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## Nona Fernández's Mapocho: Spirits in a Material Wasteland

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## Nona Fernández's *Mapocho*: Spirits in a Material Wasteland

### Abstract

This analysis of *Mapocho* (2002), a novel by Chilean writer and performer Nona Fernández, explores the significance of the author's environmentalist representation of Chilean history as the accumulation of spiritual and material contaminants—ghosts and trash—that the victorious from throughout the country's history have attempted to erase to further various economic and political agendas, particularly the neoliberal model installed during the Pinochet dictatorship. Fernández's depiction of Chile as an ecological and spiritual wasteland in which the female protagonist (re)collects, recycles and reuses the specters and detritus of past conflicts represents the author's own literary project of advocating for human rights and environmental justice during the Chilean transition while modeling a way to counter the collective amnesia promoted under the newly established democracy.

### Keywords

Generation of 1990, Nona Fernández, *Mapocho*, Chilean literature, neoliberalism in Chile

Nona Fernández's *Mapocho*: Spirits in a Material Wasteland

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By the time Nona Fernández (b. 1971) launched her literary career around the start of the new millennium, Chile's slow transition from dictatorship to democracy was considered accomplished.<sup>1</sup> The reconciliatory politics characterizing Chile during its gradual democratic return encouraged the population at large to forgive the regime for past injustices and to forget about its violent history under dictator Augusto Pinochet in the name of economic progress and political consensus. Yet, even as the transition came to an end in the late 1990s, Chilean narratives, particularly by young women writers like Fernández, continued to express concern with preserving collective memory and with seeking justice for the human rights violations that occurred during the regime (1973-1990). The early narratives by the women writers of Chile's Generation of 1990, who include Alejandra Costamagna (b. 1976), Fernández, Andrea Jeftanovic (b. 1970), Andrea Maturana (b. 1969) and Lina Meruane (b. 1970), tend to represent the traumatic aftereffects of dictatorial rule on those who grew up during the regime, while exploring the negative consequences of the regime's neoliberal agenda on the people.<sup>2</sup> These writers' early works spotlight post-totalitarian experiences, exhibiting a confused nation in transition tormented by the dictatorial past and struggling to understand Chile's present and future. In sum, their fictions assess the national reconfiguration left in the wake of what Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian has aptly termed Chile's "capitalist revolution" (28). He argues that the dictatorship revolutionized Chilean daily life, culture, and identity at their core, transforming the country from a Cold War battleground under President Salvador Allende to the poster child of the neoliberal experiment in the Americas.<sup>3</sup> The reconciliatory politics characterizing Chile in its newly democratic phase promoted cleaning up the nation's image as a site of human rights violations by stressing the country's prosperous present. The intentional distraction from the past further supported the neoliberal economy by encouraging guiltless consumption and foreign investment (Moulian 97-100). As literary critic Idelber Avelar has explained, post-dictatorial and neoliberal Latin American nations like Chile rendered everything belonging to the past—memories, history, consumer goods—outmoded and undesirable because the past threatened the myth of economic and political progress on which these new democracies built their identities (2). Cultural practices, such as abundant television viewing and the massive consumption (largely on credit) of free market consumer goods, reaffirmed consumerism as an economic model as well as a new pattern characterizing everyday life (Moulian 37).

Most literary critics have underestimated the trenchant stance towards post-dictatorial Chilean politics and culture that the women of the Generation of 1990 have espoused. Perhaps this is because the contemporaneous McOndo group, founded a few years prior to the emergence of these women writers, captured the attention of literary scholars from Chile and abroad. In two anthologies, *Cuentos con walkman* ('Short Stories with Walkman') (1993) and *McOndo* ('McOndo') (1996), Chilean writers Alberto Fuguet (b. 1964) and Sergio Gómez (b. 1962) established the identity of the McOndo group, a pan-Hispanic literary movement comprised almost exclusively of men in their thirties. In the introductions to these collections, Fuguet and Gómez argue that the image of provincial Latin America that magical realism popularized internationally in the 1960s and 1970s misrepresents the globalized, postmodern milieu in which the young Hispanic writers anthologized in the collections were actually living in the 1990s. They proposed that the dramatic changes generated by neoliberalism, technology, and the region's entrance into the global village required a renovation of theme and style to match the influences of MTV, music, movies, and the Internet on the lives of young writers. The McOndo group created a literary aesthetic characterized by expendability, utilitarianism, and political apathy that corresponded with Chile's politics of forgetting as well as with its identity as the testing ground of the neoliberal experiment. Literary critic Javier Campos has rightly argued that the McOndo aesthetic fails to appreciate the heterogeneity of Chilean life and art during the transition.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the women writers of the Generation of 1990, who are strikingly absent from these anthologies, question the Pinochet regime's violent installation of neoliberalism while showing how it created widespread inequality and had a damaging emotional effect on the dictatorship's survivors.<sup>5</sup> In contrast with the McOndo group's uncritical stance toward neoliberalism, the early narratives of these women writers tend to explore the historical, emotional, and environmental wreckage concealed beneath Chile's tenuous façade of economic and emotional wellbeing.

