



# **ARIEL DORFMAN**

## **AN AESTHETICS OF HOPE**

Sophia A. McClennen

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**THIS BOOK IS FOR  
ISABEL AND SEBASTIAN,  
STORYTELLERS OF DREAMS,  
AND FOR HENRY.**

<b>CONTENTS.</b>	Preface, ix	Acknowledgments, xvii	Note on Citations
Storyteller: Dorfman's Literary and Cultural Influences, 31	<b>3.</b> An Aesthetics		
Unity to Exile (1970–90), 93	<b>5.</b> I Am a Liar Who Always Tells the Truth: From		
Media Criticism and Cultural Journalism, 244	Conclusion: One among Many,		
Dorfman Bibliography, 295	Notes, 333	Works Cited, 349	Index, 361

and Translations, xxi   **1.** The Political Is Personal, 1   **2.** On Becoming a  
of Hope, 60   **4.** Anything Else Would Have Tasted Like Ashes: From Popular  
Exile to Diaspora (1990–2005), 152   **6.** Creative Criticism/Critical Creativity:  
280   Appendix 1: An Ariel Dorfman Chronology, 285   Appendix 2: An Ariel





**PREFACE.** This book is about breaking rules. Ariel Dorfman has spent his life breaking rules—refusing to be told who he is, what he should feel, how he should write, and what it should mean. Through his work he tells his readers to ask questions, refuse definitions, and think alternatively. But, he cautions, do not do this alone. Reach out, learn about your community, connect with humanity, be full of patience and compassion, and be full of rage and resistance. Be fallible. Be courageous. Take risks. And, most important, a message he repeats again and again is that literature, the arts, and culture play an essential role in the way we understand our world and in our struggles to change it.

One of the cardinal rules that Dorfman breaks is to passionately insist that art and politics are integrally connected. Dorfman's work challenges conservative views of art that suggest that it should be "free" of the taint of politics. Even though this debate has a long history, Dorfman has been forced to confront it repeatedly. For instance, in an exchange about the role of poetry in understanding the Abu Ghraib torture photos, David Ball claimed that poets who "try to express horror at the practice [of torture] run the risk of writing bad poems" (Ball et al., 6). Dorfman responded that poetry enables a vision of torturer and victim that reveals their mutual contaminations (ibid., 7). For Dorfman, the aesthetics of engaged literature offer the reader an opportunity

to see the world from a new angle, one that has been lost or forgotten, repressed or silenced, censored or ignored by mainstream worldviews.

Dorfman has also broken another rule regarding the artist. He has promiscuously mixed criticism with creativity, refusing the division between the critic and the creative writer. He has written an almost equal number of nonfiction works as literary texts. Moreover, he has written in every major literary genre (novel, short story, poetry, drama) and has adopted the voice of a variety of literary forms, including (among others) the picaresque, the epic, the noir, and the theater of the absurd. He has also refused common identity categories, understanding himself as a writer, an activist, a Chilean, a North American, and more. His works are read alternately and simultaneously as part of the Latin American literary canon; as examples of human rights literature; within the tradition of bilingual, cross-cultural, ethnic writing; and as part of a transnational community of exiled and displaced writers.

Dorfman's work constantly tests limits, challenges assumptions, and refuses preconceived categories. He finds hope in the most devastating moments, such as the Chilean coup of 1973 and its aftermath or the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, because such moments of horror allow the victims to learn, to connect, and to grow. Similarly, he feels compelled to be critical of the most seemingly innocuous popular culture, such as the cartoons of Donald Duck or the movie *ET*, revealing the dangers inherent in their embedded ideological assumptions. The common thread throughout all of these activities is that hope depends on a permanent state of reflection, critique, and engagement.

Dorfman's work has also been controversial, often sparking radically different responses from his audience. For instance, Maya Jaggi writes that Dorfman has been "dogged by the charge that he has profited from others' experiences from the safety of exile" (n.p.). But she further notes that "for the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who deemed *Death and the Maiden* Sophoclean in its power and simplicity, no other play in Latin America has achieved its universal resonance" (n.p.). Despite the fact that Dorfman engages in a variety of social issues, he is most often associated with human rights, and it is in this arena that his work has received the most contrasting responses.

Once in exile, Dorfman's ability to write in English and his visibility as a writer associated with Salvador Allende positioned him as a voice for Chile to the English-speaking world. Such a position is never easy, and any writer who occupies it is likely to attract intense scrutiny. As Dorfman's career as a writer became increasingly successful, it was inevitable that some would wonder whether that success meant that he had capitalized on the trauma of the

Augusto Pinochet years. Dorfman's tendency to address critical social issues with a combination of bald truth, relentless hope, literary imagination, and complex questioning has also frustrated and alienated some of his readers. In addition, his practice of alternating across many types of writing has often confused his readers, who return to his work expecting a particular Dorfman mode only to find a radically different sort of work. For instance, the baroque, picaresque, Don Juanesque, hybrid literary form of his novel *The Nanny and the Iceberg* (*La nana y el iceberg*) frustrated those readers who favored the passionate, poignant voice Dorfman often adopts when he speaks as a human rights defender. For instance, Shashi Tharoor laments in his review of the novel that it doesn't offer "any greater meaning" (n.p.). One of my central arguments in this book is that Dorfman's decision to constantly experiment with new forms and to challenge his readers has been a purposeful, albeit risky, aesthetic strategy.

Dorfman's multiple projects over a broad range of genres and discourses in addition to his complicated relationship with his reading public may explain why this is the first book on Dorfman's work to appear in English and why it is the first book in any language to treat the full spectrum of his creative and critical texts. To this end, this book has two interrelated goals: to provide readers with a broad overview of Dorfman's life and work and to offer a critical assessment of his writing. My analysis shows that despite Dorfman's vast and varied artistic forms and literary genres, he presents readers with a cohesive and organic aesthetic theory, what I have termed his *aesthetics of hope*. Rather than follow the model that applies theory to texts, this book turns such practice around and uses Dorfman's works as a basis for developing a theory about art and life.

The first chapter, "The Political is Personal," gives an overview of Dorfman's life in relation to historical developments, providing a brief introduction to the arc of his literary career. The chapter suggests that Dorfman's background and his literary works serve as an example of the complexity of a bilingual, cross-cultural, hybrid identity. His life and work also allow readers to understand the Americas hemispherically, where the north and the south engage in continuous cultural, political, and economic entanglements. Documenting how crucial historical moments—such as anti-Semitism in 1940s Argentina, the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, McCarthyism, Berkeley in 1968, and the Chilean coup of 1973—directly affected Dorfman's life, this chapter offers important insight into the ways that historical events have influenced Dorfman's writing.

