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## Rafael Chirbes's *En la orilla*: Allegories of Cryptic Transgenerational Trauma

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Published in 2013, Rafael Chirbes's *En la orilla* is regarded as one of the best examples of the so-called “literatura de crisis” (Villamía Vidal; Valdivia; Basanta). Although the novel is set in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, such categorization is insufficient because it ignores crucial aspects. Chirbes, a materialist writer, envisioned writing as an act that aims to expose the lack of a democratic culture in Spain. In *En la orilla*, he connects issues of contemporary post-crisis Spain with the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Thus, he distances himself from a trend within contemporary Spanish literature that treats the Civil War in an emotional, depoliticized manner and that adheres to hegemonic Francoist discourse, a phenomenon that David Becerra Mayor explores in *La Guerra Civil como moda literaria* (2015).

Whereas the Civil War theme is common in Chirbes (*La Buena letra* 1992; *La caída de Madrid* 2002), *En la orilla* deals with, among other issues, transgenerational trauma and its mechanisms of transmission. Studies of Spanish transgenerational trauma are scarce. Some exceptions include Anna Miñarro and Teresa Morandi (2009), Clara Valverde (2014), Ángel Rodríguez Gallardo (2015), and Paloma Aguilar and Clara Ramirez-Barat (2019), who approach the issues from fields such as psychology, sociology, and history.

María Teresa Navarrete Navarrete (2018), in “Silenced Stories and Transgenerational Trauma of the Spanish Civil War in Hispanic Literature,” attributes the absence of this literature to the denial of the trauma and to the complexities of verbally conveying traumatic experience (35). To convey something verbally by using language and linguistic tools implies symbolization and, therefore, representation. In this article, I explore how the relationship of the main character, Esteban, and his father symbolize these complexities. I analyze a space—the marshland—and an object—the calendar—as tropes that aesthetically give a voice to the unspeakable and elucidate the paradox of trauma's representability, i.e., its complex temporal structure.

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Ultimately, this essay attends to the representability of trauma.

I approach this through psychoanalytic literary criticism. Trauma has a significant role within psychoanalytic theory. Cathy Caruth and other scholars have studied the complexities of conveying trauma. They claim that it is not representable, that it cannot be captured in any meaningful narrative because it resists comprehension (5-6). However, though I concur that traumatic experiences may be unspeakable, they can be represented in fictional forms. There is no “direct” access to trauma in our psyches, but rather fictional representations of it.

To pursue this, I consider different psychoanalytic approaches to transgenerational trauma. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s theory of the crypt, developed in their essay collection *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, informs the basic theory of transgenerational trauma for this study. They, however, follow a linguistic approach, while I use their psychoanalytic interpretative toolkit to decode and analyze several hidden meanings within the Chirbes text. Valverde and Luis Martín-Cabrera’s analysis of the different generations in the Spanish Civil War offers further insights on each of them, but focuses on the Republican side. On the contrary, I see the figure of Esteban’s father as a metonymical figure that refers, by extension, to his entire generation. While understanding that belonging to the defeated side entails further issues, such as humiliation, fear, and oppression (issues that fall outside the scope of this essay), I believe that theories of transgenerational trauma can teach us about trauma transmission regardless of partisan affiliations. Associating the unspeakable generation with the Republican side seems like a partial exploration of a bigger issue. Finally, I expand on Gabrielle Schwab’s *Haunting Legacies. Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, since her analysis of transgenerational trauma in the Holocaust emphasizes the importance of working with victims and perpetrators to overcome traumatic experiences such as genocide, war, or dictatorships.

### **Sinking**

Even though the marshland is present in Chirbes’s *En la orilla* from the onset, this is the first description that the reader encounters: El mar lo lava todo, lo expulsa, o lo fagocita, lo purifica con sus yodos y salitres, lo aprovecha y recicla: se supone que es saludable, no como el pantano, siempre visto de reojo por los vecinos como lugar insalubre, infeccioso, agua estancada de la

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que hay que desconfiar, líquido que se caliente y corrompe el calor de la primavera y ya no se lava hasta que llega la gota fría de otoño. El mar limpia, oxigena, el pantano pudre. Como la guerra, la comisaria y la cárcel. (42)

