

Other Voices: Argentine Narrative
during the Military Process (1976-83)

by

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ABSTRACT

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After the Argentine armed forces launched their coup d'etat on 24 March 1976 and installed the Process of National Reorganization, commonly known as the Military Process, culture entered a deep comatose state. In spite of the military's severe repression and chaotic policies and after an initial period of silence, culture quickly adapted to the new conditions. By the end of 1980 culture had recovered from its coma and grew more contestatory of the dictatorship, as seen through the success of the lampoon Humor registrado and the festival of Teatro Abierto. After the debacle of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands war, Argentines eagerly awaited a return to democracy and judgment of the junta officers for their crimes.

This study examines how the home novels, texts written and published in Argentina, mirrored culture's recuperation from its coma. While showing that narrative passed through three distinct phases in response to the regime, I employ a "dual-track" reading of these texts. The first-track interpretation discusses general criticism of Argentine society and its problems and the second seeks criticism specifically about the Military Process and its abuses.

The first chapter establishes the background for this inquiry and outlines the political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances of the dictatorship. Chapter two discusses the initial reaction to the dictatorship and examines Juan Pablo Feinmann's Ultimos días de la víctima (1979) and Ana María Shúa's Soy paciente (1980) as narratives of negation. An analysis of Ernesto Schóó's El baile de los guerreros (1979) and Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980) as allegories of the "Argentine Question," the second stage of reaction, follows in chapter three. Chapter four explores the third facet of the recovery through Juan Pablo Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final (1981) and Rodolfo Fogwill's Los pichiciegos (1983) as declarations against the dictatorship. Finally, chapter five concludes with an analysis of Oscar Hermes Villordo's openly gay La brasa en la mano (1983) and its reception in Argentina as a refutation of the military's ideology and as an initial step for the return of democracy.

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Dedication

This dissertation is for the memory of all the human beings that have suffered and died from state-sponsored terrorism since Columbus's voyages of "discovery" to the Americas.

Preface

How I was processed

The origins of this project, Narrative during the Military Process (1976-83), arose in the Spring of 1987, during my first year of graduate studies at Duke University. Ariel Dorfman invited Ricardo Piglia, then a visiting professor at Princeton University, to give a talk about Argentine literature after the death of Jorge Luis Borges. Besides addressing Borges's legacy, Piglia also discussed his experiences during Argentina's most recent dictatorship and the regime's consequences on society. That following Fall, in Ariel Dorfman's Latin American Novel course, we read Piglia's first novel Respiración artificial (1980) and I became interested in the literature written during that dictatorship. This topic simmered until I arrived at the University of Kansas to continue my graduate studies in 1989. During that Fall Semester I wrote a paper on Piglia's work for Danny J. Anderson's Spanish-American novel seminar. The following Spring, 1990, I chose to study the narrative of the Military Process for my dissertation.

After two months of preliminary research in Buenos Aires in the Summer of 1991, funded in part by a Summer Research Grant from the Graduate School at the University

of Kansas, I decided to write on the generation of authors who emerged--began writing and publishing--during that dictatorship. Initially my project intended to answer two central questions: first, how the political situation affected narrative and second, how this generation responded to, denounced, and condemned the policies of the regime and how they avoided censorship. Due to the large number of texts written and published, I elected to exclude the books published abroad, or the "exile novels," and focus on the new novelists who stayed in Argentina, or the "home novels."

Soon after applying for the Fulbright grant in the Fall of 1992, doubts loomed about the validity of my original hypothesis. If I wanted to examine how the political situation affected and changed the new generation of writers, or the home novels, I realized that a reference point would be highly beneficial, if not essential. Following the methodology of scientific research, a control group of texts would be necessary upon which to draw any conclusions. But if I centered my study on novelists who published their first novels after 1976, a point of comparison would not exist. I pondered this problem briefly, but decided to consider any possible consequences later. To facilitate my research, I bracketed out this need for a control group. However,

this aporia in my original proposal became trivial while other more important issues appeared.

Later, while researching in Argentina with the Fulbright grant in 1993 and 1994, other complications and quandaries appeared. First, my investigations produced many writers with whom I was unfamiliar: Rodolfo Rabanal, César Aira, Ernesto Schóó, Alicia Steimberg, Alina Diáconu, Roberto Fontanarossa, Ernesto Hermes Villordo, María Esther de Miguel, Rodolfo Fogwill, Vlady Kociancich, Gerardo Goloboff, to name several. Consequently, the number of novels under consideration more than doubled. Second, and more importantly, I began discovering that the writers originally selected for my dissertation, such as Ricardo Piglia, Jorge Asís, Luis Gusman, Enrique Medina and Ana María Shúa, had already published works before the military takeover in 1976. According to my original hypothesis I was going to focus only on authors who began writing after the coup d'etat. The more research I did, more writers surfaced who had already established themselves before the magical date of 1976. I spent months searching for and examining out-of-print texts. Simultaneously I debated how to incorporate these recently discovered writers into my original project. Eventually, I concluded that the central criterion--the cut-off date of 1976--was groundless and

illogical. Therefore I needed to develop a new fundamental standard for selecting and omitting those writers who could be considered part of the new generation that would enter my study.

Finally in early July of 1994, two weeks before returning to the United States, I took a step back, contemplated my research results and acknowledged that the fundamental tenet of my hypothesis was invalid; a new generation of writers never emerged during the Military Process. Almost all the authors who published during and after the Military Process had already established a name for themselves prior to the March 1976 coup d'etat. Beatriz Sarlo confirmed my unpleasant conclusion during a brief conversation at that time. Therefore I had to start again, or at least beget a new thesis that would take into account my research and discoveries.

After grasping that my original assumptions did not agree with the results of my inquiry, I began to probe, or deconstruct, my original ideas more critically and unearthed its latent Romantic ideology. My hypothesis envisioned the writers as loud, clear and daring beacons of light and truth, lost in the darkness and ignorance imposed by the Military Process. I was searching for the heroic rebel artists, located on the margins of society, who saw the truth and risked losing their voices and

lives while facing tyranny. I wanted to find the Argentine equivalents of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Milan Kundera in the Soviet Union and in Czechoslovakia respectively, or even George Orwell (Eric Blair) in post-war Britain. Furthermore, I desired to find a large network of organized resistance, similar to the Maquis in Nazi-occupied France. Watching too many late-night World War II movies as a child and adolescent as well as crass United States Cold-War ideology fomented this Romantic and idealized outlook.

When I returned to the University of Kansas in the fall of 1994, the lyrics of a then popular club-song ran through my mind: "Where do we go from here?" I was cognizant that I had to begin again. After several conversations with my graduate advisor and dissertation chair Danny J. Anderson, I followed his suggestions and decided to fashion a cultural studies-based approach to the dissertation. I would frame the trajectory of narrative within the broader cultural milieu of the Military Process. The careful examination of the lampoon magazine Humor registrado, or Humo[®], provided me a panoramic understanding of the dictatorship and how society evolved. From that information, I adopted the medical metaphor of the "coma" and used that as a basis for my new hypothesis: I would explain how narrative

reflected and participated in culture's recovery from the comatose state imposed by the military government. The following document represents the fruits of my labor.

I have examined these works and sought to determine commonalities among them. What makes these texts unique? What connections exist between these works and the general cultural ambiance? These questions formed the new and improved point of departure for my inquiry. The general and imprecise answer to that query, besides the chronology, consists of how narrative evolved under the imposition of the "New Argentina" that emerged from the juntas' "Process of National Reorganization." I would love to say that "existential angst," "paranoid characters," "fragmented reality," "counter-history" or "testimonial narrative technique" formed the central characteristic of these texts. For better or worse, I conclude that these novels lack an overt central or archetypal commonality or recognizable theme or themes as stated above. Just like many critics affirm that post-modernism does not exhibit a central tenet, I find that I must assert the same claim for narrative during this dictatorship.

I cannot posit my project and its conclusions as the "definitive" or "comprehensive" view of Argentine narrative written and published during the Military

Process. Rather I see this inquiry as a crucial step to exploring these novels and understanding their trajectory. First, the vast number of novels produced both in exile and in Argentina renders such a study almost impossible. Appendices A and B provide near-comprehensive lists of authors and their works. Second, the same quandary that initially haunted me while working on this project has not been exorcised: whom to chose, to eliminate, and more importantly why. Several people, such as Nira Etchenique, Carlos Dámaso Martínez and Cecilia Absatz, wrote and published one or two novels during this time, and have not written much of anything since then. Should this fact preclude including these authors in a panoramic study? I reckon that literary criticism is never an absolutely objective area of study, and any selection of text always contains latent or unconscious value judgments, decisions, and ultimately political ideology. Terry Eagleton summarizes this point best when he states in the conclusion to Literary Theory:

I mean by the political no more that the way we organize our social life together, and the power-relations that this involves; what I have tried to show throughout this book is that the history of modern literary theory is part of the political and ideological history of our epoch. From Percy Bysshe

Shelley to Norman N. Holland, literary theory has been indissociably bound up with political beliefs and ideological values. Indeed literary theory is less an object of intellectual enquiry in its own right than a particular perspective in which to view the history of our times. (194-195)

In the politically charged literary world of Argentina and of Argentine literary criticism, even in the United States, any study of these novels will incite criticisms of exclusion, inclusion, tribalism, sexism, and favoritism. This problematic plagued me from the beginning of my project, caused me great panic in Argentina and still badgers me today. I admit that I eliminated Jorge Asís's novels from my project due to their mediocre quality and more importantly because of Asís's stature as persona non grata in literary circles. Likewise, although Enrique Medina published four books during the Military Process, I refer to them briefly since most critics consider that Medina's work lacks importance. A critical self-awareness about this dilemma of selecting texts comprises the only possible solution.

More importantly, just as the question about selection criteria bothered me, my status as an outsider who examines and studies a foreign culture irked me, and still does. That is, the dilemma of the "other" troubled

me: I staring at Argentina and her culture as well as Argentina gazing back at me, the nascent academic from the United States. While living in Buenos Aires I consistently grilled myself if I had a right to make judgments about a country, a culture and its literature that were not, and can never be, 100 percent my own. Shall I ever completely fathom this nation at the ends of the world? The following account best illustrates my feelings and fears. While visiting Buenos Aires in 1996, I witnessed the one-thousandth weekly march of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. On the one hand I wanted to express my solidarity and march with the survivors of the state-sponsored terror and their supporters. Furthermore, I desired to photograph the demonstration for my own memories and for academic purposes in the United States. On the other hand I felt like an invasive and parasitic entity, feeding off the Argentines' anguish and sad history. I was a terrorist, opportunist, invader, and a colonizer with my camera. As Walter Benjamin might say, I perceived that my activities, taking photographs and literary analysis, destroyed the Argentines' aura and distorted and reified it for my personal consumption. I sensed that this march was not my story to tell, and only the Argentines should participate and relate it. These same sentiments have troubled me throughout this project.

For better or worse, again I conclude that only a critical self-consciousness emerges as the only strategy of dealing with these issues.

Finally, the military dictatorship and its repercussions run deeply into the Argentine consciousness and subconsciousness. On one hand, many persons want to forget or to put aside those seven ghastly years, and continue with their lives. On the other hand, the victims and survivors, especially the Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, cannot set aside the memory of those years until the complete story is told and the government admits that it murdered over 30,000 individuals. Though 1998 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the return to democracy in Argentina, the years of the Military Process are still too close and charged with much emotion. Perhaps within another decade or two one may be able to examine those years, and their literature, more objectively, or at least from a less emotional point of view.

Following 1983, is the end of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional possible? Can Argentina ever recover and try to restore her previous grandeur? After the end? This question refers to the return to democracy in 1983 and society since then. What comes after? "The end" refers to the military's relinquishing power and the

subsequent failed coup d'etats of 1987 and 1991. Or perhaps, "After the end" means "looking," "seeking" or "longing for" "the end," or at least "an end" to the Military Process. In spite of the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas and its report Nunca más in 1984, the trial in civil courts of the members of the different juntas in 1985, Raúl Alfonsín's Punto final law of 1986, and Carlos Menem's Indultos (pardons) of the condemned officers in 1989, Argentine society still searches for closure, a final act or declaration capable of calming everyone in society and serving as a signal so that the Argentines can place those seven horrible years behind them. Former Captain Francisco Scilingo's confession in 1994 about the death flight, documented in Horacio Verbitsky's El vuelo, exemplifies this fact. In my opinion, given what happened during those seven tumultuous years, as well as five turbulent decades (1930-1980), Argentina is almost incapable of finding "the end." Perhaps the only "end" will come in the far future, toward the end of the first century of the third millennium. Until that time, or the magical closure event, Argentina will continue to grasp, understand and process the Military Process in her literary imagination. I hope that this study contributes to Argentina's long process of healing and recovery.

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Chapter One

Yes Sir! Culture flourished when Videla,
Viola, and Galtieri reigned as the butchers
of Buenos Aires

While contemplating Argentina's most recent dictatorship, officially called El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, or more commonly El Proceso Militar or simply El Proceso, the eminent historian Félix Luna, in his exposition "El 'Proceso'," asserts that the country suffered an apagón cultural after the 24 March 1976 coup d'etat (151-52).¹ This belief concerning the low level of cultural activity appears frequently in intellectuals' essays during and after the dictatorship. For example, in 1978, after the Argentine government prohibited his book Alguien que anda por ahí, Julio Cortázar published his essay "América Latina: exilio y cultura" where he strove to encourage solidarity among the Latin American writers in exile and also between the exiles and those writers still living under brutal regimes.² Cortázar states:

Mi intención no es una autopsia sino una
biopsia: mi finalidad no es la deploración sino
la respuesta más activa y eficaz posible al

genocidio cultural que crece día al día en tantos países latinoamericanos. (18)

However, instead of providing a possible answer and a source of inspiration, Cortázar's article served as the basis for another unexpected response. Two years later Liliana Hecker replied in "Polémica con Julio Cortázar" in the November 1980 issue of El ornitorrinco. In this lengthy and critical response, Hecker strongly attacked Cortázar's claim of cultural genocide in Argentina and his new status as a political exile, instead of expatriate. Hecker concludes:

Ya sabemos que no estamos en el mejor de los mundos. Que muera o se silencie un solo hombre, aquí o en cualquier lugar del mundo, sin que nadie responda por su libertad y por su vida, ya es un hecho de tanto peso como para que signe cada una de nuestras palabras y de nuestros actos. Pero no aceptamos que se lo transforme en nuestro símbolo. Porque eso sería aceptar como símbolo la muerte. Y a nosotros, acá, nos toca hacer aquello que Cortázar, ahora sí con toda su lucidez de escritor, recomienda a los latinoamericanos residentes en Europa: sumergirnos en nuestra situación y volverla un hecho positivo. No

aceptamos, de París, la moda de nuestra muerte. Es la vida, nuestra vida, y el deber de vivirla en libertad lo que nos toca defender. Por eso nos quedamos acá, y por eso escribimos.

(5; emphasis in the original)

From his vantage point in Paris, Cortázar perceived an enormous cultural vacuum, or apagón cultural to use the current term, created by the contemporary military government. In contrast, from Buenos Aires Hecker discerned a different cultural ambiance in Argentina, where creating literary works did not pose a problem but rather where publication and distribution presented the central obstacles for artists.³

This debate between Liliana Hecker and Julio Cortázar, more reminiscent of a personal feud or even a verbal vendetta, points to and also answers the query about the condition and the existence of Argentine culture during the Military Process. In this case, Hecker's virulent response indicates that the "home writers," the authors who stayed in Argentina during the dictatorship, continued thinking, discussing and composing literature, and especially narrative. On a more general level, culture survived the random and harsh repression by initially scrutinizing and understanding

the restrictions imposed by the government, and later by further expanding the contradictions and ruptures in those constraints. This adaptation process resembles how a human being falls into a comatose state after suffering a traumatic event and then gradually recovers.

In a similar manner, Argentine narrative participated in culture's slow recuperation. The works selected for this study best exemplify the different stages in this recovery process. Furthermore, these novels demonstrate how narrative reacts to the regime and at the same time display traces of the government's policies. José Pablo Feinmann's Ultimos días de la víctima (1979) and Ana María Shúa's Soy paciente (1980) point to the initial response of the coma when culture started scrutinizing and understanding the new political reality. Although these texts do not discuss the regime openly, they still exhibit vestiges of the dictatorship. Ernesto Schóó's El baile de los guerreros (1979) and Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980) belong to the central moment of the recovery, since through intricate allegories the novels deliberate on the origins and the consequences of the Military Process. José Pablo Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final (1981) and Rodolfo Fogwill's Los pichiciegos (1983) represent culture's full recuperation from its comatose state since both works

expose corruption and human rights abuses caused by the dictatorship. Finally, Oscar Hermes Villordo's La brasa en la mano (1983) illustrates culture's complete recovery and the reading public's constant defiance of the dictators' ideology. The latter five texts also demonstrate that narrative continued and innovated on different Argentine and Spanish-American literary conventions and models. These novels prove that the Military Process failed in its attempt to cut communication between Argentina and the rest of the world and to institute a new mentality and society in Argentina after the 1976 coup d'etat.

