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**“Poetry Homework”: Pedagogy, Memory, & Politics in the Visual  
Poetry of Juan Luis Martínez**

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My homework has been handed back to me. One mustn't even think of that now. I'm really beyond the grave, and no more assignments, please.

—from Arthur Rimbaud's "Vies," tr. John Ashbery

*Memoria Chilena*, the digital archive run by Chile's Department of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, calls the neo-vanguard book artist and visual poet Juan Luis Martínez “el secreto mejor guardado de la poesía chilena” [the best-kept secret of Chilean poetry].<sup>1</sup> Martínez's obscurity, no doubt, stems from a combination of overlapping reasons—from his geographical positioning to his uncompromising hermeticism to the material scarcity and limited circulation of his book-objects. Thus, recovering the secret of his poetry—a secret which Martínez himself took pains to encrypt—requires a combination of labors that are archival, historicist, intertextual, translational, and hermeneutic.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote also appears in the introduction to Martínez in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry*: “the best-kept secret of Chilean poetry—according to almost all present-day critics” (452).

Born in Valparaíso in 1942, Martínez eventually settled in Villa Alemana, remaining at a distance from the cultural center of Santiago. He deliberately avoided participation in mainstream literary discourse, existing in a state of what *Memoria Chilena* calls “permanent interior exile.”<sup>2</sup> It was an exile that he imposed so rigorously that the critic Luis Vargas Saavedra suggested in the late 1980s that Martínez was the invention of poets Enrique Lihn and Pedro Lastra, who were his early champions. Martínez prematurely died in 1993 of renal failure and self-published only two artist’s books in his lifetime: *The New Novel* (*La nueva novela*) in 1977 and *Chilean Poetry* (*La poesía chilena*) in 1978. Both books appeared in limited editions of 500 copies, and a facsimile edition of *The New Novel* appeared in 1985 in a run of 1,000. The title pages of both books are striking as they demonstrate Martínez’s effort to double himself—perhaps in a gesture to exile himself from himself—and, in an act of double erasure and qualification, the crossing-out and bracketing in parentheses of his orthonym, Juan Luis Martínez, as well as his heteronym, Juan de Dios Martínez: “(~~Juan Luis Martínez~~)” and “(~~Juan de Dios Martínez~~).” As dictatorship era works, *The New Novel* and *Chilean Poetry* register the complex dynamics of censorship and pseudonymity within politically repressive structures.<sup>3</sup> Both books, which circulated through underground coterie networks, are difficult to buy, even in Chile, and require some legwork to track down.

In a 2010 review of *The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry*, which included Martínez, Ken L. Walker says, “A quick New York library search, as well as a general Amazon search, for the work of Juan Luis Martínez results in *nada*.”<sup>4</sup> Though difficult, such a search is crucial since part of the challenge of anthologizing Martínez is that his privileged unit of composition is precisely the anthology. As Martínez was a Benjaminian collector of fragments and ephemera, his collocations of disparate materials deepen in significance by accumulation and can only be fully appreciated through extended serial reading. His practice bears some comparison to that of Bern

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<sup>2</sup> “...la revolución que implica su obra contrasta con el permanente exilio interior en el que vivió el artista, quien poco y nada hablaba de sí mismo, no era amigo de ser fotografiado y se mantuvo permanente y obstinadamente al margen de los círculos literarios y artísticos.” <<http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-94855.html>>. Accessed 11/21/2015. Jaime Quezada says that Martínez “prefirió el silencio a la publicidad” [preferred silence to publicity]. “El Legado del Poeta” *El Mercurio* (May 16, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> According to John Walker, using a pseudonym “was a technique used in Pinochet’s own concentration camps by prisoners who attributed plays performed there to nonexistent foreign authors” (687).

<sup>4</sup> Ken L. Walker, “The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry,” *Coldfront* (September 17, 2010).

Porter, bpNichol, or Ulises Carrión, to name some of his North American counterparts, and he deserves to be included in wider conversations about visual poetry and found poetry in an international context.

Fortunately, five years after Walker's fruitless search, Martínez's work is becoming more widely available in the United States: in April 2011, his widow launched [juanluismartinez.cl](http://juanluismartinez.cl), which includes electronic versions of many of his books in both English and Spanish. And as of August 2016, there are five U.S. library copies of Martínez's revelatory *The Anonymous Poet (or the Eternal Present of Juan Luis Martínez)*, his posthumous masterpiece, which was published in a facsimile edition in Brazil in 2012 in a run of 1,000 copies and released in Chile in 2013 in accordance to his instructions to his wife to have the book published 20 years after his death. In addition, Scott Weintraub's groundbreaking monograph *Juan Luis Martínez's Philosophical Poetics*, which Bucknell University Press published in 2015, has laid an excellent and consummately researched foundation for Martínez studies in the Anglophone world. The secret of Martínez is, as it were, out.<sup>5</sup>

Though—or perhaps because—he dropped out of school in the seventh grade, Martínez was a voracious reader, researcher, and autodidact. Throughout his career he insistently inhabited and subversively transformed pedagogical structures, artifacts, and protocols, whether he was collaging and implicitly critiquing a primer about sonnets, appropriating figures and diagrams from textbooks, or inhabiting the language of schoolroom exercises. As if in rejection of the separation of knowledge into specialized branches, Martínez had a penchant for combining elements from varying disciplines on what Max Ernst might call a “plane of non-agreement.” For example, in a visual poem (fig. 1) from the posthumous *Approximation of the Uncertainty Principle towards a Poetic Project* (2010) Martínez superimposes on an anatomical figure of a skeleton a Warlpiri hypercube, a model devised by anthropologist Barbara Glowczewski to conceptualize the complicated kinship relationships of the Warlpiri, an aboriginal group in the Northern Territory of Australia. Martínez's provocative juxtaposition may be suggesting that death is the ultimate kinship and that death should structure all other social relations. As we will later see, death was, in fact, one of Martínez's great subjects.

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, knowledge of Martínez is now *de rigueur*. According to poet Carlos Soto-Román, “If you are interested in contemporary Chilean Poetry, and you haven't heard the name Juan Luis Martínez yet, then something is terribly wrong: you've been missing a lot.”

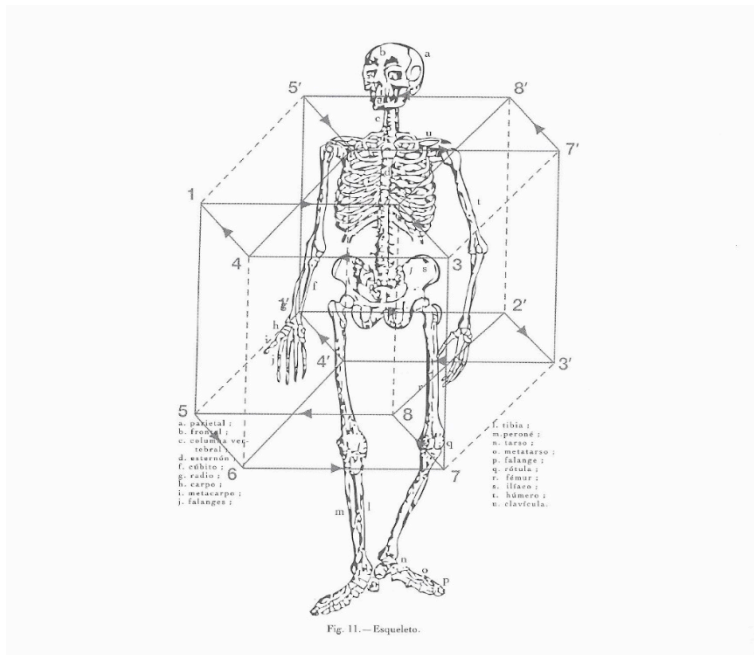


Figure 1. From *Approximation of the Uncertainty Principle towards a Poetic Project* (2010).