Since its publication in 2002, Nona Fernández's debut novel, *Mapocho* ('Mapocho River')—whose title bears the name of the contaminated river that divides the capital city of Santiago in two—has sparked significant interest amongst literary scholars. This is perhaps because of the remarkable use Fernández makes of ghost characters to depict the Chilean present as the combined result of the damage caused by the economically and politically powerful from the colonial era to the transition.<sup>6</sup> This article adds to the current scholarship by reading *Mapocho* as an environmentalist critique of Chile's violent historical past within the context of its neoliberal present and yet undetermined future.<sup>7</sup> I will analyze the author's representation of Chilean history as the accumulation in the present of both spiritual and material contaminants—ghosts and trash—that history's victors have imperfectly erased. Her depiction of Chile

as an environmental wasteland in which the fictional artist heroine, Rucia, (re)collects, recycles, and reuses the past represents Fernández's own literary project of advocating for human rights and environmental justice while modeling alternative ways to "work through" history.<sup>8</sup>

In the principal storyline of the account, Rucia and Indio, the ghosts of two Chilean siblings killed in a car accident, return to Santiago after years of exile in a Mediterranean village. When the story begins, Rucia's father, Fausto, is the only living family member. An intellectual, Fausto had been a history teacher and an aspiring writer at the time of the 1973 coup. Once authorities detain him, however, he betrays the revolution and agrees to serve the regime by rewriting Chilean history to exclude the country's long legacy of state-sponsored violence. Fausto attempts to reconcile this betrayal by clandestinely writing another history book that includes the events erased from his official volumes. He has been separated from his family since his detention; his wife fled Chile with the young Rucia and Indio as soon as he was captured. While in exile, the mother attempts to erase from her own mind and that of the children all memories of their South American past, including of Fausto, whom they believe died in a fire. The truth is revealed after the accident when the children return to Santiago as ghosts. Their existence as phantoms allows them to perceive elements of the past that the living cannot see. As the plot progresses, the protagonist, Rucia, recuperates her own and Chile's history through encounters with the living and dead as she roams the streets of Santiago looking for her brother and her family home. As she discovers material evidence of Chile's brutal history in Santiago's ghosts and trash, she realizes that all Chileans—living and dead—suffer from post-traumatic disorders, manifesting the symptoms of amnesia, denial, guilt, paranoia, anxiety, depression, and incomplete mourning.

The phantoms reenact scenes from Chilean history that the victors of past conflicts have attempted to bury and hide. These historical fragments include the politics involved with installing and preserving neoliberalism that the transition-era population-at-large, as depicted in the novel, is encouraged to forget. The ghosts of people who died throughout history appear, exposing the more recent history of military brutality alongside more distant eras of state-sponsored violence, such as the slaughter of indigenous peoples during national consolidation and a massacre of transvestites that occurred during Carlos Ibáñez del Campo's presidency in the mid-twentieth century. In this way, phantoms embody the central premise of the novel: the present is the cumulative result of history, including events imperfectly erased from the collective consciousness to support the interests of the powerful and victorious, from the conquistadores and unpunished Pinochet-era military officials to the anonymous profiteers of the corporate globalization project. The ghosts reveal that despite the continual attempts among history's triumphant to control collective remembering, the

present is nevertheless polluted with history's refuse, including the ghosts of those killed unjustly in the name of economic progress as well as the everyday trash needed to sustain the market economy.

