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Reflections on Chilean Literary Criticism: Enrique Lihn and Roberto Bolaño Challenge José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois

Abstract / Resumen

This article examines the ways in which writings by both Enrique Lihn and Roberto Bolaño enter into dialogue with the Chilean critical icon José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois. I argue that Lihn's essay *Sobre el antiestructuralismo de José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois* (1983) and Bolaño's novel *Nocturno de Chile* (2000) attempt to subvert the cultural dominance of Ibáñez Langlois through complex representations and interpretations of his theoretical relationship to language and silence. Keeping in mind Bolaño's own admiration of Lihn, this article seeks to consider the ways in which Lihn's polemic with Ibáñez Langlois during Pinochet's dictatorship especially informs the development of the fictional Urrutia Lacroix in *Nocturno de Chile*.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Roberto Bolaño, Enrique Lihn, Ignacio Valente, Literary Criticism, structuralism, Pinochet dictatorship

Cover Page Footnote / Si quiere que su cubierta contenga una nota al pie de página...

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José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois, both a professor of literature and an ordained priest of the Opus Dei Prelature, began writing for the weekly *Revista de Libros* column of the right-wing Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* in 1966. Ibáñez Langlois contributed regularly to *El Mercurio* for nearly thirty years under the pen name Ignacio Valente, establishing himself as the newspaper's official literary critic and thereby joining the ranks of a critical elite headed by Emilio Vaisse (pseud. Omer Emeth) and Hernán Díaz Arrieta (pseud. Alone) since the first years of the twentieth century. As Leonidas Morales T. explains: "ha sido una tradición del diario conservador *El Mercurio* organizar la crítica literaria alrededor de un centro, 'metafísico' diría Derrida, representado por un crítico principal capaz de darle a su palabra el peso (el poder) de la autoridad" (85).

In an article published in 1971, "Alone y su época", Ibáñez Langlois separates himself from his critical predecessor at *El Mercurio*, emphasizing the tendency of his mentor to write subjective and impressionistic literary reviews: "ha tenido siempre más sensibilidad que rigor intelectual, más sentido del placer que del valor." Despite such limitations, however, Ibáñez Langlois also values aspects of Alone's poetic approach to criticism, in which the literary review becomes an act of creation that parallels its object of study: "tantas veces se tiene la impresión de encontrar más estilo en una columna de Alone, que en las doscientas páginas del libro sometido a juicio". Ibáñez Langlois, reflecting upon his own critical evolution in a later essay, acknowledges that he initially took a more strictly "academic" or "scientific" approach to criticism, which included textual analysis of a work's structure and inner logic. In his words: "quise reivindicar –de acuerdo con mis estudios y teorías previas– una condición de máxima objetividad para la obra literaria y su *estructura*, palabra que yo usaba mucho pero con la inocencia de los años anteriores al *ismo*" ("Veinticinco" 18). At the same time, it is telling that Ibáñez Langlois thinks of science and structure as tools that should ideally serve to validate the critic's already instinctive determination of a book's aesthetic "worth" or "beauty." As Ibáñez Langlois explains: "¿de qué vale toda la *ciencia del lenguaje* –en caso de existir– si el crítico no tiene ese imponderable sentido objetivo que se llama buen gusto, buen olfato, tacto literario, don de apreciación espontánea, visión, oído, etc.?" ("Veinticinco" 18).

In his later years as a critic, Ibáñez Langlois increasingly identifies with the intimacy of Alone's readings and with "[el] poder intransferible del gusto personal" ("Veinticinco" 18). As we will examine throughout this essay, his refutation of the theoretical work of structuralists in his 1983 *Sobre el estructuralismo* –on the basis that human thought predates language and that, as a consequence, there are pre-lingual or "irrational" spaces within the artistic work resistant to textual analysis (77, 89)–, serves to foment an association of the critic with the religious oracle or the Romantic genius, whose job is to judge and predict

rather than study within an analytical framework.[1] In this sense, Chilean writer Juan Emar's condescending treatment of Omer Emeth and, particularly, of Alone in his 1934 avant-garde novel *Miltín 1934*, may also apply to Ibáñez Langlois at the end of the twentieth century:

> Señores críticos: a ustedes les gustaría ser profetas. […] ¿No encuentran ustedes que tal querer es demasiada pretensión? Les aconsejaría a todos dejar de lado tamañas profecías. En primer lugar porque no diviso ni lejanamente la talla de un profeta, y en segundo lugar, por razones de simple economía: tanto trabajo, tantos esfuerzos –recuérdese que cada vez que habla un profeta, por lo menos un volcán estalla en erupción, y Chile, país de volcanes…–". (42)

Having read and written about *Miltín 1934*, Ibáñez Langlois separates himself from Emar's portrayal of Alone as suffering from "el miedo negro de equivocarse" (42) by emphasizing his own willingness to take critical risks: "Yo me juego y me arriesgo en mis anticipaciones. Juzgar lo nuevo con un juicio comprometedor me parece la razón de ser misma de la crítica literaria" ("Desafíos" 24). At the same time, this affirmation further cements his own vision of the literary critic as the brave standard-bearer of aesthetic judgment, whose privileged sense of foresight takes priority over a more systematic exploration of the object of study.

Alone and Ibáñez Langlois are frequently characterized as cultural "dictators" of Chile who demonstrated, with varying degrees of discreetness, their acceptance of Pinochet's 1973 coup d'état and resulting dictatorship. For Guido Arroyo González, Ibáñez Langlois is "el crítico todopoderoso" and "una figura totémica y dictatorial –como lo había sido Alone– en el campo de la crítica artístico literaria" (24, 28). Javier Pinedo claims that for Alone, the Allende years represented a time of "desorden y estancamiento político y económico" (99), while "la referencia a una salida militar (a través de la presencia del líder) para oponerse a la crisis también está presente en Alone" (100).[2] Meanwhile, Bernardo Subercaseaux (141) and Jean Franco (115), alongside Enrique Lihn (23), maintain that Ibáñez Langlois (who published his study, *El marxismo: visión crítica,* in 1973) gave classes on Marxism to none other than the Military Junta. At the same time, neither Alone nor Ibáñez Langlois acknowledged direct involvement in the violent post-Allende political practices in Chile. Alone did not live to see the end

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[1] Alone also values the sensitive prophet-critic able to make value judgements over those who attempt to analyze language with purely "technical" tools: "el crítico, para juzgar, debe apoyarse únicamente en su intuición, en su sensibilidad, en su instinto, siempre sobre elementos estrictamente personales" (197).

