

## Against the Authoritarian Orator and His *Pater familias*: Deviant Literarity and Orphaned Speech in *El padre mío* by Diamela Eltit and Lotty Rosenfeld<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Published in the last year of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte's military dictatorship saw its end, *My Father (El padre mío)* constitutes an interprofessional, collaborative work between Chile National Literature Prize winner Diamela Eltit and visual artist Lotty Rosenfeld, composed of unaltered transcriptions of three monologues (dis)articulated by a schizophrenic vagrant who referred to himself as *My Father*. By re-enacting the vagrant's irrational utterances in a truthful but parodic manner, Eltit and Rosenfeld "orphaned" these spoken words into a work of written literature that mocked the authoritarian voice of the dictator who had imposed himself as the Grand Orator of the Nation and the Father of Chile. The main objective of the present work, which is principally based on the conceptualization of *Mute Speech* by Jacques Rancière, is to examine the political dimension of Eltit and Rosenfeld's aesthetic endeavor: through an exploration of the possibilities of political emancipation that the vagrant's fatherless monologues fostered in *My Father*, our study demonstrates that what neoliberal civil society presupposes as objectionable animalistic noises may be capable of intervening in what Rancière refers to as the "distribution of sensible" and its consolidated aesthetics of hierarchy, thus subverting the fable of *pater familias* and *pater patriae* concocted by Pinochet's right-wing military regime.

**Keywords:** *El padre mío*, Diamela Eltit, Lotty Rosenfeld, Chile, dictatorship, Jacques Rancière

**CLC:** I784    **Document Code:** A    **Article ID:** 2096-4374(2021)02-0012-10

**Doi:** 10.53397/hunnu.jflc.202102002

What makes an action political is not its object or the place where it is carried out, but solely its form, the *form* in which the confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute, of a community existing solely through being divided.

——Rancière, *Disagreement*

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, during the conversation between Socrates and the young Athenian aristocrat who is the dialogue's namesake, a curious analogy appears between written words and the concept of an orphan: Socrates points out that like mute paintings, written words remain in "an aloof silence" when encountering the question of their imminent meanings, since they are considered "mere image[s]" of legitimate speeches (70). After categorizing speeches as an ensouled art that should only be maneuvered by men of knowledge, Plato asserts, appropriating the guiding narrative voice of his mentor, that written texts lack intelligent adequacy to offer any explanation of the things they convey (70). Entangled in their

circular and monotonic soliloquy and ready to be wrongly handled by people whom the philosopher deems unworthy, written words are inclined to acquire the role of a helpless, forsaken “orphan” who, incapable of defending itself, “always needs its father to come to its assistance” (70).

Centuries passed, a politically engaged generation of Chilean writers and visual artists—known as the *Advanced Scene* (*Escena de Avanzada*)—made their debut during General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte’s right-wing military dictatorship (1973–1990). This generation later rose to global prominence not only for their groundbreaking Neo-Avant-Garde aesthetics, but also as political dissidents who advocated for Salvador Allende’s Chilean way toward democracy and socialism. Their literary and artistic expressions were constantly aimed at subverting the authoritarian normativity of the military regime by defying Pinochet’s self-aggrandizement as the Father of the Nation. Chilean literary critic and scholar Rodrigo Cánovas E. first referred to several writers of this group in his *The Chilean Novel* (*Novela chilena*) as an “orphaned generation”: a generation without masters or fathers, whose aesthetic endeavor had produced an atmosphere of “solitude, bitterness and despair”<sup>2</sup> (17). According to Cánovas E., the literary voice that talked to us in this generation belonged, without doubt, to “an orphan” (39), and it was an orphan’s voice that had inaugurated a split from the current literary tradition by decentering the idea of authoritarian totality (45).

