

# Chilean Exiles in Sweden: Is Alejandro Leiva Wenger a Case of in between Literature?

Exiliados chilenos en Suecia: ¿es Alejandro  
Leiva Wenger un caso de literatura  
intermedia?

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*Impossibilia. Revista Internacional de Estudios Literarios*. ISSN 2174-2464. No. 21  
(mayo 2021). Monográfico. Páginas 156-185. Artículo recibido 28 octubre 2020,  
aceptado 10 febrero 2021, publicado 30 mayo 2021



**ABSTRACT:** The article focuses on the literature of the Chilean exile in Sweden. In particular, it takes into account a short story contained in Alejandro Leiva Wenger's collection *Till vår ära* (2001), "Song for my father". Through the analysis of textual excerpts from the story, the study focuses on exile as the "invention of a transnational space" in which Chilean and Swedish identity meet and merge, contributing to the thematization of a 'multiple identity', which draws on different cultures. By drawing on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (2012), our aim is to show that Leiva Wenger's story is an example of entangled history (Werner, Zimmermann, 2002), in which the protagonist's personal sphere intertwines and is conditioned by a public sphere related to Chile at the time of Pinochet's *golpe*.

**KEYWORDS:** Postmemory, Exile literature, Chilean exile, Swedish contemporary Literature, Alejandro Leiva Wenger

**RESUMEN:** El artículo se focaliza en la literatura del exilio chileno en Suecia. En particular, se centra en el cuento "Canción para mi padre" de Alejandro Leiva Wenger contenido en la colección *Till vår ära* (2001). A través del análisis de extractos textuales tomados del cuento, el estudio se centra en la condición del exilio concebido como una "invención de un espacio transnacional" a medio camino entre las identidades chilena y la sueca, contribuyendo a la tematización de una "identidad múltiple", que se basa en culturas distintas. A partir del concepto de posmemoria (2012) de Marianne Hirsch, nuestro objetivo es mostrar que la historia de Leiva Wenger es un ejemplo de "historia enredada" (Werner, Zimmermann, 2002), en la que el plano personal del protagonista se entrelaza con —y está condicionado por— un plano público, relacionado con la situación política de Chile en el momento del golpe de Pinochet.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Posmemoria, Literatura del exilio, Exilio chileno, Literatura sueca contemporánea, Alejandro Leiva Wenger



## 1. INTRODUCTION: SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS' LITERATURE AND SWEDEN AS AN IMMIGRATION COUNTRY

In recent years, great attention has been paid to migration-related Swedish literature, generally known as *Invandrarlitteratur* or immigrants' literature. This interest is linked to the particular configuration of Swedish society, which in the last decades has been characterized by growing diversity and interest for new, multicultural literary productions. One of the outcomes has been a flourishing literary writing from 2001, composed by second generation authors with foreign background, who are challenging the general definition *Invandrarlitteratur* and *Invandrarförfattare* (immigrant author), which until 2000 were usually ascribed to first generation non-European immigrant authors such as Theodor Kallifatides, Fateme Behros, Jila Mossaed, and many others. With the works of second generation authors such as Alejandro Leiva Wenger, Jonas Hassen Khemiri, Johannes Anyuru, and Marjaneh Bakhtiari, *Invandrarlitteratur* is contested as an exoticizing term related to migration, diaspora, and skin colour (Trotzig, 2005; Hübinette, 2019), as most of these young non-European authors have not lived migration in first person, or have not experienced it as a determining factor in their life (see also Behschnitt, 2006; Mohnike, 2006; Gokieli, 2017).

For this reason, drawing on the analytical concept of postmigration in literary studies both outside (Bromley, 2017) and within Scandinavia (Jagne-Soreau, 2018), it is now possible to reframe and conceptualize *Invandrarlitteratur* as a postmigrant way of writing. Of

particular importance for this recent literature is the concept of *Mellanförskap* (betweenship), a neologism officially recognized in 2014 by the Språkrådet (Swedish Language Council), which refers to a postmigrant intermediate dimension that presupposes a critical and fundamental reassessment of Swedish identity, belonging, and its representation in the “imagined community” Sweden. As a matter of fact, the term is defined as “ett tillstånd, en position, en situation än en fast identitet” (Hübinette, 2019: 120),<sup>1</sup> which focuses on the border-crossing identity of second generations “vilka alla har det gemensamt att de är födda alternativt uppvuxna i Sverige” (Arbouz, 2012: 37).<sup>2</sup>

Such a shift within Swedish literature became possible as a result of the migration flows that have affected Sweden since the seventies, which shifted from the import of South European labour force to the reception of intercontinental refugees for humanitarian and political reasons (Camacho Padilla, 2006, 2007). In fact, Prime Minister Olof Palme, in charge for three terms between 1969 and 1986, conceived Sweden as a country of international hospitality and was extremely critical of the military dictatorships imposed in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. The Swedish authorities’ commitment to defending the rights of those who had to escape the ferocity of the Chilean regime made Sweden a privileged place to flee. Indeed, the Swedish embassy in Santiago, led by the ambassador Harald Edelstam, welcomed a large number of refugees after the 1973 coup (Camacho Padilla, 2006: 24).

In the years that followed, the experience of Chilean exile found a place in Swedish society thanks to the civil solidarity of the Chilekommittén (Chile Committee), founded in 1975 as a “solidarity organization working intensively on promoting human rights and democratization in Chile” (Camacho Padilla, 2015: 134), and the Fondo Latinoamericano para los Refugiados (Latin American Fund for Refugees). Moreover, the critical reframing of Pinochet’s brutality was elaborated in literary forms in Sweden, although not always in the

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<sup>1</sup>[a condition, a position, a situation more than a stable identity]. All translations are those of the authors.