While discussing and analyzing Argentine narrative in the parameters of the Military Process, the usage of simple prepositions generates a fundamental distinction. This study concentrates on the home novels, works written and published in Argentina during the military regime, that is, the texts from the period between 1976 and 1983. In contrast, literature about this dictatorship indicates works, regardless of the year or place of publication, that mention or focus on this time period. Thus, while the literature from the Military Process establishes a finite corpus, the texts about this military government represent an incomplete and still growing body of books. Recent novels about the

experience, such as Mempo Giardinelli's Santo oficio de la memoria (1991), Matilde Sánchez's El dock (1993), Ana María Shúa's Libro de los recuerdos (1994), and Liliana Hecker's El fin de la historia (1997) exemplify the distinction since these novels incorporate references to these horrible years. The presence and the consequences of the Military Process run deeply through society and will coalesce as major themes in Argentine literature for many decades. The texts selected for this investigation are novels from the dictatorship. More importantly, these works are home novels, all written and published in Argentina between 1976 and 1983.

In spite of the political circumstances and the unstable economy, or perhaps due to these same conditions, Argentine culture ultimately adapted, survived, and thrived during these years. Yet this eventual flourishing did not transpire easily or suddenly. In fact, culture passed through several distinct stages during the Military Process, from a deep comatose state in 1976 to an inevitable recovery, with prominent aftereffects, in 1980 and 1981. Instead of dividing society into a series of separate phenomena--placing cultural developments apart from economic and political changes--this study integrates culture in a larger frame. At the same time, this inquiry places the

changes in narrative within the general cultural context and postulates that these novels passed through three different styles, or tendencies, during the recuperation.⁴ First, the narrative of negation developed, seen in texts generally written and published between 1976 and 1980, that omitted clear references to and markers about the dictatorship. Yet, deeply imbedded traces of the Military Process still emerge in these books. Second, after 1980, more complex and allegorical novels surfaced which viewed the Military Process from a broader historical perspective. Third, almost simultaneously with the allegorical texts, more overtly critical novels, of Argentina and specifically about the dictatorship, arose as well. This last trend serves as a nexus between the novels from the Military Process and post-dictatorship letters.

A growing body of criticism has emphasized the political implications of Argentine novels, both home and exile texts, published between 1976 and 1983. A variety of analytical approaches have allowed critics to focus primarily on the theme and the representation of violence directly associated with the Military Process. Fernando Reati's Nombrar lo innombrable. Violencia política y novela argentina: 1975-1985 (1992) stands out as the most

ambitious examination of this time period. Reati's study uses Michel Foucault's concepts of power and sexuality, Fredric Jameson's ideas concerning history, and the figure of the Other and then applies these theoretical frameworks to several home and exile novels. Through this analysis Reati describes how the selected works illustrate the different facets of violence in society and its repercussions through the characters. Although encompassing a time span larger than the duration of the dictatorship, the time frame of 1975 to 1985 recognizes that political violence has plagued Argentina for many years. Furthermore, this larger view denotes that several novels from the Military Process were published just after the military relinquished power.

Similar to Reati's investigation, David William Foster also selects the portrayal of violence as the point of departure for his inquiry Violence in Argentine Literature: Cultural Responses to Tyranny (1995). Foster expands the scope of his study and considers the phenomenon of violence beginning in 1966, the year of General Onganía's coup d'etat against President Arturo Illia, until the end of the Military Process in 1983. The analysis centers on three different novels--two texts prior to and one after 1976--and three different dramas.

Unlike Reati, Foster concentrates mainly on women writers and uses feminist theory while analyzing their works.

Utilizing the depiction of violence as the central precept for deliberation may limit the variety and number of works available. However, since violence permeates all aspects of society at this time and emerges as the common experience for most Argentines, selecting this criterion as the basis of study provides important insights on the literature from the Military Process and an essential foundation for more panoramic investigations.

Perhaps due to the disparate thematics and aesthetics found in both the home and exile novels, literary critics have concentrated their endeavors on individual works or authors, and have presented their findings mainly through different academic conferences, as seen in various collections. Saúl Sosnowski edited Represión y reconstrucción de una cultura: el caso argentino (1988) based on the conference held at the University of Maryland in 1983. Daniel Balderston compiled Ficción y política: la narrativa argentina durante el proceso militar (1987) taken from the symposium at the University of Minnesota in 1986. Karl Kohut and Andrea Pagni did the same in Literatura argentina hoy: de la dictadura a la democracia (1993)

from the colloquium held at the Center for Latin American Studies of the Catholic University of Eichstätt, then West Germany, in 1987. Furthermore, the 1980s saw several different symposia that considered the consequences of the military dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina which became Testimonio y literatura (1986), edited by René Jara, and Fascismo y experiencia literaria: reflexiones para una recanonización (1985), assembled by Saúl Sosnowski. Roland Spiller followed this trend of collected essays and interviews in La novela argentina de los años 80 (1993). Unlike the other examples listed above, Spiller's volume did not come from an academic conference. Furthermore, this collection included primarily articles and interviews concerning post-Military Process literature. Like Foster's and Reati's investigations, these recompilations of conference papers and discussions constitute the necessary groundwork for more extensive and specific research into the literature of the Military Process.

In a different vein, Santiago Colás's Postmodernity in Latin America: The Argentine Paradigm illustrates another type of literary criticism that places the narrative of the Military Process under a larger rubric. Colás selects several canonical texts from the past three

decades--Cortázar's Rayuela, Puig's El beso de la mujer araña, Piglia's Respiración artificial, and Martínez's La novela de Perón--and casts his analysis in the parameters of the larger debate about modernism and postmodernism, contemporaneous in the United States academy. More importantly, Colás discusses the validity of modernism and postmodernism in the reality of Argentina.

Alongside these studies specifically about narrative, Frank Graziano and Diana Taylor have analyzed the military's discourse to consider the government's programmatic usage of violence on and in society, as well as its consequences. Graziano's Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine "Dirty War" (1992) documents and describes the evolution of the armed forces' unique and bizarre cosmovision and how this mentality affects the Argentine people. Graziano analyzes the different juntas' discourse over time--through their speeches, interviews, and written documents--and examines their ideology. Furthermore, Graziano explains how the government's blatant detention of citizens and its subsequent denial of all action or knowledge instilled paranoia and terror among the general population. A complex Lacanian analysis, which primarily details the intricate relation between the torturers and their victims, frames and forms

the majority of Graziano's research. Graziano's work also examines how the military considered the perceived subversive elements as a sickness in the national body which in turn warranted any means necessary for eradication.

Diana Taylor conducts a similar probe in Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War" (1997). However, Taylor's investigation differs greatly from Graziano's Divine Violence since it focuses on how the military's discourse created, maintained, and foisted specific gender roles on society. Furthermore, Taylor's research discusses and takes into account how the government posited the masculine as the authoritative and true Argentine and the feminine as the subversive and non-Argentine. Central to her theoretical framework about spectacle, Taylor includes an analysis about the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and addresses how this important social movement unknowingly dovetailed with the generals' binary gender vision. Disappearing Acts also contains a brief history of Teatro Abierto as well as a study of some of the prominent dramas from that festival, and many post-dictatorship dramas, through which Taylor details the persistence of these gender roles in post-dictatorship Argentina.

The above criticism serves as a basis and helps illustrate how this study posits this corpus of narrative. First, my research acknowledges and details the developments of the Military Process while culture emerged from its comatose state. Second, this investigation then situates narrative within this larger framework of cultural evolution. In this manner I concentrate on the home novels and intentionally bracket out the exile novels. While the latter exist for the same reason as the former--the bloody military regime in Argentina--they originated from the circumstances of exile, which consisted of different historical and social realities.⁵ Furthermore, many times the exiled writers, while trying to communicate with Argentina, penned works for a larger audience that included readers in Mexico, Spain, and France as well as other countries where they resided. Indeed, the exile novels merit a context-based analysis not possible here.

A brief historical overview of the Military Process helps to illustrate how narrative evolved and responded to the shifting political circumstances during this time. Since the armed forces seized the government without popular mandate, the term de facto denotes this absence of legitimacy.⁶ In contrast, when Alfonsín assumed power

through democratic procedures in 1983, the term de jure indicates its authentic nature. Hence all references to the "government" or the "regime," synonymous for the Military Process, implicitly carry the connotation of de facto.

Although this government lasted a total of eight years, a short amount of time compared to other dictatorships in Latin America, Argentina endured one of the most brutal and repressive of these military regimes and experienced unprecedented conditions and transformations. Classifying these events into governmental and socio-political issues and developments facilitates a succinct overview and understanding of these complex years.

Like many other dictatorships in Latin America, the new junta advanced simple and apparently high-minded political goals and programs that would rescue Argentina from her decline and restore her greatness and position in the world. According to the Acta inaugurating the government, the generals declared their mission as the following:

Restituir los valores esenciales que sirven de fundamento de la conducción integral del Estado, enfatizando el sentido de moralidad, idoneidad y eficiencia, imprescindibles para

reconstruir el contenido y la imagen de la Nación, erradicar la subversión y promover el desarrollo económico de la vida nacional basado en el equilibrio y participación responsable de los distintos sectores a fin de asegurar la posterior instauración de una democracia republicana, representativa y federal, adecuada a la realidad y exigencias de solución y progreso del pueblo argentino. (Troncoso 1: 110-11)

Actually, the military planned to maintain power for a long time and to eradicate the current guerrilla problem at the source: the ideas and not the people. Instead of putting the house in order and then returning the government to civilian rule as in the past, this time the regime resolved to reorganize political and social structures in order to create a new society, and thus to avoid another dictatorship in the future.

In contrast to de facto regimes in Spain and Chile, where Francisco Franco and Augusto Pinochet materialized as the respective prominent rulers, the military in Argentina governed through a triumvirate junta, constituted by one delegate from each branch of the armed forces and a selected president for a three year term.⁷

After the coup d'etat of March 1976, General Jorge Videla, Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti, and Admiral Emilio Massera formed the first junta, respectively representing the Army, Air Force and Navy, and named Videla as president. In March 1981, after manipulating the three-year term limit, General Videla finally resigned as president and General Roberto Viola assumed control of the three member junta. Following this first transition, the integrity and cohesiveness of the junta plummeted almost as quickly as the value of the Argentine peso. Internal disagreement and rivalries among the three different branches of the armed forces, prevalent since the beginning of the Military Process but hidden from public view, became visible and further generated greater discrepancies among the three branches.⁸ Furthermore, this internal instability and Viola's incompetent management of the economy precipitated the Army General Leopoldo Galtieri's internal coup d'etat against Viola on 11 December of that same year. After his disastrous Malvinas War in 1982, the armed forces replaced Galtieri when the Army, disregarding the previous model of consensus with the Navy and the Air Force, unilaterally chose General Reynaldo Bignone as the

caretaker leader until the democratic transition in late 1983.

In addition to deposing Isabel Perón and taking over the Casa Rosada and the federal government in March 1976, the generals and admirals literally occupied the entire nation as well. The military suspended the constitution and all civil rights, dissolved the National Congress and provincial assemblies, replaced all provincial and municipal leaders, substituted the judges on the Supreme Court and other high courts, and placed all police forces under their direct control. Not satisfied with commandeering the state apparatuses, the junta appointed new directors for state-run television and radio stations, supplanted the civilian directors of other state-owned companies with their own officers, and intervened in or closed the trade unions, universities, professional associations and other organizations deemed as dangerous or suspect.⁹ In all instances the generals usurped civilian power and jurisdiction. Indeed, the armed forces considered the entire Argentine population as the enemy.¹⁰

Instead of forging a unified control over the nation, this tripartite system resulted in a highly fragmented system of power and authority, which by its

nature spawned many contradictions and rivalries. While the ruling junta spoke unanimously, or at least feigned the image of unity, the lower ranks of officials and police forces disagreed and carried out their own personal agendas. The generals could not control their own colleagues and troops.

Just as the membership of the junta continually changed, so did the policies and its effects on society. Indeed, the military's rule contains three distinct time periods, characterized by important national events and by the Argentines' accommodation with the regime. The first period, commonly known as el terror, also known as the "Dirty War," corresponds to the years between 1976 and 1978, when the government quickly liquidated the Montoneros, the Ejército Revolucionario Popular, and other minor guerrilla and political groups, and executed the majority of the human rights abuses and disappearances. Curiously, the regime enjoyed its broadest support at this time as well. Before the 1976 coup d'etat many Argentines asked themselves "when," not "if," the military takeover would transpire and initially supported the new dictatorship. Remarkably this caliginous period also produced the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in 1977, which evolved into the first crack in the generals' veneer of lies and eventually

bloomed into one of the central forces of opposition against the government.

The second period includes the years between 1978 and early 1981 and denotes relative social and economic stability as well as great national triumphs and crises. In 1978 the military relished two major triumphs: the "Dirty War" ended and Argentina hosted the World Soccer Cup. The latter offered the government the perfect opportunity to unify the nation when it first manipulated the international boycott of the World Cup as an "Anti-Argentine Conspiracy," and second when it exploited the National Team's unanticipated victory. The junta milked the World Cup Championship for all its possible benefits.¹¹ While these successes bolstered public opinion, the military also capitalized on two crises for its own advantage. While the soccer players battled on the field, the country also prepared for imminent war with Chile over the Beagle Channel and several islands in Tierra del Fuego. Fortunately, in December 1978 Papal intervention prevented hostilities and promised to resolve the dispute. The following year, 1979, the Organization of American States dispatched its Inter-American Human Rights Commission to investigate alleged abuses. Two weeks prior to the Commission's arrival,

bills, bumper stickers, and flyers proclaiming "Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos" materialized everywhere and reinforced the regime's accusations about the international intervention in Argentine internal affairs.

At the same time, these years also mark the government's relative economic success with policies that created an overvalued peso or the plata dulce. These circumstances allowed a minority of people to speculate and earn great profits, as well as to purchase coveted imported products and more importantly to travel and shop abroad. But when the economic policies failed to sustain these conditions, the middle and upper classes' satisfaction with the generals faltered as well.

The final period began in early 1981, when General Roberto Viola replaced General Jorge Videla as junta president, and concluded on 10 December 1983, when democratically elected Raúl Alfonsín assumed the presidency. The military's achievements, economic and political, quickly unraveled when the value of the peso vis-à-vis the US dollar spiraled downward out of control. During this time the Peronists, the Radicals, and the Christian Democrats set aside their differences and organized the multipartidaria opposition and then together urged a restoration of civilian rule by 1984.

Labor became restless as well and declared several national strikes. After his own coup d'etat against General Viola and taking control of the government in December 1981, General Leopoldo Galtieri presumed, as many other military officials, that the recuperation of the Malvinas would rally the country behind him and also quell the growing protests and opposition.¹² While initially unifying the population, the Malvinas War concluded in complete disgrace when the Argentine military surrendered to the British armed forces on 14 June 1982. When Raúl Alfonsín occupied the Casa Rosada in 1983, the military and its ideology were both bankrupt as well as the country.

These governmental and socio-political events and developments also signal a broader history that in part explains how the Military Process could have occurred during the twentieth century. Argentina's current situation originated primarily when General José Félix Uriburu launched his coup d'état against the Radical President Hipólito Yrigoyen on 6 September 1930. The subsequent corrupt governments of the 1930s also contributed greatly to the present state of affairs. Donald C. Hodges delves into the armed forces' complex ideological mentality and the foundations of the Military

Process in his seminal study Argentina's "Dirty war": An Intellectual Biography. According to Hodges, after the Second World War the Argentine military expected a Third World War that would take place between the evil, atheist, communist East and the good, Christian West. After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, many generals and other Argentines perceived a conduit of communist influence and revolutionary momentum that originated in Moscow, passed through Havana, and terminated in South America, especially Argentina. The various guerrilla groups, which grew during the late 1960s and early 1970s, were interpreted as Moscow's directly controlled forces. Thus the officers envisioned their "Dirty War" as the first battle of World War Three, and considered any means essential for securing victory, not only for Argentina but also for the Christian West, including the United States. In contrast to Hodges's interpretation of events in the twentieth century, David Rock, in Argentina: 1516-1982: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War (1985), proposes longer-term causes. Rock considers contemporary economic and social problems, which contributed to the Military Process, as the legacy of Spanish Colonization and of the incomplete implementation of nineteenth-century liberal economic and political reforms.

Not only did the military believe this interpretation of contemporary world events, but it also endeavored, directly or indirectly, to convince the Argentine public as well. Martin Edwin Andersen, in Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the "Dirty War" (1993) describes the armed forces' exaggeration of the guerrilla groups as a justification for the 1976 coup d'etat. Andersen recounts how the armed forces staged most of the "battles" between the guerrillas and the troops during the dictatorship to instill fear in the population, to rationalize and to prolong the dictatorship's existence, and to dispose of detained persons. Instead of concentrating on the military's mentality and the different phases of the government, Andersen details the regime's most notorious inhuman acts and its control over Mario Firmenich, the leader of the Ejército Revolucionario Popular.¹³ More importantly, Andersen emphasizes the connections between the Military Process and the United States military and how the regime enjoyed tacit support from the Reagan Administration and its cold war policies.¹⁴

In addition to the larger military history behind the Military Process, the ideology of the Argentine oligarchy, the ruling elite, further illuminates the

origins of conflicts during this period. At the end of the nineteenth century, the ruling elites refused to share their political and economic power with the middle and lower classes and preferred to retain as much control as possible. Instead of placating demands for reforms and a more equitable distribution of wealth, the oligarchy set its sights on short-term monetary gains over long-term political and economic stability. The 1930s, the "infamous decade," when the oligarchy once again took control over the country for its own benefit, first through General Félix Uriburu's coup d'etat and later through corrupt elections, stand as an example of this short-sighted mentality. When the disenfranchised sectors of society finally obtained power, first under the Radicals with Yrigoyen in 1916 and later under Perón's first two presidencies of the 1940s and the 1950s, they asserted a philosophy similar to the oligarchy's. In control of the nation, the previously marginalized sectors believed that it was their turn to enjoy the spoils of power and wealth. After General Aramburu's "Liberating Revolution" against Juan Perón in 1955, and the bloody repression of the uprising against the government in 1956, the Peronists, the Radicals, and the oligarchy, via the military, continually struggled to control Argentina without allowing any room for

compromise. Thus, a cycle of military government, oscillating with limited democracy, developed during the 1960s. At the same time, political violence and government reprisals, starting in the late 1950s, escalated as the ultimate solution to disagreements and confrontation between the military and the Peronists. By the early 1970s, Argentines preferred to resolve their differences by shooting instead of by compromising. These circumstances and closed mentalities contributed to the cycles of increasing violence and sectarian politics, and also played a fundamental role in spawning the Military Process.