Martínez’s disruption of normative pedagogical patterns is apparent in *The New Novel*, a book which deliberately undermines readerly expectation: it is, despite its title, not a “novel,” not even along the lines of the French *Nouveau Roman*. Nor is it “new,” being a meta-textual collection of mostly found and recycled materials, which include diagrams, quotations, newspaper clippings, and inserted objects. The book contains, for example, images of Marx, Rimbaud, and Yeats; nonsense poetry by Edward Lear and Christian Morgenstern; a reproduction of Ezra Pound’s typewritten note to the base censor at Pisa; a pair of small fishhooks scotch-taped to page 75, and a “General Bibliography On Cats,” which includes the title *A Secret History of Cats* written by a “Juan de Dios Martínez,” a name which Martínez would appropriate as a heteronym. Perhaps not insignificantly *A Secret History of Cats* was published in 1942, the year of Martínez’s birth.

Much of *The New Novel* consists of pedagogical questions and problems that describe preposterous scenarios, confound logic, and are impossible to answer in any scientific manner. For example: “Given that you present me with a little card file, telling me that it’s empty, and if I suddenly encounter a huge crocodile when I open it, who has lied: you or me? Guess what I’m trying to say” (23). Martínez appropriated many of these exercises, which are grouped under such labels as “Archaeology,” “Geography,” and “Metaphysics,” from the 1978 *Le Professeur Frappel* by Jean Tardieu,

a poet and playwright associated with the “Theatre of the Absurd.”<sup>6</sup> While Martínez has left some of the exercises blank for the reader’s contemplation, he has answered others in the spirit of what Alfred Jarry might call “the science of the particular.” For example, in a rebus-like construction from a section entitled “Arithmetic Homework” (fig. 2), Martínez draws on the semiotics of visual poetry and the “eccentric epistemology” of collage (48).<sup>7</sup> Martínez’s subtraction of sartorial elements—a jacket and Rimbaud minus a boot and spatter guards equals, somehow, suspenders and other spatter guards—seems to obliquely reference Rimbaud’s disheveled dandyism.



Figure 2. From “Arithmetic Homework,” *The New Novel* (1985).

Martínez dedicates the section “Poetry Homework” to the Argentine poet and fellow-eccentric Alejandra Pizarnik, who committed suicide in 1972. According to the section’s visual “table of contents,” which takes the form of a collage, the sequence includes writing prompts based on canonical poems from the French tradition: Valéry’s “Graveyard by the Sea,” Mallarmé’s “Afternoon of a Faun,” Rimbaud’s “The Drunken Boat,” and Nerval’s “El Desdichado.” Martínez’s writing exercises, oriented towards the art of the dramatic monologue, seem to advocate for a

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase “eccentric epistemology” comes from Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius’s introduction to *Spectacle Pedagogy: Art, Politics, and Visual Culture* (5).

mimetic learning process: “A drunken boat relates its travel memoirs. This boat is you. Say it in the first person singular.” Or: “A faun believes that following lunch he sights some nymphs. He wants to perpetuate them. You’re this faun. Say it in the first person singular.” But rather than produce classroom imitations of Rimbaud or Mallarmé, Martínez strays from the assignment to construct mixed media collages. For example, in “El Barco Ebrio” (The Inebriated Boat; fig. 3) he bisects Henri Fantin-Latour’s study of Rimbaud for the famous 1872 painting *Un coin de table* with a compressed poetic fragment: “To remember / with words / of / this / world, / that / a / boat / parted / from / me, / carrying / me away?” These (slightly adapted) words are from Pizarnik’s groundbreaking fourth book *The Tree of Diana* (1962), a fitting juxtaposition of text and image considering that Rimbaud died at 37 and Pizarnik at 36.<sup>8</sup> In the original, a hendecasyllabic couplet, Pizarnik begins with the word *explicar*, “explain.”<sup>9</sup> Martínez substitutes the initial verb *explicar* for *recordar*, “remember,” underscoring the fact that this collage is a memorial, in remembrance of another writer from the Southern Cone who espoused Rimbaud’s oft-quoted statement that “I is another.”<sup>10</sup> Martínez “parts” Rimbaud’s image with a poem about parting in a collaged elegy for the departed, fulfilling the drunken boat’s wish to—in Samuel Beckett’s translation—“split from stern to stern” (Beckett 105). Martínez imagines poetry to reside in this very split: in the cleft between “I” and “other,” in the intertextual interstice between authors, between text and image, between national traditions. Martínez and Pizarnik were both Francophiles—in fact, Pizarnik wrote *The Tree of Diana* while in Paris—and Martínez’s “El Barco Ebrio” forges an intriguing trans-Atlantic connection. Weintraub has argued “*La nueva novela* is [...] intensely political in its critical self-reflexivity as a *Chilean* book that very clearly attempts to situate itself outside of Chilean intellectual-poetic space” (*Philosophical Poetics* 94).

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<sup>8</sup> Thorpe Running observes that “besides connecting the portrait with the title and the poem with the dedication to Pizarnik, the reader can think about the two juxtapositions because of the relationship between both of these connections: both poets, Rimbaud and Pizarnik, stopped writing when they were young...Rimbaud’s title and Pizarnik’s poem are about strange boats; and so on” (78).

<sup>9</sup> Poem 13 of Pizarnik’s *Árbol de Diana* reads, “explicar can palabras de este mundo / que partió de mí un barco llevándome.”

<sup>10</sup> In a 1972 interview with Martha Isabel Moia, Pizarnik responded “A la otra que soy” [The other that I am] to the question “Según un poema tuyo, tu amor más hermoso fue el amor por los espejos. ¿A quién ves en ellos?” [According to one of your poems, your most beautiful love was your love for mirrors. Whom do you see in them?]

