Title: Transformative (Re)Inscriptions: Testimonio and the Economy of Representation in Luz Arce’s El Infierno

Abstract: Luz Arce’s testimonio, El Infierno (1993), recounts her lived experiences as a former political prisoner of Chile’s Pinochet dictatorship and later, as an unwilling collaborator with the regime’s secret police, the DINA. Arce’s autobiographical testimonial narrative, written in light of her testimony at the Rettig Commission, calls the dominant discourses of the “official truth” into question from the marginalized position of a “traitor.” Analyzing Arce’s text using the theories of Dori Laub and Judith Lewis Herman from the field of trauma studies situates Arce’s testimonio as a complex example of scriptotherapy used to recover her sense of agency after unspeakable trauma. El Infierno operates at the same time to signal the inequalities of self-representation that exist within transitional justice frameworks. In what I describe as an “economy of representation,” Judith Butler’s reading of Emmanuel Levinas is central in illustrating how Arce’s text, specifically, functions within this economy of representation and how the discursive legitimization of representational capital is central in the social construction of her testimonio’s credibility, and by extension, the unequal distribution of what Butler calls “precarity” and “grievability.” Arce’s testimonio highlights the points of contention between fields and methodologies for interpretation of traumatic texts and underscores the tensions that arise when the subaltern speaks of the unspeakable.

Bio:

Catherine Brix currently a fourth-year doctoral student in the Ph.D. in Literature Program and Gender Studies Graduate Minor at the University of Notre Dame. She is originally from Ankeny, Iowa and completed BA degrees in Spanish and Art at Central College in Iowa. She spent a year studying Spanish literature and translation studies at the Universidad de Granada in Spain during her undergraduate formation. Catherine went on to complete her MA in Spanish at the University of Northern Iowa with a thesis entitled Más profundo en El laberinto del fauno: Un análisis de las funciones históricas y contemporáneas de cuentos de hadas [Deeper into Pan’s Labyrinth: An Analysis of the Historic and Contemporary Functions of Fairy Tales]. Her thesis dealt with Guillermo del Toro’s film Pan’s Labyrinth (2006), fairy tales as a tool of critique, and the Spanish Civil War. Her research interests include 20th century literature from Spain and the Southern Cone, testimonial literature, (re)presentations of dictatorships in films and novels, trauma studies, feminisms and questions of human rights, and peace studies.