<sup>2</sup>[who all have in common that they were born or raised in Sweden]

Swedish language; Chilean authors in exile—mostly first generation immigrants with an intellectual background—gave life to an intense and fruitful dialogue between the Scandinavian north and the traditions of the further west nation of the *Cono Sur*. This aspect will be further developed in section four.

In this study we will try to understand how, through the analysis of a second generation Chilean author, it is possible to explore how the experience of totalitarian violence in the past can be thematized from a literary perspective rooted in present-day Sweden. In particular, we will take into account Alejandro Leiva Wenger's short story "Song for my father", included in the collection *Till vår ära (In our honour)* from 2001. As we will show, on a textual level this is done through a very peculiar narrative, through which Leiva Wenger seeks to reach a synthesis between the protagonist's Chilean past and his present life in Sweden, connecting both dimensions through the reminiscences of his recently deceased father.

The article is organized as follows: section two develops some methodological lines; section three reconstructs the historical background of the Chilean exile; the fourth section offers some details about the literary elaboration of first generation Chilean exile authors in Sweden. In the fifth one, we will present Alejandro Leiva Wenger and his collection in general, presenting our analysis of some salient episodes of the short story "Song for my father" as well. We will discuss how the experience of a Chilean past is thematized in Swedish contemporary literature, while also leaving room for considerations about the innovations of Leiva Wenger in the tradition of Chilean exile literature in Sweden concerned with Pinochet's coup d'état. Through an analysis of the chronotope of self, family and home-country we discuss, against the backdrop of a postmemory and postmigrant narrative, the way in which the Nordic and the Hispanic intersect in one another through a "bilateralidad

de referencias” (Bolzman, 2012: 22),<sup>3</sup> that is connected to the dual reference system of the exiles, which is also inevitably reflected in their cultural production. In the sixth section, we will conclude the study by reflecting on this transnational intersection as an attempt to (re)create and negotiate the own Swedish-Chilean identity after the diaspora, which seems to lend towards a conceptual in betweenness.

## 2. THEORETIC FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Marianne Hirsch first used the word *postmemory* referring to the memories of the children of Holocaust victims. She used the term concerning the experiences that preceded their births, but it is also frequently used in relation to second generation Jews after the Holocaust. Hirsch defined postmemory as “an inter- and transgenerational act of transfer [...] shaped by conventions, stories and conversations” (2012: 4). The transfer takes place at the moment when contiguous and interweaved histories are told “without allowing them to occlude or erase each other” (Hirsch, 2012: 4). Concerning the case of Chilean diaspora narrative that we will discuss below, postmemory can be used regarding traumatic moments of violence, and is thus extensible to postdictatorship generations (see Levey, 2014: 7), although the core of Hirsch’s intuition is related to events recalled by subjects who did not experience them in first person.

Postmemory is usually evoked by traumatic events in the past, and it is composed of accounts in which the memory’s structures are seen as connective to the present. Moreover, in postmemory, history does not coincide with a linear temporality, but is made up of a multiplicity of durations that entangle with each other. Since our case study interweaves familial-private with historic-collective events, it also provides an example for “entangled”

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<sup>3</sup>[bilateralism of references]

literature or history (Werner, Zimmermann, 2002: 629), i.e. a critical reading of a literary work focusing on the historical consequences of transnational entanglements at both micro (personal, familial) and macro levels (social and national) (see also Lindholm, 2016: 23). As specified by Anne Heith, Satu Gröndahl, and Eila Rantonen, “the concept ‘entangled literatures’ [...] can take place both inside and outside the nation. It presents literature as a travelling phenomenon that changes the cultures of the spaces it enters and is itself changed by them in return” (Heith, Gröndahl, Rantonen, 2018: 18). By the same token, the three scholars also intend “transnational literature”. The term “transnational” is particularly relevant because it relates to Claudio Bolzman’s considerations on the condition of the exile (2012). Bolzman states that exile should be considered as a dynamic process, during which an “*invenición de un espacio transaccional*”<sup>4</sup> occurs (2012: 23). In this space, the exile integrates elements that are linked to the country of origin, reframing them within the new context, in which the exile decides to stay, even after the socio-political conditions that led him/her abroad have ceased to exist.

More specifically, in our analysis we will look at “Song for my father” as an entangled text inasmuch as the main character’s private existence is influenced by sociopolitical changes determined by macroscopic and transnational axes of power. This implies that the story can be analyzed also as an example of micro-history, defined by Peter K. Andersson as the smallest constitutive part of history, namely the single man and his experiences (2017: 451). This approach tends to focus on how common people’s lives are influenced by historical events. For this specific aspect, the label “history from below” is quite frequent (Andersson, 2017: 451). Applied to “Song for my father”, micro-history implies that the protagonist’s destiny, i.e. exile and separation, is connected to and dependent on the major political and historic frame of Pinochet’s dictatorship.

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<sup>4</sup>[invention of a transnational space]

### 3. “A PEACEFUL ROAD TO SOCIALISM”: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF A SHATTERED UTOPIA

As noted by Lars Wendelius (2002: 96) not only the Chilean coup is one of the best documented historic events in first generation exile literature in Sweden, but it also provides a critical reading of the exiles' past as “det som hjälper dom att förstå hemlandets olyckor och därmed deras egen situation” (Wendelius, 2002: 98).<sup>5</sup> The roots of this contingency have to be sought in the tragic events that engulfed Chile during the seventies.

