

Faculty Research Grant Proposal
2002-2003 Academic Year
Christopher M. Travis, Ph.D.
Foreign Languages and Literatures
Elmhurst College

Resisting Alienation: The Literary Work of Enrique Lihn (Book)

and

*Alienating and Dealienating the Familiar:
The Extraliterary Work of Enrique Lihn*
(Panel Presentation at National Modern Language Association
Conference, San Diego, December 2003)

I. Project Summary

I continue my work on Chilean poet, artist, playwright, actor, and novelist Enrique Lihn (1929-1988). As is evident, the project includes two major complementary components, which will be shown to both be natural products of the proposed research. First, there is the book. I have already submitted a proposal, including two sample chapters of this book, to two interested University Presses. Richard Morrison, of the U of Minnesota P, and Theresa May, of the U of Texas P, both expressed interest in the project and I await their response to the proposal some time in the next few months. Before I can complete the final chapters I will need to travel back to Santiago de Chile, and the Rare Books Collection at the Benson Library (University of Texas) for reasons that will be outlined below. The second component of the project is the conference talk. This requires more work. I must track down rare video footage of Lihn's non-literary work in film and theater. I have established contacts with Andrea Lihn, his daughter, and she has encouraged me to realize a series of interviews in Santiago this summer on the topic and attend productions of Lihn's plays.

a. The Book (Abstract and description)

Enrique Lihn (1929-1988), winner of the Premio Casa de las Américas (*Poesía de paso*, 1966), was one of Chile's most significant creative minds of the twentieth century. Surprising his mentors, inspiring his contemporaries and always venerated by younger inheritors of his legacy, he is as important to the Latin American literary community as are Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda or Nicanor Parra. Nevertheless, perhaps because of the sheer variety of his work, the complexity of what I classify as a "negative dialectics" in his poetry and prose, or the daunting task which faces all Chilean writers of emerging from the shadow of their Nobel-Prize-winning predecessors, Lihn has only recently been received internationally for the profound and unique poet that he was, now beginning to appear on departmental reading lists and in bilingual anthologies. In short, the contributions of this book are long overdue. The study represents an extensive reworking of my doctoral dissertation. As is to be expected, the original version is rich in literary theory, comparative analysis and interpretation of Lihn's work, including an entire first

chapter that outlines the various critical approaches used in subsequent chapters. The principal focus of this manuscript, on the contrary, is to introduce Lihn to international readers, discussing each of his works chronologically with extensive notes regarding critical approaches and relevant theoretical interpretations.

I have not sacrificed, however, the critical rigor of the project. A general audience interested in World Literature will find an organized and accessible introduction to Lihn's work. Latin Americanists will find a substantive contribution to recent critical studies which look to interpret poetry within the social and historical circumstances of late-capitalism, revisiting the debate on the legitimacy of postmodern theory in Latin American literature and the compatibility of postmodern and Western Marxist theory. Finally, Lihnean scholars will find this book respectful of their valuable contributions, while offering a distinctly new approach to the field.

Lihn was as prolific in his critical writing as he was as a poet and novelist, and we are fortunate as scholars to have access to his insightful theories on literature, revealing an understanding of negative dialectics and the theories of Western Marxism. As elaborated by fundamental theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Bertolt Brecht and Mikhail Bakhtin, and applied more recently to the case of Latin America in their interpretation of Latin American postmodernism by Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson, Marxist literary theory has proven to be effective and appropriate in the study of Lihn's work. Adorno's seminal work *Negative Dialectics*, in fact, provides the necessary tools for characterizing and understanding Lihn's search for dealienated poetic expression through the active and conscious recognition of alienation. This paradox is the essence of Lihn's *poesía situada*, a poetry which proved courageous in the face of death and innovative in the face of oppressive hegemonic ideologies.