After Juan Perón's third presidency failed to resolve the divisive politics of the 1960s and the 1970s, to unify the Argentines, and to stabilize the economy through the democratic process, another military intervention appeared inevitable. The status of Argentina's economy concerned the new leaders just as much as the eradication of the guerrilla movements. Although the generals promised to put the economy in order (one of the central justifications for the 1976 coup d'etat), the complete opposite happened.¹⁵ The regime's endeavors to halt and correct long-term economic decline and to integrate Argentina successfully into the

international economic system only exacerbated the previous dire situation. The first junta appointed as the Minister of Economy José Martínez de Hoz, who immediately attempted to stabilize the economy and the peso, and later to modernize the industrial base. Martínez de Hoz's policies reduced import tariffs, in order to promote competition and efficient production, and created an overvalued currency. In turn this economic strategy generated chronic inflation, massive foreign borrowing and subsequent foreign debt, the failure of major banks, and a decimated and dismantled industrial sector.¹⁶ Upon taking power from General Jorge Videla in early 1981, General Roberto Viola replaced Martínez de Hoz with Lorenzo Sigaut, whose economic cure, reverting to pre-1976 policies, backfired and caused further economic chaos and collapse. Galtieri's Minister of Economy, Roberto Alemann, reinstated many of Martínez de Hoz's policies, but without success. By the end of the Military Process, the Argentine economy had lost over thirty percent of its industrial base and approximately fifty billion dollars in capital, and incurred an enormous foreign debt (Smith 261). Instead of instituting a bright economic future, the Military Process spawned more despair and poverty.

These turbulent economic conditions negatively altered Argentine culture, especially the publishing and print industries, for both consumers and producers. Given the reduction of disposable income, the demand for literary products shrank, since many Argentines simply stopped purchasing books in favor of paying the rent, buying food, or simply making ends meet. As a consequence of this reduced demand, many small publishing houses and literary journals failed to cover their production costs and simply ceased business.¹⁷ Since these small enterprises previously furnished the traditional venues for young and unknown writers to publish their work, the bankruptcies contributed to the loss of a new generation of writers. The larger publishing houses modified their operations in two ways as they struggled to outlive the terrible economic conditions. First, these companies started importing from the northern industrialized countries and marketing translations of successful biographies and autobiographies of celebrities, locally known by the English phrase "best-sellers." Second, instead of less-known Argentine or Spanish-American writers, these businesses promoted well known authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Gabriel García Márquez, and

Mario Vargas Llosa, and thus protected their market share and their profits. These developments fostered Argentine culture's comatose state, especially during the first period of the Military Process.

The new ruling junta's policies effectively closed down many areas of cultural activity and eliminated public debate. In its place, the new government imposed a univocal discourse, which only acknowledged a single point of view, usually embodied by an inclusive and ambiguous "nosotros." Francine Masiello best summarizes this silencing of society in her essay "La Argentina durante el Proceso: Las múltiples resistencias de la cultura." She observes:

Al despojar al pueblo de una cultura política, la norma autoritaria expulsa a los individuos de una esfera pública y se niega a permitirles un diálogo con el poder o cualquier crítica del estado. Esa táctica crea una especie de monumento al pensamiento hobbesiano, una población de sujetos pasivos despojados de lenguaje y privados del privilegio de la ambigüedad en su pensamiento o su expresión.

The junta's voice and view of society became the only possible articulations.¹⁸

While the military projected the image of one voice and quashed dissent, the fragmentary governmental structure encouraged a shattered system of censorship.¹⁹ Juan E. Corradi, in "The Culture of Fear," compares censorship among various Latin American dictatorships of the 1960s and the 1970s and ironically comments:

In some [countries], we observed the workings of a centralized [censorship or repression] agency; in others, like Argentina, it was much less tidy--a sort of free market of horrors that would have made the institution of a Gestapo a progressive step forward. (120)

The different sectors of the military, government bureaucracies, and police forces partitioned and controlled Argentina as if she were their own private medieval fiefdoms.²⁰ Unlike Spain, where Franco established a main authority to approve, censor or ban all media, Argentina lacked a central office, which in turn propagated confusion and uncertainty. Instead of being a hindrance, this decentralization emerged as the strongest element of the censorship. Andrés Avellaneda,

in "The Process of Censorship and the Censorship of the Proceso: Argentina 1976-1983," observes:

This feature of ubiquity, this being everywhere and nowhere, was from 1974 [Isabel Perón's Presidency] and especially between 1976 and 1983 the most effective element of Argentine censorship. Its manner of operation thus fit into the general planning of State terrorism, one of whose basic methodologies was indiscriminate and groundless repression in order to massively internalize the concept of punishment and to paralyze, by doing so, the greatest number of possible reactions. (24)

The appearance of chaos on all levels of society and government turned into the generals' best friend.

Given its splintered nature, censorship evolved into a double-edged sword. On one hand, the lack of central authority provided a space where people could risk publishing controversial material.²¹ On the other hand, the absence of concrete rules permitted bureaucrats and other individuals to devise their own criteria and to prohibit cultural items at their own personal discretion. In turn, and more importantly, these conditions encouraged self-censorship, the fear of creating anything

possibly considered subversive, which stifled creativity just as much as the state-sponsored restrictions. Furthermore, this phenomenon of self-censorship clarifies why Argentine culture entered such a deep comatose state that persisted during the first years of the Military Process. Because of the ambiguous political circumstances, Argentines preferred to keep quiet and live than to speak and unknowingly insult a new junta member, or some other petty and obscure government official.²²

Each level of government--national, provincial, and municipal--engineered its own methods of censorship and imposed its decisions primarily by executive or municipal decrees. As a result, while the national government allowed a certain book, magazine, drama or film, another provincial or municipal body or agency might prohibit the same item without any explanation. Instead of the outright prohibition of certain books and magazines, and to preserve the semblance of an open society, many times the government issued restrictions on their display. That is, booksellers and newsstand operators could procure and sell certain volumes that could not be exhibited in the front window or in other areas where the clients might easily peruse or purchase them. In a

similar manner, each branch of the armed forces and the police forces established its own organization to monitor and to control society. The local police possessed the right to confiscate freely any book or magazine at any time, from a newsstand or a bookstore, and hold the item in question indefinitely for examination. Finally, the postal system and the customs offices instituted their own methods of classifying, searching, and seizing questionable material. In each instance, authority remained in the individual functionary or government bureaucracy, and ultimately in his or her education and sophistication. A set code of rules never existed.²³ Unlike the previous dictatorships in Argentina, this military government refused to establish protocols to contest the banning of cultural products. This last point further exemplifies how the Military Process did not tolerate other voices and even abolished the institutional structures to recognize them.

Submerged in this morass of confusion, fear, and economic difficulties, Argentines first kept silent and later regrouped, and then grew more outspoken. The medical metaphor of the coma serves best to illustrate the progression through these conditions. The military government, through its economic, political, cultural,

and social policies, promoted and instilled a milieu of terror, panic, and paranoia in the entire nation, a completely artificial situation. In reaction, Argentines at first shut down their minds and merely existed, just as the human body when it endures severe stress.

Yet, through this mire, Argentine culture managed to recoup and adapt to the new circumstances; eventually it thrived, as seen through four important cultural events. The establishment of intellectual journals comprises the first two cultural phenomena on an unobtrusive level. In contrast, the launching of a lampoon magazine and a theatre festival, both more noticeable, marks the last two milestones that elucidate this recovery process. The year after the coup d'etat, in October 1977, Abelardo Castillo and Liliana Hecker re-established their journal El escarabajo de oro, closed in 1974 due to economic problems, and christened their new creation El ornitorrinco ("The Platypus").²⁴ Unlike their previous journal, El ornitorrinco lacked a standard publishing cycle, a consistent distributor, or regular readers. Instead, Castillo and Hecker put out El ornitorrinco when they had gathered enough material and economic support for a single issue and personally distributed the copies to the bookstores and newsstands. Also, to avoid

possible problems with the government, Castillo and Hecker only acknowledged their role when they finally listed their names as the editors on the cover of the fifth issue, two years later in 1979. Although Hecker and Castillo only produced fourteen issues before they halted publishing in 1986 (eleven during the Military Process and three subsequently), their courage, personal commitment, and determination demonstrate that the Argentine intelligentsia refused to remain idle and silent.²⁵ The summary of the Hecker-Cortázar polemic at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates how El ornitorrinco gained eminence over time.

The following year, 1978, witnessed the second low-level event, and perhaps the first major development in culture's slow recovery. Similar to El ornitorrinco, another group of intellectuals, led by Jorge Sevilla, Carlos Altamirano, Ricardo Piglia, and Beatriz Sarlo, re-founded the defunct journal Los libros as Punto de vista. Although Beatriz Sarlo, the current director, took charge of the journal in 1979, Punto de vista started listing the editorial board only in 1981, as with Hecker and Castillo's strategy with El ornitorrinco, due to fear of possible political repercussions. John King, in his essay "Las revistas culturales de la dictadura a la

democracia: el caso de Punto de vista," presents a brief history of the journal as well as a summary of its intended purpose. King asserts that the editorial board proposed three goals for their new cultural project: "1) el replanteo de la función de la crítica, 2) las deliberaciones sobre el exilio, interno y externo, y 3) la incorporación de jóvenes críticos y lectores" (90).²⁶ Punto de vista accomplished these aspirations, as the title suggests, by incorporating many different opinions from well-known authors and critics, both Argentine and foreign. Masiello, in her article, "La Argentina durante el Proceso: Las múltiples resistencias de la cultura," notes:

Una breve lectura de los primeros números indica la reiterada inclusión de ensayos y entrevistas con Jean Franco, Angel Rama, Antonio Cornejo Polar, y los miembros de la generación de Contorno, junto con traducciones de Bourdieu, Foucault y Raymond Williams. (22)

In this manner, Punto de vista operated as a nexus between the intellectual communities and generations both inside and outside Argentina. While the Military Process imposed a permanent wall of silence, Argentine writers and intellectuals gradually transformed this wall into a

veil through which they could disclose their discontent against the regime. Punto de vista served as a small, but important, focus of resistance for the Argentine and world intelligentsia.²⁷

Unlike the aforementioned journals El ornitorrinco and Punto de vista, both designed for a limited and erudite readership, the eclectic lampoon magazine Humor registrado, or Humo[®], strove to reach a large audience on a more consistent basis.²⁸ More importantly, the founding of Humor represents the first major cultural advancement, as well as the development in popular culture, that responded to the dictatorship. Ediciones de la Urraca, under the directorship of Tomás Sanz, Andrés Cascioli, and with four other journalists, launched the monthly Humor during the World Soccer Cup in June 1978.²⁹ Soon after this date, Humor quickly grew into one of the most popular magazines in Argentina.³⁰ Less than a year later, in 1979, Humor became a biweekly in April and by the twenty-third issue in November 1979 the circulation had grown over 300 percent from 40,000 to 120,000 copies (2).³¹ While being a comedy magazine, akin to Mad or National Lampoon in the United States, with its own perverse and critical buffoonery of society, Humor also incorporated a serious journalistic countenance, akin to

The Nation or Harper's, and included important interviews with writers, performers and political figures, as well as pensive articles concerning popular culture, politics, and economics.³² Similar to the editors of Punto de vista and El ornitorrinco, Cascioli, Sanz, and other staff member of Humor, had participated in previous lampoons such as Chaupinela and Satiricón. The existence of Humor again illustrates that culture survived the initial shock of the Military Process, and more importantly the pre-Military Process cultural institutions continued, but under a different guise.

Humor's transformation to a more openly defiant stance, with overt opposition to the regime, gradually transpired between 1978 and 1981 and parallels the changes in society. First, Humor began criticizing the government when it recognized and discussed the unavoidable subjects of inflation, the deluge of foreign products, the subsequent de-industrialization and lack of reliable utility services. Yet Andrés Cascioli emphasizes that many times the editorial board had difficulties and from time to time needed approval from the government for articles or the cover (Moncalvillo 60). Later the magazine gradually reached into the prohibited areas of censorship, exile, and human rights abuses, both in

cartoons and in articles.³³ At the same time, Humor created a forum where blacklisted journalists and graphic artists could work and speak.³⁴ This same space also incorporated texts by and interviews with several exiled Argentines, most notably the novelist Osvaldo Soriano in Paris. In this manner, analogous to Punto de vista, Humor also operated as a bridge between Argentina and the rest of the world and helped transmute the military's wall of silence into a porous veil.³⁵ In recognition for its innovative defiant stance, as well as its drollery, Humor received the prestigious international Italian "Forte Dei Marmi" award as the best satirical magazine in 1983. After five long years, Humor finally obtained its deserved recognition.

Unlike Humor, which has gained scant critical attention, the festival Teatro Abierto has become the best-known, and most studied cultural development of the Military Process. Indeed, without the military government and its policies, Teatro Abierto would have never come into existence. Both El ornitorrinco and Punto de vista represent intellectual developments that started on a small scale and then grew in significance as Argentine culture awoke from its comatose state, during the darkest period of the dictatorship. In contrast,

from the moment of its inception in 1980, Teatro Abierto positioned itself more openly as a deliberate act of defiance against the Military Process and its policies. The initiation of Teatro Abierto also marks the second major cultural development and signals the final step in Argentine culture's recovery from its deep coma. By 1980 Argentines finally mustered the courage, knowledge, and stamina to confront and contest the generals. This change in attitude stemmed mainly from the consistently shifting political conditions. By 1980 the government had triumphed over the guerrilla forces, ending the "Dirty War," and accomplished one of its central aspirations. This victory also produced contradictory effects since it deprived Jorge Videla, still in power during the planning stages of the festival, and his cronies of their main *raison d'etre*. Furthermore, this triumph united the opposition in its efforts to work against the regime. Also, after the World Cup, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission's visit, and Pérez Esquivel's Nobel Peace Prize, many Argentines fathomed that the world was cognizant of their circumstances and would take notice and react against the government's possible repression.

The playwright Osvaldo Dragún planted the first seeds that would eventually bloom into Teatro Abierto.

In an interview with Rodolfo E. Braceli for the magazine Siete días, Dragún explains the motivation behind the festival:

Todo empezó hace un año [1980], en una charla de café [en Argentores, la Sociedad de Escritores Argentinos] . . . éramos tres autores. Sentíamos que había que hacer algo. La existencia del teatro argentino era muy negada. La negaban los actores, los directores, los críticos. Se lo consideraba un acto reflejo del teatro extranjero, a lo sumo. Decidimos hacer algo que iba a ser el Teatro Abierto pero que en ese momento no tenía ni forma ni nombre. Y lo decidimos así espontáneamente, en un momento de tantos prejuicios, de tanta cerrazón ideológica. No teníamos, tampoco el lugar para hacerlo.

(66; ellipsis in original)

Dragún and his associates commissioned works from twenty-one different playwrights, selected the Teatro de Picadero for the venue, and scheduled three different one-act plays for each night of the week. Each one-act drama employed a different cast, director, producer, and stage crew, with a total of over 130 people. In this

manner the organizers incorporated as many people as possible in this unique happening.

The festival opened on 28 July 1981, the same night that Frank Sinatra sang at Luna Park as an official guest of the government. Teatro Abierto relished such success that, after one week, on the morning of 6 August, the Teatro de Picadero burned down under mysterious circumstances.³⁶ Instead of turning the festival into ashes and memory, the inferno galvanized the nation to support Teatro Abierto. Every theatre in Buenos Aires offered its stage, free of charge, to the organizers. The writer Ernesto Sábato and the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel accompanied Dragún and other participants at the news conference when they announced that they had accepted an offer from the Cabaret Tabarís and would proceed with the festival on its stage. Even the reticent Jorge Luis Borges, who had happily supported the military in 1976, sent the organizers a telegram and expressed his indignation over the blaze at Teatro del Picadero and his solidarity with the festival. At its close on 21 September, over 25,000 people had attended the various performances of Teatro Abierto.³⁷ This record number of people signaled to the government and the rest of the nation that Argentine

theatre not only existed, but also that the population supported and appreciated the festival and its endeavors.