As the only living character who sees the ghosts, Fausto best represents Chileans' distressed relationship with the past. Manifested through his disturbed psychological relationship with history, ghosts who extend from his own consciousness reprimand him. His tormented guilt about betraying the revolution and his obsession with history's dead provokes ghosts to appear and allows them to be real:

La muerte es mentira. . . . Durante mucho tiempo ha tenido la oportunidad de comprobarlo. No es paranoia como diagnostican los médicos, tampoco es una alucinación que se pueda curar con pastillas o tratamientos. Los muertos viven. Son una realidad. Resucitan a diario y vagan por las calles del Barrio. Se pasean, se instalan por las noches bajo su edificio, lo esperan sobre los techos cercanos y le hacen señas o le gritan. Los muertos viven. Él puede verlos. Puede tocarlos, hablarles y hasta consolarlos si se le acercan a llorar. Habitan bajo los puentes, en las ruinas de una casa vieja, en algún rincón solitario. Todos lo buscan, lo llaman, lo apuntan con su dedo índice. . . . A algunos es tan difícil distinguirlos. Se camuflan perfecto, visten como vivos, hablan y lloran como vivos. (115)

Death is a lie. . . . For a long time Fausto has been able to verify it. It is not the paranoia his doctors diagnose, nor is it a hallucination that pills or treatments can cure. The dead live. They are a reality. They resuscitate daily and roam the streets of the Barrio. They wander around. At night, they assemble around his building, wait for him on nearby rooftops, motion to him or scream at him. The dead live. He can see them. He can touch them, talk to them, and even console them if they approach him crying. They live under bridges, in the ruins of an old house, in a solitary corner. They seek him out, call his name, and point their finger at him. . . . Some are difficult to distinguish. They camouflage themselves perfectly: they dress like the living, and talk and cry like living people do.<sup>9</sup>

In linking the novel's fictional historian to the nation's ghosts, Fernández implies that the deliberate truncation of the collective memory contributes to the creation of the phantoms. The past agitates in the collective consciousness precisely because the population of living Chileans as viewed in *Mapocho* is confused about and hence unable to confront history's lingering presence. The ghosts, represented as they are against the backdrop of Chilean history, embody the repressed traumas of the national collective as well as the pain felt by individuals,

and thus constitute a crucial intersection between shared and personal experience. The phantoms manifest the psychological turmoil, or haunting, of Chileans living during the transition and demonstrate the repressed emotional need to confront past traumas festering in the collective consciousness.

While the novel recovers the past through ghosts, the Chileans represented in the book (with the exception of Fausto and Rucia) suffer from a symptom sociologist Avery F. Gordon has called “hysterical blindness,” or a pathological inability or refusal to see the supernatural matter around them (17). In *Mapocho*, the living coexist with the dead, but unlike Fausto and Rucia, they do not perceive them as ghosts. Even Indio’s spirit manifests hysterical blindness upon returning to Chile. The pain of seeing other ghosts enact history drives him crazy, prompting him to remove his own eyeballs from his sockets in an attempt to return to his former sightlessness. Yet, unlike all the living amnesiacs he encounters, his status as a phantom prohibits him from escaping history’s presence and he continues to see the past repeat endlessly even without his eyes. Like Rucia and Fausto, he sees history’s dead haunting Santiago: the Mapuche warrior, Lautaro, gallops continually through the city in search of his head, cut off by the conquistadores; a train filled with the transvestites Ibáñez del Campo exterminated in the 1950s departs day in and day out from the Estación Mapocho; and a woman constantly traverses the city in a horse-drawn cart, asking for the whereabouts of her newborn daughter. The narration eventually reveals that the guts hanging from her slashed belly are the result of an unnecessary cesarean section performed by Pinochet’s military doctors who stole the child and left the woman to die. These ghost stories represent the nation’s unofficial history because most real-life Chileans would recognize them, even though they are not officially confirmed as true. Thus, in featuring known yet uncorroborated stories, Fernández suggests that phantoms appear because of their mistreatment in the past and their discontentment about their misrepresentation in the present. These factors prohibit the living and dead from experiencing closure (or the psychological need to understand and resolve ambiguous and troubling situations), further provoking the ghosts’ continued existence after their presumed death.

Significantly, the living amnesiacs depicted in *Mapocho* block memory by participating in the consumer culture: they shop, talk on cellular phones, and order their activities around an enormous glass skyscraper, an emblem of Chile’s economic prosperity. Just as the present is disconnected from the past, so too are the citizens from each other and their ghostly neighbors. The juxtaposition of the living engaged in these everyday practices alongside ghosts who seek recognition brings awareness to consumerism’s need to create a perpetual present: in the context of neoliberal Chile, collective amnesia produces guiltless consumers. Moreover, consumerism’s fixation on the present time discourages citizens from

noticing the impact of the present on the future. Avelar illuminates how the truncation of memory supported Latin America's post-dictatorial neoliberal economies:

Growing commodification negates memory because new commodification must always replace previous commodities, send them to the dustbin of history. The free market established by the Latin American dictatorships must, therefore, impose forgetting not only because it needs to erase the reminiscence of its barbaric origins but also because it is proper to the market to live in a perpetual present. The erasure of the past as past is the cornerstone of all commodification. . . . The past is to be forgotten because the market demands that the new replace the old without leaving a remainder. The task of the oppositional intellectual would be to point out the residue left by every substitution, thereby showing that the past is never simply erased by the latest novelty. (2)

