. Y en torno a estos departamentos literarios se han agrupado ya un número de escritores que tienen trabajos en esas universidades. Esas universidades además tienen prensas y editoriales y publican libros. Al mismo tiempo el estado tiene programas de financiamiento de proyectos literarios para los autores a los cuales pueden acceder concursando y también el estado premia las obras publicadas por esos autores en los años anteriores, tanto obras inéditas como obras publicadas. Hay un clima de estímulo a la literatura bastante fuerte comparado con lo que había durante la dictadura e incluso antes de la dictadura. Hay un clima de apoyo a las artes. Esto beneficia. Hay un gran número de escritores jóvenes que tienen un considerable público y algunos de estos autores ya tienen un público y algunos ya tienen un poco de visibilidad internacional, cosa que antes era imposible. Algunos de estos jóvenes acceden a editoriales españolas y desde allí comienzan a adquirir un nombre internacional. En mi generación lograr eso tardaba treinta años de estar publicando. Ahora ellos

lo pueden hacer fácilmente. Hay traducciones. Eso es también notable. Autores jóvenes ya tienen obras publicadas en francés o en inglés o en alemán. Es interesante.

*MM.* ¿Tomando en cuenta la historia del Boom y del Post-Boom y su postura en cuanto a la tradición literaria, puede comentar su visión de la literatura, su evolución y las influencias que predominan en ella?

*AS.* Yo me considero dentro de la literatura chilena y latinoamericana como un escritor bastante atípico. Digamos que no siento que me pueda identificar claramente con alguna tendencia. En un comienzo la prensa acuñó esta expresión Post Boom. Yo recuerdo haber escrito ensayos sobre ese tema comentado algunas diferencias fuertes que había entre el Boom y el Post Boom, diciendo que la generación del Post Boom había abierto las puertas a la fantasía ilimitada y despegando del texto de lo real y lo psicológico, de lo naturalista a la literatura norteamericana y esto había producido una suerte de afinación internacional. Cuando yo escribí estos ensayos yo estaba muy marcado emocionalmente por la dura realidad que enfrentaban los países latinoamericanos donde había dictaduras muy, muy brutales y de allá que escritores de mi generación y más jóvenes elaboraban estas situaciones trágicas, dramáticas con un tono mucho menos lúdico, mucho menos jalado que la gracia que tenía el Boom. Y me parecía que el realismo motivado por esta urgencia histórica comenzaba a recuperar un peso. No, su fuerza—el realismo comenzaba a recuperar su fuerza. Pero claro no era un realismo como lo que conocíamos de la novela del siglo 19 sino que era un realismo que ya tenía la escuela del Boom, las conquistas del Boom. Entonces la narrativa del Boom me parecía una narrativa más cerca de las urgencias, más cerca de los límites. La literatura del Boom había conquistado lo ilimitado, había conquistado los límites de una manera creativa. Esto es el balance que puedo hacer.

Para caracterizar mi literatura, hasta donde la frase de Susan Sontag es válida: Uno es pájaro y no ornitólogo. Puedo tener una sensación de lo que es mi literatura. Lo que yo pienso que es mi práctica literaria, la siento mucho más cercana a la exploración de los sentimientos que hace la literatura rusa clásica, digamos como las obras de Gogol o de Chéjov o la literatura norteamericana en obras como las de Kerouac, las de Salinger, las de Hemingway. Esto es, una concepción dramática de la literatura. ¿Qué entiendo por dramático? Entiendo una concepción de los personajes. Defino a mis personajes como personajes haciéndose. Es la definición vaga que podría dar de mi literatura, es un realismo poético. Entiendo por poético un realismo embellecido. La palabra “poético” es una palabra que siempre se utiliza para adornar algo. No. “Poético” en el sentido de la palabra griega *poesis*, esto es producción de algo. Entonces mis personajes se producen a sí mismos para llegar o intentar llegar a una plenitud. En el camino a la búsqueda de esta plenitud, mis personajes – que son figuras muy individuales, muy atentas a lo que les va pasando, y de este proceso de querer alcanzar una plenitud - enfrentan dificultades enormes que los derrotan. Alguna vez superan estas dificultades y logran mediante un acto de la voluntad o de la imaginación, de la poesía, la producción de imágenes, superar estas dificultades y rozar o alcanzar un momento de plenitud, un momento de epifanía pero también muchos de mis personajes son derrotados, pierden en este intento de alcanzar una plenitud porque la realidad es muy brutal, muy cruda, políticamente represiva en fin. O la vida es extremadamente fugaz y vulnerable y los quiebra. Muchas veces la vida de mis personajes es una mezcla de situaciones. No pierden ni ganan. Se da la experiencia que tienen, se acomodan a la vida para seguir viviendo, ya sea con un dejo de ironía o bien aceptan con una alegría escéptica la derrota.