The second chapter, "On Becoming a Storyteller," traces Dorfman's literary

and cultural influences, which range from William Shakespeare to Pablo Picasso to Harold Pinter to Julio Cortázar. Key to this chapter is the idea that the novelty of these influences lies not in their range but rather in the ways that Dorfman incorporates the voices of these texts into his own work. The chapter further suggests that Dorfman envisions the writer as a storyteller, someone who cultivates oral tales and performs a social role, rather than as an author, who writes alone and isolated from society. Dorfman's faith in storytelling reveals how he has been influenced by Jewish and Native American traditions that depend on the power of oral communication to maintain customs and preserve history. But Dorfman's view of the writer also includes incessant questioning of the problems of representational practices. Thus his view of the writer as a storyteller also takes into account postmodern ideas about the difficulties inherent in writing for social change.

The third chapter, "An Aesthetics of Hope," uses Dorfman's writing, both fictional and critical, as a starting point for elaborating an aesthetic theory based on his work. The chapter traces his influences from critical theorists, such as those associated with the Frankfurt School, and Latin American intellectuals in order to detail Dorfman's theory of the social role of art. Even though the chapter suggests that Dorfman's aesthetic theory has much in common with other Latin American writers from his generation, my analysis highlights specific features of Dorfman's writing that reveal how he links literary form to content. With analysis that ranges from sentence structure to textual structure to the use of language, I show that Dorfman's formal experimentation is a crucial part of his aesthetic strategy but that within that experimentation there are consistent textual practices that flow throughout his work. Synthesizing his critical writings with his literary practices, this chapter proposes that Dorfman's aesthetics of hope is dedicated to the conviction that art plays an essential role in how we remember the past and imagine the future. Art with an aesthetics of hope is provocative and disturbing, intimate and collective, historical and utopian. Such art also has high expectations for the reader—expectations that are not so easily fulfilled by a mass media society accustomed to easily digestible culture. These high expectations coupled with Dorfman's self-reflexive, experimental mode of writing, I argue, expose the serious challenges such an aesthetic strategy faces.

The next two chapters chronologically trace Dorfman's literary career. Chapter 4, "Anything Else Would Have Tasted Like Ashes," covers Dorfman's literary works during the years of Salvador Allende's presidency (1970–73) and the years of Dorfman's exile from Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–90).

The chapter analyzes his novels, poetry, and short stories from this period with emphasis on his investigation of the relationship between the artist and social struggle. Early in his writing career Dorfman wrestled with what he perceived to be a conflict between literature and politics. Even though he was convinced of the social role of literature, when he began to actively work in politics prior to and during Allende's presidency, he felt torn between the immediacy of political activism and the more ethereal nature of literary writing. Doubts about the political efficacy of art haunt him throughout his career, but they are of particular concern during these years. Picking up on how this theme runs throughout his literature during this period, this chapter analyzes how the early works correspond to personal and historical events in Dorfman's life.

The fifth chapter, "I Am a Liar Who Always Tells the Truth," covering the period 1990–2005, begins its analysis with the international hit play *La muerte y la doncella* (*Death and the Maiden*) and examines Dorfman's transition from exile to diaspora by focusing on his interest in the relationship between literary language and aesthetics. This chapter also explores the complex combination of local and global references in his writing. During this period there is an increasing global turn in Dorfman's work, in addition to an attunement to an audience that goes beyond the Latino/Latin American, a shift that may account for the increasing international success of Dorfman's literature. After the end of his official exile, Dorfman narrates transnational contexts in an effort to find a language that can communicate human interactions and issues of social justice to a cross-cultural audience. Simultaneously, though, he produces some of his most distinctly Chilean texts, including the novel *The Nanny and the Iceberg*; his travel memoir to the north of Chile, *Desert Memories*; and his account of the Pinochet case, *Exorcising Terror*. This chapter traces how the transition to diaspora pushes Dorfman's work in two different yet complementary directions—the global and the local. Both of these narrative trends converge, though, in a shared concern for the role that language plays in the construction of identity. Consequently, this chapter follows this theme as it runs through the works of the second part of Dorfman's career.

The sixth chapter, "Creative Criticism/Critical Creativity," centers on Dorfman's essays, journalism, and media projects, exposing the interconnectedness between his critical activities and creative work. The chapter outlines the main components of his major works in media theory. These critical works are also considered in light of Dorfman's own cultural products. Few media critics also produce media. In this sense Dorfman's work is unusual. He constantly balances his criticism with constructive practice. These dual intentions—to con-

sistently criticize the alienating effects of mass media and to create viable cultural alternatives—are at the core of his work. Yet most studies of Dorfman ignore or gloss over his essays and focus solely on his literature. I argue that his literary production must be understood as part of a larger project that includes a critique of the negative effects of media culture. Calling attention to the full range of Dorfman's creative activities, my analysis briefly examines the variety of other types of cultural production in which he has engaged, such as work with fine arts, film, photography, and music, in order to point out its discursive diversity and the relationship of these activities to his overall aesthetic project. The chapter then analyzes Dorfman's cultural journalism and proposes that he has developed a lyrical form of periodical writing.

Chapter 6 further suggests that what may be seen as a strength can also be considered a flaw: the variety of Dorfman's cultural practices can be read negatively as the result of an almost frenzied need to communicate, or they can be read positively as a multifaceted, concerted effort to create culture that can have a social impact. In fact, as the analysis of this book shows, Dorfman's writing combines unflagging faith in progressive culture with a penchant for creating dense, complex texts that runs similar risks of contrasting critical responses. As I argue, Dorfman is well aware of the dangers inherent in such a project, and they form a central part of his aesthetic theory. The question of whether or not such a project succeeds, though, is not at the center of this book. Rather, I hope to have shown that what may appear as disparate and disconnected practices actually coalesces around a coherent and innovative aesthetic project.

The concluding chapter returns to the thesis that Dorfman's cultural production reveals a combination of creative activism and aesthetic experimentation that collectively forms his aesthetics of hope. The chapter ends with a discussion of Dorfman's aesthetics of hope in comparative context. I suggest that Dorfman can be productively compared to other writers affected by diaspora and globalization who use formal experimentation to communicate political commitment and concern. Here I place Dorfman alongside other writers who engage in aesthetic innovation at the service of social commitment. The connections between these writers and Dorfman suggest that a number of writers working in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century have often turned away from literary realism and have considered complex aesthetics to be an essential literary tool for critiquing society. In this way the work of Dorfman is exemplary of a global countercultural trend.

The appendices provide two crucial tools for future research on Dorfman's work. The first is a chronology that documents important dates and events in

Dorfman's life. The second is a full bibliography of Dorfman's work, including his extensive periodical publications in both English and Spanish. Throughout the book I draw attention to the connections and distinctions between originals, translations, and later transformations of his texts. It is my hope that this book will serve as a springboard to more scholarship on Dorfman's work.





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In 2004 the University of St. Thomas's English department selected Dorfman's *Heading South, Looking North* as the common text for the entire freshman class, and I was privileged to give that year's Common Text Lecture. Thanks to Kanishka Chowdhury and Carmela Garritano and to the students of the University of St. Thomas for making that a wonderful and enriching experience.

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though, that it is just that type of passionate engagement with our objects of study that is lacking from so many other academic pursuits, and I am happy to have faced the challenge. I also believe that I learned much from Ariel about what it means to be an inspired, engaged, and committed intellectual. From the time I was his student to today he continues to teach me how to combine intellectual commitment with warmth, humanity, and compassion.