While the living Chileans portrayed in *Mapocho* conform to neoliberalism's need to generate commodities and to create "good" consumers eager to dispose of all that belongs to the past, Rucia and Fernández, who notice and actively resist the transformation of the past into trash, are the oppositional intellectual Avelar mentions. Paralleling her own literary project to question the patterns of consumption conditioning everyday life during the transition, Fernández has the young artist-heroine traverse the city, (re)collecting, recycling, and reusing the memories held in ghosts and trash. Rucia wanders around Santiago observing its modernized cityscape where the massive glass skyscraper dominates her view and directs her otherwise confused walks through the city. The protagonist is a *flâneuse* whose movement inscribes a visual narrative by way of her (re)collection of snippets of the past. That is to say, the work of art of the novel itself is created as Rucia walks and observes her surroundings. These meanderings recall Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City." In contrast with observing the city from above—the authoritarian position of social control Michel Foucault describes as the Panopticon (195-227)—for de Certeau, walking in the city constitutes a form of reading and narrating a place by improvised meanderings through it. Walkers choose their route, and see the city close up. They create a "rhetoric of walking" that engages in an inventive and subversive exchange with the Panopticon's all-encompassing view, perhaps in the far reaches of the novel's own skyscraper, a phallic symbol representing the regime's extensive control and the dominance of consumer culture (de Certeau 99). Rucia, whose proximity to the city provides for the unexpected, perceives it as "haunted by [the] many different spirits hiding there in silence," percolating up through the layers of a palimpsest of accumulated memory (de Certeau 108). In this way, the artist-walker Rucia is both a critical



observer of the hidden past as well as one of the agents representing history's lingering presence. Yet, unlike the other ghostly wanderers, Rucia's (re)collection manifests the past both visually and textually. The reader observes history as Rucia perceives it and as Fernández transforms it into text.

Contrasting with the past vestiges exposed through Rucia's agency, the regime's victors built the skyscraper to bury evidence of the massacre of all the residents of Rucia's former neighborhood, rounded up and burned to death in their municipal soccer stadium. The protagonist can see through it, intuiting that her childhood neighborhood still exists, though hidden beneath this symbol of Chilean progress. The buried neighborhood comes alive, just like the ghosts whose spirits survive beyond their death:

El Barrio vive. Se esconde tras el grueso alquitrán con el que han tapizado sus viejos adoquines. Sus muros de adobe respiran hechos polvo, su aliento añejo perfuma las calles cuando la polución recula después de un día de lluvia. El Barrio vive. Se le intuye más allá de las vitrinas y los anuncios de neón. Está sepultado por construcciones, por publicidades de televisión por cable y telefonía móvil. Sobre él las máquinas pasean, el tránsito se atasca a las siete de la tarde, los andamios se elevan, la gente circula. El Barrio yace bajo el paso acelerado de todos. Pero a veces, cuando la tierra se sacude en un temblor pasajero, el Barrio suspira y deja ver con claridad pedazos de su carne. (189)

The Barrio lives. It hides under the thick tar with which they have covered its old cobblestones. The exhausted adobe walls breathe dust; their aged breath perfumes the streets when the pollution retreats after a day of rain. The Barrio lives. You can intuit it beyond the storefronts and the neon signs. Buildings, cable television and cell phone advertisements bury it. On top of the Barrio machines go back and forth, traffic stalls at seven in the evening, scaffoldings are erected, the people circulate. The Barrio rests beneath everyone's accelerated footsteps. But sometimes, when a passing quake shakes the earth, the Barrio sighs and allows pieces of its flesh to be clearly seen.

That Rucia is able to see below the neon signs and storefronts, emblems of Chile's economic and cultural shift, shows that these artificial fabrications not only hide the country's "shit," but also provide locations to practice and reinforce Chile's new cultural identity and economic reality.<sup>9</sup>