[2] Pinedo links Alone's conservative thought to the writings of historians Francisco Antonio Encina and Jaime Eyzaguirre (97).

of the dictatorship; Ibáñez Langlois, however, found it necessary, when reflecting on his critical approach in 1992, to defend his "apolitical" stance throughout the 70s and 80s:

> Prefiero abordar el aspecto político –para mí, apolítico– del asunto. Todo empezó con el gobierno militar, durante el cual –por vejez, muerte, exilio, censura o, en fin, desaparición de los demás críticos– quedé como casi el único en estas columnas. El hecho –bien ajeno a mi voluntad– me ha valido ser calificado a veces de crítico *oficial* de ese régimen. Para mí, el asunto es sencillamente ridículo. No percibo diferencia alguna entre mi crítica anterior, concomitante y posterior a ese gobierno. ("Veinticinco" 18).

While for Ibáñez Langlois, the stability of his literary criticism before, during, and after Pinochet's reign establishes his distance from the political arena, in the context of a military dictatorship filled with "exilio, censura, o, en fin, desaprición", such stability might be read as complicity with the authoritarian regime. This is especially the case when it is one of Chile's most powerful critical voices opting to stay silent and "no hacer jamás cuestión del color político de los autores y de sus obras" ("Veinticinco" 18). Arroyo González similarly interprets Ibáñez Langlois as having fulfilled the dictatorships' need for an "agente mediador"; that is, someone able to bridge the gap between state oppression and the need for aesthetic enjoyment or "el placer de la lectura que sostuvo ciertos segmento de la sociedad" (29).

On the one hand, Ibáñez Langlois' support of more progressive literary figures such as Raúl Zurita, who was a member of the activist art group CADA during the dictatorship, suggests a potentially productive open-ended approach to criticism, unhampered by the desire to classify and analyze artists based on political preferences. On the other hand, Ibáñez Langlois' more abstract philosophical, theological, and aesthetic analyses might also be interpreted as deliberate misreadings, whereby the specific political potential of works by Zurita and others is deactivated.

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical developments on the cultural field may help to illuminate how Ibáñez Langlois' conception of literary criticism as an autonomous sphere all the more strongly situates the critic within the power-struggles of the Allende and Pinochet years. In "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," Bourdieu considers the cultural field to be comprised not only of novels, artwork, and plays, but also of such works' conditions of production, which would include critical writing and its establishment of "rules" for determining discursive value within the field (36). Writers and critics within the cultural sphere, Bourdieu explains, are governed by two inversely related principles of hierarchization: the *heteronomous* principle, governed by "*success* as measured by indices such as book sales, number of

theatrical performances, etc.", and the *autonomous* principle, whereby the writer, critic, or publisher is rewarded symbolically through "*degree specific consecration* (literary or artistic prestige)" (38). If "success" is proportional to one's proximity to the extra-artistic laws of the "field of power", within which the cultural field is inscribed, "degree specific consecration" depends precisely on the negation of such power of "economic and political profit" (38-39). Ibáñez Langlois' proclaimed commitment to "ascende[r] por la jerarquía del espíritu" ("Desafíos" 25) and his outward disavowal of politically-oriented criticism points to his own self-insertion within what Bourdieu calls the "autonomous sub-field" of culture. Nevertheless, Bourdieu reveals that such apparent critical "disinterestedness" may actually function as a symbolic guise for production that will eventually translate into economic or political capital:

> the establishment of an autonomous sub-field which is opposed to the heteronomous sub-field as an anti-economic economy [is] based on the refusal of commerce and 'the commercial' and, more precisely, on the renunciation of short-term economic profits (linked to the short cycle of the field of large-scale production) and on recognition solely of *symbolic, long term profits* (but which are ultimately reconvertible into economic profits). (54)

We might recognize Ibáñez Langlois' disavowal of structuralist developments as a purely "symbolic" act, in that he declares his methodological positioning to address exclusively aesthetic concerns. However, if Bourdieu had the chance to meet Chile's famous critic, he would likely point out that Ibáñez Langlois' high esteem for literary autonomy secretly functions as a political and economic venture. First, it enables him to distinguish himself from those who oppose arts' insertion into the market but nevertheless regard literature as necessarily heteronomous; that is, as a weapon for sociopolitical change. Second, and as a result of such a distinction, it ensures his economic success in the literary marketplace, in that the majority of his competition, including many writers influenced by structuralist thought, eventually "disappear" –often in the full and tragic sense of this word– on account of less discreet political postures. In this sense, Ibáñez Langlois manages to ensure a dominant position within the field of power surrounding the literary field, precisely by maintaining his distance from "extra-literary" struggles. Theoretical and cultural production whose objective, on the other hand, is to "deconstruct the distinctions between elite and popular culture, fictive and non-fictive discourse, tragedy and television" (Eagleton 93), could make no claim to such impartiality.