The election of Salvador Allende on 4 September 1970 was a unique event as he became the first democratically elected Marxist president in Latin America (Wright & Oñate, 1998: 1). The political experiment that came to life in Chile was made possible thanks to a left-wing movement named Unidad Popular, animated by a well-organized and politicized working class, which had managed to gain significant political space, aiming at the realization of a constructive project for a socialist, democratic and anti-imperialist state. From the very first moments of his administration, Allende faced numerous obstacles from various fronts: not only from the American president Richard Nixon, but also from political and economic elites opposed to Unidad Popular. These, having seen a serious threat in Allende's reform agenda, based on the limitation of market capitalism and more open wealth redistribution, began to put pressure on the armed forces, fostering a military intervention. In addition, a series of complications such as rising inflation, scarcity of food and primary goods, increasing violence, and discontent in a wide part of the population contributed to the loss of consensus in Allende. As a result, the end of 1972 a progressive politicization of the army took place (Wright & Oñate, 1998: 4). This highly delicate phase of Chilean democracy, as we will show, is well illustrated in Leiva Wenger's story, especially from the perspective of the protagonist's parents.

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<sup>5</sup>[what helps them to understand the accidents of their home country and thus their own situation]



The dream of achieving “a peaceful road to socialism” (Wright & Oñate, 1998: 1) was swept away by a coup d'état: on 11 September 1973, the military forces led by general Augusto Pinochet Ugarte overthrew the government. Allende lost his life during the attack, after which a bloody military dictatorship, which would last about seventeen years, was finally established. The coup, organized by the national economic elites with the support of the armed forces and the United States of America, is considered as the first attempt to establish a neoliberal state in place of a socialist one.

The dictatorship regime was characterized by extreme violence and systematic repression of political opponents. Episodes of abuse and violence accumulated as never before: the regime made extensive use of torture, unjustified detention and violence to maintain power. The repression of political enemies reached unimaginable brutality, which made the Chilean coup different from others in South America at that time. As Riccardo Nocera and Claudio Rolle Cruz note, the Chilean coup was governed by a belligerent logic that admitted the annihilation of the opponents (2010: 11). The brutality of the regime forced a large number of Chileans into exile (compulsory or voluntary), which became one of the main political instruments used to eradicate the left from the country (Wright & Oñate, 2005: 58). During the first years of the dictatorship, exile was mainly imposed by violence, affecting not only militants and citizens linked to left-wing parties, but also common citizens.

The Chilean exiles chose different destinations, also depending on political affinities; many communists were welcomed in the Soviet Union, while former MIR members (Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionaria, a far-left movement active in Chile from 1965) found refuge in Cuba (Nocera, 2011: 175). A large part of the exiles (about 120,000) fled to Western Europe, mainly to Spain, Italy, France, and Sweden (Bolzman, 1993: 127). Concerning Sweden, today, the number of foreign-born Chileans and their descendants exceeds 40,000

(Parada, 2018: 519), which makes Sweden the country with the highest number of Chileans in Europe (see also Nocera, 2011: 177).

#### 4. THE LITERATURE OF THE CHILEAN DIASPORA

Since for many Chileans the migratory project became a condition of ‘long-term’ permanence (see Nocera, 2011: 171), a re-negotiation of the Chilean identity with the culture of the host countries was needed. This process of integration, or “neoculturación” (Rossiello, 1993), not only derived from periods of life abroad, concerning daily life habits, but it also involved forms of cultural expression (Rossiello, 1993: 558). After facing some integration difficulties at the beginning, the Chilean community in Sweden finally found a place through artistic expression in music (especially in hip-hop, see Lindholm, 2016), in literature, as well as in the creation of cultural and political activities, which allowed them to retain a vivid link with their home culture.

Just to provide some literary examples, we recall the writers Sergio Infante, Sergio Badilla and Adrian Santini, who were members of the Taller group, founded in 1977 in Stockholm. Taller was concerned with promoting contemporary Spanish-speaking literature in the Nordic countries, and it published several prose and poetry works. Its members participated in the publication of the first anthology of Chilean writers in Sweden: *Bevingade Lejon* (*Winged Lion*), edited by Sun Axelsson in 1991.

It is also worth to mention authors such as Jorge Calvo, a first generation exile who wrote the novel *La Partida* (*The match*) in 1991 (translated into Swedish in 1993), and Carlos Bongcam, who published a reportage-novel in Spanish titled *Chile: Consejo de guerra* (*Chile: Council of war*) in 1974 (translated into Swedish in 1978). Both novels emphasize Pinochet’s coup and reflect on exile, and especially Calvo’s novel is interesting for the narratological strategy of non-linearity of time, where past and present intersect in recalling the events from

1973. This intersection is also central for the above mentioned Chilean exile Sergio Badilla, one of the further developers of the literary mode of transrealism, or *poesía transreal* (transreal poetry), which deals with time as a circumstantial, multidimensional and highly subjective perceptual category (see also Leyva, 2008: 59). This is indeed also the case of Leiva Wenger's "Song for my father", where two stories, one in the present and one in the past, work as an open loop of interpolated narrative layers.

