
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

BEYOND DEATH AND THE MAIDEN Ariel Dorfman's Media Criticism and Journalism

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*Abstract: Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's *Para leer al Pato Donald* (How to Read Donald Duck) is considered one of the most significant works of Latin American cultural criticism. Despite the significance of Donald Duck to the history of Latin American cultural criticism and to Dorfman's own trajectory as a writer, thus far, critical studies of Dorfman tend to gloss his essays, ignore his journalism, and focus solely on his literature, especially on his play *La muerte y la doncella* (Death and the Maiden). While the attention to Death and the Maiden is certainly well founded, it is worth considering how these two works complement each other in Dorfman's career, given the apparent lack of a shared aesthetic between the playful cultural criticism of Donald Duck and the sparse language of Death and the Maiden. In fact, attending to Donald Duck and Dorfman's other nonfiction texts reveals the ways that he has worked across styles and genres on a series of central issues that form the core of his work. As a complement to research on Dorfman's literary production, this article focuses on his media criticism and his journalism, two areas of his work that have received the least critical attention, to suggest that Dorfman's literary production must be understood as part of a larger project, one that includes his essays, journalism, and other cultural activities.*

According to George Yúdice (2003), the two foundational texts of the Latin American cultural turn are Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's *Para leer al Pato Donald* (*How to Read Donald Duck*) and Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Caliban*, both of which appeared in 1971. Building on a long legacy of critiquing culture and imperialism, these two texts reflect a key moment in the Latin American tradition of analyzing the relationship between culture and dependency. *Donald Duck* had three print runs in Chile

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during the Allende years and, by the late 1970s, the book had sold more than five hundred thousand copies in more than ten different languages (Lawrence 1991). Despite the significance of *Donald Duck* to the history of Latin American cultural criticism and to Dorfman's own trajectory as a writer, thus far, critical studies of Dorfman tend to gloss his essays, ignore his journalism, and focus solely on his literature, especially on his play *La muerte y la doncella* (*Death and the Maiden*).¹

The attention to *Death and the Maiden* is certainly well founded: it has been staged in more than thirty countries, and in 1993, there were fifty simultaneous productions of the play in Germany alone. Maya Jaggi (2003, n.p.) writes that, "for the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who deemed *Death and the Maiden* Sophoclean in its power and simplicity, no other play in Latin America has achieved its universal resonance." Nevertheless, it is worth considering how these two works complement each other in Dorfman's career, given the apparent lack of a shared aesthetic between the playful cultural criticism of *Donald Duck* and the sparse language of *Death and the Maiden*. In fact, attending to *Donald Duck* and Dorfman's other non-fiction texts reveals the ways that he has worked across styles and genres on a series of central issues that form the core of his work.

Dorfman and Mattelart's groundbreaking analysis of the ways that Donald Duck comics circulated in Chile influenced a wide range of intellectuals globally and in Latin America. Even if the work appears dated today, it was enormously successful in its time and has had an impact on the directions of recent media criticism in the region. What sets the work of Dorfman apart from that of most of the critics originally associated with the cultural turn and those that have continued in their wake is his commitment to combining critique with creative work, his persistent faith in the emancipatory possibilities of engaged art, and his efforts to redefine the discursive boundaries that shape social communication. As Dorfman (2004, 171) himself has pointed out, one of the defining features of the literary writers of his generation has been their use of the media "as a framework, as a challenge, as a source of inspiration, as a purveyor of characters, as a dilemma." But Dorfman followed an unusual path, including media references in his literature while also writing six books dedicated to media criticism.² Simultaneous to his work on *Donald Duck*, he was also writing his first novel (*Moros en la costa*), devising ad cam-

1. Scholarship on Dorfman's nonfiction work has been conducted by Oropesa (1992; on Dorfman's critique of popular culture), Berger (1975; on *How to Read Donald Duck*), Flora (1984; on *How to Read Donald Duck*), and López-Calvo (2008; on Dorfman's essays).