Unfortunately Teatro Abierto's overwhelming success in 1981 declined during the 1982 and 1983 seasons. In 1982 the coordinators established an open competition for selecting appropriate plays. In this manner the participants aspired to democratize participation, nationalize the event, and include voices from outside the City and Province of Buenos Aires. Consequently the screening committee received four hundred twelve dramas and another seventy-five experimental projects. This attempt at inclusivity eventually generated squabbles about the quality of the works chosen and the selection process itself. Jorge A. Dubatti covers in great detail the controversies surrounding the 1982 season in his article "Teatro Abierto después de 1981." According to Dubatti, Pacho O'Donnell, a playwright who participated in 1981 but was excluded in 1982, alleged that the organizers had adopted a leftist bias while making their selections (82). The dramatist Roberto Cossa, an original member in 1980, defended the committee and reaffirmed the openness of Teatro Abierto.³⁸ While these internal differences inspired dissension and played a role in the cancellation of Teatro Abierto after the 1983

season, the collapse of the Military Process in 1982 contributed more to the demise of the theatre festival than any other possible internal problem. Carlos Somigliana, one of the initial participants of Teatro Abierto, best explains what happened:

El advenimiento de un gobierno democrático produjo en muchos integrantes de Teatro Abierto--entre quienes me incluyo--junto a la alegría y el alivio que compartió prácticamente todo el país, una sensación de perplejidad y desconcierto. ¿Cuál era el destino, en el nuevo contexto, de un movimiento esencialmente crítico y contestatario? ¿Cómo aplaudir lo bueno sin pecar de oficialista, término que suscita, aun entre los oficialistas, un movimiento instintivo de rechazo? (Dubatti 86)

Regrettably, Teatro Abierto harbored built-in obsolescence at its core. In spite of this fact, Teatro Abierto's birth, brilliant brief life, and final extinction indicate that Argentine culture possessed a great amount of elasticity and flexibility, and persevered during the country's darkest hours.

Narrative, like the journals and theatre festival discussed above, dwells in the cultural, political, and economic spheres of society; it does not exist in a

hermetic and isolated environment. Furthermore, just as the transformations in magazines and drama reacted to a changing context, narrative also evolved in response to different societal factors. For this reason, an acutely contextualized examination of the selected home novels illustrates the interconnection between narrative and society. However, at times a brief time lag arose between the transformations occurring in society and in narrative, since writing and publishing a novel involves more time and editorial procedures than a popular magazine such as Humor, or writing and staging a play as seen in Teatro Abierto. This heightened awareness of the significance of historical context establishes the fundamental basis for this project, and explains why I have dwelled on the dynamics of the Military Process and on the general trends found in Argentine history. At times the plots of the novels provide the relevant details to establish the nexus between the historical context and the texts. At other times, the date of publication provides heuristic information that situates the novels in the Military Process and allows me to draw correlations between the historical referent and the text. Several times the colophon increases these connections, as in the case of Schóó's and Fogwill's novels.

Before examining the texts for evidence of the dictatorship, a narratological analysis, following Gérard Genette's concepts in Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, provides the first step for understanding the literary dynamics of the texts. I then relate and connect this textual view to a larger contextual interpretation that seeks to discover the traces of and the responses to the Military Process in the home novels, texts written and published in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. For this contextualized approach to the novel, I utilize a dual-track reading that reveals the inner workings of the texts and ascertains how these novels criticized the government and its barbaric policies. At times these grievous references appear quickly and at other times they emerge through layers of narration. Given that Argentine letters exhibit a long tradition of social commitment, the first-track reading centers on the broad criticism of Argentine society located in the texts. This level of interpretation includes reproaches concerning long-term social problems such as poverty, the unequal distribution of income among the different social classes, pre-1976 governmental abuses or errors, the position and role of women in society, the arrogance of the oligarchy and professional classes or snobism, racism, homophobia, the disparities between Buenos Aires

and the interior provinces, the pervasive national inferiority complex, and the lack of adequate governmental services like education and health care. In a similar manner, the second-track analysis concentrates on critiques and evaluations specific to the Military Process. This perspective encompasses government censorship, self-censorship, prohibition of political and union activities, the economic chaos caused by Martínez de Hoz's policies, torture, disappearances, police brutality, exile, corruption, skewed interpretations of historical events, and the repercussions of the military's policies on ordinary Argentines. At times this dual-track approach does not immediately reveal how narrative rejoins the Military Process, since on the surface a text may negate the presence and the impact of the government. But upon closer examination, the application of the second-track approach uncovers evidence of how the regime impacted the novel. At other instances, this reading strategy provides unexpected details and conditions about Argentina during the 1960s and the 1970s.³⁹

Akin to situating narrative in the larger societal context, this study also locates these texts in Argentine and Spanish-American literary continua; my readings

acknowledge the aesthetics of the texts. Like the textual responses to national historical events, the home novels also respond to contemporary literary trends in Argentina and throughout the hemisphere. More importantly, these texts utilize and incorporate the literary developments as part of their thematics of criticism against the Military Process. For example, Esteban Echeverría's El matadero and José Mármol's Amalia combined political agenda with artistic concerns since both texts utilized European Romanticism for their plots and also innovated on this literary style to protest the brutality of Rosas's dictatorship. In a similar manner, several home novels engage the Argentine tradition of detective fiction and the Spanish-American conventions of testimonial narrative in order to contest official history. More importantly, besides following established traditions and providing the astute readers meaningful codes for understanding the plot better, several texts utilize specific literary characteristics as their strategy to comment on the regime and its policies. In addition to considering previous Argentine and Spanish-American literary styles, I have discovered that a familiarity with Franz Kafka's novels provides valuable insights while analyzing several texts. This larger view demonstrates that, whereas the military intended to

install a new political and cultural system, narrative contested this attempt, carried on and innovated upon established literary traditions.

Just as the Military Process contained three distinct ruling juntas, so Argentine culture passed through three diverse movements during the recovery from its comatose state: 1976-78, 1978-80, and 1980-83. Since it forms part of the general cultural milieu, narrative also exhibits an analogous progression, but with less obvious markers between the different phases. Indeed, many texts that correspond to the first two periods, 1976-78 and 1978-80, appear almost simultaneously between early 1979 and late 1980. The time and the intricacies of conceiving, writing, publishing, and distributing a novel untangle this apparent paradox. While literary critics employ the publication dates as the central criterion to establish different periods, at times this method may pose dilemmas, as reflected in the texts selected for this study.

The novels selected for this inquiry illustrate how Argentine culture recuperated from the comatose state inflicted by the 1976 coup d'etat and they reflect the three different phases of the awakening process. Chapter two encompasses the first moment in culture's emergence from its coma and treats what I designate as the

narrative of negation. Included here are texts that espouse an innocuous posture, avoid addressing openly contemporary political or social developments, and thus do not reflect candidly their moment of creation or publication. In Juan Pablo Feinmann's first novel, Ultimos días de la víctima (1979) and in Ana María Shúa's Soy paciente (1980) the Military Process does not emerge as the background for the plot or constitute an essential element of the texts' thematics. Feinmann follows the hard-boiled genre of detective fiction, manipulates its conventions, and discusses the plight of the assassin Raúl Mendizábal in a society riddled by violence and betrayal. Situating Feinmann's text in the long tradition of detective fiction in Argentina reveals latent comments concerning institutionalized violence and bureaucratic control. In a similar manner, Shúa's novel depicts the unnamed patient's helpless situation when he is subjected to anonymous and uncontrollable bureaucratic authority in the hospital. In both novels the first-track reading elucidates general criticism about contemporary society. In turn, these texts, seen through the second-track approach, allude to the dictatorship by focusing on anonymous and unaccountable power structures. In addition, a comparison with Franz Kafka's work

facilitates an allegorical interpretation of Shúa's novel.

While the narrative of negation demonstrates how texts initially acquiesced to the circumstances of the dictatorship, chapter three depicts how other novels participated in the second stage of recovery. Ernesto Schóó's El baile de los guerreros (1979) and Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980) best represent texts that rejoin the government and the generals' discourse through intricate metaphors and allegories. In these works the Military Process, its policies, and its origins merge as the central thematic of the "Argentine Question." That is, why did Argentina, a country rich in natural resources and human capital, and the eighth wealthiest nation in 1910, transform herself into a typical underdeveloped country by 1980, fraught with political impasses and economic stagnation? Both texts take part in this inquiry by integrating Argentine history into their intricate plots. Knowledge of important events, persons, and debates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides a context and the strategy for reading and interpreting these novels. Furthermore, the first- and second-track readings elucidate abundant commentary and criticism concerning Argentine society and also the Military Process. A

comparison with Kafka's work plays a fundamental role in understanding Piglia's text. In a similar manner, placing Schóó's and Piglia's novels in the trajectory of Spanish-American literature clarifies how both texts assimilate the 1960s Boom tradition of contesting official or state-sponsored historical interpretations and comprehending contemporary reality.

By 1980 Argentine culture had fully awakened from its deep coma and started challenging and defying the dictatorship more directly, as seen through Teatro Abierto and Humor. This third moment also coincided with the period when the Military Process waned and the generals' discourse grew even more vacuous. Chapter four examines Juan Pablo Feinmann's second novel Ni el tiro del final (1981) and Rodolfo Fogwill's first novel Los pichiciegos (1983). The examination explores how these texts put forth a more defiant stance and divulge more directly the horrors of the regime. In contrast with the allegorical works and their broad time frames, these novels situate their plots during specific moments of the dictatorship. Similar to the books analyzed in chapter three, Feinmann's and Fogwill's novels also use and manipulate established Argentine and Spanish-American literary conventions to enhance their thematics and commentary concerning the regime. Feinmann's work

invokes the hard-boiled detective genre and Fogwill meshes the 1960s Boom and the 1970s post-Boom testimonial narrative with psychotherapeutic discourse. The dual-track approach uncovers many censorious remarks concerning Argentine society and the Military Process, especially in Fogwill's novel. By the end of the dictatorship narrative demonstrated that it had survived and persevered by reintegrating literary traits that existed prior to the 1976 coup d'etat.

Finally, functioning as a coda to the three stages of culture's recovery process, chapter five illustrates how narrative continued pre-1976 trends by probing Oscar Hermes Villordo's La brasa en la mano (1983). Villordo's novel portrays in a non-judgmental manner the homosexual relationship between Pajarito, the narrator-protagonist, and his pareja Miguel as well as the pervasive homosexual underground in Buenos Aires in the 1950s. While not engaging the dictatorship like the texts discussed in the preceding chapters, other contextual considerations indicate that Villordo's text merits serious study. On the one hand, La brasa en la mano became a best-seller in 1983, with five separate printings; this popularity signaled the Argentines' desire to read about taboo subjects and constituted another act of resistance against the dictatorship. In a time of economic hardship

and repressive policies, purchasing a copy of Villordo's novel was tantamount to a slap in the generals' face. Furthermore, the market success of Villordo's text announced the Argentines' willingness to explore and express ideas in a non-violent manner, essential for the upcoming return to democracy at the end of 1983. On the other hand, the publication of this text indicates another continuation of pre-Military Process literary trends. Villordo, a member of the Sur generation, was the first established writer who publicly admitted his homosexuality and years later his HIV status; he completed his novel in 1976, the same year that witnessed the printing of other gay-orientated novels, such as Manuel Puig's El beso de la mujer araña, but he could not find a publishing house in Argentina, or elsewhere in Spanish-America, until 1983. Since the plot takes place in the 1950s, a first-track reading reveals general commentary about Argentine society which questions stereotypical notions about homosexuality and documents the gay lifestyle of that time period. A second-track interpretation focuses on the thematics and the plot and shows how both contest the generals' emphasis on the Christian family and their ideology of gender roles and sexuality. In addition, Villordo's novel becomes

important since it marks a significant step toward an open and democratic country.

Although triumphing in the "Dirty War" by murdering up to forty thousand citizens and driving over a million into exile, the generals failed on all other fronts. In this manner, the Argentine people reaffirmed the epigraph that Sarmiento used to close his "advertencia al lector" in Facundo: "On ne tue point les idées," (las ideas no se matan).

Notes

¹ This study uses the English translations "Military Process" throughout. While many people freely interchange "Military Process" and "Dirty War" to refer to this military dictatorship, I make a great distinction between these two terms. The term "Dirty War" refers specifically to the military's operations against the different guerrilla movements, and the majority of the human rights abuses, between 1976 and 1978. The term "Military Process" simply denotes the entire dictatorship. Using both terms as synonyms clouds the distinctive phases of the regime.

² Cortázar originally published this essay in the Colombian magazine Eco in November of 1978, and later included it in the collection Argentina: años de alambradas culturales (1984), edited by Saúl Yurkievich. In his essay Cortázar recognized that the government would permit the distribution of Alguien que anda por ahí if he omitted two specific short stories, "Apocalipsis en Solentiname," concerning the destruction of the Nicaraguan priest Ernesto Cardenal's mission on the Island of Solentiname, and "Segunda vez," a Kafkaesque scenario about disappearances in Argentina.

Cortázar's predicament and article both point to the

problematic distinction between expatriate literature and exile literature. How does one establish these categories and does a distinction exist between these two groups? What affinities and/or differences arise? Also, at what point does an expatriate writer, like Cortázar, become an exile, and vice-versa? These questions merit further consideration elsewhere since a considerable amount of Argentine literature has been written and published outside the nation, beginning with Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's Facundo (1845), Esteban Echeverría's El matadero (1852), and José Mármol's Amalia (1851).

³ This polemic continued with another round of interchanges starting when Cortázar wrote to Hecker and attempted to quell the argument and to clarify possible misconceptions. Hecker published and rejoined, just as virulently as before, Cortázar's letter in El ornitorrinco 10 (October-November 1981). Unfortunately Hecker and Cortázar never resolved their disagreement before his death in 1984.

This debate also exemplifies the antagonistic atomization of the Argentine literary community created by the Military Process. Unfortunately, this hostile environment constitutes one of the military dictators' main legacies and still persists today.

⁴ The examination of the lampoon magazine Humor registrado played a fundamental role in the creation of this schema and greatly enhanced my understanding of the cultural milieu.

⁵ The portrayal of the military government appears as the central difference between these two groups of texts. While the exile novels usually criticize more openly the Military Process and its excesses, the home novels are more subdued. The exile novels such as Marta Traba's En cualquier parte, Osvaldo Soriano's Cuarteles de invierno, Luisa Valenzuela's Cola de lagartija, David Viñas's Cuerpo a cuerpo, and Humberto Costantini's De Dioses, hombrecitos y policías and La larga noche de Francisco Sanctis all exemplify this distinction.

⁶ Conscious of this problem, the junta astutely published its "Estatuto para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional" on 24 March 1976 to justify its actions:

Considerando que es necesario establecer las normas fundamentales a que se ajustará el gobierno de la Nación en cuanto a la estructura de los poderes del Estado y para el accionar del mismo a fin de alcanzar los objetivos básicos fijados y reconstruir la grandeza de la República, la Junta Militar, en ejercicio del

poder constituyente, estatuye. . . .

(Troncoso 1: 112)

The "Estatuto" contained fourteen different articles and quoted heavily the suspended constitution.

⁷ For a more comprehensive description of the evolution of the junta and its various members, see Donald Hodges's Argentina's "Dirty War" and Argentina, 1943-1987 as well as David Rock's Argentina: 1516-1982.

⁸ El ocaso del "Proceso" (1981), a collection of essays and discussions, serves as evidence that the triumvirate started to unravel at this time. In October 1981 Eduardo Valera Cid, at his publishing house El Cid, invited the journalists Osiris Troiani and Carlos Quirost and the intellectuals Oscar Alende, José María Rosa, Néstor Vicente and Corrado Storani to discuss the current status of the regime. During the talk, the participants predicted a transition to democracy by the end of 1984.

⁹ Javier Torre and Adriana Zaffiaroni, in their essay "Argentina: Its Culture during the Repression and during the Transition," state:

The television stations were monopolized by the military government, which used them to depoliticize the population and to disseminate the former's ideology. Given the tripartite

system of government that was practiced (due to the three branches of armed forces making up the Military Junta), one channel was given to the Marines [Navy?], another to the Air Force, and the rest to the Army. (Foster, The Redemocratization of Argentine Culture 15; capitalization in original)

In spite of the presumed equality among the three branches, by taking three of the five television stations, the Army proved again that it actually dominated the government and many political decisions during the Military Process.

¹⁰ The 1989 Argentine movie La deuda interna (titled Verónico Cruz in English), exemplifies how the military occupied the nation. On the one hand, the film presents the life of the boy Verónico Cruz, in the small Andean town of Chorcán, in the northern province of Jujuy, near Bolivia, and his relationship with the new school teacher. On the other hand, the movie also demonstrates how the Military Process affects every corner of the country. When the March 1976 coup d'etat occurs, officials garishly arrive and ceremoniously replace the civil authority with the local military official, who receives carte blanche power to govern the town. Later

the local military official examines and confiscates prohibited books from the teacher's small library. During the World Cup, the village receives a portable stereo and small Argentine flags, so that the entire population may patriotically participate in the soccer championship.

¹¹ After the World Cup victory, and upon departing for Europe, Admiral Massera states:

Tenemos muchos problemas y el Mundial, por supuesto, ha sido un éxito deportivo, pero no ha resuelto los problemas argentinos. Por eso entiendo que el gobierno tiene que canalizar ese esfuerzo, ese fervor, ese sentir nacional, en aras de una óptima solución.

(Troncoso 2: 133)

The government took every opportunity available for self-aggrandizement.

However, the World Cup also provided the opposition a chance to tell its story. The foreign press and soccer teams noticed and gave the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, and other human rights groups, a voice to tell the world about the horrendous conditions in Argentina.

¹² Since he considered himself the niño mimado of the Reagan Administration, Galtieri believed that Washington

would not assist Great Britain or interfere in the conflict (Andersen 5). Again, Galtieri showed his arrogance and blundered greatly.

¹³ Andersen documents the armed forces' control over Firmenich several times in his study from various reliable sources (117-18, 286-87, 319-21).