From this point of view, it is important to shed light on the reasons why these authors experiment with narratological categories, entangling both past and present, here and there. As also in Leiva Wenger's case, writing by mixing different temporalities and localities could be the psychological result of the effort to overcome the experience of exile as a "crippling sorrow of estrangement" (Said, 2000: 137). In particular, María Luján Leiva evidences that

la literatura y el arte producidos en Suecia por los latinoamericanos se develaban como documentos que daban expresión a las experiencias del asentamiento en la nueva tierra, a la traumática experiencia del aprendizaje de una nueva lengua y de nuevos códigos de comunicación y acción, transmitían la ambivalencia de la condición del exilio, la pérdida y la creación (2002: n.p).<sup>6</sup>

In other words, what Luján Leiva is trying to emphasize is that, through literature, exile writers experience a strong sense of *ambivalence*, realized by "un deseo de dar testimonio, de interpretar el pasado y el presente, enfrentar las simplificaciones sobre la temática del exilio y de la presencia inmigrante en general" (2002: n.p.).<sup>7</sup> In such an

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<sup>6</sup>[literature and art produced in Sweden by Latin Americans were revealed as documents that gave expression to the experiences of settlement in the new land, to the traumatic experience of learning a new language and new codes of communication and action, they conveyed the ambivalence of the condition of exile, loss and creation]

<sup>7</sup>[a desire to bear witness, to interpret the past and the present, to confront simplifications on the subject of exile and the immigrant presence in general]

ambivalent condition, we agree with Augusto Guarino's statement that Latin American exile—with all the burden of suffering it entails—has become an opportunity for “elaborazione creativa” (2011: 9)<sup>8</sup> in literary experimentalism.

In the last two decades, the exile trope has found a natural evolution in Sweden, in the need to deconstruct the irreducible opposition of two dichotomic identities, the immigrant one and the Swedish one, of which Leiva Wenger is a case in point, not only thanks to “Song for my father”. Achieving much more than a marginal space in the contemporary narrative, Chilean writers in Sweden contributed to the codification of a plural identity, which draws on two distant—but not mutually exclusive—cultural universes.

##### 5. ALEJANDRO LEIVA WENGER AND *TILL VÅR ÄRA*

In this section, we will briefly present Leiva Wenger's background and the sociocultural context in which he published *Till vår ära*. Subsequently, we will focus on “Song for my father”.

Alejandro Leiva Wenger was born in 1976 in Concepción, Chile, and moved to Sweden at the age of 9 with his mother and his two brothers. He grew up on the outskirts of Stockholm, in the south-western neighbourhood of Vårberg, a social environment characterized by a strong ethnic, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. Today, Leiva Wenger is a writer, playwright, and sociologist, and *Till vår ära* is his debut work, published in 2001 by Bonniers and reprinted in 2015 by Modernista. This collection, composed of six short stories, marked what Peter Leonard called the “ethnic turn” in Swedish literature (2008: 33), i.e. the above mentioned shift from first to second generation *Invandrarlitteratur*. When it was reissued in 2015 by Modernista, *Till vår ära* was promoted as one of those “extremt sällsynta

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<sup>8</sup>[creative elaboration]

debutböcker som förändrat litteraturen från en dag till en annan” (Leiva Wenger, 2015: back cover).<sup>9</sup>

Each of *Till vår ära*'s stories tells different and seemingly disconnected events, which makes it very difficult to find an overarching thematic thread. However, it is possible to detect some leitmotifs: generally speaking, *Till vår ära* can be defined as the account, in confused sequence, of different characters' personal and cultural growth in social contexts where the sensitivity and uncertainties of the individual are overwhelmed by the power exerted by predominant societal contingencies. Anne Heith, for example, suggests that one of the main leitmotifs in the collection is the impossibility for young male figures to show weakness and fragility because of a superstructure that requires strength and resoluteness from them (2004: 7). Male figures constitute a preponderant but heterogeneous group in the collection, with characters of different ages (children, teenagers and young adults), whose origin is most often explicitly related to Chile.

Among the most recurring leitmotifs in *Till vår ära*, in this study we pay closer attention to family ties (see also the stories “Borta i tankar”, “Till vår ära”, and “Zaqwertyuop” in the collection). This topic appears to be central also in the fourth story, “Song for my father”, where both the relationship with the mother and, in particular, with the father, are present. Within this collection, “Song for my father” represents a paradigmatic example of how familial and historical memories of Chile intertwine in the literary expression of Chilean exiles in Sweden.

### 5.1 “Song for my father”

As mentioned above, “Song for my father” is the fourth story in *Till vår ära*. It is characterized by a double intention: on the one hand, to reknit the threads of a memory

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<sup>9</sup>[extremely rare debut books that have turned literature upside down overnight]

broken, interrupted, denied with violence and pain, elaborating a private biography full of gaps to fill. On the other hand, through this same impervious path, the story aims to reconstruct a crucial fragment of history that the Chilean collective conscience, often deficient and fugitive, continues to keep on the margins of public reflection as the torn pages of its recent history.

The plot of the story is complex, as present in Sweden and past in Chile consistently alternate throughout the text within a theatrical narrative structure. Indeed, the text is composed of four acts, in which a fragmented and contradictory sequence of flashbacks, spatiotemporal alterations, and blurred memories alternate. These features make the story not only an example of entangled literature, as it entails reflections involving a transnational dimension, but also an example of transreal narration, as its structure “hace que los tiempos se yuxtapongan y creen tiempos imposibles, el presente, el pasado y el futuro en un instante” (Leyva, 2008: 58).<sup>10</sup> Organized in this way, the story’s structure shows formal and, in part, thematic continuity with Jorge Calvo’s and Sergio Badilla’s writings.