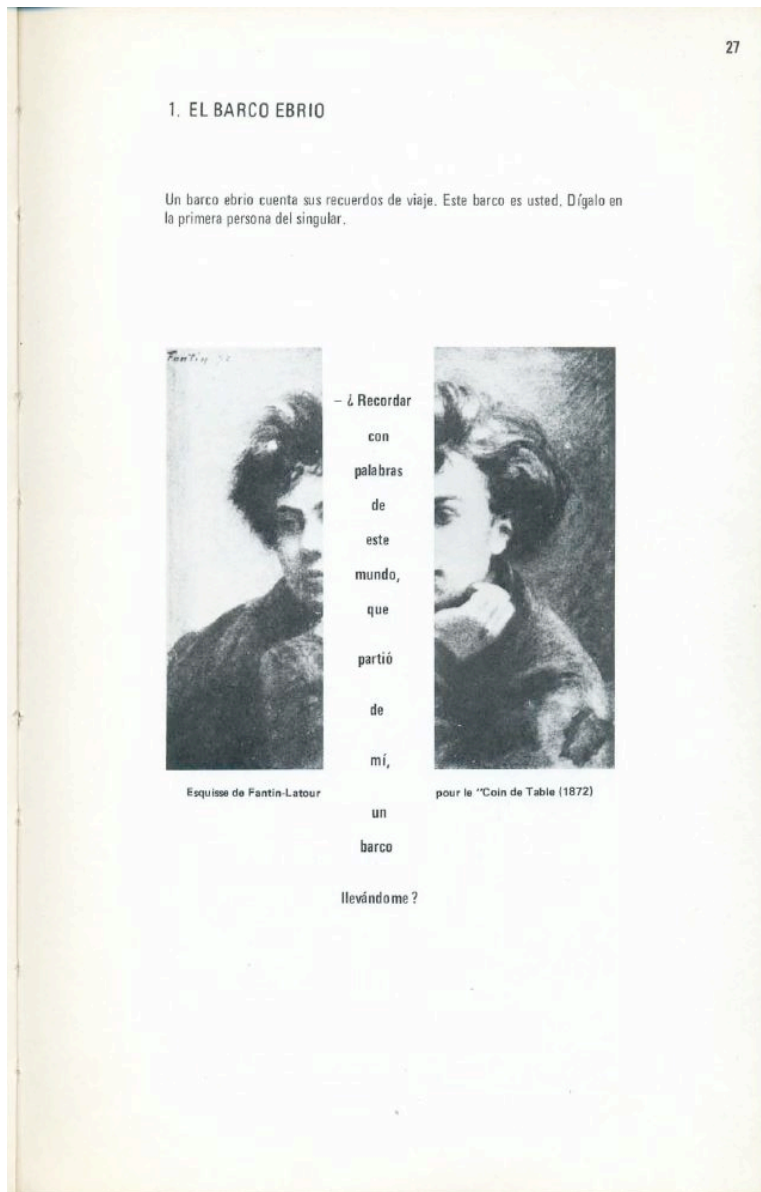


Figure 3. From "Poetry Homework," *The New Novel* (1985).

*The New Novel's* insistent dialogue with French authors—Martínez makes dedications, for example, to such figures as Roger Caillois, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, René Crevel, Michel Foucault, and François Le Lionnais—in the context of the early 1970s, when much of the book was composed, seems an example of his "virtual exile," a wilful apostasy or falling away from a Chilean tradition when a significant number of Chilean writers, film directors, and intellectuals were fleeing the dictatorship to Paris.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Oscar D. Sarmiento observes, "Martínez, quien solo realizó un viaje tardío a París, siempre tuvo, como lo demuestra *La nueva novela*, dentro de su horizonte intelectual la producción poética ligada a la producción crítica y filosófica francesa como un punto de

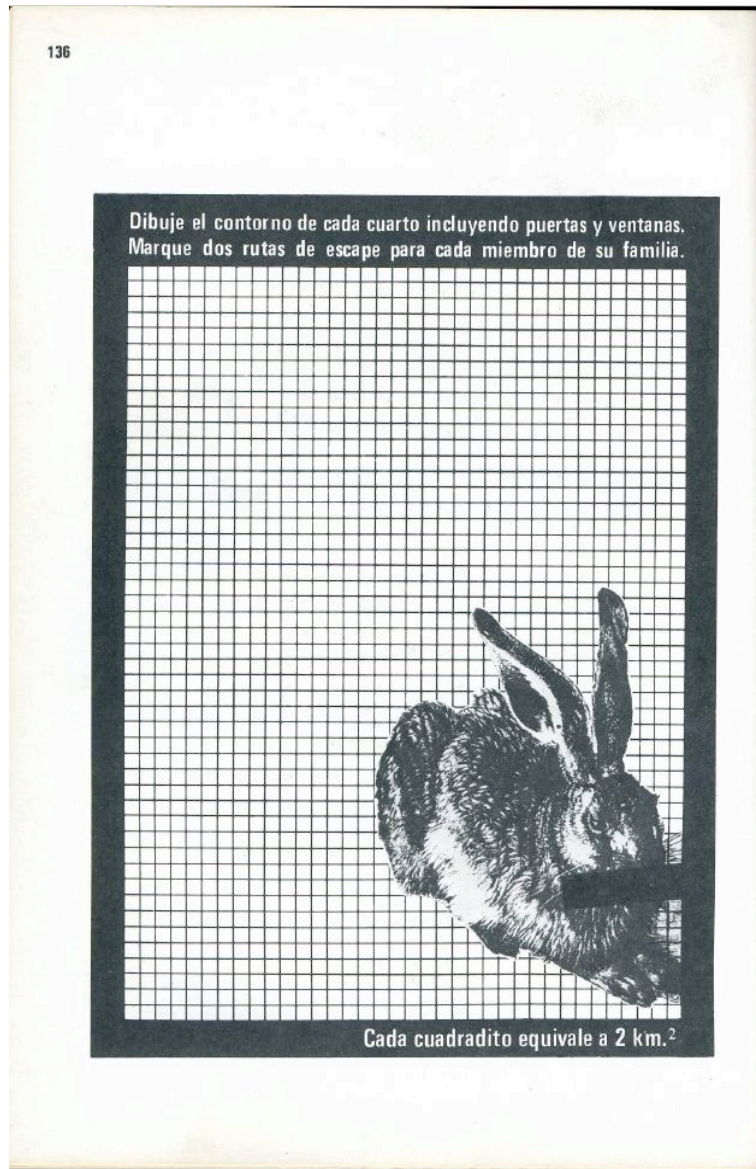


Figure 4. From “Epigraph for a Condemned Book.” *The New Novel* (1985).

Martínez begins *The New Novel*'s final and most politicized section, entitled “Epigraph for a Condemned Book: Politics,” with a pedagogical exercise about escape. The exercise in its unanswered form appears on the book’s back cover—an empty rectangular grid with the following prompt: “Draw an outline of each room, including doors and windows / Mark two escape routes for each member of your family.” What seems like an innocuous activity to teach children about fire safety

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referencia desde el cual reflexionar y elaborar el objeto poético” [Martínez, who only made a late trip to Paris, always had, as *The New Novel* demonstrates, within his intellectual horizon the linkage between poetic production and French philosophy and criticism as a reference point from which to think through and elaborate the poetic object] (244).



becomes menacing in “Epigraph for a Condemned Book,” in which Martínez completes the exercise by superimposing an image of a rabbit, an allusion to Lewis Carroll’s March Hare, in the lower right-hand corner; conspicuously, the hare’s mouth is covered with a black band, a clear reference to the strict censorship of imaginative work by the Pinochet regime (fig. 4). After the military coup, escape was, of course, fraught with the threat of violence. On September 11, 1973, the so-called “other 9/11,” the military announced, “The people of Santiago must remain inside their homes to avoid [being] innocent victims” (Qtd. in Robben 53). How does one escape such a grid of surveillance and power? Here, Martínez suggests a collaged answer that is decidedly ’pataphysical: the way out is through the rabbit hole. I’d like to build on Weintraub’s astute observation that “*La nueva novela* ends up postulating a possible universe of a pataphysical nature, in which contradiction and exception are the rule” (*Philosophical Poetics* 52). *The New Novel*, as a ’pataphysical textbook that proposes absurd answers and imaginary solutions, offers an alternative pedagogy to the equally absurd albeit deadly ’pataphysics of the Pinochet regime, which ruthlessly enforced what Giorgio Agamben calls a “state of exception.”<sup>12</sup>

The epigraph to “Epigraph for a Condemned Book: Politics,” attributed to Francis Picabia, protests against the very violence justified by states of exception: “The mother and the father don’t have the right to take their children’s lives, but the State, our second mother, can immolate them for the immense glory of political men.” In addition, there is also a kind of “visual epigraph” to “Epigraph for a Condemned Book”: an interleaf that takes the form of a small Chilean flag (fig. 5). The flag is not included in either the Spanish or English versions of *The New Novel* as it appears on [juanluismartinez.cl](http://juanluismartinez.cl) though this detail is crucial: it looks forward to Martínez’s second book *Chilean Poetry* (1978), a book-object in which he would extend his use of elegy and further critique the state’s impingement on its country’s literary traditions.