I could never have found the time or the mental clarity to write this book without knowing that my children were being well cared for. I have been extremely fortunate to have had a number of warm and wonderful women who have given Isabel and Sebastian love and care. Sofía Champac, Jazmín Villamil, Agustina Peralta, Amanda Pheeney, María Laura Sofo (and her daughters Agustina and Lucía), Agustina Roca, and Adriana Vázquez all made it possible for me to write. Their loving care helped curtail my feelings of guilt at precious moments lost, and I am sure that Isabel and Sebastian are better people for knowing them.

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## NOTE ON CITATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS.

At the first mention of each literary work in a chapter, I give the original title in italics, followed by the title in English when the original is in Spanish. When translations are available, I give their titles in italics. Subsequent references to the text use only the English title of the work when an English translation is available. Otherwise, subsequent references are to the original Spanish followed by translation into English in roman type within parentheses. For example:

1. Original in English: *Heading South, Looking North*
2. Original in Spanish, no translation published in English: *El absurdo entre cuatro paredes: El teatro de Harold Pinter* (The Absurd within Four Walls: The Theater of Harold Pinter)
3. Original in Spanish with a translation published in English: *Para leer al pato Donald: Comunicación de masas y colonialismo* (How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic).

Citations, except where otherwise noted, always include the original version. When that version is in Spanish, it is followed by a translation into English. Page references are given in the text for all citations. When a page number

follows the English translation, it refers to the published translation, which, accordingly, is set inside quotation marks. When the translation into English does not have a page reference, the translation is mine and is therefore not set inside quotation marks.

# 1. THE POLITICAL IS PERSONAL

Ariel Dorfman's personal biography is inseparable from inter-American history, and his life has been connected in uncanny repetition to many of the region's most significant historical events. Beyond being tangentially influenced by events taking place in his environs, however, Dorfman's life continually confronts and is confronted by history. His life is the story of multiple exiles, historical ruptures, and profound despair. It is equally the story of passionate social commitment and relentless hope. The story of Dorfman's life is remarkable not only for its profound connection with the hemispheric history of the Americas, but also because it is the story of a man who not only witnessed history but also felt compelled to write about it.

Vladimiro Ariel Dorfman was born on May 6, 1942, in Argentina. Throughout his life, the man known today as Ariel Dorfman has used three distinct first names: Vladimiro (Vlady), Edward (Eddie), and Ariel. Dorfman's name changes run (almost) parallel to the three nations (Argentina, the United States, and Chile) in which he lived as a young man, and they indicate some of the reasons why Dorfman's literature often deals with problems of identity. These name changes further evoke the linguistic shifts of his multiple exiles



and their cultural contexts. He moved from Spanish to English as a young boy exiled from Argentina to New York (1945–54), from English to Spanish when his family was expelled from the United States to Chile due to McCarthyism (1954–73), and then finally to bilingualism as an exile from Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973–90); a condition he only came to fully embrace after 1990, when Pinochet no longer ruled Chile. The name changes also reveal that Dorfman was extremely invested from a young age in his ability to shape identity through naming. Well before he had read theories about language and power and well before he became intellectually versed in the connections between naming and social control, Dorfman was acutely sensitive to the ways that names project meaning.

His initial, given name, Vladimiro, was assigned to him by his parents, who named him after Vladimir Lenin. This unwieldy name signals his parents’ commitment to politics and their close ties to Eastern Europe, especially to the Russian Revolution. (His father remained faithful to the Bolshevik Revolution after he left Russia in 1920.) Later, as we learn from Dorfman’s 1998 memoir, *Heading South, Looking North*, when the family lived in the United States, the “flaming moniker” Vladimiro became a tremendous liability (23). It was a name easily butchered during children’s renaming games, and Dorfman was verbally attacked with perversions of his name such as Bloody, Flatty, and even Laddie and Lady (79). Vladimiro was also a name that prevented his complete immersion into U.S. culture. So in 1951, while on a cruise to Europe at the age of nine, Dorfman launched a plan that he had been concocting for some time. He introduced himself to everyone he met as “Edward” or “Eddie,” and before his parents knew what was happening, Dorfman had been “baptized” with an Anglo name that eschewed his Jewish, Latino, and leftist heritage. “Edward” came to Dorfman by way of a comic book edition of Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper*, a fitting sign of his “conversion” to U.S. culture (79). The comic book may also have been Dorfman’s first introduction to the literary theme of the doppelganger, which would later influence much of his work (79). Remade as “Edward the Prince,” Dorfman announced to his startled parents that he “would not answer if called Vlady ever again” (80).

The eventful cruise in which “Vlady” was abandoned and “Eddie” emerged was a watershed moment in Dorfman’s quest for acceptance in U.S. culture. Prior to this trip Dorfman had grown up in a leftist household in Manhattan, where his father worked with the United Nations and the family had strong connections to many political activists and intellectuals who often visited the Dorfman home. In contrast to his parents’ world of foreign languages, young Vlady favored English and U.S. cultural assimilation, immersing himself in the

life of an *all-American* kid: “I wanted to melt and dissolve . . . into the gigantic melting pot of America” (*Heading*, 78). How did a nine-year-old Argentine boy come to desire such radical self-transformation?

Dorfman’s parents, Fanny Zelicovich Vaisman and Adolfo Dorfman, were both the children of Jewish émigrés who came to Argentina to avoid European anti-Semitism and to seek financial success. His mother’s grandfather was murdered in the pogrom of 1903 in Kishinev (now Moldavia). Subsequently her family decided to leave the country, choosing Argentina as a consequence of Baron Maurice de Hirsch’s Jewish Colonization Association, which helped many East European Jews emigrate to Argentina and Brazil. Dorfman’s maternal great-grandmother, Clara, and his great-aunt, who had stayed behind because the latter was sick with meningitis, were killed by the Nazis (*Heading*, 15). On his father’s side of the family, emigration was largely due to financial pressures. In 1914 Adolfo went back to Russia with his mother and witnessed the beginnings of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, returning to Argentina in 1920. In relation to Dorfman’s personal history it is crucial to understand that his parents’ families had endured massive dislocation as a consequence of historical conflicts. Dorfman was born into a legacy that was already deeply marked by exile, loss, and intolerance. His Jewish heritage, which is more cultural than spiritual, signals patterns and tropes that continue to influence his life: exile, wandering, loss, struggle, and the search for a community. Referring to his time in Chile, where he felt at home, he writes, “There is a place, one place, where you truly belong” (*Heading*, 275). Yet he also suggests that to “start anything worthwhile, one must leave the place of one’s birth” (276). Connecting his exile to the Jewish tradition, he writes that “salvation can only be attained by wandering” (276). These themes that link geography and identity, wandering and exile, struggle and joy, persecution and oral history, indicate the ways that his life and work highlight common Jewish motifs.