An omniscient heterodiegetic narrator provides this theatrical text with some stage directions at the beginning of each act. The narrative rhythm is quite fast, the dialogues are short, and monological forms prevail. Since the story is consistently accompanied by jazz and mixed-genre music playing in the protagonist’s room, “Song for my father” seems to recall a *spoken word* style, as the music interacts with both narrative rhythm, word choice, and mood. Indeed, it seems that the jazz atmosphere of the background music affects the rhythmic use of punctuation in almost every cue throughout the narrative.

Each act of the story is entangled in two levels: one at the present, where the protagonist is an adult man who shares an apartment with his girlfriend living an ordinary life in Sweden, and one in the past, set in Chile, where the years before and after his birth are

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<sup>10</sup>[makes times juxtapose and create impossible times, the present, the past and the future in one instant]

narrated against the backdrop of Allende's election, Pinochet's coup and family troubles in poverty and hardships. In particular, we will focus on how Leiva Wenger revisits the question of violence during Pinochet's regime from a micro-historic point of view, investigating how this affects the protagonist's family and his private life, with specific reference to his relationship with the father.

As stated by Fernando Camacho Padilla, in remembering Chile both privately and publicly, there is often also a connection to the memory of the years before 1973: "En Chile [...] se vive una batalla permanente sobre cómo abordar a través de la memoria y de la historia los hechos ocurridos durante el gobierno de la Unidad Popular (1970-1973) y especialmente el Régimen Militar (1973-1990)" (2009: 88).<sup>11</sup> As the protagonist's self-elaboration also involves episodes of a past prior to his birth, such as Allende's election in 1970, and dramatic events that he has not personally lived—such as Pinochet's coup—"Song for my father" can be interpreted as a literary re-elaboration of a painful past, carrying out a process of "intergenerational act of transfer" (Hirsch, 2008: 104), and a desire to preserve the memory of a "traumatic personal and generational past" (Hirsch, 2008: 104).

In accordance with these statements, the story's first flashback is located somewhere before Allende's election, when the protagonist was not born yet, and his parents were not married: "Chile kokar [...] valet närmar sig, vem ska de rösta på? Mamma: Allende, förstås [...] Pappa röstar inte, han är anarkist [...] men han ställer upp, spelar gitarr på konserter till stöd för Unidad Popular [...] *venceremos, venceremos*" (Leiva Wenger, 2015: 67).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>[In Chile [...] there is an ongoing battle over how to deal with the events that took place during the Unidad Popular government (1970-1973) and especially the military regime (1973-1990) through memory and history]

<sup>12</sup>[Chile is boiling [...] the election is approaching, who are you going to vote for? Mom: Allende, of course [...] Dad doesn't vote, he is an anarchist [...] but he helps, plays guitar at concerts in support of Unidad Popular [...] *venceremos, venceremos*]

In this first narrative fragment from the past, Chile is introduced as *kokande* (boiling), a country in uproar whose people were loudly claiming for change. In this act, the narrator reports the years before 1970, when the Chilean people claimed for a new government without the influence of *jänkarna* (Americans): a socialist world in a cultural setting where Victor Jara, Inti-Illimani and Pablo Neruda were leading figures (Leiva Wenger, 2015: 65-66). As the protagonist was not born yet, these postmemories are told from the perspective of his parents: the mother defends socialism and supports Allende, the father is an anarchist who refuses to vote, even though he is committing in support of Unidad Popular.

In the first act, the protagonist is reached by the sudden news of his father's death, which triggers his travellings back in time, seeking to capture the atmosphere and the realities in which not only Pinochet's coup (macro-history), but also his memories of the father are located (micro-history). As it is double framed and layered, "Song for my father" can be considered as a literary *mise en abyme*, whereas the narrative layer in the present provides direct access to the memories of the past through several sudden flashbacks or *transfers*, as Hirsch defines them. Indeed, in the present the protagonist converses with his partner, accompanied in the background by *Song for my father*, the opening single of Horace Silver's homonymous album from 1965, which most likely inspired Leiva Wenger in giving the story this title. At some points of the present, the protagonist *migrates back* in a metaphorical way, casting the reader into the past with no prior warning.

## 5.2. "Song for my father": Pinochet's dictatorship between macro-history and micro-history

By drawing on the theoretical underpinnings previously discussed, we will now look at "Song for my father" focusing on the protagonist's memory of several childhood episodes related to political and military violence experienced daily, which constitute the core elements of the story and, consequently, the reasons why he first separated from the father, and then fled to Sweden.



