



JOANNE POTTEITZER IN CHILE

PLAYING BY NEW RULES

After 17 years of military rule, the first year of democratic government in Chile has been a period of adjustment and reorientation more than jubilant celebration.

The burst of artistic expression which usually follows long repressive regimes took place three years ago, after the October 1988 plebiscite, in which Chileans voted "No" to eight more years under General Augusto Pinochet. A rush of publications by young novelists filled the bookstores; new Chilean films, seen only clandestinely during the dictatorship, opened in first-run cinemas; popular music groups which had been exiled for as long as 16 years returned to play to cheering audiences. In theatre, the folk musical *La negra Ester* (*Dark Esther*) caused a sensation when it opened in Santiago, under a tent on top of Santa Lucia Hill. Everything about it—its festive circus style, its music and special humor, the rhythms and pathos of its text of popular verse—celebrated Chile. And that struck a chord in all sectors of Chilean society at a time when people were eager to reclaim their country.

When Patricio Aylwin, a moderate Christian Democrat, assumed office in March 1990, he began a four-year presidency touted as "a period of transition toward democracy"—but Chile's return to full and unconditional democracy will be gradual. Constitutional ties to the former government are still in place. Pinochet is still commander-in-chief of the army, for example, and will be for eight more years; the constitution created by the military government in 1980 also allowed Pinochet to designate nine senators to the Chilean congress, and their vote almost invariably reverses the will of the elected majority. Many of the judges of the court system and most of Chile's mayors were appointed by the previous regime.

So artists and politicians alike have traded provocation and criticism for prudence and reconciliation to ensure a stronger and stabler democracy than the one which gave way to the military

Roberto Parra's La negra Ester, featuring Rosa Ramirez and Boris Quercia, caused a sensation when it opened in a hilltop tent in Santiago.

CHILE AFTER THE FALL

RICARDO LAGOS, Minister of Education:

Culture assumes the values, the images, the ethical conducts of a society. When you have a war as destructive as Vietnam, there is a cultural expression that is the result of the Vietnam conflict. Individuals are touched by that phenomenon and they express it. Likewise, individuals are touched by the phenomenon of human rights and equality, and they express it. This forms culture. All the literature of the 1930s in the United States—Steinbeck, for example—is the literature of the Depression.

In Chile during the 17 years of Pinochet, there was a massive exodus of our creative people. Never before had so many Chileans looked at Chile from the outside. How is Chile seen from New York, from Stockholm, from Rome, from Paris, from Caracas, from Mexico?

One product of the phenomenon of the dictatorship was that Chilean culture became very cosmopolitan. And for those who remained here, culture became a tremendous searching for freedom, like never before.

ANTONIO SKAR-META, novelist,

playwright: I left for Europe in 1973; I returned to Chile in January 1989, motivated by General Pinochet's defeat in the plebiscite. But the process of arriving back home is long. The process of leaving was much faster. I packed my bags from one day to the next. But opening my bags has taken years.

JORGE COULON, member of music group Inti-Illimani: There are certain songs, or even words or phrases within songs, that produce an electric response from the audiences in Chile. It has to do with the years of the dictatorship—and because we didn't live here, it is always a surprise for us to learn what in our songs produces certain emotional reactions. It may be that a song was played on the radio during a particular moment in Chile's history, and we don't know about that; we include it in our concert by chance and it produces this burst of unexpected emotion.

MARCO ANTONIO DE LA PARRA, playwright, psychiatrist, Chilean cultural attache in Spain: Some say that Pinochet was a teacher to Chileans, that he taught us about our own cruelty, he taught us about our darkest side, he opened the door for us to tragedy. The democracy is the time to talk about that tragedy, not against Pinochet or for Aylwin. No. The difference between the good guys and the bad guys is over, this infantile separation of redskins and cavalry. Evil will come in other ways.

SERGIO VODANOVIC, playwright, TV scriptwriter: A democratic superstructure and an authoritative infrastructure are co-existing now in Chile. It is true that we have more freedom of expression than we had before, but a piece of very repressive legislation still exists which could curtail this freedom. If an artist, for example, put on a play or an exhibit which the army deemed "injurious" to its "dignity," the artist could be brought before the military justice and could be condemned to a punishment which could be very severe. These facts of life make it such that one can't expect such large changes in artistic expression between the authoritarian government and the democratic government.