Despite Ibáñez Langlois' power within and outside of the cultural field, a number of Chilean writers and intellectuals, including Roberto Hozven, Bernardo Subercaseaux, Enrique Lihn, and, some years later, Roberto Bolaño, have confronted the critic's positions. For Arroyo González, whose essay focuses on

Lihn, such figures would form part of a long history of writers, including Emar, who independently sought to challenge "la normalización de un modo de significar el trabajo crítico" (25) represented by Alone and, later, Ibáñez Langlois.[3]

In the space that follows, I would like to focus on the treatment of this second critical icon in Lihn's essay *Sobre el antiestructuralismo de José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois* (1983), published in Santiago,[4] and in Bolaño's novel *Nocturno de Chile* (2000). As we will see, both of these texts, without sacrificing their own creative status, attempt to subvert the cultural dominance of Ibáñez Langlois by examining his theoretical relationship to language and silence. In *Sobre el antiestructuralismo*, which combines elements of the academic and personal essay, Lihn becomes a critic of "el crítico todopoderoso," while his formal experimentation, alongside his passionate backing of structuralism's analytical possibilities and his disapproval of Ibáñez Langlois' "intento de desconstituir, denegar o reprimir el discurso estructuralista" (Lihn 12), can be read in highly political terms.[5] As Ana María Risco states in her description of this essay: "Lihn logró dar una salida política a su convencimiento estético y poético sobre la realidad del lenguaje, sin necesidad de echar mano a recursos ajenos a su propia condición de 'artista de la palabra'" (66).[6] Recognizing the impossibility of a cultural field separate from sociopolitical tensions, Lihn engages in a theoretical debate in order to both defend the structuralists' gesture of democratizing and demystifying criticism and to make visible Ibáñez Langlois' purposefully "misrecognized" economic or political capital.[7] In *Nocturno de Chile*, Bolaño represents Ibáñez Langlois via the fictional first-person narrator Sebastián Urrutia Lacroix who, on his deathbed, revisits moments of his life considered to be undecipherable, "silent," or resistant to language. If the real-life literary critic does not seem to waver from what we might call his "anti-structuralist"

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[3] Arroyo González, drawing upon the work of Ana María Risco, specifically situates Emar and Lihn as a critical pair (despite generational differences) in direct opposition to Alone and Valente (30).

[4] To my knowledge, Hozven is the only critic besides Lihn to directly challenge Ibáñez Langlois' anti-structuralist writings during the dictatorship in a Chilean publication. In 1979, Hozven wrote a letter from Concepción, Chile, to the director of *El Mercurio*, which was printed some months later in the Chilean art magazine *CAL*, Coordinación Artística Lationamericana (13).

[5] Felipe Alliende, referring to Lihn's interest in structuralism, maintains that "Enrique encontró la maravilla de maravilla: disponía ahora de un aparataje que le permitía hablar sobre muchas cosas" (62).

[6] Risco, whose *Crítica situada* is dedicated primarily to Enrique Lihn's writing on the visual arts, touches on *Sobre el antiestructuralismo*'s main arguments without elaborating further on the specific conditions that allow for and elucidate the essay's "salida política".

[7] As Bourdieu explains in another essay: "'Symbolic capital' is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic' profits" ("The Production of Belief" 75).

interpretive position, Bolaño's Urrutia Lacroix alternatively evolves, through his own experience of remembering, into a new kind of post-dictatorship critic unable to turn away from the political potency behind each silenced word, each scene once deemed meaningless or unreadable. Keeping in mind Bolaño's own admiration of Enrique Lihn and his correspondence with him in the early eighties (Leddy), it will be important to think about how Lihn's attempt to take Ibáñez Langlois to task especially informs the development of Urrutia Lacroix in *Nocturno de Chile*.[8]

While Enrique Lihn's essay acts as a direct response to Ibáñez Langlois' *Sobre el estructuralismo*, its main points also challenge earlier writings by the critic on structuralism and literary criticism. As Lihn confesses in the first paragraph of his essay, he had already prepared an article entitled "Valente o la crisis de la crítica literaria en Chile" before finding out about the priest's latest publication (1). Lihn never published the preliminary version of his essay; however, it likely dealt with views expressed in Ibáñez Langlois' weekly *El Mercurio* columns. In 1978, for example, Ibáñez Langlois published "Miserias de la *ciencia literaria*". In this article, his criticism of structural analysis stems from what he perceives as its complete separation from value judgments and hierarchical organization, rendering it a "método de disección automática o mecánica de un texto al margen de su belleza" (42). Ibáñez Langlois additionally condemns structuralism for failing to distinguish between different types of texts –"es una *ciencia* que nada puede hacer por la delimitación de su objeto"– and for its use of "sospechosa jerigonza", interpreted as both boring and alienating the reader (43).[9]

Ibáñez Langlois' 1983 study, consisting of an expository section on linguistic and anthropological structuralism followed by discussion of the problems present in such methods, enables the critic to explore structuralist developments more carefully than in his previous essays. Employing a more academic tone, the critic largely refrains from inserting his personal opinion into the first part of the text. Given that this section is only some fifty pages in length, he has clearly chosen to focus on select aspects of structuralism, which in turn facilitate his critique throughout the second half of the book. Ibáñez Langlois acknowledges particular merits of structuralism – namely, its rigorous and necessary return to the field of linguistics, as well as its use of distinctive, classificatory terms that assist literary and cultural analysis (63, 85). Nevertheless, he reports that this theoretical methods' failure lies in its transformation of language into "una especie de Substancia absoluta" (65). Many of Ibáñez Langlois' critical observations may resonate with us today, such as his

[8] Bolaño also wrote a story about an imaginary meeting with Enrique Lihn in *Putas asesinas* (2001), entitled "Encuentro con Enrique Lihn."

[9] In *Sobre el estructuralismo*, Ibáñez Langlois similarly recognizes structuralist literary analyses as expressed "en un argot insoportable" (89).

questioning of the need to privilege formal relations between signifiers over content (67), or the difficulty he finds in productively applying structuralist theories to individual works (88). At the same time, what seems troubling about the critic's stance is his claim that good literary criticism should somehow help the reader to come closer to the "beauty" of a work, rather than encourage him to engage with words and histories as detached from abstract aesthetic concepts. If Ibáñez Langlois, in a qualifying statement, deems "poetic mystery" an often overused expression among critics, he simultaneously proclaims the need to "evocar ese ingrediente real de misterio que rodea a la belleza, para recordar que ella no es del todo racionalizable" (89).