2. They are *Para leer al pato Donald* (coauthored with Armand Mattelart) (1971); *Superman y sus amigos del alma* (coauthored with Manuel Jofré) (1974); *Culture as Democratic Resistance in Chile Today* (1977); *Reader's nuestros que estás en la tierra: Ensayos sobre el imperialismo cultural* (1980); *The Empire's Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Our Minds* (1983); *Patos, elefantes y héroes: La infancia como subdesarrollo* (1985).

paigns for the Allende government, and working for the state publishing house—and he had previously published two books of literary criticism, one on the theater of Harold Pinter and another on violence and Latin American literature.³ As a complement to research on Dorfman's literary production, this article focuses on his media criticism and his journalism, two areas of his work that have received the least critical attention, to suggest that Dorfman's literary production must be understood as part of a larger project, one that includes his essays, journalism, and other cultural activities.

MEDIA CRITICISM

Most of the main aspects of Dorfman's media critique can be found in *Donald Duck* and in *The Empire's Old Clothes*. In both of these texts, Dorfman emphasizes the ideological role of mass-produced culture in influencing social consciousness. Mattelart and Dorfman's text dismantles the seemingly innocuous characters of Donald Duck and his pals and demonstrates how they serve to colonize Latin America through a repeated litany of tales favoring capitalism, U.S. imperialism, and the infantilization of the reader. One of the key strengths to their analysis is the way that they critically analyze the world in which Disney characters live. Formulaic in their ethics, Disney characters are always able to resolve their problems in simplistic, facile ways. Dorfman and Mattelart critique this view of the world as well as the role that the third world and the working classes play in Disney comics.

Their critique of Disney appeared as Chilean society was undergoing rapid and intense change, and they brought to their analysis their insider-outsider status, as neither one of them had been born in Chile, but both of them were committed to the success of Allende's government.⁴ The text carried the subtitle "A Manual of Decolonization" and its mission was to raise consciousness. By analyzing the internal ethical logic of Disney, the writers hoped to unmask its false innocence and provoke its readers—both young and old—to reject Disney's ideology. They explain in the preface to the English edition that after the Chilean government nationalized the copper industry, the United States imposed an "invisible blockade" (9) and an embargo against Chilean copper was organized, moves that devastated the Chilean economy. There were, however, two products that were not a part of the blockade: military support and media culture. John Berger (1975, 478) notes that in Chile before the coup, "Disney comics

3. See *Heading South* for a description of these concurrent activities (Dorfman 1998).

4. Armand Mattelart is Belgian. He lived in Chile from 1962 to 1973, during which time he taught sociology in the Universidad Católica in Santiago. In 1973, he went to Paris. Dorfman was born in Argentina in 1942 and became a Chilean citizen in 1967.

claimed a million readers a week," an astonishing number given that the Chilean population at the time was 10 million. Writing from exile after the coup, Dorfman and Mattelart (1975, 9) explain: "In the words of General Pinochet, the point was to 'conquer the minds,' while in the words of Donald Duck . . . the point was to 'restore the king.'" According to Dorfman and Mattelart, imperialism, military intervention, and all forms of hierarchical social structures depend on media culture to create the ideological support systems they require.

Dorfman and Mattelart unpack the supposed innocence and fun of these comics to reveal the ways that they support capitalism and imperialism. First, they ask, Why are there no parents in Disney comics, only uncles and cousins? Disney's destruction of the family denies the potential dialectic between father and son, mother and daughter. Because children never grow up to be parents, social authority is endless and unchallenged. The lack of parents and of any hint of sexual reproduction relates to the lack of material production. In the land of Disney, the only work is service sector. There is no labor and those with money simply find pots of loot. The only exchange of commodities is between ignorant savages and crafty imperialists. For instance, when Donald and his cousins travel to other lands, like Inca-Blinca or Aztecland, they easily dupe the locals into trading their precious resources for items of no value. The reason certain nations are wealthy and others are poor is the barbaric ignorance of those who live in places like Unsteadystan. The last major insight Dorfman and Mattelart have into Donald's world is that there is no pleasure. There is no labor and no leisure. Instead, Donald is constantly bored and wishing he were off having an adventure. Those adventures invariably include having fun while deceiving someone else. By describing Donald's antics as innocent fun, Disney manages to gloss the real conflicts behind social struggle. The power of Dorfman and Mattelart's analysis is that, once revealed, it is so blatantly obvious.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this text has been one of the most influential works of cultural criticism both in Latin America and abroad. It has appeared in thirty-nine Spanish language editions via the Mexican publishing house Siglo XXI since its release and is translated into English, French, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Swedish, Finnish, Danish, Japanese, and Korean. It was banned in Chile in 1973 and blocked from circulation in the United States in 1975 (see John Shelton Lawrence's account of the text's blocked circulation in the appendix to the 1991 English edition). As explained earlier, *Donald Duck* remains one of the essential classics of the cultural turn, and it continues to influence research on culture and social relations. Even though the text inspired many later works, few scholars have been able to replicate its style and methods. Drawing on the combined strengths of Mattelart's background in social sciences and communication studies and Dorfman's skills as a