After a pro-Axis coup led to a change in government in Argentina in 1943 and stripped marxist Adolfo Dorfman of his position as a professor of industrial engineering at the Universidad de la Plata, Dorfman’s family moved to the United States, where his father was a Guggenheim fellow. The ironies of life were emphasized for the young Dorfman by the fact that the anti-imperialist Adolfo came to the United States, “the most powerful capitalist country in the world, protected by a foundation built with money that had come out of one of the world’s largest consortiums” (*Heading*, 24). When Fanny, Vlady, and his older sister, Eleonora, joined Adolfo over a year later, Adolfo was distant and preoccupied.<sup>1</sup> He had been called to military service and was expected to

report for duty four days after his family arrived in Manhattan. In a key example of the ways that historical events would shape their lives, Adolfo was reclassified because Nelson Rockefeller, founder of the State Department's Office of Inter-American Affairs, determined that Adolfo Dorfman's work for their office was "essential."<sup>2</sup> This reclassification gave the family a reprieve from another dislocation and separation.

Shortly after his family had moved into their first Manhattan apartment, Vlady Dorfman, then a young exile nearing three years of age, caught a terrible case of pneumonia and was hospitalized and quarantined. He was isolated from his family for three weeks, and when he returned home from the hospital, he spoke only English, refusing to communicate in Spanish altogether. Dorfman describes this complete immersion into English as a desire for coherence and unity, as part of a will to wholeness: "I instinctively chose to refuse the multiple, complex, in-between person I would someday become" (*Heading*, 42). In contrast to other immigrants and exiles who tend to live bilingually, young Vlady sought monolingualism as a way to exercise control over his identity. Or at least that is the way the adult Ariel describes his immersion into English, since much of our knowledge of his early life comes from the reconstitution of that experience in *Heading South, Looking North*.<sup>3</sup>

This event, the pneumonia and hospital quarantine that led to his adoption of English, becomes a defining moment in Dorfman's life. It not only signals a linguistic tension between Spanish and English, but also reveals another pressing tension that haunts his identity: that between understanding the self as a subject of free will or as a socially and historically determined entity. When one's life and the lives of one's family have been scattered by the winds of history and the upheavals of politics, it is tempting, if not necessary, to seek some measure of agency in understanding identity. While Dorfman describes his isolation in the hospital and its inevitable connection to English, he wavers between emphasizing his control—that is, the degree to which adopting English was his choice—and admitting his submission to external forces requiring, or at least encouraging, him to use that language only. This struggle to make sense of the forces that shape personal lives, to understand history as either malleable by the human will or beyond our control, persists throughout Dorfman's writing.

After Dorfman's initial isolation in the hospital, he was to endure another separation that caused him further anguish and confusion. Shortly after the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, Dorfman's mother, Fanny, suffered a bout of severe depression. The stresses of being separated from her exiled husband for over a year, of being thrust into the unwelcoming

environment of New York City, and of losing the one political figure who she felt could steer the world to a better place overwhelmed her, and she had a breakdown. Once again, the twists of history had intense consequences for Dorfman and his family: “My mother felt as if Roosevelt’s death were wresting a father from her, as if what was about to end was not the war but the world, as if nothing would ever be sane again. . . . She could not deal with what the orphaned world was sending her way” (*Heading*, 47). She was institutionalized, and Vlady and Eleonora spent six months in a foster home, where English was, again, essential for survival. By the time his parents came to pick him up on November 1, 1945, to move the family into a new apartment on Morningside Drive, they discovered that they had lost their son “to the charisma of America” (47).

In these early years of his life, Dorfman eagerly consumed U.S. media culture: “Listen to me in the car as we drive home . . . : I was coming around the mountain when she comes. . . . I was rowing the boat ashore, I was working on the railroad all the live long day, even if I sometimes felt like a motherless child, still, Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah I had the whole world in my hands . . . and it was marching on to the green grass of home. Home. That’s where I was, where I had chosen to be. . . . I was home, home on the range . . . this land was my land and it was made for you and me, but especially, I felt, it had been made for me” (*Heading*, 48).<sup>4</sup> It is no surprise that this young boy felt culturally lost, completely unmoored from any sense of a stable cultural background, and reluctant to use his parents as models for his own future identity. In addition to feeling abandoned by his father when Adolfo first was forced to flee Argentina, Dorfman also had to endure the trauma of being isolated in the hospital, only to quickly lose his mother to depression.

Exiled families often experience similar challenges, and the rate of divorce and separation among them is extremely high (see Grinberg and Grinberg). Added to the ordeal of exile, young Vlady became sick with an illness that made breathing difficult and painful, an event that gave him an extreme sense of his mortal vulnerability. As he desperately craved stability and security, he was separated from both his father and his mother and momentarily lost their support, comfort, and the cultural grounding of their language. In addition, Dorfman’s family was fractured at a moment in history when the United States had launched a massive global campaign for international prominence and had refashioned itself, after the Second World War, into a model society that contrasted starkly with the so-called evil of the Soviet bloc, an identity that would not only persist throughout the Cold War but would also spread with incredible speed and intensity during the 1940s and ’50s. “The United States

had turned me into one of its children by offering me comfort and safety and power during its most expansive and optimistic post-war phase” (*Heading*, 162). In this way, the cultural instability caused by Dorfman’s exile and illness was exacerbated by his personal, historical, and geographical context. The desire to belong to a community is a logical consequence to Dorfman’s early social dislocation and cultural loss. And even though the desire to belong to a community and to understand the self as whole and complete is a theme that runs throughout Dorfman’s work, the reality of his hybrid, cross-cultural life thwarted even his earliest plans to shape his destiny.

In 1949, two years before he executed his plan to change his name to Eddie and become an all-American kid, Dorfman began attending PS 117, a New York City public school located in Queens.<sup>5</sup> He was no longer sheltered in the multicultural world of the UN Children’s School, which he had attended after his father became deputy head with the Council for Economic Development at the newly formed United Nations in 1946. At the same time, the mass hysteria and fear of the Cold War was erupting in the “red scare.” Until then Dorfman had been able to lead a double life: at home, leftist activism and communist politics; away from home, capitalist consumption and U.S. nationalism. Attending public school during a period of extreme political paranoia caused him substantial distress because he was no longer able to keep these worlds apart. His teacher told his class about people who were a danger to the “American” way of life, people who were like “rotten apples” (*Heading*, 68). After a fight with his father, where he threatened to tell his teacher that his father was a communist, he finally realized the gravity of his dilemma. He could no longer love his father and his adopted country equally because with each passing day the United States was increasingly targeting men like Adolfo Dorfman as enemies of the state.

Returning to the importance of Dorfman’s cruise aboard the *De Grasse* where the author changed his name and sought a unity of self, if even for a brief moment, a third key element of his personal history and writing surfaces: the role of literature and language in shaping his identity and his relationship to the world. He tells his readers that on this trip “literature was revealed to me as the best way to surmount the question of how to hold on to the language that defined my identity if I did not inhabit that country where it was spoken” (*Heading*, 81). On the ship, Dorfman met Thomas Mann, and the meeting sparked Dorfman’s interest in the power of literature (“I wanted the power to reach all of humanity”), the role of language in literature (“In what language does he write?”), and the ways that exiles use literature to recreate their ties to their home (86). After embarking on the ship, his parents gave him a journal as

a gift. Writing in it was the first time that he recalls using words to freeze time. What would have been ephemeral now had permanence, and the notion that the written word has a way of recording time and of keeping our lives from melting into oblivion is a theme to which his work would turn with even more urgency after the death of Chilean president Salvador Allende.