¹⁴ President Jimmy Carter's opposition to the junta, his emphasis on Human Rights--especially during Jacobo Timerman's detention--and Senator Edward Kennedy's bills to prohibit arms sales to Argentina perplexed many officers. Yet Martin Edwin Andersen reveals that during this same time many other United States government officials and agencies, especially the Pentagon, extended tacit support.

¹⁵ As its objective, on 24 March 1976, the junta stated the following under "objetivos básicos," point 2.5, of its inaugural acta:

Concreción de una situación socioeconómica que asegure la capacidad de decisión nacional y la plena realización del hombre argentino, en donde el Estado mantenga el control sobre las áreas vitales que hacen a la seguridad y al desarrollo y brinde a la iniciativa y capitales privados, nacionales y extranjeros, las

condiciones necesarias para una participación racional de los recursos, neutralizando toda posibilidad de interferencia de aquéllos en el ejercicio de los poderes públicos.

(Troncoso 1: 111)

Notice the emphasis on "hombre" and the absence of "mujer," typical of the military's sexist ideology. Later, under point 2.7 the regime added that the government would insure the "[r]elación armónica entre el Estado, el capital y el trabajo, con fortalecido desenvolvimiento de las estructuras empresariales y sindicales, ajustadas a sus fines específicos" (Troncoso 1: 111). Besides declaring broad objectives, these lines provide an example of how the government used ambiguous rhetoric to say simultaneously everything and nothing.

¹⁶ For a more complete history and analysis of Martínez de Hoz's plan, see William C. Smith's Authoritarianism and the Crisis of Argentine Political Economy and Gary W. Wynia's Argentina: Illusions and Realities.

¹⁷ Between 1976 and the first half of 1979, the total of volumes published plummeted from 31.5 million to 8.7 million copies per year. Likewise the number of new titles per year fell from 6,674 to 2,026 during the same

time (Adellach 99).

¹⁸ Diana Taylor, in Disappearing Acts, makes a similar observation. She states: "[t]he prohibitions were so many, and the language so vague and all-inclusive, that anything could be construed as subversive" (11).

¹⁹ The following discussion on censorship centers mainly on the printing and the publishing industries. Long before the Military Process, Argentina already possessed a sophisticated bureau for censoring cinema, both domestic and international. Also, since the government took control of television and many radio stations and placed its own people in power, it did not need to create new rules to control those industries.

However, rock-and-roll music (both national and international), musicians, and fans suffered greatly during the military dictatorship. At one point the government published a list of over two hundred prohibited songs, which also included several tangos by Carlos Gardel. Before creating this long register, the junta banned several of Gardel's songs, which inspired Pedro Orgambide to write Prohibido Gardel (1978) while exiled in Mexico. The military government perceived enemies at every corner.

In typical double-speak fashion, after the invasion of the Malvinas Islands, the regime banned all rock-and-roll music in English and promoted Argentine musicians. However, this attempt backfired and the opposition used the state-sponsored rock-and-roll events to protest against the government.

For a more complete overview of censorship, its history, and documents see Andrés Avellaneda's Censura, autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina 1960-1983.

²⁰ Jacobo Timerman's appalling and well known experiences elucidate this fragmentation and the rivalries among the various authorities. In Preso sin nombre, celda sin número, he recounts that while the Federal Police were deporting him, another group of military officers attempted to kidnap him again:

También supe, porque lo publicó un diario argentino, que quince minutos después de la salida de mi casa, un grupo de militares llegó con la intención de secuestrarme. Y en el viaje en helicóptero, uno de los policías me dijo que no pudieron informarme en casa de mi expulsión del país porque varios servicios de seguridad tenían instalados aparatos de escucha que les podrían haber advertido que saldría

vivo del país. (159)

Such rivalries among the armed forces and the other security agencies became common and escalated the pervasive chaos and paranoia among the citizens.

²¹ Ricardo Piglia stated that his novel Respiración artificial would have never been published if the government had created a central clearing house to examine all written texts (Personal interview on 29 July 1991, Buenos Aires).

²² Although censorship briefly left many individuals alone, the national government took immediate steps to close important literary institutions. Within twenty-four hours of the coup d'etat, the state shut down the Argentine office of Siglo Veintiuno, one of Latin America's most prestigious publishing houses. A similar doom fell upon the Librería Hernández, one of Buenos Aires's oldest and most famous bookstores. The government closed the bookstore for three years, during which time the books "disappeared" from the shelves. Fortunately, the owner Damián Carlos Hernández escaped the country (Adellach 104-05).

However, Daniel and Ana María Divinskys' harrowing experience in 1977 illustrates the military's irrational and erratic policies. The Divinskys' company Ediciones

de la Flor, famous for Quino's Mafalda, published El puño, a children's book, originally from West Germany. This book tell a story about how a hand realizes that it is defenseless when open, but it can defend itself when united as a fist. The government considered El puño subversive since it believed it promoted latent Marxist ideology. Thus the junta detained the Divinskys for four months. After their release, Daniel and Ana María went into exile in Venezuela and Ediciones de la Flor reduced its activities (Adellach 103-04).

This repression also played a key role in persuading the publishing industry to change its marketing strategy just as much as the economic conditions.

²³ At one point a customs official at the Ezeiza International Airport of Buenos Aires confiscated an Art History book on Cubism (Cubismo in Spanish) since he thought that Cubism supported Fidel Castro's Cuba, and by extension Marxism. Daniel Divinsky recounted this anecdote during a personal interview on 18 June 1991 in Buenos Aires.

²⁴ Hecker and Castillo founded El escarabajo de oro in 1960, in honor of Edgar Allen Poe, which soon turned into a cultural institution with 5000 copies of each issue and wide distribution throughout Argentina.

²⁵ Liliana Hecker provided this information during a personal interview on 13 July 1994 in Buenos Aires.

²⁶ By 1978, also seeing this vacuum in the intellectual environment, the government instituted its own Revista nacional de cultura. Although purporting lofty goals, a cursory examination reveals that this journal usually contained banal articles and reviews of insignificant books; it did not contribute to the recovery of Argentine culture. In fact, this Revista served as the spokesperson for the officers' ideology as seen in an article in issue 9 (1980) attacking Antoine Saint-Exupéry, the author of Le Petit Prince, which the generals banned.

Several times the Revista openly supported the dictatorship. Guillermo Gallardo's article "La forma tradicional de gobierno en la Argentina" documents the "tradition" of military intervention in civil government from the Spanish Colony to the present. Gallardo concludes:

Y opino por último que el hecho de que por tanto tiempo hayamos unido en nuestra mente el concepto de autoridad, de gobierno, con el ejercicio de las armas, que han de llevarse como garantía del orden, del respeto a las

leyes universales de la humanidad, como amparo del bien, del pobre, del desvalido, del humilde, puede ser--ha de ser--un factor positivo que no debe dejarse de lado en el momento de la reconstrucción. (24)

The government also used the Revista nacional de cultura to justify the Malvinas war. Agueda Müller offered a collection of poems, "Nuestros poetas y las Malvinas," as evidence that the presence of the Malvinas Islands in poetry and the literary imagination reinforced Argentina's territorial claims. Not surprisingly the majority of the poems date from just after the invasion on 2 April 1982.

²⁷ A group of psychoanalysts, writers and literary critics, most notably Luis Gusmán and Eduardo Grüner, established the journal Sitio in 1981. Since the military regime considered psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis as tools of the subversives and the international Marxist conspiracy against Argentina, and discredited these fields and their practitioners constantly, the birth of Sitio represents a major rejoinder to the generals. But, given its founding in 1981, Sitio stands as a product of Argentine culture's completed recovery from its comatose state, and not as

participant.

²⁸ Although Humor played a crucial role as a center of opposition against the government, few critics have studied the lampoon's significance. Francine Masiello briefly refers to Humor as a contestatory voice during the dictatorship in "La Argentina durante el Proceso: Las múltiples resistencias de la cultura." Kathleen Newman offers a concise summary of the first year of Humor, and an analysis of several front covers and other cartoons in "Cultural Redemocratization: Argentina, 1978-89." In a similar manner Diana Taylor, in Disappearing Acts, uses several covers from Humor to exemplify the binary gender roles prevalent during and after the Military Process.

²⁹ During the tenth anniversary of the founding of the magazine in 1988, Mona Moncalvillo, in "La historia de Humo®," interviewed Cascioli and Sanz concerning the origins and the history of the magazine. Cascioli stated his belief that before 1978 it would have been impossible to establish a similar project (Moncalvillo 60). Although Cascioli did not offer a reason for this assertion, I contend that the World Cup and its publicity hype distracted attention. In addition, the regime was ending the "Dirty War" and could no longer justify such severe censorship.

³⁰ During my many conversations with friends, acquaintances, and contacts, everyone reaffirmed that Humor represented the only breath of fresh air during the dictatorship. Several individuals reported that they asked their kiosqueros, or newsstand owners, to save a copy for them.

During the interview with Mona Moncalvillo in 1988, Cascioli stated that "Muchas de las cartas [de los lectores] sostenían que "Humor" era el único espacio donde la gente se sentía representada. Creo que fue por los lectores que decidimos apelar a columnistas políticos" (Moncalvillo 61).

³¹ Mona Moncalvillo joined the staff of Humor shortly before October 1979 and started to publish extensive interviews with many well known Argentines.

³² While concentrating on television, cinema, drama, and sports, Humor paid sporadic attention to literature. Only toward the end of the Military Process, when the writer Oscar Hermes Villordo associated himself with the staff, did the magazine consider and promote literature, especially narrative and poetry, on a more consistent basis. In fact, Humor initiated a long series of reviews about previously banned books in 1984.

³³ The introduction of different journalists reveals how Humor became more contestatory. Claudio Bazán began

writing a regular commentary about economic issues, frequently criticizing the government, with issue 43 (October 1980). Later, Enrique Vázquez contributed articles on political affairs starting with issue 58 (May 1981). Finally, Aníbal Vinelli, a movie critic, initiated the regular feature "Cortes y confesión," in issue 60 (June 1981), where he filled in the gaps created by the censors.

³⁴ Given its defiant stance, surprisingly the government confiscated only one issue, 97, in January 1983. After the confiscation of issue 97, many well known figures openly supported Humor and submitted their names to the list of backers, including former President Arturo Frondizi, former Peronist Minister of Economy Antonio Cafiero, Radical politician Raúl Alfonsín, and the Peronist politician Italo Luder. The latter two persons ran as the respective presidential candidates in the 1983 elections.

³⁵ The magazine's tenuous support of the Malvinas Islands invasion best exemplifies its important role during the Military Process. While assenting to Galtieri's recuperation of Argentine territory for the national good, Humor also stated that it was prepared to continue its protests against the dictatorship.

³⁶ This is not the first time that reactionary groups torched theatres in Argentina. Diana Taylor notes three previous instances in her study Disappearing Acts. Gabino Ezeiza's tent theatre, or carpa, went up in flames in 1894. Ezeiza performed mainly drama gauchesco. Later, in 1910 the children of the fascist Liga Patriótica set fire to Frank Brown's carpa. Brown was a British citizen and a trained Shakespearian actor who moved to Argentina to stage children's theatre. In 1942, the fascists ignited the Teatro Corrientes, the home of the Communist Teatro del Pueblo (232-233). Coincidentally, 1942 also marks the year that Roberto Arlt died, a well known writer and founder of Teatro del Pueblo.

³⁷ The success of Teatro Abierto inspired other artists to hold their own festivals such as Danza Abierta and Plástico Abierto. Unfortunately, these parallel festivals did not develop the same enthusiasm as the progenitor, nor did they leave significant documents concerning their content.

³⁸ Pacho O'Donnell and Roberto Cossa carried out this debate in the cultural section of Humor over three different issues, from 92 to 94, in 1982.

³⁹ Other social concerns could also accompany this list of topics. Diana Taylor describes how the Military

Process also prohibited mentioning certain issues:

Cultural content would harmonize with the proceso's mission--there should be no contradictory or disturbing images, nothing against church, family, or state. Divorce, abortion, adultery, wife and child and elder abuse all vanished--in representation if not in life. Images of institutional and generational conflict were to be avoided at all costs. Stories had to have happy endings. (11)

Chapter Two

Let us not talk about it:

apparent evasion of historical reality

When General Jorge Videla and the other members of the first junta carried out their coup d'etat on 24 March, 1976, many Argentines breathed a sigh of relief. Given the country's history of military governments, this abrogation of constitutional rule at first did not appear any different from previous takeovers. Just as in the preceding four decades, once again the armed forces would "put the house in order" for an eventual return to democratic rule.

However, in contrast with the former regimes, this junta intended to maintain power for an indefinite amount of time and took immediate steps to assure its control over the nation. The military occupied all federal, provincial and municipal buildings and dissolved the National Congress and provincial assemblies. In addition, the generals replaced the justices of the Supreme Court and other provincial courts with their own people (Hodges, Argentina, 1943-1987 193). With respect to mass and high culture, the new rulers operated just as quickly and methodically. The junta took over state-owned radio and television stations, closed several key

publishing houses, replaced directors of governmental cultural institutions and public universities, and imposed censorship on the press, private radio and the publishing and printing industries.

During these years many authors responded to the Military Process in two different ways. The writers either immediately created narratives that exposed the regime's repressive and bloody policies, which officially did not exist, or they merely avoided the current reality completely and only later discussed its horrors. The exiled writers generally followed the first possible response to the military government by describing the atrocities in Argentina.¹ In contrast, an examination of the home writers and their texts, novels written and published in Argentina, reveals that narrative passed through three different phases while reacting to the military government; at first works refrained from talking about the dictatorship and later they discussed the regime and its policies, first by allegory and then by more direct strategies.

In this chapter I explore how the texts published in Argentina during the first three years of the regime--the evasive phase--practiced a style of writing that I designate as the narrative of negation. Between 1976 and

1978 few noteworthy novels appeared in Argentina. For example, in her dissertation, Silvia Pites provides an appendix listing the historical novels published between 1975 and 1985 (187-200). Although Pites's list accounts for a narrowly defined category, the register contains only eight entries between 1976 and 1980, which indicates the great dearth of publications. Fernando Reati's list of Argentine narrative after 1975 parallels Pites's inventory and also indicates that few novels were produced during these four years as well (247-250). My own research has yielded similar results; a small number of texts were published during the first years of the Military Process.² Generally, a state of shock permeated Argentine literary society after the coup d'etat. Many Argentines designate this same period as el terror, reminiscent of the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution, because of the regime's brutal and indiscriminate repression. The home authors did not know what themes and plots they could safely address nor did publishers perceive what stories they could print. From this state of shock arose the "narrative of negation," that is, novels that lack any candid textual connections with the historical moment of their creation and publication. These texts do not comment on the military

regime, its repressive and bloody policies, the disappeared persons and the survivors of torture, the censorship, the economic chaos, or other subjects deemed "inappropriate." Many times the books do not even discuss or mention endemic social problems like poverty, the squalid urban living conditions, or even unhappy marriages.

The phrase narrative of negation evokes two primary characteristics found in these novels from the early years of the Military Process: the "uchronic" and the "utopic." The quotation marks indicate the importance of the etymological meanings of these concepts. "Uchronic" signifies "timelessness" or more exactly "no-time."³ A "uchronic" text does not refer overtly, or possibly even covertly, to extra-textual reality by dates or well-known events.⁴ José Pablo Feinmann's first novel, Ultimos días de la víctima (1979), exemplifies this "uchronic" nature of the "narrative of negation." References to electricity, the telephone, and motorized vehicles place the story in the later twentieth century, but the novel never divulges an exact date. In a similar fashion, in Eduardo Belgrano Rawson's second novel, El náufrago de las estrellas (1979), the action occurs at some

unspecific moment in the early twentieth century, but again the text fails to disclose a specific year.

Although in current usage "utopia" denotes the perfect place or an ideal society, this word literally indicates a site that does not exist.⁵ When referring to narrative, a "utopic" text floats through space, without any consistent or direct geographical indications for its setting. The characters and the action move through the work in almost pure limbo. If the text includes concrete geographical references, they bear minimal consequence for the novel. Besides possessing "uchronic" tendencies, Rodolfo Rabanal's first novel El apartado (1975) also exhibits this "utopic" characteristic. The main character, Pablo, lives in a large unnamed city, presumably the Greater Buenos Aires area. Although Pablo drifts through this large metropolis, the book never reveals the names of the parks, streets, and squares. In a like manner, Ana María Shúa's first novel Soy paciente (1980) displays this "utopic" characteristic. The unidentified protagonist enters an unnamed hospital for diagnostic tests. Instead of discovering the disease, the main character finds himself entrapped in a bureaucratic nightmare and can never leave the institution. Though the text briefly mentions different

parts of Buenos Aires five times, these references do not strengthen the development of the action. Soy paciente transpires almost exclusively in the unnamed hospital, in an unspecified location.

Novels do not need to possess simultaneously the "utopic" and "uchronic" characteristics to qualify as narratives of negation. Both Feinmann's and Belgrano Rawson's novels, although "uchronic," still contain precise geographical information. The readers can trace the characters' movements on maps. In contrast, especially in the case of Shúa's novel, "utopic" novels are simultaneously "uchronic."