Diamela Eltit, writer, scholar, and winner of the Chilean National Literature Prize in 2018, and her collaborator Lotty Rosenfeld, a visual and interdisciplinary artist, have been revered in both local and global cultural contexts for being paradigmatic figures of the orphaned generation Advanced Scene. Their aesthetic experiments constantly stood out as a form of strategic political defiance against ideological hegemony and government-mandated censorship under Pinochet’s dictatorship. One of their strategies consisted of unrigging hierarchical family relations promoted by right-wing government propaganda and thus negating the patriarchal authority wielded by the despotic Father of the Nation—or better put, to disrupt nationalistic conservative rhetoric by transgressing established family values and their perceived preeminence. The reason against which these two consolidated their literary and artistic endeavors is the role of the father in Chile under the dictatorship as the ruling figure of the household, who had uncontested right to *Discipline and Punish*. This became especially problematic in the analogy between the sovereign power of patrimonialism at the macropolitical level and the patriarchal dominance in the private domain of the family, where feminine imagery was misappropriated to promote support of the law of the *pater familias* and furthermore, that of the military regime. As Ximena Bunster proposed in her study of women’s mobilization in militarized Chile, with the formation of the family as a model for the organization of the state, Pinochet and the military junta aimed to identify so-called patriotic female supporters “with the fatherland through their families” and through “their private experiences as mothers” (216); they were thus deemed “strictly subordinated to the *pater familias* and particularly to the *pater patriae* (father of the nation)” (216).

For this reason, we relate this specific strategy to what Michel Foucault proposes in *Discipline and Punish* regarding the sovereignty of the familial institution. To illustrate how the mechanisms of power relations within the household have been aligned with the framework of sovereign power, Foucault asserts that discipline may be taken over not only by specialized institutions, but also by “pre-existing authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power,” particularly the disciplined intrafamilial relations between parents and children (215). He then defines the considerable weight of “external schemata”—including those of education as well as military, psychiatric and psychological contrivances—as something pertaining to what has shaped the family into a “privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and abnormal” (215-216). Further, in this oedipal ploy of the Fatherland-as-Family equation, alongside the fiction of a paternal dictator and the

primacy of the maternal as subjugation, there was the younger generation who, contrived by the military regime as torch-bearing scions, would love one another with brotherly affection while fighting for a better future, delivering their country from the menace of so-called socialist usurpation. One illustrative example of this nature consists in the propaganda pamphlet *Patriotic Values and Family Values* (*Valores patrios y valores familiares*), which was written under the authority of National Secretariat of Women (Secretaría Nacional de la Mujer, SNM) and published in 1982. It includes a section titled “Features of Patriotism” (“Características del patriotismo”), in which the advocacy for *pater familias* and *pater patriae* is blatant: by stressing that the etymology of “patria” (“fatherland”) and “patriotismo” (“patriotism”) stems from the Latin word “pater” (“father”), the brochure defines these two terms as having the following connotations. First, they imply a filial relation with one’s country of origin, which is equivalent to the concept of familial parentage and fatherhood. Second, they refer to a vital, instinctive affection for nationalistic traditions, as well as a sense of “duty in solidarity [among] [all] the children from the same nation” (National Secretariat of Women 6).

However, in confronting this authoritarian rhetoric of Fatherland-as-Family and Dictator-as-Father, Eltit, Rosenfeld, and other members of the Advanced Scene willfully took a stance as symbolic orphans—or better said in the local language, as “*huachos*.” With the publication of *Mothers and Orphans* (*Madres y huachos*), the Chilean anthropologist and writer Sonia Montecino Aguirre launched an interdisciplinary pilot study of the underregistered national trait known as “*huacharaje*,” understood in the Southern Cone context as “orphanhood.” With a Mapuche origin, the term “*huacho/guacho*” initially referred to abandoned orphans or illegitimate children born to European fathers and indigenous mothers during the conquest and colonization of Chile (Montecino Aguirre 50). Since then, society has considered being called a *huacho* an indication of bastardy; in addition, it has also traversed the social order and become a troublesome mark of identity in modern Chile’s history (50). More importantly, it is due to the absence of fathers in *huachos*’ lives that authoritarian rulers usurp paternal power:

We think that, in the mestizo imaginary of Latin America, the symbolic hollow will be supplanted with a male figure who is at the same time powerful and violent: the caudillo, the military man, the guerrilla. The absent father thus acquires an appearance tinged with political, economic, and belligerent power. It is an appearance that runs the space outside the family; one that, nonetheless, imposes on our house an air of phantasm under its empire, even if only through evocation or in a glimpse. (40-41)