The main character, Esteban, a carpenter in his seventies, reflects upon the role of the marshland and its importance for Olba, his small, rural Valencian village and the surrounding region. Contrary to the fluid, dynamic, and purifying sea, the marshland appears as the last repository for waste that has been gathering for years. It consists, on a physical level, of different layers of accumulated remains: garbage, bricks, animal carcasses discarded by local farmers, weapons used by criminals, etc. It also contains diverse layers of history that overlapped during previous decades. It conceals the bodies of those who fought in the Spanish Civil War; others who died or were killed there, including policemen; waste matter of the 1960s' and 1970s' *Spanish miracle*; scaffolds and rubble from the construction bubble that ended with the real estate market's implosion in 2008 . . . everything accumulates in the marshland. Its symbolic weight builds up throughout the novel. It helps us understand the relationship of the characters to their environment and history. Yet, why does the protagonist compare the marshland to war, police stations, and prisons?

Throughout his life, Esteban repeatedly returned to the marshland. His uncle Ramón, who became a paternal figure while his father was in prison, took him there to teach him to fish and hunt. Esteban, on his own, would also go there to read and to swim. When he started his relationship with Leonor, they went there to have intimate relations. He now goes there, with his friends or alone, to have sex with prostitutes. He drives his car along the marshland's worn paths. Throughout his narrative recollections and from his emotive-evaluative perspective, the marshland is a constant presence in his life. As Javier Luis Velloso Álvarez points out, Esteban's internal monologues, with multiple flashbacks and flashforwards and changes of location and temporality, seem to take place in his consciousness. They do not belong to any specific place or time of reference; however, when he is in the marshland, both his physical location and his thoughts are set in that space (92).

The marshland is a crucial stage upon which the lives of different characters unfold. Esteban's father, whose name is never

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revealed, is deeply attached to the place. Now in his nineties, wheelchair-bound, and suffering from dementia, he fought for the Republic in the Civil War. At war's end, as a Republican ex-combatant, he had two options: to join the *maquis* guerrilla groups fighting the Nationalists in Valencia's northwest autonomous region (Olba's location in the novel), or to hunker down in the marshland, hunting and fishing to survive, as other Republicans did. He decided to hide in the marshland; his wife, however, convinced him to surrender to the authorities, who imprisoned him and gave him a death sentence that was later commuted to forced labor.

He never directly told his son about his experiences during and after the war. Instead, the boy grew up with a distant father who barely communicated with his family. When he did communicate, it was always cryptically (186). Esteban describes how, in his childhood, his father would hide to do certain things:

. . . años cincuenta, sesenta: pegas la oreja a la rejilla de la radio conectada a un volumen apenas perceptible. Escuchas las noticias que, sobre España, emiten la BBC de Londres, radio Paris, la Pirenaica: para aislar el sonido, cubres con una toalla a la vez el receptor y tu cabeza, ninguno de nosotros puede pisar esa habitación mientras escuchas los noticiarios; en el taller, bajo el banco de carpintero, en un lugar invisible (lo descubro en mis juegos, arrastrándome por el suelo) encolas fotografías con la cara barbuda de Marx, la de la Pasionaria, que has recortado de algún viejo libro, de alguna revista. Pasará mucho tiempo antes de que yo sepa quiénes son esos personajes cuyas caras guardas en un lugar inaccesible como los pintores de las cuevas de Altamira guardaban las imágenes de sus animales fetiche. (161-62)

His behavior was always enigmatic. He hid from everyone to listen to the radio and collected pictures in secret places. Esteban thus grew up with a father who remained silent, and did not communicate. His father's past life was secret, inaccessible, yet Esteban is aware that he fought in the war, but he learned about it mostly through other relatives, especially his uncle Ramón. The father himself sometimes told war stories and praised the Republican army. However, he did not talk about his own traumatic experiences, what he witnessed during the conflict: mutilated bodies, the thunder of the bombs