Yo creo que esto marca mi literatura. Y por lo tanto te diría que mi mayor influencia en mi prosa no viene de la prosa de escritores contemporáneos o clásicos sino que mi primera fascinación es el teatro. Es de ahí que mi escritor favorito sea Shakespeare. O también Bernard Shaw o Oscar Wilde o los dramas de Arthur Miller o esa cuentística norteamericana, tan apretada, tan ceñida donde los personajes definen o brindan en un breve tiempo su vida. Entonces yo creo que mi literatura es una reacción muy espontánea a la vida personal que yo tengo y mi relación con la cultura que he heredado. Entonces yo intento fundir la espontaneidad de mi vida con los temas clásicos, los autores clásicos que me han deparado la cultura. Si tú lees mi obra aparece por todas partes alusiones a Shakespeare o a obras del realismo ruso o a los norteamericanos pero no tengo un contacto tan fuerte con la literatura latinoamericana. Sí lo tengo como lector o como profesor pero como escritor ando volando en una altura diferente, a diferente altura digamos. El radar en el aeropuerto conduce mi avión por otra ruta.

**MM.** Creo notar una evolución en la temática de su obra, que empezó con lo personal y pasó por lo colectivo antes de transformarse últimamente en algo más universal. ¿Cuál sería entonces su visión del papel o de la responsabilidad del escritor?

**AS.** Sobre eso tengo una posición bastante clara. El escritor es siempre un salvaje indomable. La palabra deber, responsabilidad o rol es una opción que un escritor puede tomar en su literatura o en su vida pero no creo que la ética o el compromiso, para usar una palabra tan gastada, sea una condición favorable para la escritura. Yo diría al contrario toda la literatura que tenga algún rango, algún rasgo programático perturba la espontaneidad de la creación, la (*inaudible*), la agilidad, y termina finalmente no sirviendo a los propósitos altruistas o sociales que un escritor pueda tener.

Ahora, tocante a mi vida yo no hablo de responsabilidad en el sentido de una responsabilidad ética, yo hablo de una responsabilidad vital que tiene que ver con las circunstancias que enfrentan mis personajes. Espontáneamente mis personajes tienen que salir de la adoración de su intimidad, del culto de su yo, del narcisismo activo que se va probando con la aventura en el mundo y el amor cuando circunstancias muy fuertes en la sociedad los acosan, los asedian y ponen a prueba su fe en el universo, en la vida, en los afectos y esta experiencia está marcada muy fuertemente en mi obra por dos grandes temas.

Uno, a medida que voy siendo más maduro empiezo a ver que en el mundo que a parte de los jóvenes, que era mi medio natural donde escribía en mi tribu y para mi tribu, para mi edad, mi generación y no un tema internacional. Porque había un evangelio de la juventud dando vuelta por el mundo, los jóvenes del 68, las rebeliones hippies en Estados Unidos, los movimientos estudiantiles, las protestas, América Latina efervescente de juventud. Todo eso marca muy fuertemente mi obra.