The importance of writing in shaping identity cannot be overemphasized in Dorfman's work. After inaugurating his journal, he confesses, "I think I began, from that moment, to live in order to record life" (*Heading*, 84). For Dorfman, the links among naming, languages, history, cultural geography, and the self are articulated through writing. These connections, for instance, lead Dorfman to be particularly sensitive to the ways that colonial American texts attempted to forge the identity of the New World.<sup>6</sup> As though his own life were forcing him to see the New World through the eyes of an explorer, a conqueror as well as a colonial victim, Dorfman became acutely aware of the ways that writing alternately preserves memory and creates false memories, records and distorts history, registers protest and encourages blind obedience. Dorfman would later develop these theories in his essays and fiction.

Dorfman's decision to change his first name also reveals another motif that persists throughout his literature—the tension between a coherent, unified self at home in a community and a self that is hybrid, fragmented, and solitary. As Dorfman points out, it was fitting that his plan for self-transformation took place aboard a ship, "a site of exile where you can craft your identity any way you want, where you can con everybody into anything because there is no way of confirming or denying your past" (*Heading*, 81). But after the trip, back in Manhattan, Eddie's friends still called him Vlady, and it wasn't until he arrived in Chile in 1954, after his second exile, that he could fully institute his new persona. Dorfman's writing investigates how our own self-perceptions are often out of sync with our public selves, and in his own case this disconnect has taken place at the level of something as basic and as symbolic as his name: "Many of my friends from Chile still call me Ed or Eddie" (81).

After the cruise, Dorfman's efforts at cultural unification were further thwarted when the political tide of McCarthyism reached the Dorfman household and Adolfo Dorfman found himself the subject, again, of political persecution. Always politically active, Adolfo Dorfman refused to succumb to the tyranny of the "red scare." On June 19, 1953, the Dorfman family took part in a vigil outside of Sing Sing Prison the night that Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed. This event engendered fear in young Eddie Dorfman because he was forced to recognize the magnitude of U.S. power and the threat that it posed to people like his father. In late November of that same year, the Dorfman family

provided refuge to Maurice Halperin and his wife, Edith, who spent the night in the Dorfman's apartment as they fled from investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee on their way to Mexico. Shortly after this event, Adolfo Dorfman was forced to take a post with the United Nations in Chile, and the family established itself in Santiago in 1954.

Despite his later attacks on the hegemony of U.S. culture, Dorfman spent his first moments in Chile nostalgic for New York. He felt stripped of his cultural identity, uncomfortable in Spanish, and unwelcome in Chile, where enrolling in school proved to be extremely difficult (*Heading*, 101). To counteract these cultural pressures, he desperately tried to maintain his “gringo” self. First, he enrolled in The Grange, a British preparatory school that was exceptionally rigid but that allowed him to conduct most of his coursework in English. Then he clung to the quarterly package deliveries that his father received from the north. Because his father worked for the United Nations, he was able to order U.S. products from catalogs. These “care packages” of U.S. cultural commodities included candy bars, clothes, records, comic books—a veritable treasure trove of products that Dorfman devoured (117). He did everything possible to maintain his cultural ties to the United States, following his favorite sports teams and absorbing any U.S. culture available. He also made friends with other displaced children from the United States. Even after he first embraced Spanish in Chile, he lived a dual identity according to his two languages: “It was as if they inhabited two strictly different, segregated zones in my mind, or perhaps as if there were two Edwards, one for each language, each incommunicado like a split personality, each trying to ignore the other, afraid of contamination” (115).

During these early years in Chile Dorfman wasn't ready to see himself as bilingual; he wasn't ready to acknowledge his “journey towards duality” (*Heading*, 116). Even though he had been able to lead a schizophrenic life, his interaction with Bernie, a buddy whose father worked for a U.S. copper company, drove a palpable wedge between these two aspects of his conception of himself. One day while he was visiting Bernie, his friend showed him an enormous glass jar filled with Chilean pesos made from copper. When Dorfman couldn't guess why Bernie was hoarding the coins, his pal revealed that he planned to go back to the United States, melt them down, and sell them since the value of the metal exceeded their value as currency: “I'm going to get ten times the price. They're Indians, these guys, they like to get fucked” (121). It was in this moment that Dorfman realized that he was not on Bernie's side, that he felt more allegiance to Chile, the “country that, after all, had given [his] family refuge” (121). The conflict with Bernie signaled a transformation in Dorfman's awareness

of cultural allegiance that had already begun well before his friend's racism and imperialism disgusted him but which after this event became even more consciously manifest. From that point on, Dorfman recognized that he was undergoing yet another cultural shift that would eventually lead to another name change.

In his final years at The Grange, Dorfman became increasingly active politically. His parents, unrestrained by fears of McCarthy and his cronies, raised Dorfman in a vibrant atmosphere of leftist politics. They hosted dinners for numerous leftists, including current and future heads of state like Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz, Argentine president Arturo Frondizi, and Guyanese president Cheddi Jagan. Dorfman became increasingly fluent in his parents' politics, but he also continued to admire the United States and to consider himself an "American." His plan was to graduate from high school and to attend college in the United States: "I dreamed of returning to the Promised Land of New York" (*Heading*, 128). After hearing that he had been accepted with a scholarship to Columbia University, Dorfman excitedly began preparing to return "home." When his parents asked him to consider postponing the trip (he was after all only seventeen years old), Dorfman took a walk to mull it over: "And that is where and when I asked myself, under those mountains, if this country had not become, in some way I had not anticipated, my home. That is where I decided, far from New York and far from Buenos Aires, a different future for my life" (130). It is interesting to note, again, Dorfman's description of this moment in terms that emphasize his self-determination and his decision-making process. At the same time, though, he reveals that this twist of fate also came as a consequence of the way that Chile entered him, almost mystically, changing his destiny. He had become attached to Chile and could not so easily separate himself from its land and its people.

Dorfman's decision to stay in Chile in 1959 coincided with the eruption of revolutionary politics on the continent in the 1960s. He began his studies in 1960 in literature at the University of Chile, and his entrance into a community of young Chileans sparked yet another significant identity crisis for him. With the name "Edward," Dorfman was constantly forced to answer the question "Where are you from?" Up until the age of eighteen the answer had always been "America," and in those instances "America" did not resonate hemispherically but referred specifically to the United States, for it was not until much later that Dorfman would understand his identity as American in a broader sense (*Heading*, 152). During these early days at the university Dorfman had the sense of being an outsider, of straddling Chile and the United States. He continued to write literature in English in the evenings while spending the days discussing



politics in Spanish with his friends: “vocal as I might be in support of the Latin American resistance, I kept doggedly writing my most personal work in English” (158–59). A key turning point for him came after an earthquake rocked the south of Chile in June 1960 and Dorfman became actively involved in a relief effort. The experience gave him a profound and intimate connection with Chilean workers, who were hardest hit by the catastrophe.