The "uchronic" and the "utopic" characteristics function as strategies and create an apparently innocuous work of literature, superficially devoid of programmatic social or political commentary about Argentina in the twentieth century. Thus this inoffensive aspect becomes the third and the central characteristic of these texts.⁶ This assertion may appear problematic, reductive, and even trite. But given the state of censorship, when the military banned the Latin-American Bible, approved by the Latin American Bishops' Committee, and Le petit prince by Saint-Exupéry both as "subversive," authors grew wary about what they published (Adellach 93-95). Ana María

Shúa stated that when she began Soy paciente, she wanted to devise a setting devoid of any possible "subversive" connotations.⁷

A strong tradition of socially engaged literature has occupied a significant place in Argentine letters since early nineteenth-century romanticism. Although an art-for-art's sake tradition has emerged periodically, the prominence of socially committed writing makes the emergence of the narrative of negation more noticeable, especially during a period of extreme social turbulence. Throughout this chapter I explore how this type of narrative emerges as a response to the institutionalization of the Military Process. The texts within this category negate historical connections and avoid explicit social criticism. The characters, setting, and plots do not exhibit any obvious connections with the Military Process. However, through a contextual reading, the texts divulge allegories, allusions, parallels, and echoes about Argentine society and the regime. In this chapter I focus on Feinmann's novel Ultimos días de la víctima and Ana María Shúa's Soy paciente. I show that, although these novels belong to the narrative of negation, they present references to their historical moment of creation and publication.

The concepts of surveillance and the distant and of hidden location of power, which Michel Foucault develops in Discipline and Punish, enhance the examination of the latent presence of the dictatorship in both Feinmann's and Shúa's texts. While studying the origins of the contemporary penal system, Foucault discovers that the locus of the state's method of control and punishment over the citizenry shifted from a strategy of inflicting pain in and on the body to one of surrounding the body with legal and organizational forces of control. The state promulgated and publicized the new laws, instituted numerous governmental bodies and organized trained police forces to watch the citizenry. At the same time, the state's power structures moved from an open spectacle, such as public flogging and executions, to an unseen venue, such as walled prisons and anonymous bureaucracies. In addition to these transformations, this new system of regulation also invaded people's daily lives. Foucault writes that the citizenry slowly adopted and incorporated laws and regulations into its behavior; individuals became passive and respectful subjects. The prison best exemplifies this new method of control since the institution--through the many regulations, the guards' watchful eyes, and now the lenses of video cameras, motion sensors, and electronic

tags--surrounds the inmates and regiments every aspect of their daily lives. The government's power to control and punish becomes ubiquitous, but its origins are distant, untouchable, and almost unknowable. When the modern nation-state and its omnipresent authority came to fruition in the nineteenth century, so did a narrative form that surprisingly includes many of these new structures: the detective story.

Although the generals intended to break with the past and to institute new social structures and national ideology in Argentina, they failed at every turn. Feinmann's Ultimos días de la víctima exemplifies the military's defeat since it continues the long tradition of detective fiction in Argentina. Edgar Allen Poe initiated this genre when he penned and published his short stories "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," in 1841 and later "The Purloined Letter" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget" in 1845 (Panells 460). Poe's short stories inaugurated the classical formula of detective fiction with the "locked-room mystery." Later, when detective fiction moved from the genre of the short story to the novel, Poe's innovation transformed itself into the puzzle-novel, or the whodunit.⁸ The classical formula centers on the detective's intellectual capacity, on his

position in the upper classes of society, and on an idealized concept of impartial justice. About a century later Dashiell Hammett revolutionized the classical formula and introduced the hard-boiled genre of detective fiction with The Dain Curse and The Maltese Falcon in 1929.⁹ In contrast with the classical formula, the hard-boiled genre formula substituted the police detective, a government official who represents the justice system and state authority, with a professional private-eye, a person free from the strictures of government protocol who endeavors to satisfy his or her client's demands rather than attain an idealized notion of fairness. The private-eye may discover the true perpetrator of a crime, but may not follow through with the proper legal steps to carry out justice as the police officer does. More importantly, the hard-boiled formula replaced the intellectual and upper-class aspects of the classical formula with a more decadent, sordid, and violent vision of society.

Unlike most countries in Spanish America, where translations of foreign works dominate the majority of detective fiction sold and read, Argentina distinguishes herself with a long tradition of detective fiction authors. In the nineteenth century various writers such

as Fray Mocho and Paul Groussac experimented briefly with detective fiction.¹⁰ Although translations of foreign texts were popular during the first four decades of this century, Argentine production was limited.¹¹ Jorge Luis Borges, more than any other author, fostered the development of Argentine classical-formula detective fiction, first with Adolfo Bioy Casares and their co-written novel Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi and later with his classic short stories "La muerte y la brújula" and "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan."¹² Akin to Borges's position vis-à-vis the classical model, Ricardo Piglia played an equally important role with advancing the hard-boiled novel. In 1969 Piglia launched the collection Serie negra, published by Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, which included both foreign and Argentine hard-boiled novels (Bra, "La evolución del género policial argentino" 69). Piglia's series influenced many younger novelists in the 1970s.¹³

In spite of the generals' attempt to break with the past and install a new mentality during the Military Process, Feinmann carried on the tradition of detective fiction and published Ultimos días de la víctima in 1979 and Ni el tiro del final in 1981. Instead of imitating exclusively classical formula or hard-boiled genre

conventions, Feinmann combined elements from both traditions in his first novel and indirectly commented on Argentine society during the dictatorship. Several times I use Amelia Simpson's observations of Feinmann's text to advance my analysis and to show how Ultimos días de la víctima negates its historical moment.

Despite its suggestive title, Ultimos días de la víctima focuses not on the possible victims of state terror during the regime, but rather on a professional assassin's life and mode of operation. Instead of being a true detective story, Ultimos días de la víctima is a crime novel that delineates the construction of a homicide while using the conventions of detective fiction. Raúl Mendizábal, the middle-aged main character and hit man, receives a contract, from "un hombre importante" to liquidate Rodolfo Külpe. Rather than executing his job immediately, Mendizábal follows his normal method of operation: he watches Külpe and discovers as much information as possible. During the sweltering summer month of February, the hit man rents a room in a residencial, across the street from Külpe's apartment, and spies on him the following eight days. While trailing his imminent victim through Buenos Aires, Mendizábal photographs him constantly. This detailed surveillance and constant photographing both constitute

the assassin's standard mode of operation. But during this contract the photos of Külpe and the target himself increasingly obsess Mendizábal.¹⁴ This constant observation of Külpe elucidates the title of the novel; the text presents the final eight days of the victim's life.

While watching his target, Mendizábal discovers Cecilia, possibly Külpe's girlfriend, another friend Amanda, and her son Sergio in Barrancas del Belgrano, a park in Belgrano, an upper-class residential area of Buenos Aires. On the seventh day, the contact Peña instructs the assassin to finish the job as soon as possible. The following day, after the funeral for his friend Gato Funes, Mendizábal attempts to complete the assassination when he enters Külpe's apartment and discovers that his victim has abandoned it and disappeared. Then the hit man searches for Külpe desperately and he nonchalantly murders two other innocent people in the process. After being relieved of his job, and effectively unemployed, Mendizábal returns to the residencial and finds Külpe's apartment lit and occupied. Upon entering, the gunman discovers Külpe's apartment posted with photographs of himself, similar to his images of the intended victim Külpe, taken at

different moments during the surveillance. Then Mendizábal discovers Külpe, the long-sought target, and dies at his hands. At the end of the text, Mendizábal rather than Külpe turns out to be the true prey. Ironically, just as the novel inverts the conventions of detective fiction, the title reverses its meaning and designates Mendizábal's final eight days and not Külpe's.

The récit of the novel contains three different parts. The first section, entitled "Primera Parte: Siguiendo a Külpe," with thirty-seven short unnumbered chapters, covers the entire eight days of Mendizábal's surveillance of his target and contains the majority of the action. "Segunda parte: Buscando a Külpe," with nine brief unnumbered chapters, presents the last night when Mendizábal frantically seeks Külpe to execute him, and fulfill the contract with his employer. The third part, called simply "Final: Külpe," with three chapters, details Mendizábal's death. Ultimos días de la víctima displays a traditional third-person narrative agency that focalizes the majority of the actions through Mendizábal, the assassin-victim. Nevertheless, in the final chapter of the novel, the focalization changes from Mendizábal to Señora Garland, the residencial owner. Since the gunman left his belongings in the room, Señora Garland files a missing person report with the local police, four days

after his death, to avoid any legal problems. Also through filing this paperwork, Señora Garland can legally dispose of Mendizábal's possessions and then rent the room to another occupant. Hence this chapter also works as an epilogue and provides a closure to the plot.

To further emphasize the conventional characteristic of the récit, the text begins with two epigraphs. The first consists of a stereotypical line from an unspecified Dashiell Hammett novel: "Estaba parado en el umbral del living-room, con un revólver en la mano" (7). The second one, the concluding sentences from Borges's seminal short story "La muerte y la brújula," perhaps points to the merely conventional aspects of detective fiction: "Después, muy cuidadosamente hizo fuego" (7). Simpson correctly remarks that "These epigraphs link Feinmann's novel to two traditions, the North American hard-boiled detective model and Borges's philosophical, speculative fictions" (141). Thus, these two epigraphs indicate that Feinmann's text first recognizes Borges as the paragon of Argentine detective fiction and second Dashiell Hammett as the most important writer and innovator of detective fiction since Edgar Allen Poe. These two quotations emphasize the conventionalized literary aspects of Feinmann's novel and suggest that the

text embodies an example of re-writing previous plots and of manipulating established paradigms.

Furthermore, these two epigraphs also foreshadow the denouement. The final lines of the penultimate chapter of Ultimos días de la víctima repeat the authors' lines almost verbatim:

--Deje el arma sobre la mesa --dijo una voz
[Külpe].

Obedeció [Mendizábal]. Después, se dio vuelta y observó al hombre que, casi apoyado contra la puerta del living, lo apuntaba con un revólver.

Era Külpe.

Se miraron. Külpe dijo:

--No tengo nada contra usted, Mendizábal.

Pero tengo un trabajo que cumplir.

Entonces hizo fuego. (212-213)

Just as Borges's short story concludes when the detective Erik Lönnrot learns that he has entangled himself in his own investigation and dies at the hands of the sought-after criminal Red Scharlach, Mendizábal discovers that he has trapped himself in his own method of operation and dies at Külpe's hands. More importantly, before pulling the trigger, Külpe utters the exact same words that the assassin had originally composed for his victim. Indeed,

Külpe's imitation of Mendizábal's mode of operation and the usurpation of his words constitute an act of plagiarism. This appropriation becomes even more ironic and significant since Mendizábal concocts the sentence that evening, a few hours before dying at Külpe's hands:

No tengo nada contra usted, Külpe.

Era exactamente la frase que quería decirle un momento antes de matarlo. Que no tenía nada contra él. Que no lo mataba por ningún motivo personal. (168)

Pero tengo un trabajo que cumplir.

Entonces, satisfecho, empuñó la Luger, se paró en el centro de la habitación, miró una a una las fotografías de Külpe que había colocado sobre la pared, y en voz alta y firme dijo:

--No tengo nada contra usted, Külpe. Pero tengo un trabajo que cumplir. (169; emphasis in original)

Furthermore, Külpe's plagiarism of Mendizábal's words implies the level of sophistication that Külpe, or some other unknown person, uses to conduct surveillance of the gunman. While the assassin prefers to watch his victim from afar and refuses to use modern technology, Külpe, or his assistant, probably uses these devices and plants microphones in the residencial, infiltrates in

Mendizábal's room undetected, or eavesdrops on him from afar.¹⁵

The final chapter reveals Külpe's sophistication while he counterfeits Mendizábal's mode of operation. During the first forced entry into Külpe's apartment, the gunman slightly chars the edge of a curtain. In his mind, this insignificant incineration mark signifies Mendizábal's control and power over his victim. Also assuming that Külpe will not notice the mark, the hit man views this burnt curtain as evidence of his superior intelligence and, more importantly, artistry as a hired assassin. Indeed, before creating the tell-tale attribute Mendizábal thinks: "que cualquier signo destinado a alertar la atención de Külpe otorgaría a su trabajo un mérito superior" (24; emphasis in original). Throughout the novel the main character reflects upon the singed curtain while he contemplates his victim's fate. Thus the incinerated spot serves as a leitmotif of Mendizábal's presence in Külpe's life and his successful surveillance of his victim. But when Señora Garland presents the missing person report to the police, she comments:

Su único defecto, ~~quizá~~, era que fumaba mucho, y seguramente ~~por eso~~, sin duda

involuntariamente, había quemado con alguno de sus cigarrillos la cortina de la ventana. Pero sólo había sido una pequeña quemadura, casi insignificante. Un descuido--concluyó la señora Garland--algo que le puede pasar a cualquiera. (214)

Whereas Simpson regards this duplicated burnt curtain as an act "restoring the system to its perfect, inhuman equilibrium" (145), since both assassins treat each other equally, I interpret this common emblem as evidence of Külpe's plagiaristic capabilities, and Mendizábal's ignorance of reality.

Given the similarities between Borges's short story and Feinmann's novel, Ultimos días de la víctima resembles a re-writing, or an expansion, of Borges's short story into the length of a novel. The presence of Hammett's epigraph indicates that Feinmann's novel synthesizes the classical formula and the hard-boiled traditions into one narrative. Furthermore, the action of the text creates a situation so that the denouement fits almost perfectly with the epigraphs. Hence, Ultimos días de la víctima simulates a literary exercise, where Feinmann ingeniously manipulates established conventions and models. Señora Garland's revelation concerning the burnt curtain, which indicates the duplicity between

Külpe and Mendizábal, also reflects how Feinmann's text successfully follows the literary models invoked by the two epigraphs.

The importance of Borges's epigraph develops as the action of the novel progresses. The generality of the Hammett epigraph suggests a relation with the more general traits in Hammett's work, specifically, the themes of deception, betrayal, and a sordid and corrupt society. In The Maltese Falcon, Hammett's most famous novel, all the main characters betray one another at some point in the story. At the conclusion, the detective Sam Spade reports Brigid O'Shaughnessy to the police even after he repeatedly promised to cover up her guilt.

Whereas deceit and betrayal permeate Hammett's work, these themes strongly surface at the end of Ultimos días de la víctima, when Külpe kills Mendizábal. Someone, probably the "hombre muy importante," his boss in the underworld, or more likely the contact Peña, secretly contracts Külpe to murder Mendizábal. While discussing the job over lunch, Peña comments to Mendizábal:

es cierto que no lo trago, es cierto que me revienta su manera de trabajar, sus mariconerías y sus vueltas para liquidar a un tipo. --Sonrió con desprecio, pero resentido--. Su pulcritud, como dice siempre

el patrón. Eso sí que me revienta: su podrida pulcritud. Y más me revienta todavía que lo prefieran a usted, que le den los mejores trabajos. . . . Yo soy su enemigo, le tengo tanta bronca que podría matarlo. No diga que no le avisé. (39; emphasis in original)

Peña reveals that he pursues a personal vendetta against his associate and threatens him several times throughout the novel. Külpe's plagiarism of Mendizábal's mode of operation reveals that members of the underworld organization have deliberately betrayed the gunman. The pictures of Mendizábal in Külpe's apartment also reinforce this final double cross since they show the assassin during his surveillance of Külpe from the first day. The variety of images also indicate that Külpe works in tandem with someone else to kill the hit man. Since the photographs document the hit man during the entire eight days, they also insinuate that "el hombre importante" himself desires to liquidate Mendizábal and therefore entraps him with the proposed contract against Külpe.

Another similarity between Borges's story and Ultimos días de la víctima rests in the metafictionality of both texts. The majority of detective fiction incorporates metafictional aspects through the main

character and detective--the police officer, the hired private eye or an aficionado--who creates a hypothesis, or hypotheses, about the crime and then resolves it. The formation of the hypothesis parallels the creation of a literary text. The main detective acquires and examines the evidence available and conducts interviews with the witnesses and/or suspects. Then the sleuth fashions this information into an apparently logical and linear sequence of events, creates a motive for the crime, and finally apprehends the criminal. The investigator acts like an author who writes a narrative within the frame of the detective narration. In Borges's short story, the detective Lönnrot adopts the role of an author while he collects evidence from three different assassinations and theorizes on the possible location for the fourth homicide. Unfortunately, Lönnrot's method for capturing Scharlach turns on itself and Lönnrot composes his own death. Instead of writing his own solution for the slayings, Lönnrot unknowingly transforms himself into a character in his text as Scharlach creates his narration of murders and false clues. Much like Lönnrot, Mendizábal adopts the role of author and writes Külpe's death. But at the same time his own actions transform Mendizábal into the character and the target in Külpe's forgery.

However, Mendizábal's fiction also incorporates other persons as characters. While observing his apparent victim, the protagonist notices Külpe's friends Cecilia, Amanda, and her son Sergio. Instead of ignoring these three people, or observing them from afar, the hit man approaches them and tries to learn more about his victim. At first Mendizábal believes that Amanda is Külpe's wife, and Sergio his son, just because he sees them together in Barrancas del Belgrano Park. One day Sergio's kite becomes entangled in a tree and the assassin takes advantage of the occasion and introduces himself to Sergio and Amanda. While freeing Sergio's kite and speaking with Amanda, he thinks: "En ese exacto momento, estremecido, comprendió que en cada cosa de ella que él pudiera recibir, por ínfima que fuese, habría algo de Külpe" (67; emphasis in original). Mendizábal applies all information that he learns from Amanda and utilizes it as he weaves the fiction around his victim. The assassin does the same later when he enters the striptease club Annie Malone, sees Cecilia and wants to speak with her. Although he does not manage to approach Cecilia, Mendizábal speaks with the other "working women" in the establishment and uses the opportunity to obtain as much information about Külpe as possible.