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<sup>12</sup> According to Agamben, “modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (2). In paralleling the science of imaginary solutions to the Nazi Final Solution, Steve McCaffery writes of the “pataphysics of Auschwitz.” He suggests that “if Agamben’s postulate [...] that ‘the camp is the new biopolitical *nomos* of the planet’ [...] then this chapter could have been titled ‘The ’Pataphysics of Guantanamo Bay’” (183). So too can we consider the ’pataphysics of Pinochet’s military regime.

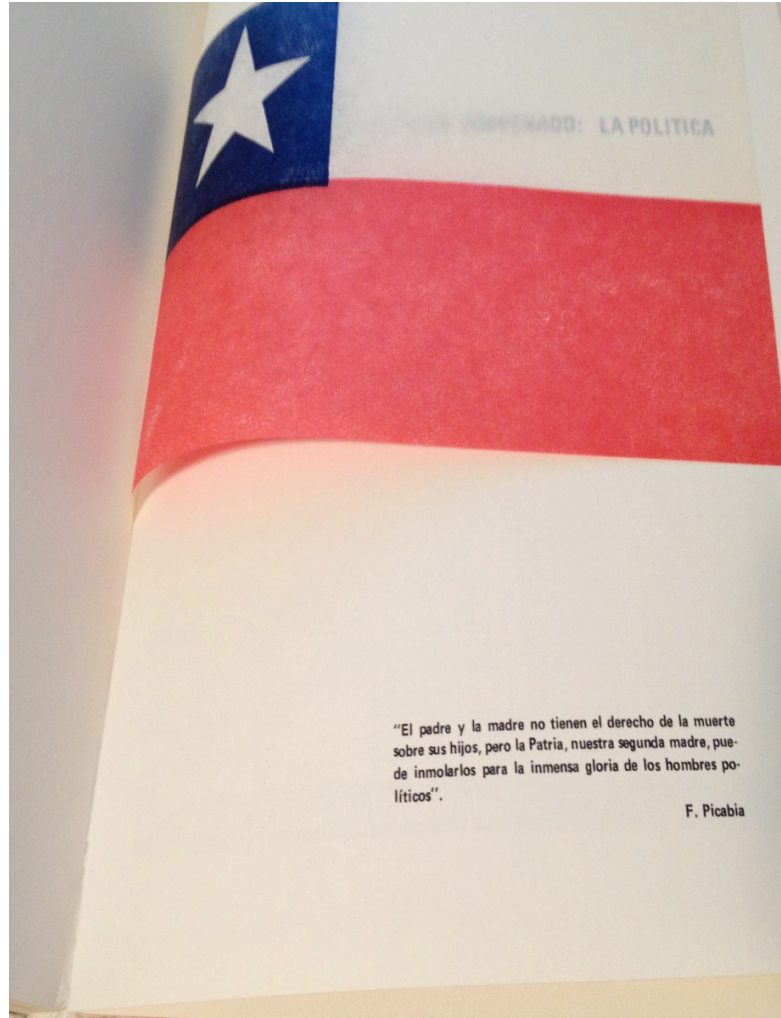


Figure 5 “From Epigraph for a Condemned Book.” *The New Novel* (1985).

If we can read *The New Novel* as a kind of 'pataphysical textbook then we might consider *Chilean Poetry* as a research project that, to quote Andrés Morales, “delimitara el tema de la muerte a la gran creación poética chilena” [affixes the theme of death to the great Chilean poetic creation] (111). *Chilean Poetry* is a coffin-like box containing a bag of soil from Chile's Central Valley and a curious booklet, which includes death certificates of the so-called “big four” of Chilean poetry—Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Pablo de Rokha, and Vicente Huidobro. The death certificates are interspersed with cards from the Chilean National Library on which are inscribed bibliographic information about significant poems the respective

authors wrote about death.<sup>13</sup> For example, a card for Mistral’s “Sonnets of Death” is followed by her death certificate, bearing her given name, Lucila Godoy Alcayaga (fig. 6).

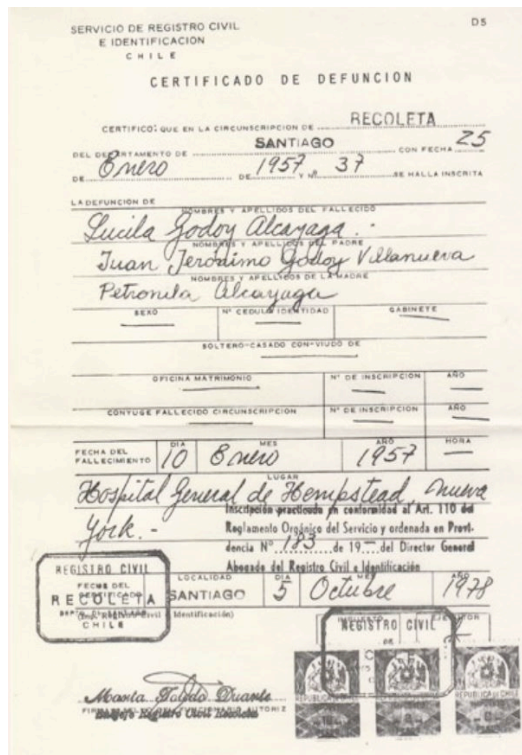
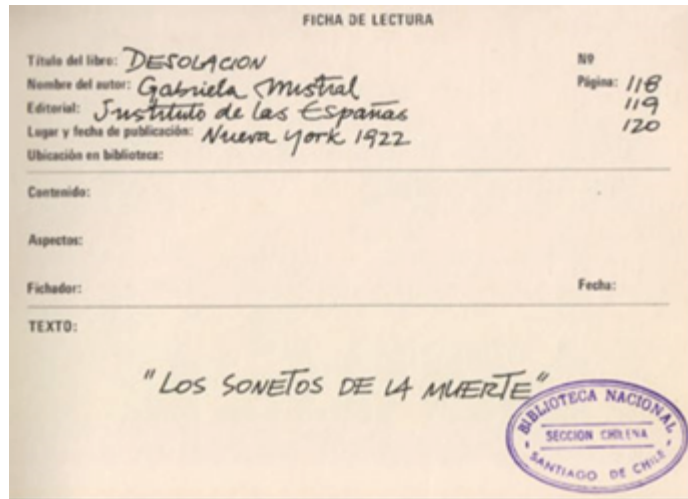


Figure 6. From Chilean Poetry (1978).

<sup>13</sup> Weintraub calls the cards “card catalogue entries” (115) though the library catalog of the Museum of Modern Art calls them “request slip[s].” <<http://arcade.nyarc.org/record=b919829~S1>>.

After Huidobro’s death certificate, the final one in the sequence, there is a series of some thirty blank cards interspersed with Chilean flags, a radically ambiguous conceptual gesture. Martínez may be implying that living under the Chilean flag during the Pinochet regime is tantamount to a death certificate, that even unborn Chilean poets, who have yet to be registered in the literary archive, need to be mourned. In its alternation between death certificates and card catalogue entries, *Chilean Poetry* contrasts the mortality of the author as a biopolitical entity with his or her existence as a potentially ever-present discursive function. According to Weintraub,

The order in which the departed poets make an appearance in *La poesía chilena* is organized by the date of publication of their poems, rather than by the date of their death or the order in which Martínez obtained the death certificates. Therefore, Martínez is creating a literary narrative that supersedes what might be the expected, official order imposed by the legality of the death certificates in such a way as to suggest that there is a literary trajectory or teleology that takes precedence over the empirical fact of death. (*Philosophical Poetics* 119)

One finds, especially with the hindsight of 2015, another narrative embedded within Neruda’s death certificate: his death in September 24, 1973 occurred just days after the military coup. Though Neruda’s death was officially attributed to his prostate cancer, an official inquiry was opened in 2011 after his driver Manuel Araya alleged that Neruda, a friend and supporter of Salvador Allende, was given a poison injection after going to the Santa María Clinic in Santiago. Araya maintains that Neruda was in good health before his stay at the clinic, which was supposed to be a safe place to hide before Neruda was to go into exile in Mexico. In 2013 Neruda’s body was exhumed and forensic experts found no evidence of poisoning. However, the case was reopened and the Interior Ministry (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública) issued a statement in November 2015 saying that it was “claramente posible y altamente probable” [clearly possible and highly probable] that Neruda’s death was caused by “la intervención de terceros” [third-party intervention] and that two international panels of experts would continue the investigation. *Chilean Poetry*, then, seems to anthologize not only the uncertainty of Chilean poetry’s future but also the uncertainty and ideological struggles surrounding “the empirical fact of death.”