In response to *Sobre el antiestructuralismo*, Lihn simultaneously summarizes and attempts to discredit Ibáñez Langlois' reflections. His counterarguments put him in dialogue with such structuralists and predecessors of structuralism as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes, who were also cited in Ibáñez Langlois' study. Meanwhile, Lihn's discussions on structuralist conceptions of language and its relationship to the human subject and artistic production are continuously punctuated by sarcasm, ironic rhetorical questions, and occasional digressions. Such interruptions distance Lihn's text from the more formal atmosphere of the university classroom, without compromising the force of his argument. Furthermore, the particular typographic spacing of *Sobre el antiestructuralismo* makes it appear as a collection of textual fragments, suggesting a sketch or outline, or even a manifesto, rather than a traditional essay or work of critical analysis. A fragment towards the end of the text consists, for example, of a single sentence, which is a clear barb directed at Ibañez Langlois: "Para que el estructuralismo no tenga sentido conviene mantenerlo alejado del sentido" (20).

Lihn begins his essay by proclaiming Ibáñez Langlois' criticisms of structuralism as anachronistic, something that might have had value "en España, antes del colapso del régimen de Franco o en sus postrimerías", but certainly not now (3). His assertion that the Ibáñez Langlois' text could only flourish in an atmosphere of Francoist censorship can be read as a direct allusion to the current state of culture and politics in Chile, where, to Lihn's surprise, "el libro de I.L. se recomienda ya como la primera visión integral del estructuralismo en lengua española" (3). Such a portrayal of *Sobre el estructuralismo* as antiquated and filled with ideas pertaining more to "la disputa medieval entre realistas y nominalistas" (7) than to current theoretical debates, also serves to underline Ibáñez Langlois' failure to recognize the important evolution of structuralism within Chile.

As Subercaseaux explains, between 1960 and 1973, Chilean criticism underwent a period of modernization, in large part due to the influence of stylistics, formalism, the Prague linguistic circle, structural anthropology, French structural semiotics, and the Frankfurt school, among other theoretical approaches (122). Félix Martínez Bonati's *La estructura de la obra literaria*, for example,

which was published in 1960, is considered to be one of the first books of literary theory in Chile and Latin America; its approach, which seeks to connect linguistics to philosophy and phenomenology, marks the rise of what Terry Eagleton more broadly identifies as the conversion of the "literary work into a subject in its own right" (93). Martínez Bonati, as similar to Cedomil Goic and other university professors influenced by structuralism, underlines the importance of taking a scientific rather than "natural" or "common-sense" approach to literature: "está la intención de buscar fundamento sólido y exactas herramientas de método (conceptos-instrumentos, sistemas de indagación) para la ciencia de la literatura" (8). If, as Subercaseaux observes, initial research from these years seems to paradoxically close itself off from the social sphere by privileging "el texto como el único horizonte legítimo de la crítica", towards the end of the 1960s there is a growing interest in "corrientes que desde una perspectiva socio-histórica proveen un marco para captar la lógica de la presencia y desarrollo del fenómeno literario" (122-123), which we can link to poststructuralist developments and to the larger democratization of both the critical sphere and the object of study.[10] Vicente Bernaschina and Paulina Soto also comment upon this theoretical aperture spurred by structuralism in Chile:

> ya para la década de los setenta los críticos literarios chilenos y latinoamericanos tampoco creían en el estructuralismo así sin más. [...] El estructuralismo había sido el empujón inicial, pero ya varios habían tomado sus rumbos e iniciado una discusión muchísimo más viva e interesante a partir de las diferencias sociales, étnicas y culturales en cada una de nuestras regiones. (4)

With Pinochet's military takeover, many of the younger Chilean critics and researchers influenced by structuralism and interested in new and often socially minded approaches to criticism, such as Jaime Concha, Ariel Dorfman, and Nelson Osorio, went into exile; those left behind were forced to revert to earlier, more insular structural analyses as the sole means of challenging the "dictatorial voices" of *El Mercurio* (Subercaseaux 131). In this sense, and as acidly acknowledged by Lihn, Ibáñez Langlois' "tardía diatriba antiestructuralista", committed to "impugnar al estructuralismo en masa, a todos los estructuralismos condensados" and to "dar cuenta –en el doble sentido de la expresión: informar y liquidar– de la lingüística estructuralista, de la antropología estructural y de la teoría estructural de la literatura" (3), deliberately erases from history the broad, heterogenous theoretical significance of the years prior to the

[10] In Subercaseaux's words: "gran parte de la crítica de esos años trasciende desde diversos ángulos el fenómeno literario tradicional; de partida se amplía el canon de lo estudiado; por una parte hacia géneros no prestigiados como la subliteratura, el testimonio o la literatura popular, y por otra, hacia temas como la dependencia o la industria cultural" (127).

coup d'état. In this context, Lihn's characterization of structuralism as a complex, fluid, and not easily generalizable system also speaks to whole ways of reading culture –and society– that have been silenced by rigid political control.

Lihn explains in *Sobre el antiestructuralismo* that for Ibáñez Langlois, structuralism's consideration of language as an autonomous system, a "suerte de códigos de signos inmotivados (que no *representan* lo que significan)" (4), threatens to expel the human subject from the literary work being analyzed. Taking up an ironic tone, Lihn imagines, from the perspective of Ibáñez Langlois, a battle or "enfrentamiento mítico" waged between "[el] héroe de la Filosofía perenne, nacido de la cabeza del 'sensato o inagotable Aristóteles'" and "la lengua absolutizada" (5). For Lihn, man, as the inventor of language, can never be expelled from a structural analysis; at the same time, he voices what can be read as a protest against current "instituciones y organizaciones que perpetúan el statu quo" by calling for the morally necessary displacement of man from the center of Western history, in this case "la historia occidental mal llamada cristiana" (10). As Lihn explains, one of Ibáñez Langlois' principle arguments against structuralism is that in any literary work, there exist diverse forms of meaning which often elude language and "'la *materialidad* de las fórmulas verbales'" (in Lihn 5). In this sense, Ibáñez Langlois suggests the need for a method of study that somehow allows for the acknowledgment of "silent" or extra-verbal elements of literature. Lihn directly deflates such a portrayal of inexpressible meaning by emphasizing its very indistinguishability:[11] a critic who finds himself in front of meaningful "silences," he says, has no choice but to remain silent, thereby renouncing the critical reflection paramount to the study of culture:

> Pregunto: ¿cómo se demuestra –sin la ayuda del lenguaje– que 'no podemos dar a nuestras locuciones y textos la sutil ligereza, la hondura, la rapidez instantánea y el fondo siempre inefable de nuestros pensamientos'[,] imposibilidad que es dogma en *S. el E.*? ¿Quedándonos callados? pero ¿de qué manera que distinga ese silencio de cualesquiera otros? El sublime afásico inefable –alma del pensamiento que prescinde del lenguaje[–] es una muda voz no oída. Escapa a toda definición del homo sapiens, el inventor del lenguaje. (6)

Lihn's most direct condemnation of Ibáñez Langlois' public behavior, embedded within his largely theoretical protest, can be found when he describes his astonishment that such an "untouchable" critic as Valente does not speak out against the literary censorship that has persisted in Chile since 1973. As he explains: "no a cualquier intelectual se le podía pedir que librara públicamente esa

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[11] In Risco's words, Lihn counters Ibáñez Langlois by proposing "la existencia únicamente lingüística de todos los discursos, la inverificabilidad absoluta del 'verbo interior' tomista o de una heterogeneidad fundamental y primera entre la palabra y el pensamiento" (65).

batalla, sí al crítico de *El Mercurio* autor de un manual anti-marxista y profesor, en el tema, de la Junta Militar" (23). Lihn recognizes that he writes from a formally disadvantageous position relative to Ibáñez Langois, proclaiming that "soy un crítico literario aunque no tenga tribuna de tal" (14). Nevertheless, his self-appointed role as critic of the "crítico todopoderoso" enables him to expose not only his adversary's analytical weaknesses, but also Ibáñez Langlois' willingness to profit from "disinterestedness." Combining different quotational fragments from the newspaper *Tercera de la Hora* in order to construct an indirect yet highly accusatory statement, Lihn suggests how we might connect Ibáñez Langlois' literary agenda to his affiliation with the Opus Dei, "una organización 'que se halla especialmente interesada en dominar los centros de enseñanza' y que 'en los regímenes autoritarios' 'penetra las estructuras de poder con facilidad'" (3). We might consider this passage as representative of the larger textual strategies guiding Lihn's essay, in that its re-contextualized pieces of previously written words mirror the author's careful crafting of a purposefully "perforated" essay, whose diverse registers and spacing leave room for the permeation of loaded political meaning.

Turning to *Nocturno de Chile*, we will find Bolaño's Urrutia Lacroix –in line with Ibáñez Langlois' "anti-structuralism"–, to be directly influenced by an appeal to critical silence in the face of apparent extra-linguistic meaning. The novel, which is not divided into chapters or paragraphs, takes the form of an uninterrupted monologue and acts as a final confession of the fictionalized literary critic and priest, who begins by stating that "ahora me muero, pero tengo muchas cosas que decir todavía" (11). Urrutia Lacroix is eager to "aclarar algunos puntos" and to justify his past actions, as well as his silences: "uno tiene la obligación moral de ser responsable de sus actos y también de sus palabras e incluso de sus silencios" (11). As we will see, the very process of revisiting situations long ago left behind ultimately distances the fictional protagonist from the security projected by Ibáñez Langlois in his 1992 *Veinticinco años de crítica*, as Urrutia Lacroix finds himself questioning different kinds of signs, gestures, or texts that once seemed to resist critical interpretation. In *Nocturno*, Bolaño turns the reader into the Opus Dei priest's final confessor; we are able to observe first hand the cracks and fissures that threaten to compromise Urrutia Lacroix's clear conscience as he recounts significant moments in his life. If Lihn appeals to theory as a coded way of "talking politics" in *Sobre el antiestructuralismo*, Bolaño's protagonist comes to recognize his own political interestedness in criticisms' autonomy when, over the course of his narration, past "silences", as well as those of his friends and colleagues, are reflected back at him as sinister, Bourdieuian "aesthetic investments" ("Production" 79).[12]

[12] Here, we might turn to Ignacio López-Vicuña's provocative analysis of *Nocturno de Chile*, which considers Bolaño's novel to bemoan the failings of literature and the intellectual sphere in general, in light of "the catastrophe of recent modern history": "by suggesting the barbarous

Urrutia Lacroix begins his confession/life story by telling of his formative first visit to the home of the famous literary critic Farewell, who is likely a fictional representation of Alone. If prior to this visit, Farewell points out to his young disciple the difficulties of dedicating oneself to literature in a "país de bárbaros" and a "país de dueños de fundo" (14), Urrutia Lacroix imagines Farewell's large country estate to be a poetic refuge from the rest of the world: "imaginé ese fundo en donde la literatura sí que era un camino de rosas y en donde el saber leer no carecía de mérito y en donde el gusto primaba por encima de las necesidades y obligaciones prácticas" (15). At the same time, the physical structure considered necessary to ensuring aesthetic autonomy for writers and critics paradoxically relies upon strict economic and political hierarchies. As Susana Draper observes in reference to the living room of Farewell's estate, which is filled not only with books but with exotic souvenirs, stuffed animals, and dissected heads: "Books and stuffed heads represent two types of accumulation that dislocate the narrator and imaginatively split his reading of the cultural house into two kinds of process: culture and hunting, housing and hunting" (133). While the *fundo* is undoubtedly "the estate-house of national literature," it functions simultaneously as "the natural museum of civilizing massacre" (Draper 133).

During his stay with Farewell, Urrutia Lacroix takes a long walk through the estate, where he loses his way. Outside of his aesthetic safe-haven, he comes into contact with peasants who work the surrounding countryside upon crossing the improvised "boundary" of their bed sheets and clothing, hung out to dry. Urrutia Lacroix's unexpected interruption of a group of adults, "enhiestos en un imperfecto semicírculo, con las manos tapando sus caras", and in the middle of what resembles a secret ritual of coordinated movements, leaves the priest perplexed: "aunque el gesto duró poco [...] consiguió alterar mi equilibrio mental y físico, el feliz equilibrio que minutos antes me había obsequiado la contemplación de la naturaleza" (30).