Fernández heightens her critique of Chile's entrance into the global free market economy in the inclusion of references to the damaging effects of economic "progress" and collective amnesia on the natural environment. Rucia's

meanderings through the city allow her to notice that places, like Santiago itself, the Mapocho River, the soccer stadium, the skyscraper, and Rucia's childhood neighborhood, have endured abuse similar to that inflicted on the people. Santiago, as depicted in the novel, is the site of human rights and environmental injustices that occurred in real life from the moment of its colonial foundation throughout its history. The city's environmental violence began with the construction of the Cal y Canto Bridge in 1780. The bridge connected colonial Santiago to La Chimba, a bucolic village on the banks of the Mapocho River that would become Indio and Rucia's childhood neighborhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The bridge allowed Santiago to consume the village, transforming La Chimba into Bellavista, a centrally located neighborhood in present-day Santiago. As she searches for home, Rucia's ghost is able to perceive layer after layer of environmental degradation where La Chimba village once lay. Since the construction of the bridge facilitated Santiago's expansion to the other side of the river, urbanization on both sides of the waterway eventually required that the riverbed be paved to protect human dwellings from nature. Years later, the fictionalized Pinochet regime rounded up all the neighborhood residents into the municipal soccer stadium, where they burned them to death. Finally, the new administration erected the previously mentioned enormous glass skyscraper on top of all these layers to suppress the evidence of human and environmental catastrophe.

The glass skyscraper is the architectural center of the city as well as a performance of amnesia; Rucia views how the living humans unconsciously order their activities around this symbol of forgetting (28). Significantly, it is an office building whose only permanent resident is Fausto, placed there by the military to work on his censored history books. Fausto's residence there highlights the attempts made to cover up the unpleasant vestiges of the past both in the creation of revisionist histories as well as in the construction of symbols of economic prowess and development. This symbol evokes Chile's most widely known performance of collective amnesia and environmental violence from the transition era. In 1992, soon after Pinochet's ouster, Chile represented itself with an extravagant booth at the world fair in Seville, an event so crucial to the formation of transition-era Chilean identity that both Moulian and cultural critic Nelly Richard, among other observers, have analyzed it.<sup>11</sup> To broadcast its newfound affluence, Chile transported a 100-ton iceberg extracted from its Antarctic territory across the Atlantic. Through an ecological symbol of cleanliness, the booth represented Chile's economic prosperity and well as its process of purifying itself of its dictatorial and socialist pasts. Moreover, the ice imagery sought to align Chile with the colder, whiter nations of the Global North and distance it from the history of violence associated with other Latin America. Richard argues that this display, a symbol of the measures taken to redefine and sanitize Chilean

identity, constituted “the first practice of identity that the redemocratized Chile makes into a spectacle in order to give form and style to its ‘discourse of change’” (109). The iceberg’s performative cleanliness, repeated in Fernández’s glass skyscraper that obscures bloodshed with images of transparency and purity, “erase[s] the remains of times past and suppress[es] the dark spaces of the preterit and of what is passé that obstruct the visual flow of simultaneity that capitalist globalization celebrates” (115). The booth’s attempted erasure of dictatorial violence was nevertheless itself an act of profound environmental violence that symbolically represented the role of the Global South in the free market model tested in Chile. The booth represented Chile’s disregard for global warming and its melting polar icecaps while reaffirming the country’s global status as a producer of raw goods for consumption in Global North.

Contrary to the image of cleanliness the Chilean government attempted to project in Seville, Fernández’s allegorical representation of Chile’s new culture as a glass edifice brings to mind the opaqueness of her ghostly characters, implying that the building, though new, is in fact haunted. Importantly, Rucia observes the skyscraper’s brittle and delicate features, and sees the concealed past lurking below its transparent surface, suggesting the impermanence, fragility, and spiritual coldness of the consumer “democracy” being built. Like the iceberg, the national construct of the era lacks durability, and like the skyscraper in *Mapocho*, it was literally built on a massacre and on a wrecked natural paradise. The façade of economic wellbeing and a functional democracy attempts to clean up the country’s tarnished image and bury its rotten foundation. Yet Fernández’s focus on human and environmental pollutants suggests that the ambitious political and economic pretenses of the powerful during the transition require stronger underpinnings to support redemocratization and the comprehensive economic, psychological, and environmental wellbeing of Chile and its people.

While the skyscraper symbolizes the deliberate and violent truncation of Chilean memory, the Mapocho River, as depicted in the novel, works to expose the city’s dirty reality. The river reveals that Santiago’s natural center is in fact polluted, contrary to the image of artificial cleanliness that the glass skyscraper built. The Mapocho River, which in the novel is laden with trash and human bodies, reveals history’s garbage and shows that, though history’s triumphant may attempt to create specular distractions like the skyscraper and the iceberg, the people in fact live in a capitalist wasteland. *Mapocho* begins and ends in the same place, with Rucia’s casket floating downriver as she attempts to escape the detritus of the city and history by releasing herself to the sea. Fernández begins and ends the novel linking Chile’s historical catastrophes to its environmental crisis:

Ahora mi cuerpo flota sobre el oleaje del Mapocho, mi cajón navega entre aguas sucias haciéndole el quite a los neumáticos, a las ramas, avanza lentamente cruzando la ciudad completa. . . . Viajo por un río moreno. Una hebra mugrienta que me lleva con calma me acuna amorosa y me invita a que duerma y me entregue por completo a su trayecto fecal. (13)

Now my body floats on the swells of the Mapocho. My casket navigates through dirty waters, and dodging tires and branches, it advances slowly, crossing the entire city. . . . I travel through a brown river. A filthy thread that takes me calmly with it, cradles me lovingly, inviting me to sleep and to surrender myself completely to its fecal path.

