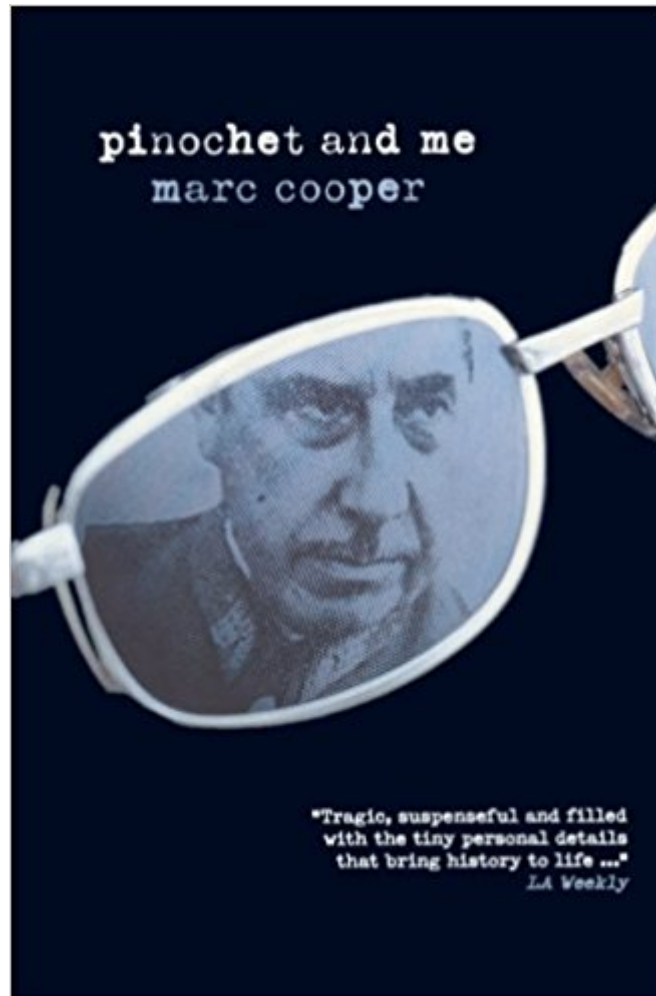




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# Pinochet And Me: A Chilean Anti-Memoir



## Synopsis

The earthshaking news of October 1998 that General Pinochet had been arrested in Britain unleashed two years of international interest in the case and its ramifications for traveling tyrants the world over. But even after the General's return home, the media has ignored the more important story of how his detention lifted a stranglehold that had suffocated Chile's moral sensibility for a generation. Award-winning journalist Marc Cooper was a translator to President Allende until the coup of 1973. In this reflection on Chile and the role it has played in his life, he reconstructs the tense atmosphere of the final days of the Allende government, including his hiding and subsequent evacuation under armed UN protection. Twenty-five years later he returns and recounts, in vivid street-level reporting, a country that is a democracy in name only and a society that has been transfigured by one of the most radical, armed capitalist revolutions of our time. Yet, he argues, spasms of protest that seemed like the last rattle of the snake may still presage the crumbling of Chile's status quo as its people emerge from the long night of reaction to the cry of "¡Adios General!"

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this brief yet expertly crafted remembrance, veteran American journalist and *Nation* contributing editor Cooper traces the fate of Chile from the overthrow in 1973 of its democratically elected Marxist president, Salvador Allende, to today. Cooper is no impartial observer. As a young man he was Allende's translator and shared his radical visions. (He also married into a Chilean family.) But it is the underlying sadness of crushed hopes and demolished dreams, conveyed in the crisp prose

of a skilled observer, that makes this tale so compelling. Cooper takes the reader through the last desperate days of Allende's rule and the "dizzying dance of chaos and blood" of his overthrow. He reports on the dreary and dangerous nature of life in Chile in the 1970s and 1980s under the dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet. On returning to Chile in the 1990s, Cooper finds that while democracy has been restored, the political soul of the nation has been lost to a cynical individualism and mindless consumerism, stirred only by the arrest of Pinochet in England for the human rights violations of his regime. He finds in Chile an unwillingness to confront the past and remarks that without doing so the country can never really leave that past behind. In the end, this is a eulogy for the lost utopian longings of Chile, of Cooper himself and of so many of his generation. He writes, "Chile was not the prelude to my generation's accomplishments [but] our political high water mark." Cooper offers engaged reporting at its best. (Jan.) Forecast: Cooper's pro-Allende stance will mark this as a book for readers whose hearts remain on the left; the author's readers at the Nation, for instance, will find this account simpatico. Recent headlines regarding Pinochet will help as well. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cooper calls this an "anti-memoir" because, he says, a memoir attempts to reassemble parts of a "forgotten or fading past," but in Chile the past has been "erased as if the internal magnets of historical retention...ha[ve] been given a massive jolt of electro-shock." Cooper (Roll Over Che Guevara: Travels of a Radical Reporter), a contributing editor to The Nation, was a translator for Salvador Allende until the Socialist democracy of Chile was overthrown by General Pinochet's coup in 1973. The author details his experiences and emotions during the days leading up to and immediately after the coup. He writes with dismay of the repression and economic inequity he has found on occasional visits back to Chile and laments the apparent refusal of the Chilean people to acknowledge the freedom and promise that the Allende government offered. Current conditions in Chile allow for historical examination of the Allende period and the brutality of the Pinochet era, and Cooper has written this "anti-memoir" to assist with both processes. Recommended for libraries with significant Latin American Studies collections. DJill Ortnr, SUNY at Buffalo Libs. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Pity the poor Chilean who had this government foisted upon by the United States. No wonder many people worldwide see the US as the devil republic. A great book showing the cruelty of a military government and the price paid by Chile when a legitimate elected government was overthrown by