The priest acknowledges that something about the unfolding scene made him feel uncomfortable: as readers, we might think of the grief or distress evident in the hands covering faces, the unity of the peasants whose shared experience, perhaps of prayer, excludes the protagonist from the closed semicircle, or the strength and determination perceived in the peasants' erect stature. However, Urrutia Lacroix does not attempt to reflect upon what he has witnessed or account for his reaction. Rather, he passively records "ojeras", "labios partidos", "pómulos brillantes", faces that "se contraían en interrogantes mudas o se expandían en exclamaciones sin palabras", and "una paciencia como venida del espacio

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reverse of lettered culture, Bolaño strips literature of its aura as a privileged space, a shelter from the violence of history – which is how Urrutia Lacroix conceives it" (163-164). With this in mind, we might ask ourselves how the fictional Urrutia Lacroix, precisely because of his enduring faith in literary creation, is able to arrive, as a narrator and "reader" of the past, at an unexpected confrontation with "the violence of history."

exterior" (31-32). While words and body parts are rendered silent, incoherent, and unplaceable, or are simply reduced to noise, movement is similarly stilled or else proclaimed as disconnected from a larger objective: "las campesinas eran feas y sus palabras incoherentes. El campesino quieto era feo y su inmovilidad incoherente. Los campesinos que se alejaban eran feos y su singladura en zigzag incoherente." (33).

Here, we might consider Walter Benjamin's reflections on the interrupted gesture in epic theater. Benjamin maintains that "processes being interrupted" are central to epic theater's intent to *reveal* social conditions, rather than reproduce them (5). When a stranger, for example, suddenly steps into a scene of domestic violence, the images of "rumpled bedclothes, open window, devastated interior" can automatically be associated with both violence and with "the more usual scenes of bourgeois life," in a way that would not be possible in a more gradual or inclusive presentation of events (5). The physical and mental distance of the stranger from the scene interrupted and his sudden contact with new images potentially enables him to perceive important connections between different levels of social violence (5). On the outskirts of Farewell's estate, Urrutia Lacroix similarly interrupts an intimate gesture of the peasants; however, he shields himself from what he sees and hears, failing to connect the images that play out in front of him to his own experience and reducing the peasants who interact with him to the category of indecipherable beings (32). The narrator's subsequent description of his return journey cannot help but reveal the political implications of crossing back over "la frontera de la ropa tendida", which, unlike the structural confines of Farewell's house, is loose and permeable to the outside world: "el paso se transformó en un trote con una ligera reminiscencia marcial" (34).

Urrutia Lacroix later recalls when, some years after his unsettling country walk, he eats at a local dive with Farewell and contemplates the future of Chile; as with the previous scene, we are once again made privy to the protagonist's limited critical readings of signs. At the same time, it is possible to detect a growing inner conflict in the protagonist-narrator, whereby it becomes more difficult to allow messages to remain silent and unexplained. While such ambivalence may or may not have been experienced at the long-ago dinner, there is no doubt that Urrutia Lacroix's recollection of his reunion with Farewell gives rise to a particular style of narrative representation, in which specific imagery and snippets of conversation allow us to perceive the emergence of doubt.

As the two friends finish their dinner inside the restaurant, they sit apart from the noise and crowds of people outside; at the same time, a sudden flow of human shadows projected against the restaurant's walls enables countless men and women from Santiago's streets to virtually travel inside and to their table. These never-ending shadows, which are at the same time mesmerizing and disconcerting for the distanced observers, evoke a kind of silent march or protest and seem to act as a symbol of the country's sociopolitical urgency, further emphasized by the length of the narrator's "run-on" descriptive sentence:

> la gente, en la calle, se apresuraba, urgida por una ansia incomprensible de llegar a sus casas, y sus sombras se proyectaban una detrás de otra, cada vez más rápido, en las paredes del restaurante donde Farewell y yo manteníamos contra viento y marea, aunque tal vez debería decir contra el aparato electromagnético que se había desencadenado en las calles de Santiago y en el espíritu colectivo de los santiaguinos, una inmovilidad apenas interrumpida por los gestos de nuestras manos que acercaban las tazas de café a nuestros labios, mientras nuestros ojos observaban como quien no quiere la cosa, como haciéndose los distraídos, a la chilena, las figuras chinescas que aparecían y desaparecían en los tabiques del restaurante, un divertimiento que parecía hipnotizar a mi maestro y que a mí me causaba vértigo y dolor en los ojos [...] (63)

If Urrutia Lacroix was able register and walk away from the previous peasant formation, here he does not close his eyes to the unfolding movement of shadows, despite the unease and physical pain he experiences: "el dolor sólo se mantuvo en los ojos, lo cual era fácil de subsanar, pues cerrándolos el asunto quedaba finiquitado, algo que hubiera podido y debido hacer, pero no hice" (63). Curiously, rather than despairing at his unexpected contact with "el espíritu colectivo de los santiaguinos", the priest seems most upset by Farewell's reaction to such a scene, which visually develops just like the sequential projection of the shadows. Contemplating Farewell, Urrutia Lacroix is forced to confront, face-to-face, an "aesthetic" distancing from the outside world that likely mirrors his own posture. From Urrutia Lacroix's perspective, Farewell seems to pretend he is dining in the "isolation" of his country estate, remaining immobile and outwardly unaffected by the virtual spectacle within the restaurant: "quien pasara junto a nuestra mesa y lo mirara sólo vería a un caballero respetable en una actitud un tanto introspectiva" (63). At the same time, Farewell's "ligero movimiento ocular" signals that the critic is in fact aware of the movement around him: such calculated "indifference" thereby lends to his attitude of introspection "connotaciones de terror infinito" (63).

Eventually breaking the silence of the ominous projection, Farewell attempts, with Urrutia Lacroix's help, to distinguish forms in the shadows that will reveal the future. However, rather than directly discuss the significance of their visual experience in connection to the tense sociopolitical moment they are living at the end of the 1960s, both become prophetic fortune tellers of the years to come, drawing on their intuitive powers and looking at the shadows as they would tea leaves. Farewell declares in isolated sentences that "Pablo va a ganar el Nobel" and that "América va a cambiar. Y: Chile va a cambiar", while Urrutia Lacroix assures Farewell that he will live to see the outcome of such predictions: "estaba haciendo mi primera profecía y [...] si aquello que preveía Farewell se cumplía él lo iba a presenciar" (64). Such allusions to Pablo Neruda and to

changes in Chile and the Americas no doubt reflect awareness of the breaking up of established power structures within and outside of the literary field. However, both critics opt to transform what could be a demystified, social reflection into intuitive, prophetic, and poetically "incomplete" visions, as they cling to an older idea of the literary critic that has up to this point proved beneficial. At one point, Farewell views the unsubstantial and penetrable shadows on the wall as books that "me hablan de la multiplicidad de las lecturas" (64), likely suggesting a perceived future loss of aesthetic autonomy. Urrutia Lacroix, however, is quick to put down this "prophecy", declaring such new literary perspectives to be "múltiples pero bien miserables, bien mediocres" (64).