As Mónica Barrientos argues in her article on marginal bodies in Eltit’s works, the noted presentations of the father figure as an embodiment of despotic authority, whether filial or military, merit a fully comprehensive academic assessment (27). Eltit’s fictional works belonging to this category include several written under the dictatorship, and later during the so-called Democratic Transition, such as *Por la patria*, *El cuarto mundo*, and *Los vigilantes*, among others. Various nonfiction works of hers oftentimes feature a focused acknowledgment of the importance of testimonial narratives as well, realized through conducting interviews accompanied by photographic and video recordings that lend visibility to underrepresented or marginalized subjects. Among these creative writings is *El infarto del alma*, a photoessay that ensued from the visual/verbal collaborative project with Chilean photographer Paz Errázuriz, which focused on the lives of mentally disabled couples who had been isolated in a psychiatric hospital in the town of Putaendo. Among the portraits of those incarcerated on the far side of society, where stands out an unflinching exhibition of insanity and affection, the two female collaborators noted that they saw “the subject of inequality” in their paradoxical intertwining of beauty and ugliness,

youthfulness and senescence, literacy and ignorance (Eltit and Errázuriz n. p.).

*My Father (El padre mío)* is another interdisciplinary showpiece by Eltit, where she and Rosenfeld concentrated on the exhibition of the political as well as the aesthetic puissance of the stories (dis-)articulated by marginalized groups, as to provide them with a heterogeneous platform of literary documentation for their muted and orphaned voices to be heard. As they clarified in the opening statements, their writing resulted from “an unstable investigation” initiated in 1980, when these two visited destitute neighborhoods known for practices of prostitution and vagrancy (Eltit and Rosenfeld 9). Here, the term “unstable investigation” holds a broader range of significance: according to Eltit and Rosenfeld, under the guidance of this structured plan, the two of them dedicated their field trips to marginal urban communities, to encounter and converse with people whose lives had been rendered impalpable to society under the dictatorship (9). Presenting the muted voices of those who, like huachos, had been banished from the ideal Fatherland, Eltit and Rosenfeld’s works managed to subvert the normative metanarrative of the *pater familias* and *pater patriae* in Pinochet’s Chile, defying his absolute power and authoritarian fatherhood.

### 1. An Unstable Investigation through Which the Unspeakable Enunciates

To render audible the often-disarticulated orphaned voices, a deliberate and effective literary device of Eltit and Rosenfeld was to map out the discrepancies in Fatherland-as-Family and Dictator-as-Father storylines, which the military regime had machinated for its political and cultural hegemony. This is exactly the case for *My Father*: during one of their encounters with the residents of Santiago’s forgotten quarters, Eltit and Rosenfeld came across a homeless man who suffered from schizophrenia, referring to himself as *My Father*. Between 1983 and 1985, the two female coauthors managed to obtain three recordings of his monologues, which, with the help of Eltit’s daughter Dánisa, would be later transcribed into written texts (Eltit and Rosenfeld 7). Their acts of observing and recording wandering soliloquies of this outcast vagabond during the years of the dictatorship were carried out on the principle that they sought to investigate “worlds intersected by differentiating energies and senses of a social and cultural system of visibility” (9). Eltit and Rosenfeld thus drew an analogy between the marginalized status of the subaltern community in Santiago and the photographic negative, which was deemed necessary to configure a comprehensive simulation of the rest of the city of Santiago under the military regime, via “a powerful territorial exclusion that aims at keeping intact the social system hatched from potent and well-sustained hierarchies” (9).

Eltit and Rosenfeld’s re-territorialization of the vagrant’s antithetical voice against the hegemonic, moral fabric of society poses a question: what strains of unaccustomed aesthetics could their experimental documentation potentially mobilize? Regarding the political dimension of aesthetics, Jacques Rancière developed perceptive insights in his *The Politics of Aesthetics*, which we deem essential to our analysis of *My Father*. It is worth mentioning that in her essay “Criticism as a Poetic Experience” (“La crítica como experiencia poética”), Eltit dwells on the momentousness of elaborating a fusion between Aristotle’s assertion of man-as-political-animal and Rancière’s statement of man-as-poetic-animal, since for her “human beings are political animals precisely for being poetic” (169). In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, the interrelationship between aesthetics and politics recognized by Rancière is not in the Benjaminian sense or in the specific way that condemns the aestheticization of politics in the era of masses in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”; instead, Rancière contends that this interrelationship must be approached at the level of “the *sensible delimitation* of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 18; emphasis added).