scholar of literature and a creative writer, the text stands as one of the few examples of the cultural turn to combine historical, theoretical, and political analysis with empirical data. It also serves as an example of the early interdisciplinary efforts of cultural studies that were dedicated to breaking down the barriers between the social sciences and the humanities.

A further important innovation is the text's style. The writers highlight this point in the first paragraph, where they claim that their mission is not only to strip naked an icon of childhood innocence but also to disrupt the cold, solemn tone of intellectual writing: "el tipo de lenguaje que aquí se utiliza intenta quebrar la falsa solemnidad con que la ciencia por lo general se encierra su propio quehacer" (Dorfman and Mattelart 1971, 9). The authors criticize intellectual writing that shrouds itself in jargon and inaccessibility while attempting to analyze society, thereby replicating social divisions and hierarchies that distance leftist academic work from the people they hope to influence. They suggest that such writing betrays the goals of revolutionary critique: "Este miedo a la locura de las palabras, al futuro como imaginación, al contacto permanente con el lector, este temor a hacer el ridículo y perder su 'prestigio' al aparecer desnudo frente a su particular reducto público, traduce su aversión a la vida y, en definitiva, a la realidad total. El científico quiere estudiar la lluvia y sale con un paraguas" (Dorfman and Mattelart 1971, 9). The playfulness of these lines combined with accessible and clear language marks one of the most significant achievements of the text. The writing style is fun, irreverent, witty, and concise. The authors urge their readers to engage with their text as a means to more actively engaging with the world. To that end, they refuse to mimic the dry, distant, obtuse language of academic discourse.⁵ Written when Dorfman was not yet thirty years old, the text displays youthful exuberance and a sense of play.

Years later, Dorfman recast his thoughts from *Donald Duck* in *The Empire's Old Clothes* (1983). The text includes criticism of Babar and the Lone Ranger and analyzes the ways that the overly reductive resolutions to conflict employed by these cultural products serve to reinforce capitalist ideology. Even though some of the pieces in the volume were originally written before *Donald Duck*, when Dorfman taught media criticism in Santiago, the pieces were rewritten after Dorfman had gone into exile following the coup that ended Allende's presidency in 1973. In the prologue to the text Dorfman (1983, 10) explains that he observed how Chile had been used by imperialist culture as a test case to experiment economically and culturally. He also differentiates his work in *Empire's Old Clothes*

5. Even though they avoid dry, academic discourse, the book is clearly aimed at an educated left elite. The authors even mention rereleasing the book in a more accessible version in the preface (10).

from *Donald Duck* by articulating a broader audience for his critique; history has taught him that successful political activism requires that your message go beyond the sphere of the already convinced (Dorfman 1983, 11). He argues that the receiver should be actively involved in the production of meaning, and he analyzes ways that the cultural content of most mass media aims to fortify the strength and ideological hold of the social system. An elaborate explanation of these thoughts can be found in the chapter "The Infantilization of the Adult Reader." Analyzing *Reader's Digest*, Dorfman (1983, 144–145) details the ideological world fostered by such "light" reading: "whatever is faraway and famous is reduced incessantly to its most comprehensible, immediate, not to say vulgar, form. . . . Whatever the reader might not be able to handle is never presented." Creating a reading public that has no skills in critical thinking leads to a society that lacks the ability to interpret information received via the media, including the news.