The rhetoric of literary theory is meaningless, however, without a clear study of those *ideologies*. Lihn was a skilled craftsman, and I will discuss the detail of his talent. But I am also concerned with his social consciousness, and the degree to which his poetry reflects his position within a larger social and historical context. To that end, I present careful biographical research and historical perspective on the direct effects of the Pinochet Dictatorship and other significant social and political events on Lihn's work. Avoiding gratuitous anecdote, I support my claims with interviews with Lihn's daughter Andrea and peers such as Nicanor Parra, as well as hundreds of articles exhumed from the archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

Currently, as mentioned, there are no monographic studies of Lihn's work in English. However, given the three works in Spanish (whose strengths and pronounced oversights we might discuss later) and a slew of recent articles, there is little doubt that *someone* will publish a thorough chronological critical introduction to his work in English within the next few years. I believe this study to be comparable to the first seminal studies of Neruda, Borges, and Octavio Paz that appeared just a few decades ago.

In fact, I have been in close contact with René de Costa, the first to publish a similar study of Neruda (*The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*), and he has expressed his unwavering support for this project. First published in 1971 by Harvard UP, his book has served as a general critical introduction to Neruda's work. Thousands of copies later, de Costa still receives reviews, inquiries and feedback from interested English speaking scholars worldwide. Equally supportive of the project are the members of my dissertation committee, Naomi Lindstrom, José Cerna-Bazán, Richard Flores, Enrique Fierro

(Uruguayan National Poet, 1999) and Vance Holloway, as well as my friend and translator of Lihn, David Oliphant, Nicanor Parra, and many Chilean writers active in the Santiago community. Many of the above-mentioned have expressed a willingness to assist with book reviews, words of support and even promotion in Chile. Since finishing at UT, I have published two articles on Lihn, two more on other Chilean writers, and reviews of related projects.

b. The Conference Talk

Having published over 20 books of poetry, two collections of short stories, and three novels/antinovels, Enrique Lihn is best known for his literary work. However, in critical articles reflecting his profound interest in the work of Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, among other members of the Frankfurt School, Lihn clearly outlines the revolutionary potential of multigeneric works, experimental films, theatrical productions and spectacles of public art. Lihn cannot be referred to tritely as a “Renaissance man” because of his constant desire to decenter the subject and avoid what René Girard deems the “elevation of the self to universal dimension.” However, Lihn, originally trained as a painter and sent to Europe by UNESCO to become a museum curator, does seem to have dabbled in almost every art form.

His poetry is distinctly musical, visual, and aural without being falsely harmonious. His comic drawing and caricatures, such as the illustrations for a special edition of Nicanor Parra’s *Poemas y Antipoemas*, reveal a literary sensitivity. His short satirical films parody the social and historical circumstances of the Chilean dictatorship and its alienating influence on the discourse of all forms of artistic expression. Finally, his own tempestuous public personality and the invention of his alter ego Gerardo de Pompier (Lihn, disguised as a pompous pontificator and farcical literary commentator) led to a period of theatrical interest that combined various media.

My proposal for the MLA panel is to briefly document Lihn’s eclectic interests, beginning with articles and interviews (my own and those of others). I would then show rare footage of his films, posthumous productions of his plays, artwork, politically satirical collages (The *Quebrantahuesos* project, realized with Jorge Berti, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Nicanor Parra in 1952) and comic books. My thesis will be that in all of Lihn’s fascinating experiments one finds a core connection to his critical appreciation of the ideas of the Frankfurt School, and the “negative dialectics” of art that acknowledges the alienated nature of its own expression. Decentering the subject and topicalizing the separation of subject and object, Lihn’s art, in any form, poeticizes the struggle of the artist to transcend the alienation caused by dominant ideologies.

Brecht and Benjamin, in praising the revolutionary potential of theater (Brecht’s *Lehrstucke*) and film, believed that it could shock the viewer into unfamiliarity, and therefore consciousness of his or her historical reality. By effecting alienating circumstances for the reader or viewer -alienating the familiar, that is- art could counteract (in a very distinct use of the term) *ideological* alienation. This is evident in Lihn’s extraliterary work, and as such, supports continued investigations of his poetry and prose through negative dialectics.