American imperialism. Sound familiar?

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Marc Cooper, contributing editor to that fine periodical *The Nation*, was twenty years old when he arrived in Chile in 1971 after being kicked out of the California higher education system by governor Ronald Reagan for his anti-war activities. At the time of the September 11 1973 coup he was a translator for president Allende. This book is made up of notes he made while living in Chile and visits to it since. It is very well written. When he arrived in Chile, Nixon had ordered "make the economy scream," CIA money began pouring into opposition media outlets, parliamentarians, far right organizations and military officers, general Rene Schneider had been assassinated and so on. But Allende had the support of the poor majority and his party won handily congressional elections in March 1973. Bands of peasants, impatient that the opposition controlled congress was blocking land reform, took to seizing estates and dividing them amongst themselves. When the military attempted a coup in late June 1973, Allende urged workers to seize control of their workplaces which they did, to the consternation of the communist party, always among the most horrified whenever genuine socialism emerges (as they were during the civil war in Spain). About a week before the coup, a half a million workers took to the streets in support of Allende. But the U.S. backed military had the guns and they acted. Over the next seventeen years, Chileans experienced massive terror. After ten years of neoliberal economics, the economy was on the verge of collapse in 1983, eliciting severe unrest from virtually all of Chile's classes and terrorism in response, particularly against the poor, from Pinochet. It is true that since 1986, with the exception of workers wages being well below what they were during Allende's time, a massive upward redistribution of wealth and half of the private social security accounts having less than a thousand dollars in them, Chile's economy has shown some nice statistics. But what is most remarkable is the utter alienation that most Chileans feel towards their political system. Relatively few people belong to a union, a church or any organization; everyone is an individualist fighting for themselves. People don't march for a living wage or free milk anymore; a more likely scene is that described by Cooper, of social security workers protesting very modest government attempts to prevent corruption in the way they earn their commissions. People are more likely to be concentrating on putting a toy phone to their ear while in their cars so that their neighbors will think they can afford a cell phone; or putting expensive items in their shopping carts to impress fellow shoppers and then discarding them quickly before they leave. But Cooper sees some hope in the arrest of Pinochet and his cronies, the

reemergence of the previously almost dead Chilean left wing and the small steps Chile has taken towards a sort of "denazification" process.

This is simply the best book I have read on the whole Chile experience, and one of the best books I have read this year. I have had a curiosity about the Allende government for years and could never fully satisfy it until now. Everything I had previously read was a dry, distant accounting. Cooper's involvement as Allende's translator was direct and passionate and he fully transmits that emotion and drama to the reader. He is obviously a highly talented journalist and the material comes so alive in his hands. This is literary journalism at its best-- right up there with Richzard Kapucinski, Marhsall Frady and George Orwell.

I am unusually critical of critical of books written about Chile by Americans, but Marc Cooper's account is perfect. I lived in Chile, before and after the Allende Government and the Coup, and often find I read these books grumbling about how they authors don't really know what they are writing about. Things aren't right. But not this book. This time I found myself reading and, sometimes, crying, but still feeling a kinship with the author and somehow heartened that the tragedies he portrays have not been entirely forgotten.

I saw Marc Cooper at a reading in Portland and was very taken by his talk on Chile and human rights, especially his reflections on the recovery of historical memory. I bought Pinochet and Me and wound up reading it one sitting. I was emotionally moved and felt ashamed for what my country did to Chile and its people. This is a very very good book.

Not content to praise all persons and polices associated with a liberal agenda, Cooper has to throw his ridiculous sentiments worldwide. Essentially Margaret Thatcher gets thrown under the same bus as Pinochet. No pretense of objectivity in Cooper's "reporting".

Cooper provides chilling details concerning the Allende overthrow that otherwise would lost to history. This is an excellent first-hand account of one persons experience during that tumultuous time. Although Cooper provides a biased account of the political environment in Chile during this time, it nontheless is a true account, whether we Americans like to look at our complicity in these events or not. Bravo to Cooper, the truth shall set you free!

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