During the first encounter in Barrancas del Belgrano, Mendizábal learns that Sergio's father has died in an accident. Later the gunman ponders the possible relationship between Külpe and Amanda and concludes:

¿Qué había entonces entre Külpe y Amanda? Era increíble como con solamente dos frases (No tiene padre. Murió hace dos años), ella había destrozado todas las conjeturas que había sido posible forjar en torno a su relación con ese hombre. No discutían, entonces, porque él la había abandonado, ni porque no cumplía con su papel de padre, ni porque le pasaba poco dinero, ni porque tenía una amante. Habría que imaginar otra historia, porque--indudablemente--era otra la relación que los unía. Pero ¿cuál? (79-80; emphasis in original)

So convinced that connections must exist among Külpe, Amanda, and Sergio, Mendizábal concludes that Sergio's father did not die in an accident, but that Amanda and Külpe assassinated him to consummate their illicit relationship.

As in detective fiction, the assassin lists possible scenarios, draws charts, and organizes all the persons involved around Külpe. Again these diagrams present echoes of Borges's short story "La muerte y la brújula."

In this short story Lönnrot draws lines among the three murder sites, projects coordinates and discovers the site for the possible fourth homicide. In Ultimos días de la víctima Mendizábal begins the first chart and draws lines between Külpe, Amanda, and Sergio (78-83). Later, after obtaining more information, the gunman expands the chart and adds Cecilia and himself (157-58). Mendizábal contorts all of the information so that it agrees with his highly personal pre-conceived notions of reality. While creating the chart, and the possible connections, the assassin speculates about the possible relationships and connections among the people and later concludes:

Cecilia vivía enfrentada a Amanda. Ajena, seguramente, al crimen que Amanda y Külpe habían planeado y ejecutado, pero luchando ahora por la posesión del hombre que quería. Y algo más: cansada de la indefinición, quizá de la debilidad de Külpe. (157)

The conclusions about the relationships among the different persons emanate from the hit man's peculiar world view. No matter what he learns about the other people, Mendizábal distorts the information and fits it into his personal scheme of the world.

Feinmann's novel combines elements from both the classical formula of detective fiction and the hard-

boiled genre. The similarities between Feinmann's text and Borges's short story demonstrate that the classical formula predominates over the hard-boiled elements. At the beginning, however, the novel presents the underworld organization and the contract on Külpe, both hard-boiled elements. But these elements fade into the background and appear occasionally through the first part, "Siguiendo a Külpe," in two different ways. First, when the gunman and Peña discuss the hit in the restaurant Stromboni and in the residencial, Peña exhibits much hostility toward Mendizábal. Only in these scenes does the potential of violence and vendetta emerge. Second, while following Külpe through Buenos Aires, the murderer discovers two locales: the Prode y Lotería agency and the striptease club, or bordello, Annie Malone. Mendizábal believes that some underworld organization and Külpe use the Prode y Lotería agency as a front for their illicit dealings. The bar Annie Malone is located in the upper-class residential area of Barrio Norte: "De dudoso aspecto exterior, no muy pintarrajeado, pero bien convencional. Algo que uno espera encontrar por el bajo en 25 de Mayo [el barrio del puerto], o apenas en uno o dos lugares de la capital" (56-57). Whereas the Prode y Lotería agency presents a plausible underworld spot--a secret back room--Annie Malone represents the only truly

sordid locale present in the entire novel. While several key events occur in both establishments, neither business contains connections with any underworld crime syndicate.

Indeed the influence of the hard-boiled similarities only appear in the final two parts of the novel, which cover the final night during Mendizábal's search for his victim. After discovering the abandoned apartment, the gunman finds Cecilia on the street and accosts and batters her for information about Külpe. Then the assassin goes to the Prode y Lotería agency where he threatens the unnamed clerk with his gun and then beats him almost to unconsciousness. Later, the hit man abuses the confidence with Amanda and intimidates her in her own home. Before leaving, Mendizábal informs Amanda that he intends to kill Külpe. Amanda then chases after him in the rain screaming "¿por qué?" in the dead of the night. Finally the gunman goes to Annie Malone where he batters and kills Morales, the owner of the night club and Külpe's friend, and then the bartender. Throughout the first part the potential for hard-boiled style violence exists at several important moments, but only surfaces in a tour de force at the end.

Ironically, the latent ~~hard-boiled~~ characteristics imbedded in Feinmann's classical ~~formula~~ narrative also parallel much of Borges's fiction. Ariel Dorfman, in his

essay "Borges and American Violence," argues that violence and death represent constant themes in Borges's fiction. Indeed, Dorfman states that "This violence is, moreover, central to the very development of events: the presence of death coincides with the revelation, for the readers and for the dying character, of the true structure of the universe" (27). Only at the closing does the true nature of this part of Argentine society, filled with tension, personal vendettas, violence, underworld and underground organizations, deceit, and betrayal, become manifest and shine forth.

Contrasted with the action of the novel, so precise that readers can trace the characters' movements on a map of Buenos Aires, the ambiguity of the time frame seems inappropriate. Although the action transpires during eight sultry summer days in February, the novel does not offer a concrete year or date to situate the action. Furthermore, the text does not mention any important historical or cultural event contemporaneous with the plot. Thus since Feinmann's novel lacks a concrete historical moment it acquires the "uchronic" characteristic.

However, Ultimos días de la víctima displays two surreptitious and covert clues to create a time frame. First, while pursuing Kúlpe, Mendizábal celebrates his

fiftieth birthday. After receiving the contract, the narrator observes: "Afuera había árboles, pájaros y un sol implacable. Era verano. Mendizábal, bruscamente, recordó que estaba por cumplir cincuenta años" (13). By taking into account his date of birth, and adding fifty years, the readers could easily calculate the year when the action occurs in the novel. In a similar manner, the readers could compute the current year by combining the year of a well-known event and his age. But, although he turns fifty, Mendizábal does not recall the year of his birth, nor does he remember any significant historical event or his age. Instead, the text tantalizes the readers with these possibilities, but consistently negates the information necessary for these possible calculations.

The second clue appears when Mendizábal decides to clean house one evening. On Friday, the fifth day of the job, the assassin

se acercó a un viejo bargueño que tenía contra una de las paredes. Lo abrió. Estaba cubierto de cajones, todos con una tarjeta en su frente, cada una de las cuales se leían siempre dos fechas que emarcaban un período de tiempo: agosto 1961-noviembre 1965, o también octubre

1967-julio 1970, o si no enero 1972-diciembre
1974. (95)

Since the last drawer mentioned carries the date December 1974, one can assume that this one indicates the most recent date. In spite of the general uchronic characteristic of the text, the list of years, which evades the date of the present--plausibly February 1975--points to how the narrative of negation eludes precise historical markers. Feinmann's crime novel, working with the traditions of detective fiction, allows the text to explore the underworld and its order and disorder in a safe manner. Yet the disorder outside the text emerges as a constant pressure that the novel must avoid or negate, as in this list of dates. Indeed, issues of historical importance in February of 1975 would have included Juan Perón's recent death, the political developments in Isabel Perón's debilitated government, the urban guerrilla movements, the chaos in the Peronist party, and the nascent spiraling inflation and economic chaos. By avoiding these current events, Ultimos días de la víctima negates the tradition of engaged literature, as well as a precise time frame.

When viewed from the negational perspective that actively represses history, Feinmann's novel becomes much more complex than Simpson recognizes when she states:

Feinmann applies the device Borges uses in "La muerte y la brújula" to a text which, unlike Borges, is concerned with concrete social issues. The parallels between Feinmann's view of institutionalized violence and recent Argentine history are clear. The use of elements of the hard-boiled tradition in Ultimos días is characteristic of detective literature in the seventies in Argentina, where the duros represent a literary response to the increasingly repressive and violent social climate of the period. (144-45)

Simpson acutely perceives the parallels between Borges's short story and Ultimos días de la víctima, especially the deep philosophical commonality. Throughout the text Mendizábal experiences several moments of existential angst and then completely acknowledges his old age and mortality, starting when he remembers his upcoming birthday in chapter one. Simpson seems to suggest that the portrayal of organized crime represents another example of how Feinmann's text innovates Argentine fiction, especially the hard-boiled genre. But other depictions of the underworld abound in Argentine letters, especially Roberto Arlt's Los siete locos (1929) and Los llanzallamas (1931). Still, Simpson touches on the

central originality of Feinmann's text since she recognizes how it manipulates not only Hammett's work but also a classic Argentine text.

Simpson briefly draws parallels between the Military Process and Ultimos días de la víctima on the criterion of violence, a fundamental feature in the hard-boiled genre. On the one hand, the text presents savagery when Mendizábal brutalizes several people while hunting Külpe. But, upon closer examination Ultimos días de la víctima does not consistently render active violence, and limits its portrayal to the final two parts of the novel. Simpson does not distinguish between the potential for violence in the novel and its depiction. On the other hand, a stronger connection arises when considering the latent violence in the text, brewing just below the surface of society and the personality of many characters. At the beginning Mendizábal receives a contract to murder, which remains the central motivation in the plot, but does not occur until the end of the novel.

While avoiding political and social matters, Feinmann's novel exhibits many metaphysical issues, Mendizábal recognizes his mortality and his solitary lifestyle, and his friend Gato even declares:

Vos no podés seguir así, Raúl. Necesitás, no sé, una mina, pero no una mina cualquiera, una compañera, digo. Y algo más también. Porque, en serio, ¿de qué te sirve reventar gente, cobrar la guita y volverte a tu casa? Seguís solo igual. (122-23)

Simpson quickly includes these subjects under what she considers "concrete social issues." But, when placed in the context of the Military Process, such concerns as human rights abuses, the disappeared, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, censorship, women's position in society, anti-Semitism, homophobia, exiles, and economic chaos overshadow and clearly outweigh Mendizábal's problems and in turn question Simpson's assertion.

These considerations point toward a first-track interpretation of Feinmann's novel. On one hand Mendizábal's loneliness starts to address the larger social concern of human alienation and the growing precarious position of older citizens in society. On the other hand the text does not contain enough information to develop a complete first-track interpretation of Mendizábal's circumstances since the novel does not invoke his situation as part of a general, national and long-term concern in Argentine society that merits attention. Rather Mendizábal symbolizes a larger

universal philosophical concern and not a specific Argentine social question. In this manner Ultimos días de la víctima demonstrates how a text negates current historical reality and also reveals the parameters of the first-track reading. Yet through allegories and allusions Feinmann's text provides ample material for a second-track interpretation of the text, commentary and criticism precisely about the Military Process and its repercussions on society.

Instead of appraising violence as the central affinity between Feinmann's novel and the Military Process, examining the underworld's power structure constitutes a better criterion to discover traces of the regime. During the dictatorship the juntas concealed their decisions and internal conflicts from the public while they presented the appearance of unanimity and inclusion of all parties to the Argentines. When the armed forces, police, or other security group arrived and disappeared a person, no one knew who originally gave the order; they all invoked the chain of command to elude responsibility. When the generals or other government representatives made proclamations or changed current policies, they used an inclusive "we" to legitimate themselves, blurred the origin of the decisions, and thus avoided accountability. Ultimately, no one knew who was

liable for many decisions. The unfortunate fate of the disappeared demonstrates how the juntas hid their power structures. Behind every torture, disappearance, and execution the government used written texts to justify and rationalize its activities.

Amelia Simpson mentions the importance of the hidden power structures when she comments on the Kafkaesque quality of Feinmann's novel, but she does not develop these remarks and centers her analysis on the violence instead of the bureaucracy. While discussing the etymological significance of Külpe's name, Simpson states:

"Külpe" reminds us of the Spanish word "culpa" for guilt, as well as of Kafka's "K." Ultimos días is certainly reminiscent of Kafka's fantastic allegories. Here Feinmann uses the organized underworld to represent a society in which violence is naturalized. (142)

Kafka's literature conceals the power structure and portrays decisions as arbitrary and lacking logical explanations: his characters never question the bureaucracy. In The Castle power rests in the fortress on top of a hill, and the inhabitants of the surrounding town can only gain access to this power by telephone. In The Trial a faceless bureaucracy, ubiquitously present in

the attics, shields its apparatuses from Joseph K.'s understanding. Feinmann's novel describes the power structure in a similar fashion. An unidentified "hombre importante," also known as "el patrón," engages Mendizábal for the assassination. Another man known only as "Peña" serves as Mendizábal's contact. Reminiscent of The Castle, Mendizábal always contacts the underworld organization by telephone.¹⁶ The text never reveals the name of the organization. At the end when Peña relieves Mendizábal of the contract, and in effect retires him from his profession as a hit man, he adds: "nunca más le vamos a encargar un trabajo. Ni nosotros ni nadie. Y me voy a ocupar de que sea así" (206). Peña insinuates that a vast, hidden network of organized crime thrives in Buenos Aires, and that with one word he can eradicate a person's life.

Simpson observes that while realizing he works only as an instrument of the underworld, Mendizábal's downfall originates by asserting his individuality through his method of operation, which she sees as his hesitation to kill another human being (143). Furthermore, Simpson concludes that Mendizábal's existential crisis contributes to his reluctance in immediately completing the contract. However, the text provides abundant

evidence that the underground world has accepted Mendizábal's individuality and his idiosyncratic method of operation, and even appreciates his clean style for liquidating its opponents. For this reason the underworld considers him the best hit man in Buenos Aires. Instead of Mendizábal, the crime syndicate changes and no longer accepts him and his methods. At the end Peña, not the "patrón," occupies the chair of authority and dismisses Mendizábal.

In a similar manner Külpe remains anonymous throughout the novel. Mendizábal receives only minimal knowledge about his victim on a small index card. This lack of information propels him into the detailed and idiosyncratic surveillance of Külpe; he photographs him, enters his apartment, and becomes acquainted with Amanda and Sergio. But Mendizábal does not learn much from his investigation. Several times the assassin wonders about the contract on Külpe, but each time he concludes that "algo habría hecho para tener los días contados" (82; emphasis in original). For Mendizábal, Külpe represents a challenge that he must conquer.

Within the hidden and anonymous power structure, the human being becomes lost and depersonalized. The second-track reading of the novel views this process of dehumanization also as a strategy through which the text

corresponds to the Military Process and its repercussions in society. The armed forces, the police, and other security groups reduced citizens' complex personalities to a binary position of ally or subversive and classified them accordingly. In a similar manner, Mendizábal maintains files on his victims, along with a photograph, and reduces their identity to the date of assassination. For the gunman, these human beings only represent jobs well executed. His files, in addition to being reminiscent of police archives of possibly dangerous and subversive people, also comment on the depersonalized individual in contemporary society. In a similar manner the terrorist organizations saw a select group of people as possible kidnap, extortion, or assassination victims, and as instruments in their greater struggle. Upon leaving the office after the first meeting, Peña gives Mendizábal the information on the victim: "Atravesaron un largo pasillo y entraron en una habitación mal iluminada, estrecha, cubierta por ficheros metálicos. El hombre extrajo una ficha copiosamente escrita a máquina" (13). In all circumstances, the human being, dead or alive, turns into a mere index card in a catalogue drawer or file cabinet.

When considered through the second-track reading of texts, and given the year of publication of Ultimos días

de la víctima, it appears logical to interpret the hidden power of the underworld organization, or its bureaucracy, and the depersonalization of the human being as allusions to the Military Process. The police and other security forces reserved the right to check citizens' documentation randomly and the government maintained surveillance on many people. But this situation is not exclusive to military dictatorships, since the complex bureaucratization of the individual constitutes a basic reality of twentieth-century life. This is even more true in a country like Argentina where people only exist after they have acquired the proper government documents, sealed and stamped by the correct bureaucrat.

The hit man's indifference about Külpe's guilt parallels the attitude held by many Argentines about the widespread and highly orchestrated and blatant arrests that were most frequent in the first three years of the Military Process. After wondering about Külpe, Mendizábal concludes that Külpe "algo habría hecho" (82; emphasis in original). In a similar fashion, when confronted with a turbulent arrest of a person on the street, at work, or at home, many people stated "por algo será" or "algo habrá hecho" and continued their lives without considering the spectacle further (Graziano 43 and passim).

Mendizábal's superimposing his unique version of reality upon the characters, especially Külpe and Amanda, provides another parallel between Ultimos días de la víctima and the Military Process. With scant and tenuous information the gunman concludes that Külpe and Amanda assassinated Sergio's father five years ago:

No había otra explicación. La idea, obsesivamente, había ido creciendo en él desde el momento mismo en que Amanda pronunció, curiosamente unidas, las palabras accidente y muerte. El asesinato del padre de Sergio, planeado con monstruosa minuciosidad por Amanda y Külpe, y ejecutado por alguno de los dos, o por los dos a la vez, era la clave que permitía entender la relación atroz que unía a estos dos seres. Quizá, es cierto, era una idea descabellada. Pero si lo era, ¿cómo explicar lo que realmente surgía de las discusiones entre Külpe y Amanda en las Barrancas?

(81; emphasis in original)

Mendizábal bases his subsequent assumptions about the other characters on this conclusion and he uses it as leverage against Amanda so that she will reveal Külpe's whereabouts.¹⁷ Amanda, dumbfounded, responds that the

gunman is crazy. Mendizábal then interprets Amanda's negative response as declaring her guilt and as validating his conclusion. In addition, while interrogating Cecilia, the Prode y Lotería agency worker, and the bartender Morales about Külpe's current whereabouts, even when they repeatedly tell the truth and state that they do not know anything, Mendizábal cudgels them constantly until they are almost unconscious. Likewise, during the dictatorship the torturers interpreted their victims' negative responses and pleas of mercy as validating their original questions and techniques. The second-track interpretation considers Mendizábal's actions and attitude as commentary about and parallels to the armed forces during the Military Process.