If Martínez entombed Mistral’s “Sonnets of Death” in *Chilean Poetry*, he would create his own innovative “sonnets of death” in *The Anonymous Poet*. The British poet Jeff Hilson has recently called “the visual sonnet [...] an underappreciated subgenre of the form,” and Martínez’s unique contributions to this

subgenre certainly deserve wider recognition. “Dismissed by John Fuller in his influential 1972 book *The Sonnet*, [...],” Hilson argues, “[t]he visual sonnet, like all good visual poetry, has an immediate appeal that runs counter to the still-prevailing Aristotelean notions of persuading and convincing the reader through argument.”<sup>14</sup> Considering Martínez’s investment in disrupting systems and structures of formalized thinking, it is no surprise that he has taken on what is perhaps the most privileged form in the Western poetic tradition for ratiocinative thought. In the second section of *The Anonymous Poet*, called “Poetry and Prose Overseas,” Martínez creates a visual sonnet (fig. 7) by superimposing rubrics cut from a literature textbook, such as “READING A POEM” and “FINDING THE MEANING,” onto John Donne’s Holy Sonnet 10 (“Death, be not proud”), a move that ironically hinders the meaning and reading of the original poem.<sup>15</sup>

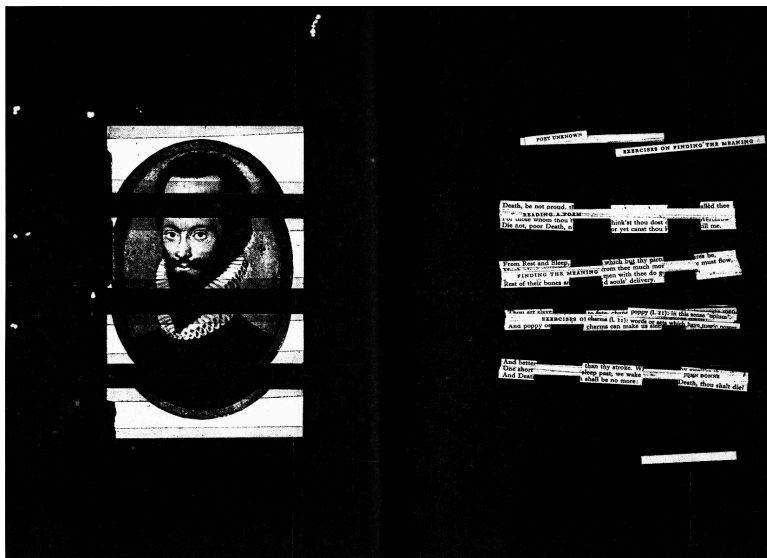


Figure 7. From *The Anonymous Poet* (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Muldoon, Meg Tyler and Jeff Hilson, “Contemporary poets and the sonnet: a triologue,” (22). In the introduction to his excellent *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets*, Hilson remarks that the sonnet’s “varied structural features—14 lines, octave and sestet, rhyming couplet, volta, etc.—are metonymic of the whole form and can’t be disturbed without destroying its integrity, so the sonnet itself stands as a metonym for the kind of poetry published by the big publishing houses. To disturb the sonnet’s form too radically therefore is not just to disturb the sonnet itself, or the sonnet tradition, but to endanger the foundations of the wider poetic tradition” (10).

<sup>15</sup> *The Anonymous Poet* is a massive, 300-page book—Weintraub likens it to Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (*Philosophical Poetics*, 194)—with a very complicated superstructure. It is divided into eight sections based on the eight trigrams of the *I Ching*: “Baudelaire’s Tomb,” “Poetry and Prose Overseas,” “The History Professor,” “The Honor of the Poets,” “The Stamped Signs,” “Signified and Signifier,” “The Chimera’s Desolation,” and “Epilogue: Twenty Years Later.” Each of these sections is then divided into two further subsections with equally poetic and philosophical titles such as “Texts of the Chilean Night,” “The Absence of the Author,” “The Wind of Memory,” and—in a Mallarméan register—“The Castle of Purity.”

But the visual sonnet in which issues of pedagogy, cultural memory, and politics most powerfully collide is the first poem of the book, “The Sleepers of the Valley” (fig. 8). This elegant piece refers to Rimbaud’s early poem “Le Dormeur du Val,” a sonnet that bears witness to the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>16</sup> “Le Dormeur du Val” famously describes a soldier sleeping “open-mouthed” among flowers and “bluish water cress,” as if languorously dreaming in a pastoral idyll, until the closing tercets divulge the fact that “he is cold”: in Robert Lowell’s translation, “He sleeps. In his right side are two red holes” (146). Martínez not only appears to translate Rimbaud’s eccentric alexandrines into a pictographic language of inverted animals but he translates them into a new context: Lonquén, Chile. In 1978, a mass grave was uncovered in Lonquén’s abandoned lime kilns containing the bodies of fifteen people who disappeared after they were arrested as political prisoners in Isla de Maipo in October 1973. The allusion to the bullet wounds in Rimbaud’s poem act, in this new context, as a scathing indictment: the police who arrested the victims claimed they shot them after an armed struggle even though forensic testing showed the victims died of blunt force trauma.

The iconography of “The Sleepers of the Valley,” then, suggests the symbol of the *Agnus Dei*, that the Lonquén victims, most of them farmers, were like sacrificial lambs brought to slaughter. (Jorge Polanco Salinas speculates that the animals in the poem could allude to “*ovejas negras marxistas*” [black sheep Marxists.]) It is worth noting that after they were discovered, the bodies of the Lonquén victims were subsequently buried in a common grave in the Isla de Maipo municipal cemetery and were not properly identified, returned to their families, and laid to rest until 2010.

On the recto side of the page, directly facing the sonnet “The Sleepers of the Valley,” is another version of the poem—also called “The Sleepers of the Valley”; as Felipe Cussen perceptively notes, the second poem conjures the disordered anonymity of a common grave.

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<sup>16</sup> Hugo Rivera-Scott observes this allusion to Rimbaud: “En ese título: ‘El durmiente del valle’ reconocemos el de un poema temprano de Rimbaud, un soneto cuyo contenido corresponde a la visión o encuentro del poeta con un soldado tendido en el césped en un bello vallecito iluminado por el sol, y que aparentemente duerme con una mano en el pecho mientras un arrollo [sic] cercano corre dulcemente; pero el soldado está helado porque ha sido muerto de dos tiros” [In this title “The Sleeper of the Valley,” we recognize an early poem by Rimbaud, a sonnet whose content corresponds to the vision or meeting of the poet with a soldier stretched out on the grass in a beautiful little valley illuminated by the sun, and apparently sleeping with a hand on his chest while a nearby stream sweetly runs; but the soldier is cold because he has died of two gunshots] (12).

## LOS.DURMIENTES DEL VALLE

(Lonquén, Chile).