The transition from Dorfman's critique of Disney comics to his analysis of media culture in *Empire's Old Clothes* also reflects a historical shift in the cultural turn. Michael Denning (2004, 8) notes that, after 1968, the left's critique of culture consisted mainly of "denunciations of the dominant culture, as ideological state apparatus, cultural imperialism, consciousness industry, or society of the spectacle" alongside "theorizations of cultural revolution." Dorfman and Mattelart's work is a key example of post-1968 cultural critique. By the time of Dorfman's work on *Empire's Old Clothes*, though, the cultural turn was entering a new phase that developed in response to the repressive backlash against 1960s and 1970s revolutionary politics. This new phase "gave way to reflections on the failures of popular nationalisms and the contradictions of popular cultures" (Denning 2004, 8). Denning notes the increased interest in Antonio Gramsci in this phase that resulted in new approaches to cultural studies, such as that found in postcolonial theory and subaltern studies.⁶ Following the work of subaltern studies in South Asia, Latin Americanists like John Beverley applied subaltern studies theory to Latin America in conjunction with postmodern or postcolonial critiques of master narratives and of the privileging of literature over oral traditions (especially testimonial). Indicative of this turn is Beverley's highly influential work *Against Literature* (1993), which expressed profound skepticism toward all forms of literature and turned to the *testimonio* as a more politically powerful form of writing. Beverley (1993, xiv) explains that "there is always a danger that even the most iconoclastic or 'progressive' literature is simply forging the new forms of

6. Dorfman recounts that when *Empire's Old Clothes* first appeared in English translation in 1983, a reviewer mistakenly suggested that the book was an example of the influence of Edward Said's critique of colonial structures of knowledge in *Orientalism*, a book that appeared in print a few years after Dorfman wrote the original texts.

hegemony." Dorfman himself had been at the forefront of promoting the testimonial form: he worked directly with Amnesty International while in exile gathering testimonios, and his essay on the Chilean testimonio (originally written in 1982) in *Some Write to the Future* is one of the first critical pieces dedicated to the form. He, however, would never be thoroughly convinced of the theoretical moves of the Latin American subaltern studies group, nor would he succumb to the extreme skepticism that characterized much critical theory in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Although his position called for "permanent criticism and revision," and while he recognized that, once in exile and after the violent crush of many of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s it was no longer possible to feel that he had all of the answers, he was reluctant to relegate literature to the realm of social oppression (Dorfman 1983, 11).

Beyond attempting to reach a broader audience and in addition to stressing questions over answers, *Empire's Old Clothes* signals one key change in Dorfman's theories about culture and society that indicates both his affinity for and his departure from a number of the postmodern theories circulating at the time. From this moment forward, Dorfman comes to perceive that social relations refuse Manichaean categories of good and evil. He begins to emphasize, instead, the degree to which all members of all social sectors are capable of violence, betrayal, and evil. He explains in the preface to *Empire's Old Clothes*: "I have also been discovering and exploring, through my poetry and fiction, that jungle which each of us can become. These violent undergrowths of imaginary characters are successful because in our own provinces and sewers, they match and accompany deep-seated tendencies and fears" (Dorfman 1983, 12). This observation signals the end for him of romantic, nostalgic notions about the masses versus the elites, the victims versus their oppressors. It no longer makes sense to divide the world into good guys and bad guys, which further means that there are no good texts versus bad texts. The idea that certain cultural forms oppress and others liberate places too much stress on the cultural product and misses the necessary interaction between cultural form and audience, a point later elaborated on by Jesús Martín Barbero in his theories of media and mediations.

So, in contrast to postmodern critics who turned to testimonials or other popular cultural forms as antidotes to the failures of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Dorfman followed a different track that refused to place the power solely in the cultural product but instead moved toward the study of representation, discourse, and cultural dialogue. This meant that Dorfman along with other postmodern theorists who emphasized the need to problematize representation increasingly stressed that progressive cultural forms could not be understood in the abstract but acquired meaning only when studied in concrete, material cases.

One of the best signs of this transition in Dorfman's cultural theory takes place in *Empire's Old Clothes* and appears in most of his nonfiction works after exile. Like the stylistic innovations of *Donald Duck*, *Empire's Old Clothes* also reveals an important poetics that integrally links Dorfman's theory to his style. Perhaps as a consequence of Dorfman's belief that his life was spared during the coup so that he could be its storyteller, or perhaps as a sign of Dorfman's postmodern transitions, his nonfiction work after exile always incorporates multiple voices. Dorfman includes in these works the testimonials, anecdotes, phrases, and memories of others that he places in dialogue with himself. At times these voices serve to illustrate his position, and at others they speak in opposition. They serve as interruptions of Dorfman's voice, and they connect his theories to the world outside the text. For instance, *Empire's Old Clothes* begins by recounting Dorfman's experiences with a Chilean "slum dweller" who chastised him for his critique of mass media culture because he was stealing her dreams only to later thank him after Allende's election, because now she didn't read that trash, now she was "dreaming reality" (Dorfman 1983, 5). Of course, idealistic as it may be, this practice runs the same risks as that of the testimonial. Because, even though Dorfman opens the text to other voices, ultimately he is the compiler and his voice is most dominant. Eventually, the reader must decide whether this practice unravels the hegemony of the critical voice or simply rearranges it. What should be emphasized, though, is the fact that Dorfman's style lays this practice bare, facilitating the critical engagement of the reader and encouraging, through its own self-reflexivity, questioning of the ideas put forth in the text. Some of these same practices are visible in his journalism.