Though dirty, the river provides Rucia with refuge and helps her access the past. The waterway helps guide the protagonist to her old neighborhood and family home and fosters her recollection of fragments of national history that reconciliatory politics downplay; contemplating the river's trash and her own body floating amongst it stimulates Rucia's recovery of personal history, prompting her to remember seeing the body parts of Pinochet's detained and disappeared cast away in the river on the day she went into exile as a child. This recollection corresponds to the known military practice of throwing the bodies of the disappeared into the Mapocho River, a tactic described in the *Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation* released in 1991. The military's public transformation of dissidents into garbage made violence into a spectacle aimed at controlling the population. Through the incorporation of ghosts and their counterpart trash, which recall these violent acts, Fernández delineates again a profound relationship between brutality and waste to reveal the particular complexities of the Chilean situation that also calls to mind Joseph Roach's theories on violence and garbage. Roach uses George Bataille's notion of "catastrophic expenditure" to argue that "violence is the performance of waste" and excess. He states: "to be fully demonstrative, to make its point, [violence] must *spend* things—material objects, blood, environments—in acts of Bataillan 'unproductive expenditure'" (41). Violence is a spectacle that necessitates an audience (even if it is merely God or the victim) in order to illustrate its point. Similar to the production of consumer goods and trash, the violence depicted in *Mapocho* replicates the excesses of market-based economies. Fernández's attention to trash suggests that Chileans recognize and confront the fear military violence instilled in them, and begin to make collective decisions regarding issues of national importance, rather than surrender their influence to political and economic interests.

Further linking buried traumas to environmental concerns, it is important to observe that most of the phantoms have died in the name of economic

“progress,” and therefore reflect the disposable nature of consumer society. This society requires, on the one hand, the abundant production of material goods as well as, on the other, the rapid conversion into trash of the same goods it produces, all to assure the continuation and reproduction of the market system. Fernández’s eco-critique cautions readers that history, like trash, can be placed out of view temporarily, but it continues to exist—materially and emotionally—polluting the present and threatening the future. Humans, particularly in late-capitalist societies, perpetuate a cycle of producing and ridding themselves of trash and ghosts that never fully disappear, and hence are always contaminating the present and threatening to continue to do so in the future, as the text poignantly reveals:

Pero la historia no acaba así de fácil [trasladándola al basural]. Se multiplica en el papelerero del water, sale de nuestros cuerpos, de nuestras máquinas de escribir. Se cría en nuestras cocinas, se amontona en los rincones más queridos, y así vive, extendiendo sus tentáculos de mugre, sembrando su semilla cochina. Los basurales colapsan y ya no dan abasto para tanta suciedad. Los vecinos reclaman, el olor se hace insoportable. Nadie quiere estar cerca de la basura. Hay que tapparla, echarle algo encima, enterrarla bien enterrada, extirpar su olor y todo su hálito putrefacto.

La pelea es dura, pero finalmente se gana. Hay que tener paciencia, elevar peticiones para cerrar los vertederos, pintar uno que otro cartel de reclamo, gestionar todas las reuniones posibles....Se enumeran los contra y así, con un poco de burocracia y tiempo, los basurales acaban por desaparecer. Se les entierra bajo capas gruesas de relleno como se hace con los muertos. Se les inmoviliza y se les controla porque la basura es rebelde y se cuele hacia afuera en forma de gas tóxico. Los vestigios de la mugre son tan peligrosos como ella. Pueden aparecer en cualquier momento, irrumpir cuando ya se les creía olvidados. Por eso se les reduce y cuando ya están bien controlados, se diseña un buen paisaje para instalar encima. Algo que ayude a borrar su imagen cochina. Un centro comercial, una torre de espejos, un parque, una plaza para los niños del sector. (217-18)

But history doesn’t end that easily [by taking it to the garbage dump]. It multiplies in the bathroom wastebasket, it comes out of our bodies and out of our typewriters. It grows in our kitchens, it piles up in our most cherished corners, and that’s how it lives, extending its filthy tentacles, planting its dirty seed. The garbage dumps collapse because they can’t withstand such filth. The neighbors protest, the smell becomes unbearable.