Figure 8. From *The Anonymous Poet* (2012).

In writing about the column of the 14 inverted lambs, Cussen says,

Esta imagen se opone a la de la página siguiente, en que aparecen las mismas figuras pero en una cantidad mayor y desordenadas [...] En esas dos páginas enfrentadas, pues, se oponen dos formas de dar sepultura: los cuerpos sin identidad ordenados en fila versus la disposición caótica de los cadáveres en una fosa común.<sup>17</sup> (255-6)

[This image opposes the one on the following page, on which appear the same figures but disordered and in a greater quantity... On these two facing pages, then, two forms of burial oppose one another: the unidentified bodies arranged in a row versus the chaotic configuration of the corpses in a common grave.]

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<sup>17</sup> Cussen productively puts “The Sleepers of the Valley” in the context of various visual sonnets, including Nicanor Parra’s “Los 4 sonetos del apocalipsis,” which, according to Cussen, “alude a los cuatro miembros de la Junta Militar” [alludes to the four members of the military junta] (253).

Because of the disparity of burial practices of victims of political violence, Martínez proposes that “The Sleepers of the Valley” demands multiple forms and instantiations, that is, it is ethically compelled to be non-self-identical.

According to Antonius C.G.M. Robben, massacres and cover-ups such as the one at Lonquén were exercises of necropolitical power: “the military junta possessed a power over the living by assassinating them at will, and over the dead by denying them an identity and a proper burial.”<sup>18</sup> And according to a 1981 internal document from Amnesty International entitled “Chile Group Level Special Action: Circular no 4 – Disappeared Prisoners,” “In June 1980 the Supreme Court rejected a petition requesting the military judge who was in charge of the Lonquén investigation to authorize the recordings of the deaths of the 14 [sic] peasants in the Civil Register. Thus, even though their deaths were established during the proceedings, they are still not legally dead.” The way in which “The Sleepers of the Valley” exposes the problematic politics of death’s legal registration dialectically resonates with the official death certificates of canonical authors in *Chilean Poetry*; so too does this memorialization of the disappeared (*los desaparecidos*) contextualize “The Disappearance of a Family,” one of the most well-known and oft-quoted poems from *The New Novel*, with a much more materially specific politico-historical frame.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the inverted lambs are not part of the text proper but a pictographic annotation of a rhyme scheme in the margin, a counter-necropolitical paratext that reminds us that whatever is to be inscribed in this unfinished memorial sonnet should “rhyme” with an honorific death even if the detained-disappeared have yet to be recovered. This reading is supported by the fact that the final part of the book’s second section (the subsection called “The Defoliated Laurels”) begins with reproductions of various rhyme schemes from Fuller’s sonnet primer, a book whose formal conservatism *The Anonymous Poet* implicitly critiques. The suggestion is that Martínez has “disappeared” his sonnet, that he has stripped it bare, leaving only a paratextual residue: a title, subtitle, and rhyme scheme. If Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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<sup>18</sup> See also Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” tr. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003).

<sup>19</sup> “The Disappearance of a Family” describes the gradual disappearance of a man’s family—his daughter, his son, and even his pet cats and dog as they mysteriously vanish within various interstices of the house (“entre el comedor y la cocina,” “entre la sala de baño y el cuarto de los juguetes,” etc.) (*La nueva novel* 137). Though the elliptical content is more metaphysical than political, the poem is often read in political terms; for example, Matías Ayala notes that “La desaparición de la familia’ puede ser una alegoría de la violencia política del Estado” [“The Disappearance of a Family” can be an allegory of the political violence of the state] (224).



famously stated that a sonnet is a “moment’s monument” then “The Sleepers of the Valley” monumentalizes an unfinished, protracted moment of mourning, in which the detained-disappeared hover in a state of not being fully dead but not being alive—just as Rimbaud’s sleeper seems to be suspended in a waking death. Like the blank catalogue card entries in *Chilean Poetry*, the empty lines of “The Sleepers of the Valley” remain in an open state of potentiality, suggesting an endless number of memorializations.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this experimental visual sonnet is surely—to quote Morales on *Chilean Poetry*—“una de las elegías más extraordinarias y únicas” [one of the most extraordinary and unique elegies] in any tradition (112).

In a 1991 interview with Felix Guattari, Martínez said, “my main interest is the absolute dissolution of authorship—anonymity—and the ideal, if one can use that word, is to make a work, a work in which almost none of the lines belong to me.” Martínez’s insistence on anonymity, on disappearing as an author, puts him in radical solidarity with the detained-disappeared, a position more extreme, in fact, than the poets associated with the so-called “NN Generation,” which took the initials, signifying “no name,” from the mass graves in Santiago’s General Cemetery that had crosses marked “NN” (Robben 65-6). Jorge Montealegre describes “the NN Generation” as “those beginning to write poetry under the dictatorship [...] a generation of the Diaspora or internal exile, condemned to live in anonymity and at the margins; to disappear metaphorically, when other fellow-citizen disappeared physically” (37-8).

In the same interview with Guattari, Martínez called *The Anonymous Poet* “un libro intolerable” [an intolerable book] and “una obra que podría ser interminable” [a work that could be endless]. “Es un trabajo de Penélope” [It is Penelope’s work], he said, alluding to Penelope’s weaving and unweaving of Laertes’ shroud. *The Anonymous Poet* weaves together—as if in an endless act—the mourning of the victims at Lonquén with other victims of political violence throughout history, creating a kind of transnational and multilingual martyrology. In the section called “The History Professor,” Martínez includes, for example, various photos and texts (in French, German, and Spanish) about Hans Scholl, who was arrested and executed in Munich in 1943, for distributing anti-Nazi literature; Federico García Lorca, who was arrested and murdered by rightwing authorities in Granada in 1936; and Elisabeth von Dyck

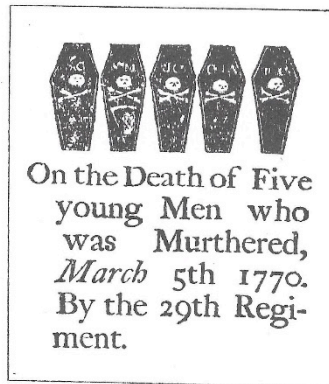
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<sup>20</sup> Critics have often remarked on Martínez’s pursuit of capturing manifold meanings in his work; for example, in discussing *The New Novel*, Marcelo Rioseco calls Martínez’s poetry “una máquina multiplicadora de significados” [a multiplying machine of significations] (871). In this case, emptiness or blankness would signal the full range of potential significations.

of the Red Army Faction, who was shot in the back by Nuremberg police in 1979. In a kind of Poundian “historical rhyme,” Martínez places Pushkin’s manuscript sketch of the five Decembrists who were hanged in St. Petersburg in 1826 directly across from an image of the top of a broadside commemorating the five victims of the 1770 Boston Massacre (fig. 9).



*Manuscrito de Pushkin con los cinco revolucionarios ahorcados.*



*Figure 9. From The Anonymous Poet (2012).*

And, towards the end of the book, in the subchapter “Sermon of the Day of the Innocents,” Martínez movingly reproduces images of anthropological skulls—mostly Selk’nam and Halakwulup (or Kawésqar)—taken from Martin Gusinde’s monumental study *Anthropologie Der Feuerland-Indianer* (1931-39). The Selk’nam, an indigenous group from Tierra del Fuego, were prey to genocidal violence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their culture is now extinct while the Kawésqar, a maritime people that suffered forced relocation as well as high casualties from European diseases, are on the brink of disappearance. Less of a memento mori, Martínez’s “visual sermon” reminds us of the multiple registers of historical violence sedimented within constructions of Chilean citizenship: indeed, according to Pinochet, “indigenous populations do not exist, we are all Chilean” (Qtd. in Ray 118).