For a more inclusive understanding of aesthetics as a delimitation of senses, it is necessary to further probe Rancière's definition of "distribution of the sensible." The distribution of sensible functions, according to Rancière, as a "system of self-evident facts of sense perception" whose natural propensity is to establish what is common and shared, and to delimit what is appropriate in accordance with one's expected role(s) and position(s) in society (12). While indicating it as a way of delimitation, Rancière asserts that by inquiring into the mechanisms of such distribution, one can see "who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and, in the time and space in which this activity is performed" (12). According to his theorization, in the established social system, not only what is apprehended by the senses is predetermined, but also the representations of a priori factors related to activities, such as space and time (12-13). More crucially, through the distribution of the sensible, the differences between social inclusion and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, are revealed and thus fixed. In the following terms Rancière circumscribes the term:

... a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and *the talent to speak*, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (13; emphasis added)

In light of Rancière's conceptualization, it is opportune to reckon Eltit and Rosenfeld's work as an interprofessional endeavor that destabilizes the preestablished distribution of the senses through a transgression of boundaries between those who have the right to speak and those who do not—a work that can be aligned with what Rancière's terms as a "reign of writing, of speech circulating outside any determined relationship of address" (*The Politics of Literature* 12). The aesthetic dimension and the possibilities of emancipation harbored in the vagrant's monologues in *My Father* can thus be deemed as well what Rancière defines in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* as "politics," referring to the type of "activity which turns on equality as its principle" (ix). The democratizing politics of dissensus imbedded in Eltit and Rosenfeld's collaborative undertaking rendered audible what civil society considered to be animalistic noises, and thus opposed hegemonic hierarchy under Pinochet's dictatorial regime—or the Rancierian notion of "police," whose order of bodies "defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task" (Rancière, *Disagreement* 29). Intriguingly, in her article, Bunster also argues that while associating the notion of politics with the imagery of chaos, violence and international socialism, Pinochet promised his sympathizers a stable and social order "built on a rejection of 'politics' and anything 'political'" (216). Nonetheless, as mentioned by Eltit and Rosenfeld, the self-(re)presentation of the homeless community itself was chaotic, and their complicated quotidian dressing habits had already conveyed a "baroque corporality"—a "violent external appearance" that may presage multiple levels of political significance (10).

"Politics today must be immodest," Rancière maintains in a similar vein, "in relation to the modesty forced on it by the logics of consensual management of the 'only thing possible'" (*Disagreement* 136). The chaotic nature of *My Father's* incessant wrangling with words sustains a similar anarchist aesthetic, in such a way that the aesthetically political dimension that Eltit and Rosenfeld discovered in *My Father's* monologues consisted precisely of what they had proposed for their unstable investigation around vibrant, marginalized urban sites. According to the authors, what they found in the words of *My Father* was an "aesthetics capable of begetting cultural meanings," stemming from a place of exclusion that may open up vital spaces of political contention to the dominant hierarchy in Chilean society (Eltit

and Rosenfeld 9). They commented as follows:

While not possessing any sociological or anthropological perspective and keeping in mind both the advantage and disadvantage to appear in those areas, we had to disclose a wide and great margin of speculation by resorting to the narrative practice that allowed us to weave and unite creative discrepancies, as well as to set free analogical flow and aesthetic charge embedded in bodies, gestures, behaviors, and fragments of the way of living. (Eltit and Rosenfeld 10)