Nobody wants to be close to garbage. You've got to cover it up, put something over it, bury it really deep, eradicate its smell and all of its putrid breath.

The fight is hard, but it is finally won. You've got to be patient, demand that the dumps be closed, paint a protest sign or two, organize every possible meeting....You make lists of pros and cons, and with a little bureaucracy and time, the dumps disappear. They bury them beneath thick layers of filling like they do with the dead. They immobilize them and they control them because garbage is rebellious and it pushes through in the form of toxic gas. Filth's vestiges are as dangerous as filth itself. They can appear at any time, interrupt when you thought they were forgotten. That's why you've got to overpower them, and when they are good and controlled, you've got to design a nice landscape to put over them. Something to help erase its dirty image. A shopping center, a mirrored skyscraper, a park, a playground for the neighborhood children.

This depiction of history as the cataclysmic accumulation of trash—the simultaneous existence of past events, rather than a linear chronology of occurrences—recalls German philosopher Walter Benjamin's perception of the past. He observed history by interpreting Paul Klee's painting, "Angelus Novus," and wrote:

[the painting] shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixed contemplating. . . . This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to. . . make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is brewing in Paradise. . . . This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257-58)

Benjamin's Marxist representation of historical progress through the metaphor of a pile of garbage criticizes a "triumphalist bourgeois history" in which capitalism's continuation requires the justification of the "barbarism of the [capitalist] present" (Sandilands 30). Benjamin's critique of late capitalism is particularly useful in understanding Fernández's assessment of Chile's more recent history of "progress," where the triumph of the bourgeoisie that produced the novel's historical present during the transition occurred through the Pinochet regime's violent installation of the free market economy. The trash metaphor, moreover, allows Fernández to nuance the far-reaching ecological consequences

of the neoliberal globalization project, where multinational corporations profit from laissez-faire environmental regulations in developing countries like Chile, leaving the poor and younger generations to deal with the mess. Fernández's presentation of history is thus eco-conscious and oriented towards both human and environmental rights. Encouraging Chileans to clean up their environment, the author demonstrates the importance of (re)collecting the buried aspects of the past, and through Rucia's agency, shows readers that wellbeing in the present and future depends on recycling historical trauma and resisting planned obsolescence. Fernández suggests that the solution rests in working through the past like Rucia, who (re)collects and then reuses the detritus of the past to reconstruct her own and Chile's history as well as to envision an alternative future. Fernández calls on the principles of the green movement to reveal the need to confront human and environmental injustice, while warning readers about the dangers of ignoring the contaminants surrounding us. Through this critique, the author shows the need of transition-era Chileans—citizens of a capitalist democracy in the making—to determine for themselves where their historical trash would go and to consciously decide how the past, present and future would interact.

*Mapocho* exhibits the spiritual, political and environmental crises facing Chile during its complicated transition from dictatorship to democracy. Rucia models an environmentalist working-through of history that mirrors Fernández's own literary project. She engages with the other ghosts and recovers historical vestiges polluting Chile's present. This has consequences for the implied amnesic Chilean readers of *Mapocho*, who parallel the living national population included in the book that customarily turned a "hysterically blind" eye to images of the past. Rucia's recollection of the past by resurrecting ghosts and recycling history's trash makes the reader aware of repressed history as well as the deliberate processes of negation amongst history's victors. By way of Rucia's experience, Fernández proposes a reunion of the severed community, suggesting a productive end for the common citizen that may come about through an exchange between the living and the dead and the past, present, and future times. Her work suggests that such temporal and affective bonds lessen the residual psychological scarring that collective amnesia causes. Drawing on environmentalist discourse, she questions Chile's participation in the corporate globalization project. By focusing on the nation's historical pattern of human rights injustice and environmental exploitation in the name of "progress," Fernández shows her readers the enduring consequences of the consumer model and bloodshed in the name of economic "progress" through the depiction of history as the accumulation of the past in the present. Unlike the trends characterizing the McOndo group which remained uncritical of neoliberalism's need to create a perpetual present, *Mapocho* seeks to demonstrate that what is missing from the culture of instant gratification characterizing free-market economies is an

emotional connection to the past and future. Fernández's work, much like that of other women writers of the Generation of 1990, is a poignant proposal to repair spiritual and environmental damage. In that way Fernández offers transition-era Chileans an alternative means with which to grapple with history and to engage in the larger global context of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century from which her book emerged. The author shows us that the experiences of her tiny nation, isolated in the extreme southern end of the earth, remind individuals, countries, and the world-at-large of their own unfulfilled challenges and unmet needs. She urges us to observe not only the ghosts who call Chile home, but also those spirits who drift through time and space, haunting us with their troubling evocations of our collective pasts from their native soils in the Global South, asking us how long we will pollute our world with ghostly debris.