Al mismo tiempo viene el tremendo acoso de la realidad a través de la dictadura, la opresión, el exilio. Entonces necesariamente la intimidad de mis personajes individualistas se ve afectada porque comienza a ser destruido el medio natural en que mis personajes viven y ya la vida no es una garantía que asegura la (inaudible) del día. Se produce el temor, el miedo, la incertidumbre, lo arbitrario. Tú no sabes si tu novia sale de la casa un día si va a volver o va a ser raptada o va a desaparecer o va a volver torturada. Se modifica el mundo. Entonces mis personajes tienen proyectos de vida que quieren... pero tienen que tomar en cuenta el peso de la realidad que está fuera de ellos. Y lo que está fuera de ellos es la sociedad y no una sociedad abstracta. Así que muchos seres que están actuando también para realizarse, ellos en conjunto con la sociedad, ellos quieren alcanzar esta plenitud. También la sociedad la busca. Yo estoy en

un momento en mi vida en que por estas urgencias dramáticas, por la violencia, ante mis seres tan vulnerables mi literatura evidentemente se abre más a la riqueza del otro que a la riqueza del yo.

**MM.** Quisiera explorar la omnipresencia de Neruda y Mistral en su obra. Aparecen como figuras históricas transformadas y tienen un rol en sus cuentos y novelas. ¿Puede comentar la representación de estas dos figuras?

**AS.** Es una gran suerte para un escritor haber nacido en una cultura llena de tradición geográficamente tan acotada. Chile tiene muchas ventajas. Una de las grandes ventajas que tiene es realmente que ha sido la tierra o el espacio donde se originó una poesía magnífica. ¿Qué es lo que me atrae a mí en la figura de Neruda y de Gabriela Mistral? ¿Por qué son motivos recurrentes de mi obra? Encuentro que ellos son poetas fundacionales, es decir nos sugieren la base de una existencia que sea sensible a lo afincado que es la realidad y la historia. Por ejemplo, Pablo Neruda, si tú ves la versatilidad de su obra, Pablo Neruda descubre y nos excita hacia los ancestros latinoamericanos, sus *Alturas de Machu Picchu*, su *Canto General*, muestra las raíces enterradas que nosotros las pisamos pero no las veíamos. Entonces Neruda hace visible gran parte de lo que somos, nos enseña que la vida no es solamente lo que estamos o nuestro presente sino que provenimos de varias tradiciones y que éstas necesitas explorar porque hacen el mundo mágico, que abren mayores posibilidades.

Gabriela Mistral tiene lo mismo. Gabriela Mistral tiene el gran mérito de, siendo una mujer de un mundo muy pequeño, rural, insignificante geográficamente, una pobre maestra de escuela en un lugar perdido, tiene el mérito de haber entendido toda la poesía española, toda la tradición clásica y mística y haberla usado como instrumento para expresar una realidad regional

muy agotada. Eso me parece a mí un gran mérito que la figura, el oficio, de poeta es inmensamente grande para mí porque es el que nos hace ver y que al mismo tiempo aquel que nos hace ver en todas direcciones, más que nada en la conquista de la tradición, del pasado ... en su visión humanística. Entonces, ¿qué tema me obsesiona a mí? ¿Qué me hace volver hacia estos poetas? Si tú ves *El cartero de Neruda*, *Ardiente paciencia*, *La boda del poeta*, *La chica del trombón*, básicamente se trata del retrato del artista joven para utilizar la palabra de Dylan Thomas o de Joyce, cómo el artista joven enfrenta su herencia, como va conquistando al maestro. Con su espontaneidad consigue acceder a lo que el otro ha conquistado y que ha dejado como herencia para que el rival joven haga su propia vida.