Aesthetics—whose marginal nature would serve for a more discursive reflection on the society in which Eltit and Rosenfeld lived—characterize the irrational use of language by the vagrant man, or better put, a narrative assemblage fueled by a theatrical tension (12). In the absurdity of his baroque speech, one can find a similar rhetorical feature shared with the theatrical conventions of Absurdism, especially the latter’s repetitive or circular technique of storytelling, as well as the depiction of a world ruled by irrationality. Eltit and Rosenfeld associated the vagrant’s disarticulation with the work of Samuel Beckett, as someone who was “traveling irascibly among words wrapped behind the figure of a secluded mother who had been buried in the page” (5). In his monologues, the vagabond launched into a tirade about his own confusing identities, as well as several other figures whom he regarded, incoherently, as accomplices in their implementation of political schemes and as adversaries in competition for power. The names uttered by the vagrant include those of both fictional and historical personages: King George, Mr. Colvin, Mr. Luengo, the Argentine Ledesma, Augusto Pinochet, Salvador Allende, Jorge Alessandri, Juan Domingo Perón, Eduardo Frei, and William Marín the football player. For himself, *My Father* reiterated that he was one who gave illegal mandates in the country, confirming: “I will give the orders in the country, since I do not have commitments with them nor with King George, who has lately been giving the orders, with high rank in his possession. Now, *My Father* gives the illegitimate orders in the country” (1). Similar examples appear in all three transcribed recordings from 1983 to 1985, where the disarticulation of identities serves as a convincing example to underscore the baroque repetitiveness and absurdity of the vagrant’s speech patterns:

[First recording, 1983] *El padre mío* lives permanently from the usurpation with Mr. Luengo, who is Mr. Colvin who serves him for Antarctica. . . . Mr. Pinochet himself is Mr. Colvin, who is the same footballer William Marín who plays for Audax Italiano, the very same. He’s Mr. Colvin, Mr. Luengo, King George, he is one of them. (Eltit and Rosenfeld 23, 25)

[Second recording, 1984] I have a commitment with President Jorge Alessandri, because he sought me out once, and with Mr. Frei and Mr. Allende. . . . *El padre mío* is not a communist but an opportunist, which is why him and I are carrying out this conversation. However, I am indeed a communist and a socialist, of course I am, and I voted for him, for Mr. Allende. However, Mr. Allende is not the one who gives the orders now: now, it is Mr. Colvin. (35-36)

[Last recording, 1985] I ignored what was related to *El padre mío*, since somebody planned at that time to assassinate me, yet later, another time, for what I am telling you. However, I shall be my own testimony. (44)

As proposed by Michael J. Lazzara in his article on the poetics of impossibility in the vagrant’s speeches, *My Father*’s language shares a similarity with the incoherent discourse of the madwoman in Beckett’s dramatic monologue, “Not I”: instead of involving the audience in an unmediated and integral way that

could be perceived as common reality, the demented female orator presents a dark, babbling broken sequence of her own stories of solitary life and traumatic experiences. While the “rest of face [is] in shadow,” the madwoman’s mouth is illuminated—as instructed by Beckett in the script—by a beam of light “about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below” (Beckett 376), in order to demonstrate the “very inexpressibility of her plight,” as well as the impossibility of reconstructing her trauma (Lazzara 115). In *My Father*, the chaotic chains of nominal references—characterized by a “disjuncture between signifiers and signifieds”—disrupt the identitarian individuality that these names embody (112); instead, by “grammatically equat[ing] with one another,” the chains of references that feature in all three recordings of the vagrant’s monologues “come to represent a general structure of power and corruption that the madman wants to denounce” (112). In light of such similarity between Beckett’s aesthetics of the absurd and *My Father*’s incongruous verbal barrage, we propose that Eltit and Rosenfeld’s interprofessional elaboration of the vagrant’s monologues does not aim to deliver to its readers well-balanced stories curated through the lens of intellectuals, nor at keeping his voice as the only authentic, authoritative one in this book which says, “I should be my own testimony” (Eltit and Rosenfeld 44). This reminds us of what Chilean cultural theorist Nelly Richard states in her *Cultural Residues*, concerning how Eltit and Rosenfeld nurtured a “testimonial poetics” (51). Richard proposes as follows:

[T]he book [referring to *El padre mío*] frustrates the denunciatory mission this marginal voice might warrant. The testimonial function is deliberately complicated by what certain politics of the genre would expect to see fulfilled in orthodox fashion. *El padre mío* mixes up the documentary axiom of transparent speech that is merely presentational with an unusual metaphorical theater that displaces the naturalism of the recorded voice into a surprising display of literary artifice. (52)

“After Beckett, another image came to my mind,” Eltit and Rosenfeld wrote, “It is Chile, we thought” (15). The speeches of *My Father* responded, in a paradoxical manner, to the false self-aggrandizement of familial, political, and economic fables with which the military regime tried to embellish their undemocratic normativity. Eltit and Rosenfeld journeyed through his paradoxical language along with the quasi-testimonial presentation, where the schizophrenic homeless man was oxymoronically an exposed orphan and an autocratic father. On the one hand, the reclusive madman was ostracized from the Fatherland and its patriarchal and patriotic *ethos*, deprived of the civil right to have his voice heard in so-called civil society. On the other hand, as indicated by Richard, he was “a metaphor of the dictator who fraudulently exercises power” by mandating illegitimate orders in Chile (53).