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and shells exploding, or the screams of those undergoing surgery without anesthesia (354). After the war, he would lie in bed, crying, recalling these scenes in horror, feeling like a coward and a deserter for having turned himself in. Esteban grew up in the shadow of a trauma that was affectively, not verbally, communicated to him. How was he to make sense of all this? Torok and Abraham's readability theory, one of interpretation, centers on the figure of the "crypt." The crypt is not a metaphor for the unconscious, but for the complexities inherent to accessing the unconscious. What is a crypt? It is the place of a secret, κρυπτός (*kryptós*, Greek for "hidden"). A crypt seals, encloses a secret, making it hermetic and inaccessible. To encrypt is to conceal information, to hide it, generally through a code that, if not deciphered, extends the possibility of the secret. Abraham and Torok use the notion of the crypt in a figurative sense. Their theory accounts for family secrets. These secrets are "trauma[s] whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences are entombed and thereby consigned to internal silence, albeit unwittingly, by the sufferers themselves" (99-100). They are traumatic experiences from actual events that have been excluded from reality, repressed, and passed on intergenerationally.

Their theory involves how to think through trauma's inheritance, its transference from generation to generation. "Inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. Reconstituted from the memories of words, scenes, and affects, the objectal [sic] correlative of the loss is buried alive in the crypt as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography" (Abraham and Torok 130). When the mourning of a traumatic experience does not occur or, if it does, it is unsuccessful, we create a crypt, a metaphorical place where we "bury" what we have lost, be it a person, an object, or an abstract idea. The crypt, the encryption, in my unconscious is not mine; it precedes me. It is "*lo reprimido*"—the repressed thing(s) inherited from the maternal and paternal figures. However, the crypt is, simultaneously, a part of me that is buried in the deepest part of myself, as well as a theory of *extimacy*, a radical exteriority.

Valverde and Martín-Cabrera explore the consequences of Francoism, focusing on those generations that did not experience the Civil War and the repression that followed firsthand. Expanding upon and in contrast to Abraham and Torok's theories that do not name

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the different generations, Valverde and Martín-Cabrera analyze three different generations and call them “the unspeakable, the unnamable, and the unthinkable” (170).

The first generation, those who have directly experienced the traumatic experience and loss, deal with the trauma by never speaking of it because it would be too painful and would trigger past hurtful experiences that they may have repressed. “What they experienced was so overwhelming that it defies words and the mind’s previous ability to elaborate events” (Valverde and Martín-Cabrera 174). The traumas exceed their previous structures of experience; they cannot articulate what they have experienced. Therefore, this generation is “the unspeakable generation.” As mentioned, Esteban’s father experienced firsthand the war’s atrocities. His experience was so horrible that it challenges and subverts his mind’s ability to reproduce the events.

The second generation, raised bearing the unconscious inheritance of the first’s affective traces, receives these traces as something whose existence is intuited, but whose content is an absolute mystery. They cannot truly grasp what is persecuting them and their reality. Although their parents’ behaviors show that they have lived through horrible experiences, this generation does not inquire into their parents’ traumatic experiences, “they wanted to know what happened to their parents, but at the same time they did not want to know because they were afraid of the upsetting information that they might receive” (175). The descendants of the person who has been through a traumatic experience will “receive” the affective legacy of trauma, but for them it appears as though lacking a source. They will not understand because the event was not *directly* experienced. They thus bear the inscription of the trauma, but lack the tools to make sense of it. This generation, Esteban’s generation, is called “the unnamable” generation.

His father does not tell him about his world experiences because Esteban is friends with Francisco Marsal, the offspring of a family that sided with the Nationalists in the war and, consequently, made huge profits. Esteban grows up confused, claiming “no soportaba las alusiones de mi padre—siempre misteriosas—a cosas que habían ocurrido. Primero, no las entendía; luego, me aburrieron. Al final, me asquearon” (186). He cannot make sense of his father’s mysterious comments. He does not even know that he was born while his father

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was in prison. Nonetheless, he does sense that his father has been through horrific experiences. Not having access to the content of his inherited crypt, Esteban lacks the linguistic tools to name and thereby to symbolize it. Language cannot express his interiorized exterior. That cryptic aspect of language, the incommunicability of the interior of language, is what the second generation interiorizes.

In his internal monologues, Esteban pities himself several times, comparing his life to his father's:

ni siquiera acudía al bar (ahí reaparecen los síntomas de la infección heredada de mi padre), no veía a nadie, pasaba semanas enteras sin salir de casa; sí, fui un heredero de mi padre, él a la vuelta de su guerra, yo de la mía: él, los hielos de Teruel, yo, los lluviosos bulevares, las luces anaranjadas y el frío de París. Dos derrotados (305).