En *El cartero de Neruda* es absolutamente claro. Ahí hay una persona que vive de la ingenuidad, del momento puro de las circunstancias cotidianas, que es iluminado por la presencia de alguien que ya ha conquistado un espacio. Y este espacio, lo deja como herencia. En la poesía de Neruda esto se materializa en obras tan geniales como *Las Odas elementales* que son una incitación a convivir con el mundo de una manera creativa, con un deslumbramiento cotidiano. O en los *Poemas de amor* o en los sonetos o en fin lo que es más de fondo. El artista joven, el cachorro que aparece frecuentemente en mi literatura aunque no sea poeta no sea pintor no sea cineasta, en mi personaje está viva esta necesidad, esta ansia de crear y este deslumbramiento por los que crean. Entonces lo llamo yo la vinculación entre acción y tradición, entre sabiduría y espontaneidad, entre cultura y, digamos la palabra de una vez, subcultura.

**MM.** Pasando a *La boda del poeta*, *La chica del trombón* y *El baile de la Victoria*, tres novelas que se publicaron en un corto periodo cerca del año 2000, puede comentar si resultaron o no de un momento de mucha producción después de regresar a Chile a fines de los años ochenta?

**AS.** Recuerdo del tiempo que estuve de embajador que escribí mucho cuando comencé, pensando que podía armonizar el trabajo de embajador con la vida cotidiana de escritor. Pero a medida que uno trabaja en diplomacia es tan intenso el trabajo que si tú haces bien tu trabajo y trabajas por tu gobierno, y por tu país y por tus ideas y si trabajas seriamente desde el momento que tienes tantas relaciones de trabajo, de obligaciones que ya no puedes seguir escribiendo. Eso fue el caso mío. Entonces yo comencé escribiendo bien y ya decidí de dedicarme exclusivamente a la función de embajador porque ya no me daba el tiempo.

No recuerdo bien la cronología. *La boda del poeta* es antes del 2000 cuando me fui de embajador y quizás *La chica del trombón* también. *El baile de la Victoria* la tengo que haber escrito a mi vuelta a Chile después.

**MM.** ¿Sintió un impulso mayor para escribir volviendo a Chile?

**AS.** Si, un impulso mayor y la posibilidad de hacerlo. Volvía a hacer un *writer's life*, volvía a mi profesión natural.

Ahora te quiero comentar lo siguiente, de que el tema, los motivos de *La boda del poeta* y de *La chica del trombón* donde está muy fuertemente el tema de la inmigración de Europa a América Latina, de buscar en los ancestros una respuesta a la vulnerabilidad, a la fragilidad del mundo, al mestizaje que es América Latina, a la mezcla, a lo heterogéneo. Estos entes que vienen de una plenitud natural, que pierden todo por una catástrofe y que se sienten en un nuevo mundo sin ser ellos parte de este mundo, o sea abandonar un mundo que ya no les pertenece y están en un mundo que todavía no conquistan. Eso también me parece una situación dramática. Yo la quise explorar y formular en *La boda del poeta* y *La chica del trombón*. Ahora éste no es un tema nuevo en mi vida. Yo te recomiendo que prestes atención a lo que podría ser

teóricamente mi primer cuento, “La Cenicienta en San Francisco.” La protagonista le pregunta al chico ¿Cómo te llamas y quién es? Y el chico que está en plena aventura, en pleno desarrollo de sí mismo, que es prácticamente un joven cuya vida no está hecha, le contesta o no sabe contestarle sino que apela a toda la tradición de inmigrante que es la de todos sus ancestros europeos y hace una locución muy locuaz, muy elegante de quien es—la vida de un ser en la vida actual, en un momento de la vida contemporánea si no se tiene presente todo aquello que ha llevado a este ser. Y entonces mi tema en *La boda del poeta* y *La chica del trombón* es ver eso, de dónde y cómo esas raíces cortadas han tenido que arreglárselas dramáticamente en una nueva costura. Y eso para un autor que tiene ojo de dramaturgo, que ama el teatro, que ama el conflicto, que tiene la visión del realismo poético es un gran tema que se me dio muy naturalmente.