JOURNALISM

Early in Dorfman's career he joined the long history of writers who turned to journalism and periodical writing to earn a living while working on their own creative projects. From 1965 to 1967, for instance, Dorfman frequently wrote for the Chilean weekly news magazine *Ercilla*, covering stories on literature that ranged from the beats to Chinese poetry, and the money earned was a welcome supplement to his meager pay from the university.⁷ Once in exile, Dorfman followed in the footsteps of a number of Latin American exiles, who used periodical writing to communicate their views to a public sphere that did not always include readers from their own nations. Studies by Julio Ramos and Aníbal González have considered the extent to which Latin American literature and journalism have

7. This information comes from personal e-mail correspondence. According to Dorfman, when *Ercilla* censored a piece of his on Nicolás Guillén, he resigned.

overlapped and influenced one another. In *Divergent Modernities*, Ramos (2001) focuses his study on the Buenos Aires periodical *La Nación* to trace the development of the modernist chronicle. González's (1993) *Journalism and the Development of the Spanish American Narrative* argues that journalism has been intimately tied to Latin American literature since the nineteenth century, and he traces the historical trajectory of these two discursive forms.

The following analysis of Dorfman's journalism builds on the scholarly insights of those two studies. Similar to Ramos's (2001) claim that José Martí's journalism pushed on the boundaries of the genre and used his periodical writing for formal and literary experimentation, Dorfman's journalism is directly tied to his overall aesthetic project. His combination of testimonial with objective reporting and imaginative prose with stark observations speaks to his commitment to use his journalism as a critical mode that reinforces his vision for the social role of literature—where hopeful imagination and an aggressive pursuit of the truth productively complement each other. Furthermore, Dorfman's journalism during exile corresponds to González's (1993, 120) observations that, beginning with the boom, there was an increased interest on the part of narrative writers to use journalism in their prose to explore an "ethics of writing." Although Dorfman does not incorporate journalistic modes to the degree that Elena Poniatowska does, his fiction certainly investigates the role that literature plays in documenting historical events and archiving historical memory. More important, in the tradition of Martí, Dorfman's journalistic writing forcefully brings the metaphorical and passionate language of literature to journalism. In this sense, his ethics of writing is dedicated to recognizing that cold, sterile words cannot capture the realities they pretend to transmit.

In addition to the ways that Dorfman's work relates to these traditions, his periodical writing includes two further features central to understanding how this writing relates to Dorfman's work as a whole. First is the fact that he writes in both English and Spanish, informing English-language readers about Latin America and informing Spanish-language readers about the United States. In the preface to *Other Septembers, Many Americas* he explains: "I could speak to the United States where I lived with the voice of a Latin American and to the Latin America that I inhabited only in my mind from the remoteness of living in North America" (Dorfman 2004, xiv). The second distinct feature of Dorfman's journalism is its correlation to his media criticism. From his first works in exile to today, Dorfman has written metacritical pieces of journalism that draw attention to the fragile process of reporting news in a world that is always hostile to truths that threaten the status quo. He wonders how journalists can fight the self-censorship that keeps them from reporting a piece because they

worry that it might affect their next promotion or might cause even worse damage to their lives. Correspondingly, Dorfman raises questions about what happens when the public has lost interest in the news because it has come to represent nothing more than propaganda, entertainment, and manipulation.