II. Narrative

a. Current Situation

As explained in the abstracts and descriptions above, Lihn is venerated my Latin American writers, and each day more widely studied internationally, yet no single monographic critical introduction to his works currently exists in English. My book and continued work to promote critical interest in his work here in the United States have already been welcomed by members of the field as new, significant, and long overdue contributions. In a greater context, my own scholarly progress will be aided by continued involvement in Latin American literary circles. When I last traveled to Chile to research Lihn I ended publishing an article on the side on a completely separate writer, Raúl Zurita, as well.

b. The Project Plan

This project relates directly to the mission of Elmhurst College in a number of ways, especially regarding its dedication to “critical and creative inquiry” and the “understanding of global interdependence.” It is “student centered” in two ways. First, because I will be sharing my research and progress directly with students at each stage of the project, and second, because the book itself is directed towards a wide, English-speaking audience and is meant to be accessible to general readers as well as specialists in the field.

I will travel to Austin, Texas in early June to study some rare books and recordings in the Benson Latin American Collection. I have received permission to make copies of some of the recordings, and will take notes on and digital photographs of a rare copy of Lihn’s comic illustrations. While there I will also meet with Theresa May, the acquisitions editor for UT Press, who has expressed sincere interest in my book. If necessary, I will discuss other technical issues with her staff. I will also consult with Naomi Lindstrom, my dissertation adviser, about the conference presentation.

I will then travel to Santiago, Chile during the second half of June, to a) conduct research at the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, b)conduct interviews with Andrea Lihn, the artist’s daughter, and Lihn’s colleagues, c) present my work informally at the SECH (Sociedad de Escritores de Chile [Santiago Writer’s Guild]), d)attend poetry readings at the SECH, e)attend productions of Lihn’s plays, and f)meet with leading critics of Lihn’s work.

I will have the opportunity to share my plans with students and faculty on campus before I leave, and the results of my work upon return. I believe that the cohort of Spanish majors with whom I have worked would be interested to participate in the planning of my trip, and some of the preliminary investigative research. I also can offer to make photocopies for students of articles from the Benson Library’s collection, and videotape poetry readings in Santiago and interviews with Chilean writers. On the whole, I will harvest a tremendous amount of genuine material that can be shared with students and colleagues.

It’s worth mentioning that as a poet, I am always reinvigorated by a trip to South America. I feel welcome and among friends at the SECH, usually attend their workshops, and always come back with a couple of poems of my own and others to publish in the United States and share with my students.

c. Faculty Expertise.

Please see attached CV and list of publications. In the past year I have published two articles on Chilean poetry, written three book reviews on Latin American literary topics, and submitted two more articles to respected journals. I speak Spanish with near-native fluency, and have established many contacts in both Austin and Santiago.

d. Plans for evaluation and dissemination.

I have already discussed the plans for a book, and presentation at the MLA conference. I may also have taped interviews to publish in a scholarly journal and share with Elmhurst College students and faculty.

I want to be clear, that the market for books on Latin American Literary Criticism is extremely competitive, and I will not judge the success of the trip and research by the time it takes to see my work at Barnes and Noble. If the book is rejected, even after the many positive reactions I have already had, I will certainly produce at least another article from the material. Also, as a young scholar I have noticed something for the first time. It is difficult to make the leap to the next topic after the dissertation. I cannot write on Lihn forever, and staying active in the Latin American literary community, I expect to be inspired to consider new topics as well. Two potential publications that could involve Elmhurst College students in the future might be translations of Lihn's short stories, or an anthology of young Chilean writers.

III. Time line:

This would all take place in the Summer of 2003. I will travel in June and the first part of July, returning to Elmhurst to finish writing and contact publishers during the month of August. I can present results the EC community in the Fall of 2003.

I am scheduled to teach on online class this summer, FL 209 World Literature. However, after careful consultation with Earl Thompson, Pat Lynott and Marie Baehr, it has been concluded that the course will be offered in the second session. I will be on campus if anything should come up that needs my personal attention, but most of the administration of the class will be done from home. It is a new and exciting pilot course, and I will continue to work to make it as successful as possible, but I believe the flexibility of the class will keep it from interrupting the plans I have laid out in this proposal.