**MM.** En relación con la cuestión de la inmigración, ¿era muy importante para usted hablar de la historia de su familia y los inmigrantes de Dalmacia? ¿Se cuenta mucho esta historia en Chile? ¿Era un impulso importante conservar esta historia?

**AS.** No, no era un impulso. Yo no escribo nada programático. Si tú me dices, “escribió usted esta novela o esta obra para dar a conocer algo que se ignora, que es cómo fue la inmigración dalmata a América,” no. No lo escribí con este propósito. Yo creo que la literatura no es información, aunque incorpora información ampliamente. Incluso una cosa que no me gusta de la novela histórica es la responsabilidad que marca al escritor para ser fiel a la realidad que lo vigila. Me gusta justamente en la literatura todo aquello que distorsiona la realidad para poder crear un mundo propio, para pegar el mundo. El mundo puede ser una fuente de inspiración pero no puede la literatura servir a la realidad. No es eso el rol de la literatura. Lo que sucede, mi intención al escribir estas obras es desbordar mi infinidad, mis ansias de comprender quien soy,

mirando el mundo contemporáneo en que estoy viviendo y el mundo contemporáneo incluye un dato muy fuerte, está hecho de inmigrantes, de fusiones, de intervenciones, en realidades distintas. Y eso era América Latina. Era una propuesta que me daba la realidad absolutamente estimulante.

También había una voluntad algo pícaro, de hacer algo distinto porque meterme yo como latinoamericano en el mundo europeo del pasado, de la pre-primera guerra mundial era un rasgo muy original de creación que consistía en algo así como *latinoamericanizar* la historia europea con una novela que es una novela que se desarrolla en Europa pero desde la experiencia de un autor latinoamericano. La mentalidad de muchos de estos personajes no es una mentalidad o un espíritu estrictamente determinado por la geografía del mar Adriático, de la costa de Croacia sino que son personajes anfibios, contaminados por el latinoamericanismo del autor. Muchos de estos personajes hablan como chilenos. Es un intento que podríamos llamar incluso un poco paródico de conquistar o de intervenir el pasado europeo desde una perspectiva marginal. Para crear este universo yo me encuentro muy original, es un rasgo bastante original esto de un latinoamericano que tenga un zarpazo original latinoamericano en un coto europeo. Eso era el proyecto.

**MM.** ¿Y cómo reaccionó el lector? ¿Cómo se recibió el libro en Chile?

**AS.** Yo te pido que consideres que esta literatura está traducida a 35 idiomas y que muchas de estas obras que tú nombras están traducidas a 15 idiomas fácilmente. Es decir que tienen una vinculación con un lector internacional. Entonces cuando tú me dices ¿Cómo se leyó esta novela en Chile? me estás preguntando tal vez cómo reciben los inmigrantes al mundo chileno este retrato que se hace de la inmigración. Yo diría que nunca la novela fue leída o vista o interpretada en estos términos. Simplemente la vieron como una obra de ficción. Y no se

remitieron a la realidad que inspira esta obra. Por otro lado la crítica literaria o los comentaristas literarios en Chile no le interesó yo creo demasiado el hecho de que esta novela transcurriera en el pasado europeo. Como que siempre que los comentaristas o los críticos literarios esperan o están ambientados en la realidad de nuestros países, de nuestro idioma. Entonces yo creo que les pareció algo exótico.

No así en otros países porque está (*inaudible*). *La boda del poeta* obtuvo el premio Medici en Francia, en Italia el Cavour. Aquí también fue premiada, con el premio Altazor, el premio que dan los artistas a un artista. Pero yo creo que en la crítica literaria, no sé si salió alguna incluso. La novela estuvo en la lista de los más vendidos durante algunos meses, en primer lugar, pero de las escrituras sobre la novela, yo no recuerdo nada. Esa crítica tarda. Eso no es tan rápido, la versión crítica o los estudios.