NISSIM SHARIM,

actor, co-director of Teatro Ictus: In the Pinochet era, Chilean artists' greatest merit was also their limitation. Dedicating their work to combat the dictatorship reduced their investigations to what was prohibited. And once the ban was lifted, the invisible (which we artists have the task of making visible) was no longer so clearly defined. The recent world events have only sharpened this lack of definition. Suddenly you don't know whether to attack or applaud the fall of the Berlin Wall or the introduction of capitalist structures in what were socialist countries. Reality is telling us that transferring political events to artistic generalities is not as easy and mechanical as it has seemed. Neruda said something very beautiful: "Poor is the artist who isn't a realist; but poor is the artist who is only a realist."



DELFINA GUZMAN,

actress, co-director of Teatro Ictus: Our illusions about Chileans being the English of Latin America—that we lived in such a firm democracy, that nothing would change—are over. People have taken a greater responsibility in politics. That is because you know that a political commitment can mean, under certain circumstances, your life. Many people have died in the process of regaining democracy. This country has matured a lot. It is a democracy which is more mature than it was before. More difficult, but more mature.



coup in 1973. "Political debates are a ballet of courtesy, a public ceremony of co-existence against a backdrop of great pain, with burning problems kept under the table," observes Antonio Skarmeta, a novelist and playwright who spent the years of dictatorship in Germany. "This policy of consent was undertaken consciously and intelligently," he believes, as part of the process "which took us out of the hell of the dictatorship. The pain one feels for a postponed justice, for what is hidden, for the caution, seems secondary to the enormous task at hand."

The first year of democracy produced a flurry of cultural activity: eight national theatre festivals, seventeen productions from abroad, more than fifty play openings in Santiago; a three-month nationwide government-sponsored series of performing and visual arts events; and an international film festival. But the need to nurse and protect the new democracy, like a delicate child, has weakened the once-outspoken voice of the arts in Chile. Confrontational themes, customary during the last 10 years of the military dictatorship, no longer had meaning and were discarded.

Theatrically, it was a strange year. Leading playwright Marco Antonio de la Parra and director Ramon Griffero were noticeably absent from the stage. Several theatres which had anticipated increased government funding for the arts had to scrap or postpone ambitious productions when the money did not materialize. In spite of the impressive number of openings, few of the new works consciously reflected the pain of a nation whose wounds had not yet healed or responded in any way to what was happening at the time. Two exceptions were Alfredo Castro's minimalist production of *La manzana de Adan (Adam's Apple)*, which addressed themes of marginality—poverty and transvestism—and psychic pain; and Ines Stranger's *Cariño malo (Bad Affection)*, written, directed and performed by women, which for the first time brought women's issues to the fore. Subliminally, playwright Castro believes, almost all artistic work done after the dictatorship has dealt in some way with the subject of death. "The experience of lifting up stones and finding dead bodies has to run deep," he suggests.

Actor and director Nissim Sharim, one of many artists who had actively challenged the repressive measures of the military government, now feels disoriented and displaced in the new democracy. Co-director of Teatro Ictus, one of Chile's oldest and most respected theatre companies, Sharim was one of 78 actors and directors whose lives were threatened by an extremist group in late 1987. The written threat ordered the artists to leave the country within 24 hours or they would be killed. It also warned them not to reveal the threat to the press, which is precisely what they did. In response to both national and international outrage, theatre artists and journalists from three continents, including U.S. actor Christopher Reeve, traveled to Chile in an international demonstration of solidarity. "I believe that artists are capable of creating their own spaces of reality," Sharim notes, "but they must have a starting point that is based on an objective reality. I don't think we can create art based on fantasy. And this is what has me feeling displaced

Joanne Pottlitzer is a theatre director, translator and expert on Latin American theatre.



La Japonesita (Maria Izquierdo, with umbrella) is among the colorful characters in La negra Ester, adapted and directed by Andres Perez Araya.

right now. I don't know what my starting point is."

Like Sharim, conceptual artist Lotty Rosenfeld took part in confrontational acts during the dictatorship. The most visible was the "No + " ("No More") project created by CADA, an activist arts collective. The insignia was adopted spontaneously throughout Chile in the 1980s—"No + Smog, No + Dictatorship, No + Exonerated Professors, No + Hunger, No + Communists, No + Disappeared"—and became the logo for the "No" campaign of the 1988 plebiscite. Rosenfeld expressed her disillusionment with the new democratic system where "even human rights issues are negotiated, and that frightens me. It's not as though the dictatorship ended and we entered paradise. Maybe we thought that when democracy came, we would be living in a kind of socialism. That image, for which we fought so hard, in which we saw our future, is gone. It's difficult to know where one fits."