Shortly thereafter Dorfman began to reframe his identity, and as he describes it, “the change in my name became . . . the first step, the easiest symbolic step” (*Heading*, 159). This time Dorfman did not fabricate a name; instead he recuperated his forgotten middle name, Ariel, which resonated for him on a number of levels and thereby facilitated his multifaceted identity. In Hebrew Ariel means “lion of God” and is used in the Old Testament to refer to the city of Jerusalem, but in Latin America in the 1960s the name more readily evoked Ariel from Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. More specifically it referred to José Enrique Rodó’s 1900 essay, entitled *Ariel*, which called for the youth of Latin America to use Shakespeare’s character as a role model because Ariel reflected the “spirit of air and goodness and magic” and provided an intellectual example for cultural autonomy (159).<sup>7</sup> Consequently in college Dorfman met a number of fellow students with the name Ariel. Their parents, Dorfman’s mother included, considered “Ariel” “a symbol of opposition to the United States” (160). For Dorfman, “Ariel” indicated his Jewish legacy, referred to a play by Shakespeare on colonization, and invoked the beauty and spirit of the America to the south. Ironically, in choosing a name that had deep meaning for him and his Chilean friends, Dorfman also chose a name that simultaneously registered close ties to English and to Shakespeare, a writer who has had a tremendous influence on Dorfman’s work. As Dorfman has interpreted the event, changing his name to Ariel allowed him to become “Caliban the savage, cannibalizing Ariel, the Hebrew Lion of God, for my own purposes” (160). By renaming himself Ariel, he attempted to merge his own identity with that of Latin America, and the act itself paralleled the rebellious, revolutionary spirit that was overtaking the region: “Latin America, contestatory, insurgent and rebellious, would appeal to an entirely different way of imagining myself, encouraging me to merge my personal crisis of identity with its parallel crisis, my own search with its search, my journey with its journey” (162). Consequently, just as Dorfman used “Eddie” to merge with the “American dream” as exemplified in Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper*, he later used “Ariel” to merge with the Latin American dream of Rodó’s *Ariel*. In each case, literary texts served as the basis for his identity; they gave his life structure and meaning, and they bound him, however tenuously, to a community.

Dorfman's resulting change into a rebellious, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist leftist Latin American would solidify, ironically, when Dorfman, his wife Angélica, and their newborn son Rodrigo spent a year in the United States at Berkeley in 1968 while Dorfman was on a fellowship to write a book on Latin American literature. At this point in his career Dorfman had already cultivated a broad scholarly interest in literature. He had graduated from the University of Chile in 1965 with a *licenciado* (roughly the equivalent of a master's degree) in literature and was an assistant professor of Spanish literature and journalism at the same institution. He wrote his thesis on the pastoral plays of Shakespeare, had published his first book on the theater of Harold Pinter, and was working on a book on the contemporary Latin American novel. While in Berkeley, twists of fate, once again, placed Dorfman in precisely the time and place where history was being made. One of Dorfman's important lessons while at Berkeley concerned the nature of revolutionary struggle. He became acutely aware of the separation between the pleasure-loving hippies and the militant anti-war protesters, and he concluded that it was absolutely essential to bring these two strands of rebellion together. The unabashed quest for pleasure and sexual freedom was something Dorfman had not experienced in the relatively conservative youth culture of Chile: "I was to be permanently affected by those libertarian and anti-authoritarian and hedonistic urges, by the need to see the revolution as a territory of freedom that could not be forever put off" (*Heading*, 227). These concerns prepared him intellectually for postmodern struggles that included feminism, ecology, aboriginal rights, sexuality, and artistic experimentation. The question of how to link the personal with the political, of how to unite various political constituencies while respecting difference, traveled back with him to Chile and became a part of his contribution to debates over the agenda for Allende's party, the Unidad Popular (227–28).

Dorfman's return to the United States in 1968 placed many of his thoughts about inter-American art and politics into relief. On the one hand, both the United States and Latin America were experiencing a heightened explosion of political and revolutionary art and activism. In the United States Dorfman became familiar with the work of Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, the Beats, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, the Grateful Dead, and Herbert Marcuse (*Heading*, 198, 217). He was able to see firsthand the influence of Bob Dylan on the hippies (209). He could then experience these cultural icons alongside the writers of the Latin American literary boom, the poetry of Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo, the political writings of José Carlos Mariátegui and Che Guevara, and the music of Victor Jara and Violeta Parra. This comparative inter-American perspective on

the region's revolutionary culture further developed his sense of the intersections between culture and social change. Alternatively, Dorfman was reminded of the cultural legacy that had led those in the United States to favor a cult of the hero and that had fostered an individualism contrastive to the collective subjectivity of Latin American political movements. In addition, Dorfman confronted the ways that this individualistic U.S. cultural legacy was also his own; it was what continued to isolate him at a profound level from his Latin American *compañeros*. Dorfman and the Berkeley youth culture shared the same cultural baggage, which included Amos 'n Andy, Esther Williams, Marlon Brando, and James Dean: "[The Berkeley youth] had adored optimistic heroes who always saved the day in the same way and believed in know-how that could solve any dilemma, they had bought into the American dream as kids, just as I had" (212). Even though the youth movements were critical of this ideology, they were often unable to escape it and could not avoid replicating it in their own political practice. With the privileged perspective of an outsider who is also an insider, Dorfman saw these flaws and vowed to try to eradicate them from his own identity, an irony, due to his insistence on an individual act of will, which he recognized but nevertheless could not avoid.

While in the United States, Dorfman lurked; he observed and witnessed the increased politicization of students on campus, but in keeping with his history of being an outsider, he did not become too involved because he was concerned about deportation. At the same time that the rebelliousness of Berkeley youth culture inspired him, it also bothered him in its distance from the immediate working-class struggles that formed the heart of Latin American revolutionary practice (*Heading*, 225). Sitting at a desk in Berkeley, Dorfman made the ultimate move to unite himself with Latin America: he stopped writing in English. In order to be close to Chile he realized that he had to lose the English language and end the game of dividing himself between politics in Spanish and personal writing in English (210). The cyclical nature of this act does not go unnoticed by Dorfman: "Repeating more than twenty years later my childhood gesture in that hospital, reacting in Berkeley just as I had back in New York, I drastically broke off relations with the language in which I had sought refuge from solitude my whole life, I embraced a tongue that would link me to a community that was imagining a different history for itself and for me, and I chose to become a contiguous human being" (220). In phrasing that echoes his recollection of his willful embrace of English as a two-and-a-half year-old boy quarantined in a New York hospital, Dorfman reflects on this moment as an act of agency: he broke off relations; he embraced; he chose. Yet again, coupled with this characterization of subjectivity as an act of free will, he

exposes this description as idealistic fantasy and underscores the way that his identity was determined by history. In fact, he indicates that his “decision” was driven by historical circumstance, by the pressures of the moment that called for his identity to be “intact, seamless” rather than “hybrid” (221, 220).