He believes that they have both been defeated—his father during the war, and he himself during the year when he attended college in Paris. Even though he grew up with a father who secretly hid his past, Esteban identifies certain patterns of shared behavior, seeing in himself symptoms that come from his father's "inherited infection." Throughout the novel, he constantly complains about his father, yet claims that they are the same person: "pero en el fondo él y yo idénticos. El mismo pesimismo. La misma idea de que no hay hombre que no sea un malcosido saco de porquería" (134). As Valverde and Martín-Cabrera posit, this (unconscious) identification with a relative that experienced the Civil War firsthand is a symptom of transgenerational transmission of trauma (171).

Finally, the third generation is the "unthinkable" generation that cannot imagine what their grandparents and parents went through. However, other transgenerational trauma scholars, such as Dan Bar-On (1991), Avery Gordon (2008) or Vamik Volkan (2013), suggest that it is usually the third generation that makes visible what previous ones could not and is decisive in bringing visibility to the legacy of the trauma. Since Esteban did not have children, this third generation does not apply to our analysis.

I should clarify that this transgenerational trauma theory does not imply that everyone reacted similarly to the Civil War—some fled the country while others stayed to fight the dictatorship. However, dealing with dictatorial repression is different than processing trauma.

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The narrative voice is displaced onto Esteban's father for a few pages when his son finds a 1960 calendar that had been in an old workshop closet for decades. On the backs of the pages dating from June to October, there are notes from his father, writing about *his* father (Esteban's grandfather), about his childhood and adolescent memories, his dream to become a wood artist and, mostly, about his Civil War experiences. He describes how the conflict turned his life upside down. He constantly worked with wood, creating little figurines with political content: keychains with the communist hammer and sickle along with chains and plates with revolutionary, secular imagery. With the war's arrival, he had to get rid of all political symbols. By the time he got out of prison, he had already given up on his dream and never again created figurines. Once back with his family, he perceived them as the enemy and thought of himself as an outsider.

Whenever Esteban's father had talked about the war, it was tinged with an epic narrative of resistance. Now, for the first time, his calendar testimony discloses the hidden part of the story: the bombs, the shells, the corpses, the screams. Schwab explores the function of writing in transgenerational trauma, particularly in the second generation. According to her, stories that arise from a traumatic core are the product of the collision of two realms: life and trauma (41). The traumatic aspect of the father's story is not conveyed in life, but in writing, to fight what is silenced in real life.

Schwab, further developing Abraham and Torok's crypt theory, talks about "crypto-narrative": "a narrative that encrypts the secret" (57). Those war stories praising Republican resistance, which Esteban shared with his family, are crypto-narratives. They do not reveal the secret and do not work towards the processing of trauma; instead, their eulogistic rhetoric hides the traumatic reality from whence they arise. The calendar stories, however, do give account of the crypt experience. As she explains, these narratives

can also describe the process of traumatic encryptment and its impact on psychic and social life, thus bringing a different social recognition to histories of violence not by revealing the silenced violent act but by giving testimony to its lingering toxic effects and its transmission to those forced to suffer the silence. (56)

The father's stories recount not only his traumatic experiences, their encryptment, their impact on his social life and his own mysterious

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behavior, but also the poisonous consequences for those who suffered his silence. At the end of the calendar, in a postscript, the father explicitly states what he thinks its destiny will be:

PD: Cuando dentro de unos días vengan a vaciar la casa, y pase el mobiliario al almacén municipal o a alguna nave habilitada para guardar lo embargado durante los últimos dos años, nadie—como es lógico—se fijará en el calendario de 1960 perdido entre montañas de papel, fracturas, albaranes, catálogos, periódicos y revistas. Antes de la subasta del mobiliario que tendrá lugar unos meses más tarde, los empleados vaciarán de objetos inútiles los cajones de mesas y armarios de la casa y arrojarán papeles y prendas de ropa al basurero comarcal, donde serán *incinerados* con otros restos. Pero para que eso ocurra han de pasar todavía unos meses. (357, emphasis added)