The first episode of violence lived in first person by the protagonist is in the second act, where the narration is set during Pinochet's regime. In this fragment, the protagonist and his father are purchasing bread at Don Mario's bakery. During a sudden inspection by the Carabineers of Chile, the father is arrested before his son because he was found without his ID. The Carabineers' inspection was actually a ploy in which they staged the finding of a time bomb in the shop's back to legitimize the confiscation of both Don Mario's cash and goods: "och då marscherade karabinjäreerna ut, den ene med utsträckt arm och ett paket i handen, den lille pekade: se där, en tidsinställd bomb, kära medborgare, men som ni såg har vi varit på plats för att tjäna och beskydda!" (Leiva, 2015: 73).<sup>13</sup> This short but significant episode helps to understand how micro-history works, i.e. how a private anecdote illustrates the arbitrary logics of terror and power legitimation under the regime's repression, in such a way that micro-history serves "för att levandegöra det förflutna" (Andersson, 2017: 459).<sup>14</sup>

In the third act, the narrator goes back to the first months of Allende's government, in which early disagreements with the right wing became visible. In the story it is told how landowners destroyed their crops as a sign of protest against nationalizations (Leiva, 2015: 77). Many working-class movements, often on USA funding and political influence, were encouraged to strike in order to sabotage the newly reformed country's economy. Even Don Mario participated in the destabilization, making sure that his bakery's shelves were found semi-empty, as to prove Allende's responsibility for the impoverishment of the country: "chaufförerna strejkade och fick betalt av CIA. Av CIA? Och Don Mario gömde sina varor: se, nu finns inget i hyllorna, precis som i Sovjet och mamma: det är sabotage, det vet alla" (2015: 76).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>[and then the carabineers marched out, one with an outstretched arm and a package in his hand, the little one pointed: look there, a time bomb, dear citizens, but as you saw, we have been in place to serve and protect!]

<sup>14</sup>[to vivify the past]

<sup>15</sup>[the drivers went on strike and were paid by the CIA. By the CIA? And Don Mario hid his goods: look, now there is nothing on the shelves, just like in the Soviet Union and mom: it's sabotage, everyone knows]

In this act, the protagonist's parents discuss the issue of violence: as seen above, his father is an anarchist affiliated with MIR, so he is an enthusiastic supporter of armed movements to establish a left-wing force. Oppositely, the mother believes that the country does not need further violence because social reforms are the key to solve political problems. This husband-wife ideological clash also represents a wide ideological dialectic within the Chilean left (see Camacho Padilla, 2009: 93). As narrated in the text,

Nu är det precis som i Sovjet, se vad marxisterna gör med vårt fosterland, snart dör vi alla av svält [...] och hon: MIR?, varför! Och han: något måste göras, [...] vi måste gå hårdare fram mot borgarna och hon: skrik inte och nej, ingen terror, gå ur, folk har fått nog av våld, reformer är det enda rätta (Leiva 2015: 76).<sup>16</sup>

In the following pages, Chile is still described as boiling, a recurrent term that summarizes the political chaos and economic shortages during Unidad Popular's government, when several commercial activities closed down. The government no longer had any power and, on 11 September 1973, the *golpe* took place. The protagonist dwells on this second, crucial, violent episode of the (hi)story, recounting it in details:

militären intar gatorna och mamma: nu är det slut med oss. Pappa satte på radion: bara marschmusik på alla stationer och medborgare, militären har sett sig föranlåtten att å fosterlandets vägnar kräva presidentens avgång. [...] militärerna stormade in i hemmen drog ut folk i bara nattlinnet sköt ner dem på gatan, Allendes röst på radio, jag vägrar avgå, med mitt liv ska jag betala, snart kommer ni inte längre höra min röst och mamma grät och

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<sup>16</sup>[Now it is just like in the Soviet, see what the Marxists do with our mother country, soon we will starve to death [...] and she: MIR?, why! And he: we must do something, [...] we must go harder against the bourgeois and she: don't shout and no, no terror, get out, people have had enough of violence, reforms are the only right thing]

pappa, grät han? [...] och presidenthuset bombades och hon avstängdes från sina studier och fotbollsstadion blev ett interneringsläger och folk försvann (Leiva, 2015: 78).<sup>17</sup>

As can be seen, the rhythm is very fast, as commas are sometimes missing, while direct and indirect discourse alternate. In this quick juxtaposition of scenes, the narrator accounts from the parents' perspective for a shocking moment which marked that terrible day of recent global history. This moment is central, not only because Leiva Wenger emphasizes the cruel street executions, and the mysterious (often tabooed) story of countless disappearances of Chilean citizens (macro level), but also because it entangles with the private reactions of the protagonist's family, showing the mother's desperation, her suspension from the university, and the father's ambivalent reaction (micro level).

The last flashback recalling violence is a private episode that we intend to frame as a psychological violence experienced by the protagonist. Here, the protagonist's mother is preparing the departure for Sweden. The father is absent after he suddenly and unannounced disappeared. In quick succession, phone calls with relatives, luggage packing and farewell to friends follow one another. The young protagonist does not realize what is going on, so when he asks her mother whether the father is travelling with them, she is forced to tell him a sorrowful lie to make him forget his father for good: "han är död pojke, han är i himlen nu, hatar du honom?" (2015: 82).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>[the army takes over the streets, and mom: this is the end for us now. Dad turned on the radio: only marching songs in all the stations and citizens, the military was forced to ask for the resignation of the president on the fatherland's behalf. [...] The military raided the buildings and pulled down the people in their nightgowns executed them in the street, Allende's voice on the radio, I refuse to resign, I will pay with my life, soon you won't hear my voice and mum cried and dad, was he crying? [...] and the President's house was bombed and she was suspended from her studies and the football stadium became an internment camp and people disappeared]

<sup>18</sup>[He is dead, boy, he is in heaven now, do you hate him?]