Dorfman frequently publishes in a variety of newspapers and magazines such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Guardian*, *Página Doce*, and *El Proceso*, among others. His regular commentaries for *El País*, one of the leading newspapers in the Spanish-speaking world, are syndicated around the globe. From his days in Chile to his writing in magazines like the Chilean *Hoy* while in exile, Dorfman often used journalism as a way to earn money and to work on forms of writing and themes of interest to his literature. Nevertheless, it would be the 1983 *New York Times* article "An Exile Finds Chile 'Struck by a Plague'" that Dorfman dictated into the phone while visiting Chile that would forever mark his journalism as a distinct form of social intervention. Returning to Chile after ten years of exile, Dorfman boldly described what he observed: what had changed and what had remained the same. There are the same birds, the food tastes the same, and life continues. But much has changed: "It is as if Chile had been struck by a plague. I am scandalized by the physical ruin of my country. The economic crisis, the worst in our history, touches everybody" (Dorfman 1983, 23). Such a claim was extraordinarily risky for Dorfman to make since the article would appear while he was still in Chile. From that moment forward, Dorfman became highly visible as the voice that described Chile under Pinochet to the world at large.

This need to characterize journalism as a form of communication that simultaneously reflects the state of the world and moves readers to imagine their role in shaping the future is visible in the 1983 *New York Times* article. After detailing the economic devastations of the Pinochet regime—devastations that surpass the typical class divide that has historically haunted Latin America—Dorfman ends his piece with a tone of hope and a rally to revolution. Calling attention to the fact that stories like the one he is writing cannot circulate in Chile, Dorfman (1983, 23) begins his last paragraph by emphasizing an optimistic future: "And yet, in this land without a free press, this land where hundreds of thousands have been jailed and humiliated, where exile and violence and lying have become as natural as breathing air, the predominant mood is not despair." Dorfman's use of the word *land* rather than *nation* or *country* to refer to Chile is indicative of his mixing of the literary with the journalistic. His last lines join an increasingly literary poetics with the subversive observation that the Chilean people are seeking ways to overthrow Pinochet: "People are no longer afraid. At night, they bang pots and pans to protest as if they were in front of the walls of Jericho, and in the daytime they march and congregate and openly discuss ways of ridding themselves of the tyrant"

(Dorfman 1983, 23). Using the symbolism of Jericho, Dorfman describes the Chilean resistance to Pinochet in epic terms.

Dorfman described the process of writing this story in a piece titled “Fear and the Word,” which was written for a special issue of *Autodafe* that explored threats to creative expression after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Dorfman’s essay provides background to the 1983 article and permits a glimpse into the fear that overwhelmed him when he decided to risk telling the story of Chile, how he saw it and how he hoped it would be. He explains that he carefully chose his words as a form of naked condemnation:

My words were harsh, blunt, calling things by their names, lamenting the blood and the pain and accusing the military of murder. This was the way I had written, outside Chile, for the last 10 years—it was, after all, to be free in expressing myself with unequivocal clarity that I had left my country. I told myself that now, when the dictator had allowed me to rejoin my homeland, I should not let any changes creep into my style or my vocabulary. I had to prove, more to myself than to others, that I could not be silenced. (Dorfman 2003, 219)

Dorfman explains that as he dictated the words of the article he caught a glimpse of his son, Rodrigo, who stared at him with a mix of admiration and alarm. It was then that the fear began. Waving his hand at Rodrigo in a gesture of calm that belied the pounding heart in his chest Dorfman suddenly became acutely aware of how daring this act was. And then the voice from New York asked him to repeat the story because something had gone wrong with the recording. This time as he reread the words that had been hastily scribbled early that morning Dorfman began to sweat and tremble:

I felt somehow naked, exposed—as if this sudden experience of fear had really returned me home, as if I could now really connect like lightning with what so many Chileans had been living, day in and day out, during my 10-year absence. . . . It was, in a way, a true homecoming for me, a way of understanding how repression can shape the shadow of our every word—a lesson in fear and what it does to us. (Dorfman 2003, 221)

What Dorfman appreciated in that moment was the ubiquitous combination of fear and political writing. Instead of using the story of this moment in his life to contrast a free press with the challenges of presenting alternative views during dictatorships, Dorfman (2003, 224) describes his experience as indicative of all journalism and he urges his readers to ask questions about their own guilty avoidance of fear: “How many journalists in what we call the free world write everything they want to, speak the same words in public as they mutter to themselves softly in their own minds? How many bite their tongues, accommodate their views to those with more power? How many buck the trend toward infotainment, dare to disturb and transgress?” In connecting the invisible censorship of a

media that is dominated by commercial interests to that of the plight of journalists living under dictatorship, Dorfman emphasizes the ethics of writing that is at the heart of his journalism.