He believes that the calendar will be destroyed and that no one will ever read his testimony. What then is the purpose of writing these stories? He does not write to remember, but to forget. The only material representation of his trauma was meant to be destroyed, an act that could be read as the Freudian death drive, the aim to destruct a representation. The father tries to “bury” his unspeakable traumatic experience. He hopes that fire will destroy its material traces and also symbolically erase his past. The burning would represent the destruction of his traumatic memories and their only access—the calendar as a material trace. Indeed, the calendar is a figure of the transmission of trauma, a trauma that is imprinted and whose origin is thereby hidden, hindering its access. It is not just a figure of oblivion since it sustains a print of the trauma. It is more a figure of inscription, of encoding. How does one encode a trauma? How does trauma encryption work?

Introjection and incorporation are two crucial concepts of Abraham and Torok’s theory. They deviate from the traditional Freudian conceptualization of introjection as the “process revealed by analytic investigation: in fantasy, the subject transposes objects and their inherent qualities from the ‘outside’ to the ‘inside’ of himself” (Laplanche et al. 229). For Freud, introjection denotes a fantasy. Yet, Abraham and Torok understand introjection as “the principle of gradual self-transformation in the face of interior and exterior changes in the psychological, emotional, relational, political, professional landscape” (101). For them, introjection is a process of transformation

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of the subject, who psychically processes and adapts to external factors that affect the psyche. For instance, to introject the death of a loved one, the subject must process the death, assimilating the changes in daily life—absence, sadness, frustration, etc. The subject will gradually mourn the dead, adapting to the new situation. Conversely, when introjection is unsuccessful, incorporation takes place. Bound to fantasy, incorporation

suppose[s] the loss of an object in order to take effect; it implies a loss that occurred before the desires concerning the object might have been freed. The loss acts as a prohibition and, whatever form it may take, constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to introjection. The prohibited object is settled in the ego in order to compensate for the lost pleasure and the failed introjection. (113)

The lost object (a person, an item, or an abstraction hovering over life) is prohibited, denied. The subject does not acknowledge the new reality; therefore, the subject holds on to a fantasy in order to recover the lost object. This fantasy is narcissistic in that it intends to transform the reality around the subject rather than accepting the loss of the loved object and the suffering that it will entail. Since this refusal of loss is an “illegal act” (Abraham and Torok 114), it hides from the ego, which tricks itself into believing that introjection has taken place, faking a psychic transformation. The unassimilated portion of reality solidifies into an imago that is projected onto an external object; this imago brings hope to the subject. Consequently, the ego is compromised in a contrariety that causes great suffering.

Some who fought for the Republic hid in the marshland at war’s end. The Nationalists set the marshland on fire and sent patrols with dogs to track them down and kill them. The Republicans survived for a while, but eventually committed suicide—some bodies were buried while others were eaten by wild animals or simply decomposed. However, the father’s version of these events was different:

Pero esa no era exactamente la historia que guardaba mi padre en su cabeza; para él la vida de los refugiados del pantano estaba envuelta en un aura más noble. Descubría complacencia en sus palabras cuando me habló de los fugitivos que se pegaron un tiro en la sien, o se dispararon en la boca: no eran pobres bestias vencidas por la desesperación, sino los únicos habitantes de

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la comarca que guardaron la estatura de hombres. Sucios de barro, barbudos, semidesnudos, apenas cubierto el cuerpo por harapos, algún taparrabos, restos de antiguas prendas o trenzados de hojas. (358)

Even though he wanted to hide in the marshland, his wife convinced him to turn himself in. The Nationalists sent him to prison and eventually commuted his death sentence to forced labor. He thereafter perceived himself as a coward and a traitor. Having to face these traumatic experiences and humiliations, he created a crypto-narrative of resistance: the exaltation of the refugees. His unassimilated portion of reality has congealed into an imago of the Republicans that is projected onto the marshland. This imago, this fantasy, allows him to conceal his denial of reality, simulating a psychic transformation. He does not process his traumatic experiences or introject them, but holds on to a fantasy that is the result of an incorporation. Simulating a psychic transformation to hide his incorporation from the ego, his postwar life revolves around Republican battle victories and those with similar political views. On the backs of the calendar pages he marked the dates that were relevant to this end: the Warsaw uprising, the Russian occupation of Budapest, the Red Army's occupation of Vienna, the Nazis' surrender of Berlin to the Soviets, Mao Tse Tung's People's Republic in China, Fidel Castro's triumphal entry into Havana, and so on. However, he does not include any personal important date:

Ya lo he dicho: ninguna anotación sobre nosotros: tu mujer, tus hijos, ni siquiera tu madre y tus hermanos aparecen en las notas. En esas hojas de calendario no nacemos, ni cumplimos años, ni padecemos enfermedades, ni empezamos a acudir a la escuela; tu madre muere durante esos años, el cincuenta o el cincuenta y uno, y no aparece. No merecemos ni una mención, no formamos parte del avance del mundo, no conmovemos a ningún dios, estamos fuera de ese sistema universal del dolor y la injusticia y la rebeldía, no formamos parte de la legión de cuerpos transubstanciados, pálidos camaradas que se adivinan en el horizonte; ni accedemos a los grandes conceptos que los nutren. Somos lo privado, que es deplorable, que te ata y te pone a ras de tierra (164)

After finding the calendar, Esteban realizes that his father did not include anything related to their family. He only marked milestones

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that might contribute to the victory of those politically aligned with the Republicans. For him, their victory would lead to a restoration of power, a return to prewar politics. Their victory would reconcile a fantasy that was psychically exhausting for him to maintain with his prewar reality. He sustains the hope that his imago, his fantasy, will remove the repression that he is undergoing. His incorporation and encryption hide his shameful secret.

His love object—his idea of a prewar Republican life—is the source of his secret. Consequently, his love object works as his ego ideal, “a model to which the subject attempts to conform” (Laplanche et al. 144). Hence, he needs to keep the secret of the loved object in order to cover up his shame (Abraham and Torok 131). His secret, the core of the crypt, is too burdensome to bear, so holding on to his fantasy, even if it causes great suffering and entails a failed introjection, seems to be enough. To protect his crypt and internally support it so that his fantastic world does not disintegrate, he blends the ego and the crypt into one. Throughout the novel, we find subtle hints that point to Esteban’s final objective: to murder his father and his dog, and then to commit suicide. The title of the second and main chapter of the novel, “localización de exteriores,” refers, precisely, to his search for a location in the marshland to take up his task. He inherited his father’s carpenter shop but, with the 2008 crisis, his profits were severely reduced to the point that he had to lay off all the employees. He had money invested in his friend Pedrós’s real estate business. However, Pedrós also suffers the consequences of the crisis and declares bankruptcy. Esteban, desperate and with no money, decides to kill his father and himself using his hunting weapons.

By this time, the father is immobile in a wheelchair and stricken with dementia. He had a tumor surgically removed from his trachea and, since then, has not spoken. Although doctors examined him and confirmed that he had no brain damage, he still does not communicate verbally, nor does he write or make gestures. Trauma causes “psychic aphasia” (damage of the psyche that results in unintelligibility of language). This inability to communicate works as a psychic mechanism that hinders the retrieval of signification, which is crucial to process a trauma (Abraham and Torok 17). This form of paralysis is bound to incorporation, i.e., it contributes to the blockage and denial of painful realities. The denied pain and shameful secrets

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disturb the subject and their offspring; the ghosts buried in the crypt haunt language, shattering its communicability and its expressiveness. Simulating a psychic transformation—maintaining his fantasy, his imago, his crypto-narratives—to hide incorporation from the ego requires a great deal of effort. This may result in psychic aphasia that, paradoxically, exacerbates confusion and contradiction.