**MM.** ¿Hablando de traducciones, porque *La boda* y *La chica* no se han traducido al inglés, piensa usted?

**AS.** Bueno, las dos novelas están traducidas en todos los idiomas posibles menos el inglés. Una vez una editorial las quiso publicar en inglés y hasta se hizo una traducción. Finalmente no cumplieron con las condiciones que habían pactado con mi agente y no prosperó. Es un tipo de narrativa para la cual no hay espacio en la esfera anglosajona. Yo creo que es algo que miran como algo demasiado extravagante, abigarrado, confuso. No sé cómo podrían vender o visualizar un libro como éste. No me lo puedo imaginar bien. Así que ya acepté que va a ser difícil publicar estos libros en inglés.

**MM.** En *La chica del trombón* la vida de la chica coincide con las primeras décadas de su vida, pero es una niña inmigrante. ¿Puede comentar la elección de la primera persona para la voz narrativa de la protagonista de *La chica* y la tercera persona para *La boda del poeta*? ¿Cómo había pensado eso de la voz narrativa?

**AS.** No lo había pensado, de modo que voy a especular. Dice la crítica francesa de *La boda del poeta*—ella la entendió bastante bien y han sido muy certeros—que *La boda del poeta* es una suerte de épica. Una épica castigada, una épica paródica, no una épica de héroes, una épica de antihéroes, una épica de personajes secundarios. Son un poco así como los habitantes de la tercera clase o de la cuarta clase del *Titanic*. Es una épica de lo mínimo, de lo insignificante. Entonces uno no ve una épica llena de sol y de grandes hazañas. Pero en la medida de que sea fiel a este mundo pequeño también en un mundo pequeño las tareas que tienen por delante los hombres pueden ser muy grandes en la proporción en que ellos viven. Entonces para contar una historia de un grupo o de una generación conviene tener una voz que le cuenta de muchas más cosas, que tenga una mirada mucho más amplia que la que los protagonistas pueden tener de su propia vida.

En cambio, *La chica del trombón* es un retrato intimista de cómo una chica se asume como mujer, cómo asume su vulnerabilidad, cómo tiene el proyecto de realizar la vida frustrada de sus ancestros masacrados en Europa y cómo encuentra un camino en la sociedad chilena para intentarlo. Yo quería que tuviera este tono íntimo, personal, porque quería justamente quitarle todo tono épico porque lo que venía—esto es muy interesante—el fin de la novela anuncia una épica que es el famoso histórico triunfo de Salvador Allende y su proyecto de un socialismo libertario pacífico, democrático. Entonces esta chica lleva toda su vida desde la resistencia a la política, la lleva a la participación, la lleva al sacrificio. Recuerda que la chica se queda—tanto él

como ella se quedan—en Chile. Será porque se les abre una nueva vida. Aquí en esta novela como en *El cartero de Neruda* yo apelo en el final al conocimiento y a la sensibilidad del público que conoce ya en qué terminó esa ilusión, esa fantasía. Yo recuerdo que el niño está tocando la bocina, celebrando, gritando y termina en un momento de plenitud. También la vida del poeta en *El cartero* era una vida de plenitud pero los fines abruptos de estas dos novelas son llenas de la emoción que yo tuve con el golpe en Chile que marcó mi vida. Algo tan abrupto, tan rotundo, tan salvaje, tan bestial que dejó temblando los cimientos, la base de mi existencia. Y eso lo refleja la literatura. Pero soy muy discreto. Por eso yo quiero contar estas historias siendo fiel a la intimidad de la voz de mis protagonistas. Y por eso yo no cuento la épica del desastre al final del *Cartero de Neruda*. Porque eso es un aporte que va a hacer el lector. Y tampoco lo cuento al final de *La chica del trombón* porque es un aporte que también va a hacer el lector.

**MM.** ¿Hablamos un poco más de *La chica*? La novela es a la vez *family romance*, novela histórica, autobiografía ficticia de esta niña que está construyendo su vida con su escritura, con memorias muchas veces falsas. Usted dice que la ve como un retrato intimista, no una épica. ¿Cómo caracteriza el género de la novela o hay que caracterizarla?