The priest, who persistently questions Farewell inside the restaurant, seems to struggle with revealing an underlying connection between the passage of the shadows and important historical processes: "¿distingue algo cierto en las sombras chinas?, ¿distingue escenas claras, el remolino de la historia, una eclipse enloquecida?" (64). Nevertheless, if for Farewell many images come to life in the shadows –including "un cuadro campestre" that connects the earlier praying peasants to his premonitions for Chile–, Urrutia Lacroix continues to resist this more penetrating gaze: "Y yo: qué curioso, a mí no me sugiere nada, sólo veo sombras, sombras eléctricas, como si el tiempo se hubiera acelerado" (64-65). He is intrigued and perturbed by his mentor's contradictory posture and yet at the same time not yet willing to change his own.

Allende's victory in 1973 similarly becomes something deemed unspeakable by Urrutia Lacroix: "Después vinieron las elecciones y ganó Allende. Y yo me acerqué al espejo de mi habitación y quise formular la pregunta crucial, la que tenía reservada para ese momento, y la pregunta se negó a salir de mis labios exangües" (96). It is significant that Urrutia Lacroix contemplates himself in the mirror, rather than looking outward onto the streets of Santiago, when thinking about Chile's political transformation. No longer facing Farewell's terrifying "frozen" expression, the priest now looks directly at his own "labios exangües"; he is able to perceive, but cannot verbally react to, a changing situation. While Urrutia Lacroix favors a personal, intuitive perception of the world over other types of readings, when confronted with myriad systemic changes propelled by Allende's presidency, he suffers from the aphasia recognized by Lihn. The subsequent three years of Allende's presidency, described in a single sentence that continues for nearly two pages, likely remits, as with the earlier description of the shadows, to the rupture of cultural hierarchies and to the pluralization of artistic and critical voices that takes place during this time. Draper astutely characterizes this passage as "refus[ing] to let us pause for breath, causing the same problem for the narrator as the campesinos –the difficulty of making sense when faced with a logic that does not fit easily into his Christian or aesthetic categories" (137). We are also reminded here of the new

boom of “la subliteratura, el testimonio o la literatura popular,” as mentioned by Subercaseaux (127).[13] Only after the fall of Allende is Urrutia Lacroix, who has spent the past years “hiding out” in the protective tomes of classical literature, able to turn away from his mirror and assume his former method of narration. As the remembering critic makes clear, the outside world has once again been “silenced” for him: “Me levanté y me asomé a la ventana: qué silencio” (99).

When Urrutia Lacroix recounts his experiences during the dictatorship, however, we find the priest less and less willing to avert his critical eye from what makes him uneasy: he can no longer act as he did as in his youth at Farewell’s estate, when “tuve conciencia de mi miedo, aunque preferí seguir mirando la luna” (26). The narrator recalls, for example, that his own poetry becomes uncharacteristically violent during this period, grounding his once exclusively metaphysical poetic concerns: “Mi poesía siempre había sido, para decirlo en una palabra, apolínea, y lo que ahora me salía más bien era, por llamarlo tentativamente de algún modo, dionisíaco. Pero en realidad no era poesía dionisíaca. Tampoco demoníaca. Era rabiosa” (101). If Urrutia Lacroix, as a poet, has let down his aesthetic guard and become angry with the world –“escribí sobre mujeres a las que zahería sin piedad, escribía sobre invertidos, sobre niños perdidos en estaciones de trenes abandonadas” (101)–, his own critical stance towards poetry has also changed. Rather than accepting his poems as incoherent or unimportant texts that, like the gesturing peasants beyond Farewell’s house, are simply “there” and not meant to be explained, Urrutia Lacroix insistently enters, from the present, into critical dialogue with his past self:

> ¿Qué me habían hecho esas pobres mujeres que aparecían en mis versos? ¿Acaso alguna me había engañado? ¿Qué me habían hecho esos pobres invertidos? Nada. Nada. Ni las mujeres ni los maricas. Y mucho menos, por Dios, los niños. ¿Por qué, entonces, aparecían esos desventurados niños enmarcados en esos paisajes corruptos? ¿Acaso alguno de esos niños era yo mismo? ¿Acaso eran los hijos que nunca iba a tener? ¿Acaso se trataba de los hijos perdidos de otros seres perdidos a quienes nunca conocería? ¿Pero por qué entonces tanta rabia? (101)

Perhaps for the first time, Urrutia Lacroix openly acknowledges the possibility that he has never really been immune to the “paisajes corruptos” of the

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[13] The great (and contradictory) symbol of Chile’s literary autonomy has also been deflated: “la Reforma Agragria expropió el fundo de Farewell y muchos otros fundos” (98). In relation to this section, Draper, who is interested in the text of *Nocturno* as a form of architecture, observes that “language and boundaries emerge in the textual space as expropriated from the usual standards that mark the double problematics in the text: economy and aesthetics, private property and narrativization. It is not accidental that the only explicit expropriation of an estate mentioned is that of Farewell himself, the bastion of national literature, which is progressively appropriated by another principle or meaning of politics (another type of housing)” (139).

world; in fact, he might have been one of the “niños perdidos” who for so many years had no place in his own writing.