Exiled artists who have returned to Chile lament the absence of pointed artistic criticism in this period of transition. Painter Guillermo Nuñez lived in New York City in the mid-'60s and spent the years of the dictatorship in France. Since the time he was imprisoned by the Chilean military in 1975, Nuñez has concentrated his art on the theme of torture—his studio near the foothills of the Andes on the outskirts of Santiago is lined with large expressionistic canvases which evoke the human body in bold shades of red, blue and green. "If we insist on forgetting these things and they don't come to light, a hidden wound will always remain and fester," he believes. "Whether or not these problems are resolved by the government, artists are obliged to show the problems—to show what is not visible."

Artists who remained in Pinochet's Chile are convinced that their exiled colleagues cannot begin to understand the emotional conflicts and weariness engendered by political defeat. They see the current period as a time to assimilate recaptured freedoms which have fallen short of expectations, to redefine their role in democracy (especially true of younger artists, who have known only the dictatorship), and to work through a residual psychology of fear. Lack of communication, underlying resentments and different experiences and codes of communication have contributed to a difficult reencounter between exiled artists and those who stayed. So has the cultural shock of returning to a relatively isolated country after having lived for a generation in more cosmopolitan centers of the world.

On a visit to Chile earlier this year, I attended a joint concert by the country's two most popular music groups, conceived as a symbolic bridge between exiled artists and those who remained. Inti-Ilumani, which had gained international acclaim in Rome during the years of the dictatorship, returned to Chile last year in spite of the fact that the move meant a significant cut in income. "We always wanted to come back to Chile," Jorge Coulon of the Inti told me. "So we made economic concessions and plans to ensure that it will work. After all, one works to live, one doesn't live to work." El Congreso, which like the Inti began playing in the late '60s, created its fusion of rock and indigenous rhythms in Chile and had never even traveled outside the country. The concert was held in Chile Stadium, the 8,000-seat soccer stadium which had been a detention center in the first months after the

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VANYA VARIATIONS

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source of identity and, admittedly or not, experience it largely as illusory satisfaction, if satisfaction at all. ("Utility," Nietzsche wrote, "is a figment like any other and may be the one by which we will some day perish.")

Love and work. In both realms the self is urged toward, vitalized or depressed by one's idea of the future. How does time to come, *in our heads*, affect what we do and feel now? To put it another way: We live in such and such a manner now, but what might be different for us later, what might be different for our successors on earth, and is there a reciprocal influence, from us to them, from them to us?

I spoke of the *idea* of the future, a

sovereign subject in Chekhov's last three plays; we will see *Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* composing a sort of trilogy of the human tenses, of which the future is the most treacherous. Chekhov's imaginative point is that time to come is always unreal or, the same thing, not yet real, but that we habitually ignore or suppress this obvious truth, hypo-stating futurity and so allowing it to live illegitimately, and most often destructively, in the present. In rather the same way, we reify love and work.

The impasse or permanent stasis with which both *Vanya* and *Three Sisters* end, and which is surely the chief reason these plays are so often thought of as chronicles of helplessness and defeat, isn't the outcome of some social or psychological defeat, something remediable by, and for, stronger

people, but the result of a recognition, if never a full acquiescence in it, on the part of characters who with one intensity or another have passed beyond illusion: Love will not save me, work will not ennoble me, the future won't rescue the present.

Yet how often do people in Chekhov imagine the future, near or far, as splendid. "A new life will dawn one day," says a character in the remarkable long story "Ward Six," and "justice will triumph. . . . I may not live to see it . . . but someone's grandchildren will." And from another story, "A Visit": "She was making plans for the future. . . and this life, when she was working and helping others, seemed wonderful and poetic to her." Time to come: imminent or remote, but either way transfigured, a promise kept. But by whom, to whom? □

AT THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



Action by Sam Shepard

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POTTLITZER IN CHILE

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military coup. The event was electrifying. "The whole period of the dictatorship," Coulon observed, "spawned an atmosphere of individualism, each one fending for himself. There was very little feeling of solidarity. People thought that because we were the two most successful groups, there would be a sense of competition. But no. There is room for all of us. And this is the attitude that has to be nourished in Chile." Like Guillermo Nuñez, Coulon is disheartened by the current lack of provocation in the arts, but feels that Chile has gained immeasurably with the events of the past year. "What we have gained is the awareness that there are no definitive solutions. The revolutionary struggles in Latin America have created this illusion—that if we win, everything will be resolved. It's a religious idea, the redemption. The military had a similar illusion, that with the coup and with the killing of thousands and thousands of leftists, they would find the solution. People here know now that the 'final solution' doesn't exist. Wars don't solve anything. If you take Iraq off the map, for example, the Palestinian problem and the problems of the whole region continue, even heightened by the experience of war."