While the reader may be persuaded to believe that a twenty-six-year-old is more capable of enacting a reversal of language and creating his own identity than a two-and-a-half-year-old, Dorfman’s description of his transformation while at Berkeley requires skepticism. Both tales of linguistic “control,” despite the vast difference in Dorfman’s age, read as highly analogous. In each case, Dorfman’s will to wholeness mirrored a historical moment that demanded allegiance to a unified, coherent, stable identity. Just as he explains that his immersion into English accompanied the heightened U.S. nationalism of the postwar era, Dorfman explains his quest for unity with Spanish and Latin America as a result of the political climate of the 1960s: “This was the sixties of extreme nationalism, the all-or-nothing, the either-or sixties. It was not a time for shades of difference, for complexity, for soul-searching about the enigma of heterogeneous identity” (*Heading*, 220). Not only does Dorfman depict this “personal” moment as one guided by “public” events, but he also suggests that his current self-presentation as hybrid is indebted to a certain extent to post-modern sensibilities. These descriptions call into question the degree to which critical tides shape our own “self”-understanding.

Upon his return to Chile in 1969, Dorfman (who had previously obtained Chilean citizenship in 1967) became even more actively involved in national politics, and he and his friends began work on Salvador Allende’s campaign. Dorfman’s experience as the child of leftists, his exposure to radical politics in Chile and Berkeley, and his early life experience of exile and dislocation combined to form the foundation of his dedication to Allendista politics. As an activist, Dorfman recognized early on that his militancy was best served by drawing on his skills as a writer and culture worker. The Allende campaign allowed him to join a community and to struggle in solidarity in a way that he had never experienced. It also allowed him to become a part of one of the few successful socialist revolutions that peacefully came to power. The belief that revolutions can take place through democracy has had a major impact on Dorfman’s pacifism and his faith in the transformative experience of gentle solidarity.

The successful election of Salvador Allende on September 4, 1970, had a profound effect on Dorfman’s life as well as his writing. He remembers the night of September 4 as utopian, and he describes it in both his memoir and his fiction. In the memoir he writes of that night being “as near to a religious

epiphany as I have had in my life” (*Heading*, 243). In his second novel, *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* (1982; *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero*), written in exile, Dorfman narrates the night of September 4 as a singular moment of community: “Estaba por fin en mi propio hogar. . . . La ciudad también estaba satisfecha de que por fin hubiéramos llegado. Después de tantos siglos, que al fin y al cabo sus hijos preferidos, sus reales habitantes nuevos, sus herederos entre los que yo me incluía, que todos ellos hubieran arribado . . . a sus fronteras” (120–21) (“At last I was in my own home. . . . The city was also pleased we had finally come. After so many centuries, at last her favorite children, her true native sons, her heirs, among whom I included myself, had reached her borders”; 148–150). As soon as the experience is over, Dorfman’s first inclination is to narrate it, to record it through literature: “I wanted to put every last word of it down on paper” (*Heading*, 45).

Toward the end of the Allende government, Dorfman accepted a position as the administration’s communications and media adviser, and he quickly became engaged in advertising campaigns intent on disseminating Allende’s message to the people. Throughout the Allende years, he was also involved with publishing, working for the state publishing house, Quimantú, a word that means “sunshine of knowledge” in the native language of the Chilean Mapuche Indians. Dorfman’s work with Quimantú included releasing international classics in Spanish in affordable editions. Quimantú released over 5 million books in two and a half years. It also transformed the content of some of the magazines it inherited from before the Allende government and created new ones. In this context of excitement and cultural revolution, Dorfman began work on one of his most internationally read pieces of writing—the critique of North American cultural imperialism *Para leer al pato Donald* (1971; *How to Read Donald Duck*), co-authored with Armand Mattelart. The authors explain in a preface to the English translation that they wrote the book accompanied by “a people on the march to cultural liberation—a process which also meant criticizing the ‘mass’ cultural merchandise exported so profitably by the U.S. to the Third World” (*Donald Duck*, 10). Dorfman’s early affiliation as a young boy with what he termed the ideology of Donald Duck uniquely situated him as a critic of its seductive powers. His attack on Disney bore the weight of his anger over the way that U.S. pop culture had co-opted his identity as a young man (*Heading*, 251). Ironically, it is precisely this U.S.-insider vantage point that sharpened his analysis and facilitated his acceptance into the Chilean intellectual community: “It is paradoxical that it should have been my penetrating and intimate knowledge of the United States that would finally

allow most of my compatriots and many other people around the world to identify me as a Chilean writer” (*Heading*, 253).

Prior to publishing this sociological critique of media culture, Dorfman had published two books of literary criticism. His first book, released in 1968 (the year he traveled to Berkeley), was *El absurdo entre cuatro paredes: El teatro de Harold Pinter* (The Absurd within Four Walls: The Theater of Harold Pinter), a close reading of Pinter’s work. Dorfman’s analysis focused on the violence, conflicts, and lack of communication that run throughout Pinter’s theater. The book also investigated the ties between culture and social criticism, especially interrogating the political possibility of the theater of the absurd and Pinter’s distinct role in that project. In 1970 he published *Imaginación y violencia en América* (Imagination and Violence in America), the work he developed while at Berkeley. The book has essays on Jorge Luis Borges and a number of boom writers. Each essay bears the historical context of its writing and reveals Dorfman’s interest in linking literature with the social conflicts of Latin America. He asks how literature works to promote a fatalistic mentality, how it provides hope, how it assumes violence, and how it fosters rebellion. At the same time, Dorfman completed his first novel, *Moros en la costa* (1973; translated and reedited as *Hard Rain* in 1990), a highly complex meditation on the relationship between art and politics and on the potential disconnect between intellectuals and social struggle. These four books taken together provide the foundation for much of Dorfman’s future work, and they underscore the multiple, yet complementary, directions that his writing would later take. The synchronicity of these books reveals much about Dorfman’s creative project, which has always been formally diverse in its approach to the underlying issues and themes that nevertheless span his oeuvre. When we read these books in conjunction with Dorfman’s university teaching as a professor of literature and journalism, his work for Quimantú, and his other cultural projects in support of Allende’s presidency, we see the full range of activities that he has maintained throughout his life. These multiple activities—from writing highly experimental fiction to literary criticism to cultural criticism to political slogans; from teaching to working in the publishing industry to working on ad campaigns and television programs to activism and marches and speeches—reveal the dizzying array of registers within which he operated and continues to operate.