Now, the protagonist lives his present in a comfortable and democratic society that has become his home. At the end of the story, after not having seen his father anymore, he realizes that during all these years the father was still alive and had only died recently. But this also means that the protagonist had lived for years with an open scar that will always generate different positions vis-à-vis his past and his identity. At the end of the story, once the protagonist sinks into his night thoughts, the narrator takes the last word describing the protagonist's reflections: "I morgon är en annan dag med en ny tidning en ny frukost, samma föreställning samma längtan, hatar du honom? Du ligger och stirrar som en katt upp i ett tak som inte finns och väntar på en sömn som inte tänker komma" (83).<sup>19</sup>

Since he believed he was already dead, the father's *real* death is the very last violence that the protagonist experiences from Chile. This ending gives us a hint that we have only read a fragment of his "itinerary of self-discovery" (Heith, 2016: 67), a narrative journey that perhaps will never come to an end. Sentiments of nostalgia and pain are central in this quote, disclosing an apparent reconciliation with the existential compromise of the exile, i.e. the awareness of "the loss of something left behind forever" (Said, 2000: 137), and the self-deception that it is possible to face a new morning in a foreign country with the same habits and the same absence of both family and home.

At the end of the story, the protagonist leans towards the personal philosophy of *inexistentialism*, invented by his girlfriend and based on the principle that everything we do not see does not exist: as the room is dark, he cannot see the ceiling, therefore it does not exist. The protagonist embraces this doctrine as a self-induced consolation, believing in the principle that if he can see neither his father nor Chile, then they do not exist and, as a consequence, neither pain nor nostalgia do. Summarized in Sara Ahmed's words: "home

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<sup>19</sup>[Tomorrow is another day with a new newspaper, a new breakfast, same image, same absence, do you hate him? You lie and stare like a cat at a ceiling that does not exist waiting for a sleep that is not thinking to come]

becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there)" (1999: 331). As we can see, the story has an open ending, where the memory is neither occluded nor erased (Hirsch, 2012: 4), leaving room for different interpretations.

### 5.3. *Post-exile literature: The archaeology of memory in "Song for my father"*

In this section, we discuss the way in which Leiva Wenger's story finds a distinctive position within exile literature in Sweden. Following Erik Olsson (2007) and María Esquivel Sánchez (2005), the post-exile period resulted for the children of Chilean refugees in Sweden in two main possible outcomes. Olsson (2007: 220) argues that they automatically identified themselves with Sweden, while Esquivel Sánchez (2005: 78) claims that they identified themselves more with Chile. Our argument is that Leiva Wenger's protagonist, physically located in Sweden, but mentally in Chile, lies exactly *in between*: he neither identifies with Sweden nor with Chile. He is rather *floating* between both localities. Inspired by such a condition, we draw on Wendelius (2002: 121), who noticed that the shift between past and present in the immigrant's consciousness is a way of merging cultural and geographical borders. The protagonist places himself in a dimension of both rupture and bridging with transnational ties, which is very similar to Homi K. Bhabha's "Third space" (1994). In this sense, it is possible to argue that, by means of an entangled story, the main character forms a *hybrid* sense of belonging to a state that is both old Chile and present-day Sweden, or neither one nor the other, an ambivalent location where a calm life in adulthood, his disappeared father, the violent regime, a vivid childhood in Chile, and the scar of exile are simultaneously present and absent.

One may ask why these questions are important in this study if our aim is to focus on the textual content. Since the chronotope of home is part of our textual analysis, our

reflection about this dynamic dimension starts from defining “Song for my father” as an experience of “wandering without a fixed home, dwelling at the crossroads” (Chambers, 1994: 4). These aspects are important in the protagonist’s transnational, and postmigrant memory. As Wright and Oñate notice, “[i]n Europe, too, the full psychological weight of exile was commonly felt: feelings of defeat, of guilt, memories of torture, of leaving dead, jailed, or disappeared comrades [...] profoundly affected the exiles, compounding the challenge of adaptation” (1998: 125). As he left behind his disappeared father, the protagonist becomes “el exiliado [...] que traía consigo un bagaje de experiencias traumáticas”,<sup>20</sup> the *exiliado* who wants to witness, as he is “una persona vital, portadora de cultura, ansiosa de decir y difundir su verdad” (Rossiello, 1993: 554).<sup>21</sup> Since Rossiello essentially referred to first generation Chilean authors such as those mentioned above, who all published works about exile in Spanish language, Leiva Wenger’s story becomes relevant as one of the first literary accounts not only written by a second generation Chilean author, but also as one of the first fictions written in Swedish language about a personal but contradictory aspect concerning exile and Pinochet’s regime.

According to Rossiello, for South American authors in exile, writing can be experienced as a necessity to maintain and affirm their Latin American identity which, for understandable reasons, feels threatened or is on the verge of dissolution (1993: 560). We suggest, instead, that Leiva Wenger’s case has gone *beyond* migration and the need for preservation of a South American identity. The fact that he composed a text about the Chilean coup in Swedish language marks a difference from other Chilean exile authors in Sweden, who wrote in Spanish. Thus, our suggestion is that, intersecting old Chilean memories with a calm and sober present in Sweden, Leiva Wenger’s story sheds light on Pinochet’s coup from a postmigrant perspective: he witnesses a literary necessity aimed at

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<sup>20</sup>[the exile [...] who brought with him a baggage of traumatic experiences]

<sup>21</sup>[a vital person, a bearer of culture, anxious to speak and spread the truth]

introducing a part of Chilean history as an integral part of Swedish identity, but also at elaborating the past on a very individual level.