#### Notes

1. The transition describes the ten-year period when Chile moved from dictatorship to democracy, which began with the plebiscite in 1988 and symbolically ended at the time of Augusto Pinochet's house arrest in England ten years later.
2. The Generation of 1990 is the term most frequently used to refer to this group, but it has also been called: the Group of Very Young Writers, the McOndo Generation, the Emerging Generation, the Generation of 1987, and Generation X (Kohut and Morales 13). Elsewhere I have called it the Group of Cultural Industry.
3. Moulian argues that the Pinochet dictatorship constitutes the only true revolutionary period in Chilean history. He maintains that the neoliberal economic system supplanted socialist ideology, and stamped out the community-mindedness and collective political engagement associated with the Allende years. The totalitarian government successfully constructed a new socio-economic and cultural structure that valued the individual, technological advances and consumerism, and made Chileans apathetic about politics.
4. Campos criticizes the McOndo project, arguing that the scarcity of women writers in one anthology and their complete absence in another is alarming given the importance of the female authors of the dictatorship-era Generation of 1980. The editors address this lack in both introductions, attributing it to a deficiency in talent, submissions, and numbers of young women writers at the time.



5. In the introductions to both anthologies, the editors remark on the paucity of women writers in their books. In *Cuentos con walkman* ('Short Stories with Walkman') they define the generation as male, even though several women writers appear in the collection: "Veinte jóvenes, casi todos varones (¿dónde están las voces femeninas?), casi todos periodistas, han contado su cuento" (12-13) 'Twenty young people, almost all male journalists (where are women's voices?) have told their story.' Again, in *McOndo*, the editors recognize the absence of female contributors, explaining that their limited knowledge about and contact with contemporary women writers led to their exclusion (14). I question their justification for excluding women when they insinuate that the incorporation of them could be interpreted as a concession to a politically correct readership. In my mind, literary production among contemporary Hispanic women writers abounds in quality and quantity and therefore does not need the protection of politically correct watchdogs to merit the consideration of the anthologists.

6. Fernández is a multi-talented writer and performer whose work has been recognized in Chile and abroad. Alongside her career as a professional actor, she has published four novels, a collection of short stories, a play, and numerous television scripts and adaptations. In *Mapocho*, Fernández develops thematic interests that repeat themselves in her later narrative works, including: a focus on recuperating suppressed memories; a concern with depicting the troubling experiences of individuals who grew up during the regime; and attention to the significance of the Santiago cityscape.

7. All four scholarly works published to date that analyze *Mapocho* inform this study. Juan Armando Epple interprets a number of exemplary fictions by the women writers of Chile's Generation of 1990, including *Mapocho*, to show that shared thematic concerns, such as the propensity to depict the dissolution of the national "family" and the inclusion of woman writer protagonists, warrants considering these authors a literary generation. For his part, Christian Opazo reads *Mapocho* as an inversion of the national romance, arguing that the book depicts the failure of the national project of the twentieth century through its inclusion of the stories of the repressed alongside those of official history. My interpretation of the novel is most related to Andrea Jéftánovic and Daniel Noemi Voionmaa's analyses of Fernández's representation of Santiago as a repository of historical memory and forgetting situated within the context of the neoliberal economy.

8. I am alluding to Sigmund Freud's well-known concept of "working through," in which the psychoanalyst treats the patient by helping him or her disinter and interpret the repressed traumas and memories festering in their unconscious.

9. Since *Mapocho* has not yet been translated into English, all of the translated quotations included in this essay are my own.

10. In her oft-quoted study, *Escenas de la vida posmoderna (Scenes of Postmodern Life)*, Argentine cultural theorist Beatriz Sarlo argues that the consumerist locales characterizing postmodern and post-totalitarian urban Latin America intensify the loss of collective memory. She contends that shopping malls in particular erase the historical conditions on which they are built and replace them with a new culture based on consumerism (19).

11. For a more detailed reading of the cultural implications of the Chilean booth in Seville, see Richard's chapter entitled "The Graphic Model of an Advertising Identity" in her *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition*, and the section in Moulian's book titled "El iceberg, escultura del blanqueo" 'The Iceberg, Sculpture of a Blocked Memory.'

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