Esteban decides that the marshland is the perfect location to kill his father and commit suicide:

Sin embargo, esta luminosa mañana de invierno, soy yo--uno de los inocuos--quien busca el decorado en el que restablecer una parte del código en una *representación íntima*, teatro de cámara, reparación de lo que la historia quebró. Preparo el momento, padre, me encargo de devolverte al lugar en que quisiste quedarte y por nuestra culpa no te quedaste, reconstruyo el cuerpo demediado de tu dignidad para devolverlo a la plenitud de hombre que no conocí, porque mi otro hermano, mi hermana y yo llegamos después de la *mutilación*. . . . Me toca cumplir su deseo aplazado, devolverlo a sus camaradas. (214, emphasis added)

Killing his father in the marshland seems symbolically to compensate for the unfortunate consequences of the war for him and his family. All that happened after the “mutilation”—the Civil War—led to a traumatized and cryptic father. Esteban thus understands this act as an allegorical solution that will return his father to his prewar, trauma-free life, as a reconciliation between his life and his deferred desire. With this “intimate performance,” he nurtures his father’s fantasy, the possibility of returning to a historical time that, for the father, meant happiness away from trauma. The marshland works as an allegorically atemporal space—the protagonist states that “el pantano me parece el núcleo de pervivencia de un mundo sin tiempo, que se sostiene a la vez frágil y energético, en el centro del tapiz menguante” (101).

Why does Esteban choose this location, with its allegorical weight, if he is aware of his father’s fantasy? Because he is a cryptophoric subject who bears the inscription of the trauma, a trauma that, for him, has no origin, since he never experienced the traumatic events. Though he read the backs of the calendar pages, he still cannot make sense of the trauma that he inherited affectively and that is inscribed on him. Not having access to the content of his inherited crypt, he

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lacks the linguistic tools to name it and, therefore, to symbolize it. Consequently, he sees himself inscribed in the circle of violence that caused his father's trauma. The combination of his inherited trauma and the lack of tools to understand it becomes a driving need to grieve. All that is left for Esteban is to surrender to his crypt and collaborate in the fulfilment of his father's fantasy. However, this ultimately fulfils another function:

Le devuelvo lo que como hijo le debo, cambio vida por vidas, cumplo mi papel anónimo en la cadena de la historia, lo que acompaño para que no le falte nada en el último acto, un papel decisivo, aunque vicario. Los pueblos cultos han banquetado en honor de sus muertos, han festejado sus tumbas. Vicario de tu ceremonia, soy la mosca que se va poco a poco secando, atrapada en la urdimbre pegajosa de la trampa, insecto condenado a encriptarse pegado en la telaraña de voces ajenas, eco sin soporte de voz. . . . La telaraña de voces que te envisa, el insecto atrapado en la tela que de repente se rasga. (215-16)

Esteban believes that sacrificing his father will put an end to the trauma that he has transferred to the family. Celebrating his father's death, introjecting it, will put an end to his incorporation and to the crypt. Thus, his performative act will liberate his family from the crypt, from the transgenerational trauma, retroactively assigning a new trauma-free meaning to their lives. He is the insect that is fated to be encrypted in a web that suddenly breaks. Upon reading the calendar that reveals his father's crypto-narrative, he realizes that the cause of his trauma-inscribed existence is his father. He has to advance his own fantasy of mourning and kill his father. This is his own fantasy.

As demonstrated, the marshland becomes a crucial scenario, both literally and allegorically. In his last internal monologue, Esteban describes how the marshland arose from a bay that gradually closed in on itself with layers of mud and sand that both created and swallowed it up at the same time. The same mechanism that produces the marshland threatens its existence. It is an undefined space, a half-made world, blocked by dunes and suspended in time. The marshland is trapped in a dynamic between creation and downfall that tinges its figure with an ambiguous temporality and historicity. However, its natural formation is not the only aspect that contributes to this ambiguity. Historically, the deterioration of the marshland started at the end of the Civil War. With the justification of finding the Republicans that were hiding there,

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Nationalists drained part of the water and gave some of the land to their ex-combatants. An accumulation of layers of human waste starts after the war. Unlike seawater that breaks it down, marshland water allows the waste to putrefy rather than purify.

### **Drowning**

Here I entertain an allegorical reading of the marshland with its physical attributes representing certain aspects of trauma and its transmission over time. As seen at plot level, the marshland degenerates with the war (first generation). Its levels of garbage increase and accumulate in its stagnant waters, hiding previous levels while also retaining them. Some individuals profited from it, but only through a perpetuation of the violence exerted by those Nationalists that burned, drained, and gave away parts of the marshland. The war was a turning point for the area. Esteban (second generation) grew up around the marshland and, for years, saw garbage accumulating while never seeing or having access to the waste accumulated before his birth, e.g., rotten human remains, animal carcasses, weapons, etc. By the time the second generation was born, Nationalists were already profiting off the lands they received after the war. Their descendants (Francisco Marsal) were the benefactors. Esteban, however, ignores the origin of their wealth.