Not insignificantly in a section called “The Honor of the Poets”—the name referencing the clandestine anthology of French Resistance poetry published in Paris in 1943—there is what I take to be one of Martínez’s most magnificent visual poems of protest: “Metáforas para un magnífico” (fig. 10). The title appears to be clipped from a translation of Wallace Stevens’ 1918 poem “Metaphors of a Magnifico,” which famously begins:

Twenty men crossing a bridge,  
 Into a village,  
 Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,  
 Into twenty villages,  
 Or one man  
 Crossing a single bridge into a village. (35)

This appropriation very well could have been a response to a poetry homework assignment from *The New Novel*: “You are a magnifico and you need to lead your platoon of twenty men across a bridge into a village. Say it in the first-person singular.” Yet, as a dictatorship-era composition, it harnesses the ludic spirit of *The New Novel* to make a revolutionary statement.

Perhaps because the word “magnifico” comes from the Italian, Martínez has placed below the translated title figures that look to be from some Italian engineering manual which illustrates how to cause, for example in “Fig. 4,” the demolition [*distruzione*] of a railway siding with a one-pound explosive. But “Fig. 38”—which appears to depict three blasts of a bridge demolition—most directly responds to the Stevens poem, which describes “[t]he boots of the men clump[ing] / “On the boards of the bridge” as the soldiers, presumably from World War I, menacingly approach “[t]he first white wall of the village.” Martínez’s pictorial insertion on the page, then,

indicates a desire to interrupt the poem’s diegetic drama—as if Martínez, in an act of guerilla insurrection, could demolish the bridge, preventing the soldiers from reaching the village.

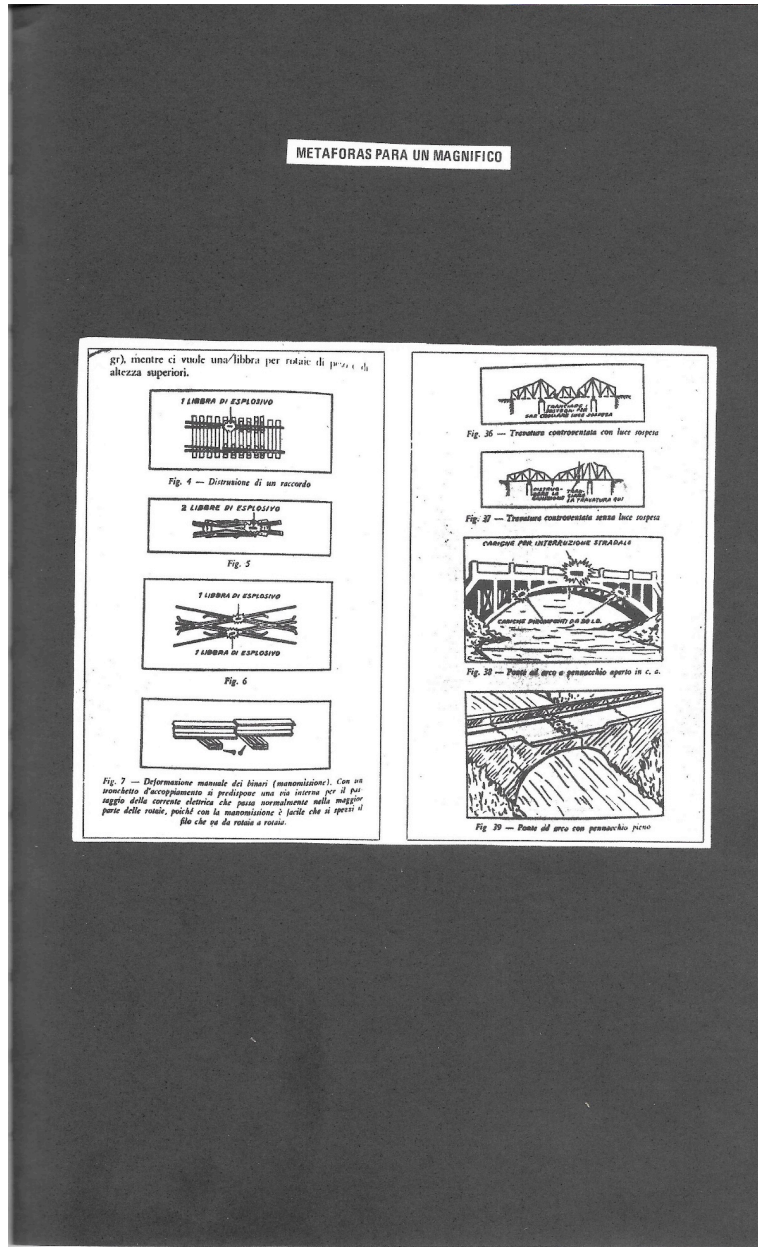


Figure 10. From The Anonymous Poet (2012).

As in “El Barco Ebrío,” the elegy for Pizarnik, Martínez makes a strategic change. The title of the Stevens poem ought to be translated “Metáforas de un magnífico,” “Metaphors of a Magnífico,” not “Metáforas para un magnífico,”

“Metaphors *for* a Magnífico.”<sup>21</sup> Martínez’s seemingly innocent substitution of “of” for “for” is crucial. In this context, the “magnífico” appears to be none other than Augusto Pinochet, who in 1974 magnificently declared himself to be “Jefe Supremo de la Nación” or “Supreme Chief of the Nation.” I want to suggest that “Metáforas para un magnífico” is an explosively dissident text aimed at Pinochet, a poem that perhaps looks forward to the activities of the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (or *El Frente*), the armed wing of Chile’s Communist Party, which, in the mid-1980s carried out numerous bombings of trains and bridges. According to the Global Terrorism Database, several railway bridges in Chile were bombed in 1984 and 1985.<sup>22</sup>

In a brief discussion of Martínez’s first book, Heriberto Yépez says, “*La nueva novela* [...] is an experimental book with a political position and a coded but very effective critique; in order to escape censorship, the work employs code” (209). I would argue that the coding of “Metáforas para un magnífico”—the ingenious way it encrypts a dissident politics—is much more complex than anything in *The New Novel* as it relies on an allusion to an oblique Anglo-modernist poem as well as a response to that poem’s war-time context in the diagrammatic language of an Italian found text. Weintraub calls *La nueva novela* and *La poesía chilena* “militantly artisanal,” a phrase that could certainly apply to *The Anonymous Poet* (*Philosophical Poetics* 190). In fact, “Metáforas para un magnífico” might be Martínez’s most *artisanally militant* visual poem. Certainly one of his most militant visual works is “Tribute to a Terrorist” (fig. 11), which was displayed in the 2012 São Paulo Biennial—the composition date of “1990” is significant, as it marks the official end of Pinochet’s rule.<sup>23</sup> The piece pays tribute to the anonymity of resistance while metonymically gesturing towards the anonymity of Martínez’s “handiwork.” The fact that “Homenaje a un terrorista” appears on the front cover of Diego Zúñiga’s recent book of fictions *Niños héroes* (Literatura Random House, 2016) shows the extent to which Martínez’s radical presence has now deeply penetrated the contemporary Chilean scene.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Wallace Stevens’s *Harmonium*, tr. Julián Jiménez Heffernan (Barcelona: Icaria, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> The Global Terrorism Database lists, for example, a “bombing/explosive” attack on the “railway bridge over [the] bio-bio River” in Concepcion on April 11, 1985. <[www.start.umd.edu/gtd](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd)>.