IV Estimated Budget:

Air Travel to Austin, TX	\$250
Air Travel to Santiago, Chile	\$700
Room and Board in Austin	\$380
Room and Board in Santiago (stay in hostel)	\$680
Travel within Chile	\$180
Books and Supplies	\$150
Photocopying	\$70
Salary during preparation of publications	<u>\$1000</u>
TOTAL:	\$3410

V. Current and Previous Grants:

2001-2002, Faculty Research "Start-up" Grant Through Dean's Office:	\$2000
2002-2003 Faculty Development Travel Grant:	\$300

VI.

Publications

- "Beyond the *Vanguardia*: The Dialectical Voice of Enrique Lihn."
Romance Quarterly. 49:1 (Winter 2002).
- "Pablo Neruda's Public Intellectualism: The Mexico Years (1940-1943)."
Revista Hispánica Moderna. 55:2 (2002).
- "The Chilean *Quebrantahuesos* Project and the Influence of Nicanor Parra on the Early Writings of Enrique Lihn" *Latin American Literary Review* (under consideration).
- "Post-Identity in Chilean Poetics: Persistence of the Palimpsest in Raul Zurita's Search for *La Vida Nueva*." *Hispanic Review* (under consideration)
- Revista de: Juan Medrano-Pizarro y Karin Waisman, *(Des)encuentros: La mirada poética de Enrique Lihn*. *Crítica Hispánica* 25 (2003).
- Review of: *Selected Prose and Prose Poems. Gabriela Mistral*. Ed. Stephen J. Tapscott.
Crítica Hispánica (forthcoming).
- Review of: *¡Agítese bien! A New Look at the Hispanic Avant-Gardes*. Ed. María Pao and Rafael Hernández Rodríguez. *Crítica Hispánica* (forthcoming).
- "Poesía de Christopher Travis." *Cormorán*, Santiago, Chile. (Forthcoming: spring 2003).
- "El rostro de la muerte/ The Face of Death" by Carlos Brandy. Trans. Christopher Travis
Montevideo, Uruguay. (Forthcoming: spring 2003).
- "Beyond the *Vanguardia*: The Dialectical Voice of Enrique Lihn." *Proceedings of the Cincinnati Romance Languages and Literatures Conference*, University of Cincinnati, 2000.
- "Five poems by Christopher Travis." *Tropos*, 25 (1999).
- "Padre Vallejo/Father Vallejo" by Ida Vitale. Trans. Christopher Travis.
Luis Campodónico Poemas 1,4,5: Misterio del hombre solo. Buenos Aires: Sodre, 1999.
- "Nostalgia y anacronismo en la novela Mexicana: Una conversación con Luis Eduardo Reyes y Luis Humberto Crosthwaite." *Dactylus*, 16 (April 1998).

Papers Presented

- "Post-Identity in Chilean Poetics: Persistence of the Palimpsest in Raul Zurita's Search for *La Vida Nueva*." Midwest Modern Language Association, Minneapolis, Nov, 2002.
- "A Mask of Oneself: Fragmentation of the Subject in the Work of Enrique Lihn." South Central Modern Language Association, 57th Annual Meeting. San Antonio, TX. Nov. 9-11, 2000.
- "Beyond the *Vanguardia*: The Dialectical Voice of Enrique Lihn." Cincinnati Romance Languages and Literatures Conference. Cincinnati, OH. May 11-14. 2000.
- "Pablo Neruda's Public Intellectualism: The Mexico Years (1940-1943)." Seventh Colloquium on Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Romance Linguistics. University of Texas. Austin, TX. April 15-17, 1997.
- "Rolando Hinojosa and Lucha Corpi: Reconciling Public Intellectualism with Cultural Production in the Chicano Community." Hispanics: Cultural Locations. University of San Francisco. San Francisco, CA. October, 1997.
- "El suicidio como escape metaficticio en *Amor y pedagogía* y *Niebla* de Unamuno." Sixth Colloquium on Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Romance Linguistics. University of Texas. Austin, TX. April 19-21, 1996.