The first year's cultural adjustments and reassessments have meant institutional changes. The unorthodox ideas

of Nemesio Antunez, one of Chile's most respected painters, have breathed new life into the National Museum of Fine Arts, an elegant old building modeled after the Petit Palace in Paris. Antunez, who had been director of the museum in the late '60s spent 12 years of the military dictatorship in Europe and returned to Chile in 1986 to participate in the campaign to defeat Pinochet. "The first exhibit I organized after being re-named director last year was 'Open Museum,'" he says. "It was open to any artist between the ages of 19 and 25 who wanted to exhibit their work. It was enormous. The museum looked more like a parade ground." Antunez's highly rated weekly television show, *Ojo con el arte (Keep an Eye on Art)*, explores art trends, and his new season will include an exhibition of black and Hispanic art from the United States.

The Ministry of Education, under Ricardo Lagos, has taken a leadership role in creating a national cultural policy. A cultural advisory commission of 22 artists and social scientists was formed last December to investigate arts funding mechanisms in various European countries and the U.S., and to design an arts bill to be presented to the congress. "We want to create a cultural institute which will have more autonomy than a ministry, one which can receive both private and public funds," minister Lagos explained. "The cultural commission will give the law the legitimacy of having been generated by the artistic community."

Lagos, a member of the Socialist Party, is a popular political figure and a strong supporter of the arts. "In a society with immense social inequities, or where there is no freedom or basic human values, a Nobel Prize-winning poet like Neruda becomes a militant communist of the 1960s and 1970s, or a great actor like Nissim Sharim becomes a member of the governing board of the Party for Democracy to defeat Pinochet in the plebiscite," he points out. "It's normal. There is a connection [between politics and art] because there are larger social demands."

The new cultural season, the first to be planned after the change of government, shows signs of progress in Chile's healing process. In March, the president's Commission on Truth and Reconciliation published its 2,000-page report on violations of human rights and political deaths under the

military, an important step toward reassuring Chileans, especially the families of those who disappeared or died, that the crimes of the former regime will not go unrecognized. A "purification" ceremony was held in April at Chile Stadium, where popular singer Victor Jara, among others, was tortured and killed immediately following the military coup. Jara's widow, Joan Turner, along with the Intillimani and Andres Perez (director of *La negra Ester*), designed and organized the special two-day ceremony. "It has always seemed necessary to me to hold an event there that can help us get over the trauma we have about the place," said Turner, who is co-director of a two-year-old dance school in Santiago. "It may reopen wounds, but in a way it is the funeral processes, the mourning processes, that are needed. It will be a kind of remembering, but also a demand for a recognition of guilt, a testimony that it happened. And, then, let's go on from here. A celebration."

A new production of *The Winter's Tale* opened in May. The play was approached by director Ramon Griffiro as a kind of moral for what has happened in his country. It was his concern with the themes of turning points, eras ending, ideologies toppling, that led him to Shakespeare's play, which is subtitled "The Triumph of Time."

"It begins with a bad dictator, but with time the situation changes, other generations grow up, another cycle begins, and you are in another phase," Griffiro notes. "Time wins out, really. And it is time," he adds ruefully, "perhaps more than anything else, that holds out the possibility for change in Chile." □

GELDERMAN IN ISRAEL

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that the government decided to rescind all censorship of plays. "This is a theatre that isn't just in the art columns," the Cameri's director proudly says, "but everywhere in the news."

The subject that is on most people's minds if not everywhere in the news is the Intifada, the uprising in the Israeli-occupied Arab territories. The Cameri's one-man play *Ta'atuon*, mounted in early 1990, is based on a story by Yitzhak Ben-Ner and dramatizes the dreadful situations Israeli soldiers are faced with on the West Bank

and in the Gaza Strip. *Brothers in Arms*, which won first prize for the young playwright Ilan Hatzor at the Acco Festival in 1990, is a one-act play about three Palestinians from the West Bank. (The English translation from the Hebrew title *Re'ulim* is way off the mark, however. "Re'ulim" means "masked men," the term for Palestinian men who cover their faces with the traditional Arab headdress, the kafiyeh. The masked men are stone-throwers who endanger travelers on the roads of the West Bank and Gaza.) The play is one brother's interrogation of another brother, who turns out to be a spy for the Israeli army. A third brother kills the spy. "Ilan Hatzor lets us look into the souls of the Palestinians," writes one of Israel's leading drama critics, "and succeeds in the challenge of getting us to identify with the characters."

Determined to do more sociopolitical plays when he became artistic director six years ago, Ilan Ronen has succeeded in this goal and in making his theatre the leading repertory the-

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