<sup>23</sup> “Homenaje a un terrorista” is displayed on [juanluismartinez.cl](http://juanluismartinez.cl) though the important date of “1990” is not included. <[http://juanluismartinez.cl/jlm/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/homenaje\\_a\\_un\\_terrorista.jpg](http://juanluismartinez.cl/jlm/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/homenaje_a_un_terrorista.jpg)>. The date is mentioned, however, in *Lista de obras da 30ª Bienal de São Paulo* <[http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/30bienal\\_listadeobras\\_pt](http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/30bienal_listadeobras_pt)>. Accessed 12/5/15.



Figure 11. “Homenaje a un terrorista” [Homenagem a um terrorista]. 1990. Lã e colagem em caixa de vidro. 35 × 37 cm.

The English version of [juanluismartinez.cl](http://juanluismartinez.cl) says of Martínez that “[h]is brief but significant poetic legacy consists of two books: *The New Novel* and *Poems of the Other*.”<sup>24</sup> Published posthumously in 2003, *Poems of the Other* includes—somewhat surprisingly—a small collection of lyric poetry, including “Who I Am,” which Martínez read at the Sorbonne in 1992 during his only trip to Paris.<sup>25</sup> The curious fact that such an uncompromising experimentalist, interested in what Gwen Kirkpatrick calls “otro tipo de autoría y de colaboración creativa” [another type of authorship and creative collaboration] (233), would publish conventional lyric poems was finally and dramatically explained when Weintraub discovered in 2013 that the poems in *Poems of the Other* were, in fact, translations. Martínez, it turns out, had appropriated 17 poems originally published in French in the 1970s by a Swiss-Catalan poet—also fortuitously named Juan Luis Martínez (but with no accent)—in an act of one-sided, creative

<sup>24</sup> <[http://juanluismartinez.cl/jlm\\_english/juan-luis-martinez/](http://juanluismartinez.cl/jlm_english/juan-luis-martinez/)>. Accessed 12/5/15. The Spanish version, interestingly, doesn’t include this assessment, which raises interesting issues regarding translation, audience, and reception. The statement also appears to be a close paraphrase of Sarmiento: “El escueto pero significativo legado poético de Juan Luis Martínez (1942-1993) se reduce a dos libros: *La nueva novela* y *Poemas del otro*” (241).

<sup>25</sup> A translation into English of “Who I Am” is available on the official Martínez website: [http://juanluismartinez.cl/jlm\\_english/post-01/](http://juanluismartinez.cl/jlm_english/post-01/). Accessed 8/20/15.

“collaboration.”<sup>26</sup> Going beyond the Rimbaudian aesthetic of *Je est un autre*, Martínez’s unauthorized and unacknowledged translations from *Poems of the Other* are—quite literally—poems by another. Moreover, Jesús Sepúlveda rightly points out that “the discovery by Wientraub [sic] more than ten years after the publication of Martínez’s translation of his Swiss-Catalan homonym has recovered some of the lost aura for Martínez’s figure and works” (xxi). The other Martínez (1953- ) has, to be sure, contributed in ramifying Martínez’s remarkable *Nachleben* or literary afterlife.<sup>27</sup>

While I don’t wish to minimize Martínez’s bold appropriation of Martínez, I argue that, in light of the recent publication of *The Anonymous Poet*, Martínez’s ultimate “poetic legacy” should be deemed even wider than just *The New Novel* and *Poems of the Other*. I read *The New Novel*, *Chilean Poetry*, and *The Anonymous Poet* as a trilogy, an epic conglomeration of found materials that place the dictatorship era in a multiplicity of provocative contexts. It is a distinctly Chilean trilogy—as all three texts have inserts of the Chilean flag—one that must be considered as significant as Raúl Zurita’s (Martínez’s ex-brother-in-law) acclaimed trilogy of *Purgatory*, *Anteparadise*, and *The New Life*.

If the Chilean flags bind together Martínez’s three major book-objects, there is one significant difference. There is no author attribution on *The Anonymous Poet*’s title page, not even, as in *The New Novel* and *Chilean Poetry*, a name or heteronym under erasure. It is Martínez’s final disappearing act, an instantiation of Roland Barthes’ dictum that the birth of the reader is “ransomed” by the death of the author.<sup>28</sup> As flippant as that may sound, we remember that Martínez had intended *The Anonymous Poet* to be a posthumous book, to be published twenty years after his death, an interval that allows for a final reappearance, the possibility of a final decryption (of Martínez’s

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<sup>26</sup> See Weintraub’s *La última broma de Juan Luis Martínez*, which brings this complicated literary charade to light. In examining *The Anonymous Poet*, Weintraub was struck by a reproduction of a review of Juan Luis Martínez’s *Le Silence et sa brisure* [*Silence and Its Breaking*] (Paris: Editions San-Germain-des-Prés, 1976), which he would eventually find out was the source text for Martínez’s *Poems of the Other*. On the verso side of the leaf that contains the review of *Le Silence et sa brisure* is a card catalogue entry for the volume from the French-Chilean Institute of Valparaíso, ostensibly the book to which Martínez had access. These important clues come from a subsection that Martínez titled, not insignificantly, “*La Ausencia de Autor*” [The Absence of the Author].

<sup>27</sup> In “Finding (the other) Juan Luis Martínez,” Weintraub recounts Martínez travelling to Chile “in late October 2014 to meet the Martínez family and the public who read his work in (an appropriated) translation for over ten years. He gave talks and readings in Valparaíso and participated [...] in a panel discussion about ‘el caso Martínez’ at Santiago’s prestigious International Book Fair, the country’s largest literary event.”

<sup>28</sup> According to Richard Howard’s translation of Barthes, “the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author.”

various secrets—his coded politics, his use of the Swiss-Catalan Martínez’s language as mask, etc.). Indeed, to open *The Anonymous Poet*, one needs to pull out the imposing volume, printed on heavy weight (120 g/m<sup>2</sup>) paper, from its black, sarcophagus-like slipcover—an action, full of both excitement and gravitas, that is not unlike cracking open a tomb.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the passage of Martínez’s name from author position to subtitle—(“el eterno presente de Juan Luis Martínez” [the eternal present of Juan Luis Martínez])—marks the proleptic passage through death’s threshold, and Martínez reappears to us now as living dead. If *The New Novel* represents a violent interruption in the present of Chilean poetics (it was, as the colophon notes, composed between 1968-1975), and *Chilean Poetry* mourns the death of a national tradition, then *The Anonymous Poet* proposes Chilean poetry’s afterlife, ghostly demarcations that refuse to go away.

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<sup>29</sup> Multiple commentators have remarked on the tomb-like nature of *The Anonymous Poet*. According to Luis Pérez-Oramas, “*El Poeta Anónimo* puede haberse iniciado durante los años 80 y creo poder afirmar que funciona como un testamento. O mejor: como una tumba. La tumba misma de Juan Luis Martínez” [*The Anonymous Poet* could have been started during the 1980s and I think I can say that it functions as a testament. Or better yet: as a tomb. Juan Luis Martínez’s tomb itself] (20). But, as I argued above, *The Anonymous Poet* is also a tomb and memorial for, among others, the victims of colonial and dictatorship violence—from the detained-disappeared to the indigenous people of the Patagonia.

In “Poeta chileno editado en Brasil: Publican ‘El poeta anónimo’, libro póstumo de Juan Luis Martínez,” Pedro Pablo Guerrero calls the work a “monumento funerario” [funerary monument]. He also reports that Diego Maquieira observed that the design of *The Anonymous Poet* resembled a “tomb” or “sarcophagus”: “Diego Maquieira, que fue invitado a exponer en la 30ª bienal y participó en la segunda entrevista de [Pedro] Montes con Cosac, opina que con este diseño el libro parece una tumba o sarcófago” (32).



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