**AS.** Otra vez venimos al mismo tema con el cual partimos, que es el realismo poético. O sea, un personaje intenta realizar su vida, alcanzar una plenitud y en el camino le van surgiendo dificultades, aparecen seres en su vida que los ayudan—y eso también vale para *El baile de la Victoria*— o los ayudan o los destruyen. Entonces esto es lo que está presente en *La chica del trombón*. Lo que pasa es que el relato es personal, es intimista. Se respeta la voz de la protagonista. El narrador no va más lejos, el escritor no va más lejos que lo que la narradora pueda ir. El mundo se circunscribe y así el sentimiento, la emoción se hace más pura. Pero lo que

sucede es que aquí el relato íntimo se encuentra con una épica en la puerta de esquina. A cada rato la cocina de esta épica que va a estallar al final de la novela se va labrando, va creciendo. En *La chica del trombón* hay un mundo allá afuera que va a explotar hacia algo épico. Eso es el carácter, es lo íntimo rozándose con el gran exterior social.

*MM.* Según mi lectura, la vida de la chica es en parte una metáfora para la vida del país.

*AS.* Claro que sí pero en primer lugar es una metáfora de la chica para sí misma. Porque es un relato auténtico de una experiencia íntima que resulta ser significativa y tú le puedes adjudicar a eso un valor simbólico pero no está en la intención de la voz hacerlo ni en la intención del narrador. Es muy interesante que se produzca este efecto, que tú la veas así. Magnífico. Pero no está programado para que sea así.

Interview: November 29, 2012

Transcription: January 2013

## Appendix 2

### Antonio Skármeta: Other Media Projects

#### Film scripts

*La Victoria*. Directed by Peter Lilienthal, 1973.

*Es herrscht Ruhe im Land /Reina la tranquilidad en el país*. Directed by Peter Lilienthal, 1976.

*La insurrección*. Directed by Peter Lilienthal, 1980.

*Desde la lejanía/Desde lejos/De lejos veo este país* (screen version of *No pasó nada*). Directed by Christian Ziewer, 1978.

*La mancha*. 1978.

*La composición*. 1979.

*Permiso de residencia*. 1979.

*El regalo*. 1980-81.

*Die Spur des Vermißten/La huella del desaparecido*. Directed by Joachim Kunert, 1980.

*Muertos Mientras Tanto*. 1982.

*La Insurrección*. 1982.

*Si viviéramos juntos*. 1982/1983.

*Ardiente paciencia*. Director and script writer, 1983.

*Despedida en Berlín*. 1984.

*Pequeña revancha*. 1985.

*A las arenas*. 1986.

*Seine Letzte Chance*. Directed by Alexander von Eschwege, 1986.

*Nupcias*. 1986.

*Match Ball*. 1987.

*Der Radfahrer von San Cristóbal/El ciclista del San Cristóbal.* 1988.

*Neruda todo el amor.* Directed by Ignacio Agüero. 1998.

*Brisa de Navidad.* Directed by Carlos Carrera. 1999.

### **Theatre**

*Ardiente paciencia.* 1982.

*Dieciocho kilates.* 2010.

### **Radio**

*La búsqueda.* 1976.

*No pasó nada.* 1976.

*La mancha.* 1978.

*La composición.* 1980.

*Muertos mientras tanto.* 1982.

### **Television**

*Libro abierto.* University of Chile. 1960s.

*El show de los libros (El show internacional de los libros/ La torre de papel).* 1992-2002.

### **Opera**

*Il Postino.* Music composed by Daniel Catán. 2010.

### **Popular Music**

*Café Frío.* Killy Freitas and Antonio Skármeta. Words by Antonio Skármeta. 2014.

Note: This list is based on what could be verified and is therefore likely incomplete.

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