After struggling with exile and displacement early in life, Dorfman felt that he had truly found his home in Chile and the Unidad Popular. Soon, though, Dorfman’s personal history of exile repeated itself when Allende was over-

thrown on September 11, 1973, by Augusto Pinochet's military coup, which sent Dorfman into exile once again. As he recounts in *Heading South, Looking North*, it is because he felt he belonged to the Unidad Popular that the decision to go into exile was especially painful. He could not help but imagine that he should have died with his comrades in Chile. At the beginning of his memoir he refers to September 11, 1973, as the day "when I should have died and did not" (*Heading*, 3). In their study of exile and migration, Leon and Rebeca Grinberg explain that exiles often suffer intense feelings of guilt and anxiety; this was especially true for Dorfman since he was supposed to be at La Moneda, the Chilean presidential palace, the morning that the military invaded. Dorfman spends considerable time in his memoir debating whether he was spared death due to pure chance or for some higher reason. The fact that Claudio Gimeno—the man who replaced him on his shift—died haunts Dorfman and suggests to him the arbitrary unpredictability of life.

Dorfman's survival seems to hinge, in part, on his role as a creative member of Allende's government. He had switched shifts with Gimeno so that he could pitch an idea for a political commercial. Susana la Semilla (Susan the Seed), the lover of Federico el Fertilizante (Fred the Fertilizer), was part of an ad campaign Dorfman concocted to raise public awareness of the politics behind the transportation strike that took place in 1973 and threatened public support for Allende. In order to present his project to Augusto Olivares, the director of national television, he could not be at La Moneda on the morning of the coup. Was this sequence of events an accident, or could Dorfman imagine that his cartoon character had worked to save his life? For many years he would explain his survival as a consequence of Susana—that is, as a consequence of his creativity, because such an explanation "gives me the illusion that somehow I created the conditions whereby I thwarted death" (*Heading*, 30). Yet he also recognizes that it is quite likely that a "series of arbitrary intercessions spared me" (37). The second key intercession came from Fernando Flores, who was responsible for calling Allende supporters to La Moneda the night before the coup and who had purposefully crossed Dorfman's name off the list. Years later, Dorfman confronted Flores and asked him why he hadn't been called. Flores responded: "Well, somebody had to live to tell the story" (39). Dorfman admits that such an explanation is comforting but that to believe it would be to discount all of the other "fortuitous coincidences" that had kept him alive and had buried other young Chilean writers as talented and "as much in love with life" as he was (39). Unsure of whether his survival is logical or a twist of fate, Dorfman hopes that his life, surrounded as it has been by so much death, has grown to have meaning through his work as a writer.

A series of events after the coup led Dorfman to formally seek asylum at the Argentine Embassy. First, he witnessed the burning of his book *How to Read Donald Duck* on television. He imagined that he was “the first author in history to have watched his own work burnt live on TV” (*Heading*, 139). Next, when Dorfman tried to visit a friend to seek his advice, he found that his friend had been abducted by the police. Dorfman was stubborn and procrastinated, hiding out within an underground network until a leader of the underground explicitly told him that as a writer, he was worth more to the party abroad than in Chile (139–49). As he waited to gain entrance to the Argentine Embassy, hiding out in the home of the Israeli ambassador, he watched through a window as his wife was picked up, questioned, and then released by two secret police. It was the experience of seeing Angélica in such a perilous situation that caused Dorfman to realize that he had to get his family out of Chile. That day he reluctantly became reconciled to exile (175–77).

Dorfman would never be reconciled to the fact that Pinochet had tried to rob Allende’s supporters of their hopes and dreams, however. He spoke to a fellow passenger in a van shuttling them from the Argentine Embassy to the airport, a worker named Juan who also had sought refuge at the Argentine Embassy; he told Dorfman that he believed the coup had happened because Pinochet wanted to punish the workers for believing in social change, for daring to feel joy. Dorfman realized in that moment that they were “being disciplined for an act of imagination. Pinochet was trying to make [Juan] and millions like him admit that they had been mistaken—not so much in tactics as in their human strategy, the very rebellion itself, the fact that they had dared to dream of an alternative to the life charted out for them since before their birth” (*Heading*, 261). Dorfman now recognized the extent to which Pinochet and his supporters were preparing the world for the mind-numbing consumption of advanced capitalism and neoliberalism (261–62). Everyone close to Dorfman at the time of the coup was either disappeared, tortured, or exiled. Every single friend suffered. It is difficult to convey the extent of Dorfman’s loss, especially because his writing, while trying to keep the memory of those who suffered alive, refuses to wallow in the devastations of the coup. Despite living such an extraordinary nightmare, he still maintains hope: “I was not willing then, in the van, and I am not willing now, so many years later, to tell Juan that his joy was unreal” (262).

When he left the Argentine Embassy in Chile, Dorfman fled first to the country of his birth, Argentina, where his recently awarded novel, *Hard Rain*, helped to get him an Argentine passport with which he was able to travel to France. Dorfman’s early years in exile were difficult. He was depressed and



unable to write fiction for years. “My suffering had been remote before,” he says, “but friends were being killed, and we were on the verge of hunger; I was turned into a beggar” (cited in Jaggi, n.p.). He lacked work for a couple of years but eventually found a position teaching at the Sorbonne in 1975. (Dorfman is fluent in French as well as English and Spanish.) Friends credit his wife with helping him to sort through the losses resulting from the coup. Slowly Dorfman was able to turn his pain into language, his sadness into poetry; his first creative writing was a series of poems that were later translated into English and published as *Missing* by Amnesty International in 1982. During this period Dorfman spent considerable time aiding the Chilean resistance to Pinochet, using his bilingual language skills to write letters and petitions. After a few years in Paris the Dorfman family moved to Amsterdam in 1976, where their second son, Joaquín, was born. They then moved to the United States in 1980, when Dorfman was awarded a fellowship at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., a move that paralleled his father’s refuge in the United States on a Guggenheim fellowship in 1945. Dorfman attempted to gain a visa for Mexico in order to relocate his family there, but when that request was denied and when teaching opportunities became available at Duke University in 1984, he resigned himself to living in the country responsible for Pinochet’s dictatorship: “I felt the paradox in Washington; I’m here because this was where Nixon and Kissinger conspired to get rid of my government. . . . But it was also a place where I could make a living” (cited in Jaggi, n.p.). Dorfman used his proximity to U.S. lawmaking to raise awareness of the atrocities of the Pinochet dictatorship. For instance, he delivered copies of *Viudas* (1981; *Widows*) to the entire U.S. Congress, a move that led North Carolina’s Republican senator, Jesse Helms, to denounce Dorfman as “one of the prime disinformation agents of the radical Chilean left” (cited in Jaggi, n.p.).

To read Dorfman’s work chronologically is to have the uncanny experience of seeing history revealed in fiction before it was enacted in life. Sadly, many of Dorfman’s pessimistic literary works have prefigured Latin American history. For example, *Hard Rain* was released at the same time that the warning signs of an impending coup were raining down upon the Chilean people. Dorfman writes in a preface to the 1990 translation that “violence, like a hidden wind, blows through the narrative voices. It would eventually come to the surface in the hard reality of historical Chile. Less than ten months after I completed the text, a military coup brutally ended our experiment” (vi–vii).

Dorfman wrote his next three novels in exile, and each novel progressively reflects his sense of political disempowerment. After experiencing historical agency and political success with the Unidad Popular, the suffering of exile for