As a country characterized by increasing heterogeneity and the effects of “coming, going, and staying” (Römhild 2015: 37), Sweden’s contemporary history is written beyond its own Nordic, and Western heritage. The experience of Leiva Wenger’s protagonist is a personal “Rekonstruktionsarbeit, [...] eine Art ‘Erinnerungsarchäologie’”,<sup>22</sup> through which he tries “andere Geschichten, die bisher nicht erzählt wurden, in das öffentliche Gedächtnis zu bringen” (Yildiz 2013: 144).<sup>23</sup> As an entangled story, “Song for my father” proves, therefore, how the events of Chile and Sweden intersect and reflect new opportunities for simultaneous identifications and belongings, both individual and collective.

Not unlike Esquivel Sánchez, also Rossiello stated that South American writers in Sweden addressed almost exclusively to a South American audience, because the works are “obras de creación escritas en Suecia por latinoamericanos”,<sup>24</sup> whose contents “se proponen como una parte de la literatura latinoamericana” (Rossiello, 1993: 551-552).<sup>25</sup> Contrary to it, we argue instead that Leiva Wenger’s in betweenness reveals a work that is equally part of Swedish literature and history, as migration flows from South America to Sweden are assigned a place in the recent historiography of the Nordic country, changing its social, cultural, and political patterns. Seen in this context, “Song for my father” represents a “transnational literature [that] may free literature from the ideological baggage of national concerns” (Heith, Gröndahl & Rantonen, 2018: 18). It is worth to recall, however, that this literary transnationalism is achieved first and foremost by the author’s intention to show a

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<sup>22</sup>[reconstruction work, [...] a kind of ‘memory archaeology’]

<sup>23</sup>[to bring other stories, that have not been told before, into the public memory]

<sup>24</sup>[fiction written in Sweden by Latin Americans]

<sup>25</sup>[are proposed as a part of Latin American literature]

very personal, critical act of remembering on the one hand, and the awareness of having a Nordic-Hispanic transnational conscience on the other.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study, we have tried to show how Chilean fates can be narrated from a postmemory and postmigrant perspective, which provokes a profound reconceptualization of what it means to remember Chile today. The fact that dictatorial barbarism, torture, and abuse of power are portrayed in a Swedish context for a Swedish audience means not only that there were countries living in oppression, but also that those who nowadays bring these experiences to the fore are living among Swedes (Wendelius, 2002: 96). The creative re-elaboration of past events, drawing on the concept of postmemory (Hirsch, 2008), allows the postdictatorship generation to maintain an open link with a “*historia comenzada en otro contexto*” (Bolzman, 2012: 22),<sup>26</sup> of which the exiles are bearers. The creative and/or literary declination of this memory, as well as the re-elaborations of that story, is realized in a desire to transport and re-meditate the past through the text, articulating it in the present, within the new context.

Placed within the field of literature of the “post-exilio” (post-exile) (Bolzman, 2012: 25), “Song for my father” crosses borders as a flagless state of writing showing how, quoting Michel de Montaigne “every man carries within him the entire form of the human condition” (in Compagnon, 1998: 20). Therefore, Leiva Wenger’s story seems to shape a relational grid as it relates in a renewed way the specific place from which literature comes to the world as a totality and vice versa. A literary work inevitably comes from a specific place,

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<sup>26</sup>[story begun in another context]



in this case from Sweden, but—as it recalls Chile—it always has transnational polygenesis overarching different cultures and histories.

Coming to terms with the condition of “errancy” between Swedishness and home-country identity—often referred to with the above mentioned postmigrant term *Mellanförskap* (Jagne-Soreau, 2018)—the protagonist tries to find a way out from the dichotomy between Swedishness and Latino identity. Thus, *Mellanförskap* can be seen as a very Swedish specific synonym to Bhabha’s notion of “Third space” (see Arbouz, 2012: 39), even though the story’s protagonist does not actively place himself in between, but rather cannot do more than just acknowledge his *predefined* in between position: “Always in transit, the process of home-coming—completing the story, domesticating the detour— becomes an impossibility” (Chambers, 1994: 4). In fact, as specified by Arbouz, what is typical in the condition of *Mellanförskap* is “en känsla att leva utanför eller mellan en eller flera [...] länder samtidigt” (2012: 38).<sup>27</sup> The protagonist’s homelessness is not a chosen condition. As a result, he starts thinking of home as an in between space, not just the comfortable and comforting apartment that he shares with his girlfriend, but a personal “inhabitable space [...] in which memory can allow the past to reach the present [...] separated from the particular worldly space of living *here*” (Ahmed, 1999: 330-331).

Seen from this perspective, the struggle between memory in Chile and present in Sweden needs to be discussed as a constantly relational and ongoing process, a borderline work of “translation” between overlapping localities and temporalities. With regard to this, the protagonist’s inner journey through time and space makes him an *Invandrare* (immigrant), not in the sense that he remembers migration as an action, but rather in the etymological sense of the term: The Swedish verb *vandra* means “to wander”, thus *invandra* literally means to “wander into” (a specific place). Thus, “Song for my father” foregrounds

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<sup>27</sup>[a feeling of living outside or between one or more [...] countries at the same time]

not just an “immigrant”, but also a person who wanders in time and space through his memory, a *Mellanförskapare* (Inbetweener, see Hübinette, 2019: 121) without anchorages to a specific dimension.

To conclude, in this study we have tried to highlight the structure of “Song for my father”, which continuously shifts between space and time. It doesn’t follow comfortable paths, because the protagonist’s life path itself is not comfortable at all. In this story, however, it is not important to focus on the path *per se*, but rather on the intersections crossed along the way.

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