## 2. The Orphan’s Speech that Redistributes the Senses

As suggested by Ivette Malverde Disselkoen, instead of being a simple appellation without profound meaning, the name “El padre mío” also constitutes a remedy for the restoration of his voice usurped by the dictator, while Eltit and Rosenfeld played the role of daughters who assisted their victimized, silenced father in (dis)articulating his stories (70). By transcribing the vagrant’s irrational utterances and re-territorializing them through a paradoxical and parodic appropriation of testimonial convention, Eltit and Rosenfeld transformed them into a written work that needed no authoritative voice to gain validity or legitimacy for its possible interpretations in a “literary game” between delirium, reality, and imagination (Malverde Disselkoen 74). In their anarchy of an aesthetic game, Eltit and Rosenfeld conjured up the anguish of the literary interior monologue, “that rush and profundity to state the ‘true’ truth of the

character shielded behind the formal sham that reproduces ideas” (15). The homeless madman reminded Eltit of her country under a dictatorship whose image of vencidos [defeated] was nothing but an antithesis to the one that the military regime had glorified. Eltit and Rosenfeld wrote:

Chile as a whole and in pieces is in the malady of this man; shreds of daily news, fragments of extermination, syllables of death, pauses of lies, commercial catch phrases, names of the deceased. It is a profound crisis of language, an infection in the memory, a disarticulation of all ideologies. It is a shame, I thought. (15)

However, through literary transformation, the vagrant’s fragmented and infected words in crisis were turned into the orphaned words that Rancière examines in *Mute Speech* and *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. In the former publication, Rancière refutes Plato’s claims of written words as embodiment of linguistic inadequacy, and instead proposes that their nomadic nature generates a destabilizing potential to defy the established hierarchical sociopolitical order, as well as its unwavering distribution of the senses. According to Rancière, orphaned written texts do not need protection from authoritative voice/speech to guide them in a legitimate manner; although Plato scorned their dissonant nature, the orphan logos can serve as an active, ungovernable medium of communication for a heterogeneity of voices to articulate themselves, and thus to defy the oratorical authority of the father figure. This is exactly the case of literature and its emancipating power. Rancière presents the emancipated literature, whose principles are opposed to the norms of representative poetics as follows:

[T]he concept of writing is split in two: It can be orphaned speech lacking a body that might accompany it and attest to it, or, on the contrary, it can be a hieroglyph that bears its idea upon its body. The contradiction of literature might very well be the tension between these two ideas of writing. (*Mute Speech* 36)

The French philosopher accentuates Plato’s insistence on the distinction between the authoritative role of speech and the orphaned status of written text embodies the “classical representative order” that canonizes the “active speech of the great orator who moves deeply and persuades, edifies and leads souls and bodies,” while largely discrediting writing as a mode of mute logos “incapable of saying what it says differently or of choosing not to speak” (Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* 32-33). As proposed by Sean Noah Walsh in his analysis of the reasons behind Plato’s esoteric strategy, the Athenian philosopher feared that instead of persecution against him based on his dissident ideology, there was an “abomination” or predicament that “the wrong man will gain influence through teaching and politics, thus subordinating the Good under the tyranny of the vulgar” (67). In other words, Plato’s fear substantially relates to inappropriate domination over language and manipulation of its power, with written text being an orphan “abandoned into the world without an authoritative voice to lend it validation” (Walsh 80-81). On the Platonic theory of the illegitimacy of orphaned written text, Walsh concludes:

Writing, and in particular philosophic writing, therefore, [for Plato] is an activity demanding extraordinary care. The written word is particularly susceptible to the inadequacy of language because of its permanency. . . . [A] written text can be in places an author cannot, either in multiple locations where the author is not present, or surpassing a long-deceased author in time. Because the text can exist where the author cannot, in multiple places or in near immortality, it is born an orphan with



language as its orphanage. The text is compelled to explain itself without recourse to a clarifying authority. And, as Plato concedes, in every respect and in every instance, it fails this task. (81)

Rancière argues against Plato that writing, more than being “a form of manifestation of speech,” is fundamentally “an idea of speech itself and its intrinsic power” (*The Aesthetic Unconscious* 32). Rancière proposes that, in the aesthetic revolution, “there is thought that does not think,” or says a “non-thought that inhabits thought and gives it a power all its own” (31-32). It is essential to indicate that orphaned literature, as *Mute Speech*, is situated firmly within this aesthetic revolution, as confirmed by the French philosopher in his public lecture at the Collège International de Philosophie in 1999 (Rockhill 179). Accordingly, the monologues transcribed in *My Father* that were regarded as unhinged jabbering in the eyes of civil society convey an emancipating, creative power of the non-thought envisaged by Rancière. The aestheticization of *My Father*’s anarchy of speech subverts the empowered, oppressive language practices of grand orators and the Father of the Nation, as well as the normative conceptions of ethos that serve as the basis of the Fatherland. On the one hand, Eltit and Rosenfeld’s experimental artifact of transforming the vagrant’s words into parodic, *Mute Speech* fits exactly within the Rancièrian notion of the aesthetic regime of art, which harbors the possibility of the redistribution of the sensible. “[I]n this regime, art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or is something other than art,” Rancière defines in this way the paradoxical nature of the aesthetic politics of emancipation in *Aesthetic and Its Discontents*, as a dynamic counterpoint between its autonomy and heteronomy (36). This fundamental paradox makes art “the harbinger of a new life, only to the extent that it is defined as distinct from life” (Tank 84). On the other hand, there is the dictator as a grand orator, whose hierarchical vision of the community simulates that of the representative regime: a regime that configures the highs and lows of genres “according to the dignity of their subject matter” while privileging the primacy of the art of speech in actuality (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 22). The literary work of Eltit and Rosenfeld demonstrates that what authoritarian society considers to be inappropriate and worthless noises may be capable of intervening in the spatial-temporal and visual-audible configurations in the distribution of the sensible, since these marginalized voices possess a subversive, egalitarian power that challenges the common language. Over and above the question regarding the differentiated assessments of noble speech and mute writing, Rancière maintains: “There are no noble and vulgar subjects, nor important narrative episodes and accessory descriptive ones. . . . Everything is on an equal footing, equally important, equally significant” (*The Aesthetic Unconscious* 36).

### 3. Conclusion

Archiving the non-speech of an illegitimate orator encourages the configuration of a new literary aesthetic for which the world of the homeless vagrant served as an ideal example, “in order to think critical orders that passively transgressed the institutional vocation which had taken refuge in private space” (Eltit and Rosenfeld 9-10). By exposing in a faithful manner the vagrant’s monologues, which would otherwise go unnoticed or unheard, *My Father* comprises an effort to increase the visibility of Deleuzian-Guattarian minor literature that re-territorializes the hegemonic language of dictatorship. By adopting a minor aesthetic and literary approach, Eltit and Rosenfeld stepped outside of Santiago’s urban center, venturing into places that were both spatially and socially marginalized, in an endeavor to find among the authoritarian metanarrative of Pinochet’s Fatherland-as-Family and Dictator-as-Father a fault line—“an aesthetic *appendage*,” just like they propounded in the preliminary statement of *My Father*

(9; emphasis added). This “aesthetic appendage” was posed as a threat to the alleged common values orchestrated by Pinochet and his military junta, which may necessarily sacrifice manifestations of liberty, democracy, and other civil rights. The analogy drawn by Eltit and Rosenfeld between the demented orphaned vagrant and Chile is strikingly seditious in the way that the portrait of a nation encumbered by social segregation and cultural decrepitude is in direct and plain opposition to the image of Chile conceived by Pinochet as *pater familias*.

## Notes

1. The research in present work is supported by the Social Science Foundation of Beijing under grant no. 21WXB006.
2. All translations of transcriptions from *El padre mío* and other citations in Spanish are ours.

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