Dorfman's insistence that journalism requires bravery and commitment regardless of context runs throughout his periodical writing regarding the Pinochet regime. Dorfman wrote about Chile, about Pinochet, and about his hopes for Chile up to, during, and after Pinochet's rule. These concerns did not ebb after the elections that called an end to Pinochet's dictatorship because even though Pinochet was no longer head of state he was directly involved in the transition government as head of the military and later as a senator for life. Dorfman's obsession with Pinochet and Pinochet's influence on the Chilean imagination would reach a climactic turn on October 16, 1998, when Pinochet was arrested on charges of torture and genocide in London on extradition orders from Spain. These events provided Dorfman with an irresistible opportunity to explore not only the bizarre twists in the Pinochet case but also the symbolic role of Pinochet in Chilean consciousness. The result was *Exorcising Terror: The Incredible Unending Trial of Augusto Pinochet* (2002).

The book is a highly hybrid text that weaves together a number of stories. First is the journalistic recounting of the details of the Pinochet case, many pieces of which were published in periodicals. This portion of the text is told like a suspense novel and Dorfman presents the intricacies of the case, highlighting its twists and turns as Pinochet battled the legality of his arrest in the British courts, claimed he was a political prisoner, argued that he was unfit to stand trial, was freed in London, returned to Chile, was arrested in Chile, and then later was deemed unfit to stand trial. Dorfman's account brings the reader to July 2001, when it seemed that all avenues for prosecuting Pinochet had been pursued.⁸ The book would have made a valuable contribution to public understanding of the case if it had covered only those events, but Dorfman goes beyond the mere reporting of events in an effort to use Pinochet's arrest to investigate the deeper question of what Pinochet represents to the Chilean people and to the global community.

Dorfman refuses to allow Pinochet to occupy the center of his own story, which is why the book opens with a dedication to his victims. Dorfman begins by describing the Wall of Memory that was erected in Santiago in 1994. It includes the names of victims of the military regime, more than a thousand of whom lack dates of death. The wall also carries a large blank space for those names that the sculptors knew would emerge over the years. Dorfman explains that he wants to dedicate the book to five friends whose names appear on that wall, but that is not all, because the

8. The case was reopened in May 2004. When Pinochet died on December 10, 2006, he had not been convicted of any crimes.

wall—even with its open space for names to be identified—is still missing information. It is missing the names of those who lost their jobs, their homes, their loved ones, and their dignity in the years of the dictatorship. Most important, “the wall does not include hundreds of thousands who were tortured and who survived, it does not include their memories” (Dorfman 2002, 10). The wall, then, like the facts of Pinochet’s arrest, only represents one small segment of the story. If Dorfman were to report the facts only, then he would perpetuate the crime of silence and he would contribute to a communicative mode that fails to register the complexity of state violence.

Consequently, the book centers not on Pinochet but rather on what Pinochet represents, on how a man who had been considered to be “honeyed and even groveling” orchestrated a reign of violence and terror (Dorfman 2002, 165). Interspersed with Dorfman’s coverage of the arrest are a series of stories about Pinochet, like that of Moy Tohá who had socialized with Pinochet during Allende’s presidency and who confronted him twice after the coup (Dorfman 2002). Dorfman also writes about those who followed Pinochet, those who professed and continue to profess his innocence. But Dorfman is not simply interested in condemning Pinochet’s supporters. That would be too easy. Rather than highlight the chasm between Pinochet and himself, Dorfman wonders how much of Pinochet lives in everyone. “Maybe what is frightening about Pinochet is not how far from us he has been all of this time, but how very close” (Dorfman 2002, 141). Pinochet as representative of the human weakness to use violence to ensure power, to maintain authority, and to silence opposition runs throughout the text and ties Dorfman’s analysis of the Pinochet case to his postmodern belief that the province of evil cannot be contained and that any hope for social change requires that we all face our own demons.