After giving classes on Marxism to the Military Junta, Urrutia Lacroix’s initial anxiety about his pedagogical capacity quickly broadens to include the ethical implications of his academic services. If the priest maintains critical detachment from the object of study –he has studied Marxism “pero por motivos estrictamente intelectuales” (103)– his approach has nevertheless has provided cultural capital to a force more than willing to trade philosophical concepts for bodies. Urrutia Lacroix’s questions, and his suggestion of the slippery boundary between *right* and *wrong*, attest to a new attempt to verbally account for his uncertainty: “¿Hice lo que tenía que hacer? ¿Hice lo que debía hacer? [...] ¿Sabe un hombre, *siempre*, lo que está bien y lo que está mal?” (113). The narrator is especially worried about how his “amigos escritores” will react to the news about his classes. When the word of his involvement with the Junta spreads, he expects to receive a whole host of negative verbal reactions, from “las llamadas de los amigos o de los ex amigos” to “llamadas anónimas de los resentidos” (120). However, contrary to the priest’s prediction, his days are surrounded by silence, the very critical silence that he himself has practiced for so long:

> Al principio achaqué este silencio a una actitud de general rechazo hacia mi persona. Después, con estupor, me di cuenta de que a nadie le importaba un pepino. Las figuras hieráticas que poblaban la patria se dirigían, inconmovibles, hacia un horizonte gris y desconocido en el que apenas se vislumbraban unos rayos lejanos, unos relámpagos, unas humaredas. ¿Qué había allí? No lo sabíamos. [...] Ninguna discusión, ninguna investigación. (120)

As if once again in front of his own “lifeless” lips in the mirror, Urrutia Lacroix looks out onto a whole group of writers willing to overlook what goes on around them in order to protect their own symbolic power. On the one hand, such indifference to Urrutia Lacroix’s behavior is what allows him to continue to write and publish as Chile’s premiere literary critic during the dictatorship: “en aquellos años de acero y silencio, al contrario, muchos alabaron mi obstinación en seguir publicando reseñas y críticas. ¡Muchos alabaron mi poesía!” (121). On the other hand, the dying Urrutia Lacroix seems to recognize, and condemn, the capacity of many Chileans to simply deny or shut away their own contradictory actions, or to prefer, just as he did, the easy profits to be gained from “aesthetic” silence over critical attempts to analyze that which is painful or perturbing. While at a party hosted by María Canales –a fictional version of ex-DINA member Mariana Callejas–, the critic openly views the hostess’ son, “mi pequeño homónimo”, as a symbol of such a will to “shut out”, which he has come to abhor, and which determines his decision to stop associating with many of Chile's avant-garde writers: “[aquel niño] miraba sin ver mientras era transportado en razos de su

horrible nana, los labios sellados, los ojos sellados, todo su cuerpecito inocente sellado, como si no quisiera ver ni oír ni hablar […] Me hice, acaso, el firme propósito de no asistir nunca más a las veladas de María Canales" (134).[14]

Towards the end of his monologue, Urrutia Lacroix reflects on the recent disappearance of his unnamed critical arch-nemesis, "el joven envejecido", whose attacks throughout his career as a critic originally spurred him in his efforts to justify his past, and who could loosely represent either Lihn or Bolaño. If, for so many years, "el joven envejecido" has prevented Urrutia Lacroix from feeling at peace, by the end of his exploration of past actions and silences, the priest comes to lament Chile's weighted silence at a time when words, dialogue, and alternative critics, willing to mix aesthetic impressions with other kinds of "readings", are fundamental: "Desde hace mucho el joven envejecido guarda silencio. Ya no despotrica contra mí ni contra los escritores. ¿Tiene esto solución? […] Y a veces tiembla y todo queda detenido por un instante. Y entonces me pregunto: "¿dónde está el joven envejecido?, ¿por qué se ha ido?" (148-149).

In this essay, I have suggested that both Enrique Lihn and Roberto Bolaño recur to the figure of José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois in order to reveal the ways in which aesthetic and critical positions, no matter the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the artist or writer, inevitably take part in extra-literary struggles, which may then translate into particular modes of "reading" the world. While both Lihn and Bolaño criticize Ibáñez Langlois for masking what they interpret to be a highly interested way of looking at cultural production, Bolaño presents us with a fictional critic-priest who, albeit ambivalently, comes to acknowledge the very real dangers connected to his past interpretative approach in the context of Chile's transition to democracy. Lihn's essay also shows us how discussions centered around literary theory and aesthetics can serve as a productive way of protesting social, political, or economic conditions, if and when the writer or critic recognizes and draws upon a work's necessary contact with the outside world.

As a mode of concluding, I would like to fast-forward to August of 2003, when, only weeks after Bolaño's early death, Ibáñez Langlois was interviewed in Santiago by Cristián Warken as part of the television show *Una belleza nueva*. Warken, himself a literature professor, begins by asking his guest to speak about his personal definition of poetry, in light of Borges' pronouncement that "muchas cosas que no pueden ser definidas existen y al revés" (1-2). In Ibáñez Langlois' answer, poetry's words seem to reigns supreme:

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[14] Bolaño's description of Canales' son seems highly influenced by the José Donoso's *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* (1970), which is replete with allusions to the *imbunche* myth and to images of the protagonist as a shrunken infant bound and reduced to silence. Jean Franco also associates this description with artist Catalina Parra's representations of the *imbunche* as "a symbol of the silencing of the population" (116).

> Hay gente que sitúa a la poesía en un horizonte tan trascendental, enigmático, misterioso que sencillamente nos prohíbe toda palabra sobre la poesía. Hay tantas cosas misteriosas en la vida en las cuales nuestra inteligencia puede avanzar y la poesía es una de ella, ¿no? Pero recurriendo a conceptos, que tal vez no son una definición pero son una aproximación que va más allá de lo que dice Borges […], podríamos decir, con Pound por ejemplo: poesía es el lenguaje humano, o sea la palabra, cargada de con [*sic*] el máximo de significación posible. (2)

Is Ibáñez Langlois' reference to the charged words of poetry simply a subtler means of continuing to set his own critical vision apart from more "scientific" approaches, even as he recognizes the limits of poetry as mystery? Or has he perhaps been influenced by Lihn's condescending treatment of critical aphasia? Along these lines, might Bolaño's portrayal of an evolving literary critic in some ways mirror the words of Urrutia Lacroix's real-life double?

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