On a trauma theory level, the driving paths keep disappearing in the mud. They both hide and reveal at the same time, which parallels the complexities of accessing the unconscious. This dynamic (in)visibility and its mutable-but-stationary landscape also resonates with the paradoxical structure of trauma, that is, with its need to represent, to symbolize, and to speak about it in order to process it as it exceeds structures of knowledge and meaningful narratives of representation. As discussed, the crypt and first generation cryptophoric subjects affectively reveal a traumatic past though they remain silent about it. Esteban's (second) generation is characterized by cryptophoric subjects who grew up in the shadow of the trauma, but who cannot make sense of it. They are unable to access its core because they never experienced it and have no access to it.

A crypto-narrative around the marshland conceals its history. As Esteban claims, "solo con la mola conservacionista y el ecologismo el espacio ha adquirido valor simbólico, y los periódicos y la tele hablan del gran pulmón verde de la comarca" (41). This narrative, created in recent years, conceals the deterioration and distorts the suspect origin of the space. While it allows plants to grow and animals to feed, the

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marshland sustains a macabre biomass—dirty, smelly, and disgusting. Esteban would not exist if not for his father, but his whole existence has been nurtured on his trauma. Consequentially, he has a miserable life and constantly feels helpless to change it.

By killing him, Esteban hopes to take his father back in time. The setting he chooses for committing the murder makes this temporal transgression possible. He describes the marshland as an atemporal place: “el pantano me parece el núcleo de pervivencia de un mundo sin tiempo, que se sostiene a la vez frágil y energético, en el centro del tapiz menguante” (101). He negates temporality, but he also negates its presence: “puedes construirte en el marjal tu propio mundo fuera del mundo” (367). This description colors the marshland as a utopic place in its literal sense. Etymologically, “utopia” comes from Ancient Greek, a no-place. Esteban’s and his father’s fantasies reside in a figure of no-temporality, no-locality. Traumatized or trauma-carrying subjects, especially those that incorporate, need to ignore or disguise aspects of reality that remind them of the trauma. Thus, they turn into an existence outside time and space.

As Abraham and Torok theorize, incorporative subjects trick their ego with figurative fantasies of swallowing (115). Neither Esteban nor his father can introject the trauma since they do not successfully deal with it. They instead succumb to their fantasies, taking them to the extreme. Esteban’s father dies in the marshland to recover his past life. Esteban kills his father in the marshland to free himself from the latter’s burden. The marshland, the object where they deposit their fantasies, devours them, just like it swallows up all corpses, weapons, or garbage.

Some trauma scholars maintain that trauma is not representable because no knowledge or experiential narrative can capture it meaningfully. Genocide, war, torture, or dictatorship are examples of forms of violence that exceed the limits of representation. Yet, as Schwab suggests, they call for speech, testimony, and witnessing (48). These forms of traumatic writing occupy a contradictory and paradoxical space: the therapeutic need for writing and the resistance to representation.

Abraham defines psychoanalysis as “an apparently paradoxical discipline pinpointing areas of incoherence, discontinuity, disruption, or disturbance in self, reality, object, experience, meaning, present,

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past, other, etc., even as it postulates the need for finding a level of coherence which can absorb the noncoherence” (Abraham and Torok 77). Concurring with this definition, I believe that psychoanalytic hermeneutics along with art and/or literary analysis can contribute to our understanding of the paradoxical structure of trauma—what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub define as “artistically bearing witness.” Narratives such as *En la orilla* capture the complexities and paradoxes of speaking about the unspeakable, writing about silences.

The idea of trauma as having a representation is complex, but this analysis of *En la orilla* illustrates its possibility. There is no “direct” access to trauma in our psyches but rather fictional representations of it. This is what I find in Chirbe’s *En la orilla*: an allegorical reading of the figures of the marsh and the calendar fictionally representing the complexities and paradoxes of trauma and its transgenerational transference. The marshland and the calendar create and destroy, and so does literature because its hi/stories destroy and create themselves through different interpretations.

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