Not only does Dorfman expand the realm of traditional information included in such a text, but also he makes a concerted decision to intercalate the specifics of the Pinochet arrest with those very facts that the arrest hoped to uncover. In all of his writing on the violence and horror of the coup, Dorfman has never recounted the brutal details of those tortured under Pinochet to the extent that he does in this book. Beginning with the dedication, readers familiar with Dorfman’s writing know that he has decided to break that silence and tell those stories in a way he never has before. In explaining what is missing from the Wall of Memory, he tells readers the story of a man who was brutally tortured: “And then they attached something—a wire, a clasp, what was it?—they attached it to my genitals and then that voice said, Let’s make him dance, let’s make him sing, let’s fuck him over. And then they made me dance. And they made me sing” (Dorfman 2002, 10). This story and its absence from official memory begin the text and indicate to the reader that this book is dedicated to reminding its audience that the facts of the arrest should not su-

persede the reasons behind it. These stories continue throughout. Some of them come from the 249-page indictment prepared by the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón, and they contain lists and details of horror and violence (Dorfman 2002). Added to that are stories from Dorfman's own admittedly imperfect memory. In his recounting of a meeting with the family of Eugenio Ruiz Tagle, who was brutally murdered, he confesses that his memory might be unreliable: "Angélica says I am mistaken . . . and yet that memory burns within me still" (Dorfman 2002, 178). By pointing out that he may not be remembering the story exactly, Dorfman is pushing on the limits of what constitute the important "facts" in the Pinochet case. He is also engaging in a debate over testimonial and truth that parallels his play *Death and the Maiden*. What happens to the stories that are not a part of the legal documents? Dorfman stresses that any effort to account for the horror of Pinochet will always be incomplete, will always ignore a story that should be preserved. He makes it clear that this book itself is only the beginning. He also underscores the fact that while his memory and that of other victims of Pinochet may be imperfect, that does not mean that what they misremember did not happen. Memory in cases of mass trauma becomes fluid, fragile, and imprecise, but as Dorfman shows, this does not make memory any less essential to the process of recovery.

Dorfman ultimately considers the Pinochet case in terms of its implications for the world at large. And, in fact, before Dorfman had finished the manuscript Slobodan Milošević was arraigned on July 3, 2001, clearly indicating the precedent set by Pinochet's arrest. Then, on September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States set into motion a series of events that tested global support for international human rights. Exploring the uncanny historical coincidence of terror and September 11, however, is not the goal of *Exorcising Terror*. Dorfman leaves that task to his next book of nonfiction, *Other Septembers, Many Americas*, a work that represents a broad range of Dorfman's periodical writing, delves into many of the themes that are at the heart of his cultural criticism, and provides a survey of almost a quarter century of his writing. The goal of the text is to use Dorfman's (2002, xvi) own experience as a hemispheric American, an American of the South and of the North, of Spanish and of English, as a way to "break down the barriers that separate Americans and foreigners," as a way to "envision a different dialogue, another sort of relationship." Dorfman's subsequent periodical writing has continued to take up themes of human rights and social conflict, especially with regard to the war on terror.

From *Donald Duck* to *Death and the Maiden* to *Exorcising Terror*, Dorfman's works reveal his commitment to engaged art and provocative criticism. To a certain extent, this approach is a consequence of Dorfman's historical and social experiences. Responding to the Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1960s, accompanied as these were with

the extraordinary artistic innovations of the boom writers, the New Latin American cinema, and the boom of the testimonial genre, writers from Dorfman's generation often created literature that oscillated among the highly intellectual aesthetics of the boom writers, the critique of media culture of Latin American political filmmakers, and the direct form of political denunciation found in testimonio. These writers, known as the postboom generation, constructed texts that were aesthetically hybrid and politically motivated.

What continues to set Dorfman apart from other members of his generation is the way that he works across diverse genres using myriad styles. Describing the writing of Gabriel García Márquez, Dorfman speaks of his unified, original style, and he notes that his own writing has not achieved such unity: "My style isn't at all unified. I'm full of fragments and contradictions. I haven't been able to find that unity in my work, in my vision. My life had been very fragmented and my vision is as well" (qtd. in Incedon 1991, 98). So not only does he write books of media criticism and cultural journalism in addition to works of literature, but he also writes using the stark Pinteresque language of *Death and the Maiden*; the irreverent, witty tone of *Donald Duck*; and the combination of suspenseful reportage and testimonial of *Exorcising Terror*. These activities may appear as stylistic chaos, but I would argue that they are actually a deliberate, albeit risky, textual strategy that includes formal experimentation, constant questioning, and radical hope.⁹

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9. An exploration of this textual strategy is at the center of my book, *Ariel Dorfman: An Aesthetics of Hope*.

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