Just as Mendizábal establishes the relationships among Külpe, Amanda, and Sergio, and he only sees those characters through his imagination, the military rulers imposed their idiosyncratic world view on Argentina and the population. According to the armed forces, the social and political problems in Argentina, especially the guerrilla warfare, corresponded to the first battle of World War III, the war between the Christian West and Communist East. And for the benefit of the West, so the generals believed, Argentina won this battle via the

Military Process.¹⁸ Mendizábal's thought and rationalization processes echo the juntas' thought procedures. The hit man uses violence needlessly, much like the military, and imposes his view upon the characters and believes that they all conspire against him to protect Külpe by not revealing his location. The military and their cronies operated with a similar conspiracy mentality, as seen from their perception of World War III to the international Anti-Argentine campaign.

While recounting his gruesome imprisonment, torture, and trial by the military in Preso sin nombre, celda sin número, the journalist Jacobo Timerman presents a grisly example of how the military's closed, recalcitrant, and illogical vision of the world affected the Argentine population. Similar to how Mendizábal creates and embellishes the relationship between Külpe and Amanda, the armed forces imposed their vision on the Argentine population using highly hypothetical and distorted information, without any evidence to support their actions. Timerman describes how the military's intelligence service envisioned guerrilla life and concluded:

Los siquiattras conocían muchos entretelones de las actividades subversivas de la guerrilla urbana, y que al mismo tiempo había siquiattras cuya misión era fortalecer el espíritu de los guerrilleros cuando se sentían deprimidos por las dificultades de la vida clandestina. (93-94)

In the confidentiality of the treatment session, the generals believed that the guerrilla members would express their fears and frustrations. Furthermore, the guerrilla members and the psychiatrists would use this confidential space to scheme against the government under the guise of mental health. Thus the armed forces, acting on the intelligence service's conclusions, brutally arrested the president of Argentina's Psychiatrists Organization because she would clearly lead such an organization or at least know the guerrilla leaders and the psychiatrists involved in such groups.

As in Ultimos días de la víctima, where Mendizábal interprets everything around Kúlpe, during the Military Process the ruling juntas comprehended everything as a grand conspiracy against Argentina and Western Christian values. Both Mendizábal and the armed forces inhabit a highly hermetic realm where only one interpretation of reality holds validity. Although Ultimos días de la

víctima does not represent a programmatic allegory or supply direct references to Argentina during the dictatorship, and consistently negates the historical moment of the action, it still displays parallels and echoes about the military regime, as revealed by the second-track explication of the text. However, to discover these affinities the readers must recognize how the hard-boiled detective genre deals with the relations of power, the corrupt underside of society, and personal ambition and also must understand the dynamics of the military's power relations and its unofficial and unsavory actions in Argentine society during the Military Process. Reading from such a perspective brings to light the contextual references that otherwise would remain hidden under the text's narrative strategies, the intertextual allusions, and the experimentation with the conventions of hard-boiled genre.

Just as the usage of detective fiction functions to place Feinmann's Ultimos días de la víctima in the parameters of the narrative of negation, Ana María Shúa's first novel Soy paciente (1980) also exemplifies a text that negates its historical moment.¹⁹ In contrast to Feinmann's use of the hard-boiled conventions to negate or annul direct references to the regime, Shúa's work

employs the closed space of a hospital room and creates a uchronic and utopic text. As in Ultimos días de la víctima, Shúa's novel also presents itself as innocuous literature. Nevertheless, Soy paciente offers indirect criticism about the conditions of the government. Again Foucault's principles concerning surveillance and punishment underlie the analysis of the role and the presence of bureaucracy in the text.

Without the surprise denouement or inversions found in Feinmann's text, Soy paciente plainly details an unnamed male patient's adventures and misfortunes in an undesignated medical center. The patient, who also serves as the first-person narrator, enters the hospital for the diagnosis of his mysterious disease. Following a short stay in the male sala general and a brief escape home, the patient returns to a double room for more tests. Doctor Tracer, the primary physician, assures him that the other bed will remain vacant. To demonstrate the quality of the room, Doctor Tracer states that the Director of the medical center used the same one when he was hospitalized for his illness. After many tests, an unneeded operation, the delousing of his room because of the pigeons outside, the loss of his job, the loss of his apartment, and bureaucratic turmoil, the patient finally obtains permission to leave. During the exit-permit

interview with the Director the protagonist realizes that the world outside the hospital no longer exists for him and that he forms an integral part of a social structure in the hospital:

Siento que el impulso que me trajo hasta aquí me ha abandonado. Tengo hambre. Son las cuatro de la tarde y a esta hora la mucama entrará en mi pieza con cuatro galletitas. . . . Me angustia imaginar mi cama acostumbrándose al peso de un nuevo jinete. Después de todo, es posible que decida quedarme unos días más. Solamente unos pocos días. Les comunico mi decisión. (135)

The patient remains in the hospital indefinitely, perhaps for the rest of his life. He completes a full circle from initially resisting the order of the hospital to finally accepting the uniformity and fully participating in it. The closing scenes illustrate the patient's acceptance of his position in his new society. During the annual delousing of his room, he spends the day in the sala general and associates with his friends and plays cards. When a newly admitted man enters, the patient greets him, along with the other occupants, and everyone sings the same welcoming song that was sung when

the patient had arrived for his initial stay in the sala general.

Whereas the histoire does not present any complications or surprises, the récit is more intricate. Soy paciente consists of nineteen chapters and opens in media res when the patient already occupies the double room, after his frightful experience in the sala general. The second and third chapters function as analepses of the patient's first sojourn in the sala general and his return to the medical center. The subsequent chapters of the novel take place in sequential order without any anachronies. The longer the patient lives in and adjusts to the hospital, the narrative becomes more general and sheds his preoccupation with the passage of time.

Usually first-person narration utilizes one of three different narrative strategies. The first person-narrator, the main character or a minor character, transfers the events into a written text with metafictional self-reflexivity and consciousness of the writing process. Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980) and Marta Lynch's Informe bajo llave (1983) both employ this narrative technique. In a permutation, the first person-narrator may engage in a conversation with a known or unknown interlocutor, who may speak or be completely silent and the text resembles a long

conversation. Many times this narrative mode incorporates vernacular vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation to create immediacy and orality. Enrique Medina uses this scheme in Con el trapo en la boca (1983) and Manuel Puig in El beso de la mujer araña (1976). Finally, the text may project the main character's thoughts either as an interior monologue or stream of consciousness.

Shúa's novel uses all three of these narrative strategies at different moments. On one hand, Soy paciente contains a high amount of orality. Frequently the patient speaks and his language resembles a conversation with an unidentified interlocutor or with himself. The opening lines of the text demonstrate this technique:

Me gusta leer en el colectivo. Sentado es fácil. Parado es difícil pero no imposible. Las cosas se complican cuando la letra es chica y el colectivo va por una calle empedrada. Las palabras bailotean, se vuelven borrosas y para distinguirlas hace necesario un esfuerzo coordinado entre la vista y el resto del cuerpo. (7)

The focalization through the main character reinforces the conversational tone and the orality of the text.

Furthermore, the simple present tense dominates much of the narration and further strengthens the conversational aspect. However, many times the text slips from a conversational narrative technique to an interior monologue:

--Cualquier día de éstos se nos cura y lo vemos saltando en una pata alrededor del Obelisco--me dice, [Doctor Goldfarb] alentador.

En algo está equivocado el doctor: cuando yo me cure, no pienso perder el tiempo saltando en una pata alrededor del obelisco; voy derecho al Tropezón y me mando un pucherazo de gallina. (72)²⁰

The narrative constantly oscillates between the patient's thoughts and other characters' verbal utterances.

On the other hand, Shúa's novel resembles a written document, or perhaps even the patient's personal diary. Through the first seven chapters, before the operation, the patient maintains control over the time he spends in the hospital. An implicit chronology exists between chapters four and five and between chapters six and seven. In these pairs of chapters the text presents the action in consecutive days.²¹ Although he does not mention days of the week, nor does he count the total

number of days, the patient still uses temporal markers, such as yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and thus interconnects these groupings.

But, after the operation, the patient loses his control over tracking time:

De los últimos días me acuerdo bien. A los anteriores (ni siquiera sé cuántos), los tengo borrosos. Recuperé la conciencia en la Sala de Terapia Intensiva. Ajustando el foco de la memoria apenas alcanzo a distinguir ciertas figuras, algunas sensaciones.

Mis recuerdos de ese período de inconciencia tienen el carácter de los de la primera infancia: algunas historias, a fuerza de haber sido escuchadas y repetidas se vuelven carne. (68)

The temporal indicators slowly disappear from the text. Days merge into weeks, and weeks to months, and months into years. In the final chapter, the patient states: "Como todos los años, el personal de desinfección ha entrado en mi pieza para desalojar a las palomas y eliminar a los piojos consiguientes" (137). Then the patient gives details of his location during the previous lice extermination. As time grows more indistinguishable, the delousing functions as the only

interruption in the protagonist's monotonous hospital existence. This final summation of the annual fumigation also reinforces the first-person autobiographical aspect prevalent in the novel.

Hence, the narration of Soy paciente flows randomly between oral and written strategies and techniques; some parts of the text resemble pure conversation, while others appear in diary form. But, whenever the patient mentions his misadventures, he refers not to a diary but rather to his "libretita de quejas:" "Los voy anotando en una libretita con tapas de hule" (13). At first, the patient notes all the mistreatments and complaints in the libretita de quejas. By chapter five the main character reports that he has seventeen different complaints noted in the libretita. But after the operation the "libretita" disappears:

La libretita donde anotaba mis Motivos de Queja no la puedo encontrar. Empecé a buscarla para anotar a una lauchita gris que se asomó el otro día a mi pieza. (Las ratas no me asustan por mí sino por las palomas[]). A la libretita la tenía debajo de la almohada: la debe haber confiscado la enfermera jefe en una de sus visitas de control. (75-76)

If she confiscates the libretita, then the head nurse would probably also take a diary, if the patient had one. Although linguistic traits at times suggest the attributes of a diary, the patient never says that he keeps one. Therefore, the communicative context of the récit remains vague and unspecified. The conclusion of the novel further reinforces this ambiguity.²²

In a similar manner, the title of Shúa's novel also displays ambiguity through the word paciente. As a noun, the title means in Spanish and translates into English as "I am a patient." As an adjective, the title signifies in Spanish and is rendered in English as "I am patient." Ironically, both titles apply to the main character simultaneously. Doctors Tracer, Goldfarb, and Sánchez Ortiz's patient acquires a great amount of patience while he stays in the hospital, submits himself to endless medical analyses, and waits for his diagnosis. The duality and the ambivalence of the title resonate throughout the entire novel and my two interpretations of Shúa's work.

On one hand, Soy paciente is a farcical, surrealist, oneiric and even absurdist work, in the sense of the 1950s "theatre of the absurd." The setting of the novel provides the central element of comedy. The

patient enters the hospital and cannot leave due to inane circumstances. When he finally has the opportunity to egress, he decides to stay indefinitely.

In addition to the setting, the characters contribute to the comic nature of the novel. At first the patient's cousin la Ponchi visits him frequently and secretly establishes a romantic relationship with Doctor Goldfarb. One night the main character discovers la Ponchi and Goldfarb in the kitchen, adjacent to his room. Instead of sending him to his room, Goldfarb makes the patient spend the night in the kitchen so that he can avoid returning barefoot to his bed on the cold tile floor. The patient agrees and Goldfarb and la Ponchi bring him his mattress and bedding. In turn the lovers spend the rest of the night together in the patient's room. When his co-workers finally pay him a visit, they throw a boisterous party, with loud singing and dancing. Instead of collecting the money among themselves for a gift and the party, they use the patient's severance pay. In the middle of the party, the co-workers lock their sick colleague in the bathroom as a joke and abandon him there. Before the mysterious operation, a nurse, without locating the patient on her roster, completely shaves him, including his eyebrows, to avoid making any mistakes. After the patient loses his apartment and

gives away unnecessary possessions, cousin la Ponchi comments when receiving his cookware:

--¡Acero inoxidable, por favor!--se indignó la Ponchi, cuando le propuse que se las lleve--. Podrías haberme consultado antes de comprarlas: en el acero inoxidable se pega todo. (121)

During all these instances, the protagonist demonstrates the duality of the title Soy paciente; he never complains or shows anger about his situation and stays in the hospital. Yet while all of these scenes portray humorous elements, throughout the novel the humor grows darker and more tragic.

While the above characters appear once or twice and contribute to the ludicrous scenes, others consistently repeat the same actions or words, which in turn reinforces the humor of the text and points to the hermetic and repetitive atmosphere in the hospital. The Monjita Manzanita, of unknown nationality, enters the patient's room daily and asks "¿Miedo usted tiene?" and later comments "No tenerr miedo. Hombre joven como usted, en operración irrará bien, mucho bien. Es una operración sencillo" (14; orthography in original). Throughout his stay, even when the patient explains that he does not need an operation, and even after the

contributes to a first-track reading of Shúa's novel since it points to general criticism about Argentine society and its health-care system. However, at the same time the generality of this interpretation also indicates the universality of this view, and moderates a pure first-track reading. The hospital evolves into a penal institution without bars or guard towers, but also without any escape. Here, the bureaucracy and its invisible rules keep all the patients inside. Toward the end of the novel the patient briefly mentions the book Papillon and speaks of the prisoner's ordeal on Devil's Island in the Caribbean. Both Papillon and Soy paciente portray the main character entrapped in a closed and hermetic world of Devil's Island and the hospital respectively. Like the character in Papillon, the patient resists his imprisonment by at first fleeing the sala general and later his private room. However, unlike the character in Papillon, the patient realizes that he has no alternative, acquiesces, and eventually accepts his situation. At the beginning of the novel the patient states: "tarde o temprano me veré obligado a aceptar mi destino . . ." (14). While at this moment he reflects on his illness, this statement eerily prefigures the entire plot. At the end, the patient has created a perfect niche for himself in the hospital world.

The quest for the tarjetita rosa best represents how the protagonist acquiesces to the hospital's bureaucracy. In chapter six, at about the mid-point of the book, the patient again attempts to escape, this time late at night. But at the door an "anciano uniformado" stops the fugitive and does not allow him to flee. After a brief argument the patient comments to himself, "El hombre no me permite ni siquiera indagarme contra la burocracia." But then the "anciano uniformado" explains the seemingly facile bureaucratic procedure for release:

--Ah, eso es muy fácil--me dice, aliviado de verme entrar en razón--. Yo le doy este formulario, usted lo llena, se lo hace firmar por el médico que lo está atendiendo y por el director del hospital y después va a Administración donde se lo cambian en el acto por una tarjetita rosa. Tiene que juntar una foto cuatro por cuatro medio perfil con fondo negro. (59-60)

Instead of ignoring the "anciano uniformado," or even knocking down the frail man and bolting out the door, the patient follows the proper steps to obtain all of the necessary signatures and letters of recommendation for the tarjetita rosa. Upon learning that he needs a personal interview with the Director so that he can

receive his signature, the patient uses all his connections to secure the interview. He even asks his uncooperative cousin la Ponchi to sway Doctor Goldfarb for a recommendation so that he can receive the appointment. The patient explains his actions when he later comments: "Yo, quien soy un buen ciudadano, opto por la legalidad siempre que puedo" (86). The Director's signature holds more power to keep the main character in the hospital than bars on a prison window.

The confusion over the operation also serves as an example of how the protagonist, lost in the paperwork, submits himself to impersonal authority. However, when the bureaucracy fails to control the patient, the staff resorts to ungarnished physical force to implement its rules. When the patient at first protests that he is not scheduled for an operation, the nurse calls "el practicante" who threatens him with sedation. When failing to remember where to shave the patient, she looks at her paper:

La enfermera sacó del bolsillo una lista muy larga escrita en una letra pequeñísima y casi imposible de entender. Entre los dos estuvieron un buen rato tratando de encontrar la clave con ayuda de una lupa, pero la urgencia pudo más. (63-64)

When civility fails, brute coercion appears. This episode with the shaving nurse also demonstrates how Soy paciente simultaneously presents scenes comically and tragically. In a similar manner during the delousing of the room, the patient spends the day in an ambulance, under restraints for no reason. Again these scenes depict general aspects of the human condition during the twentieth century and contribute to a universal appreciation of Shúa's novel.

The patient not only surrenders himself to the hospital bureaucracy, but also to the "Comisión del Piso," the hospital patients' own governing institution. Each floor and sala general of the hospital runs its own "Comisión." Hence the hospital has two layers of bureaucracy and rules, one imposed by the administration and another self-imposed. When the co-workers throw the unruly party, the patient fears that the President of the "Comisión" will appear and protest the noise. This self-appointed committee slowly gains as much importance in the patient's life as the hospital bureaucracy itself. In the latter half of the text, the protagonist describes how the "Comisión" writes a petition to fire the temporary Director. The patient refuses to sign since it does not address his concern about the tarjetita rosa and more importantly because

[el petitorio] no tenía el más elemental respeto por las reglas de la acentuación prosódica. El presidente le echó la culpa a la máquina de escribir, que era importada y no tenía la tecla con el acento. (126)

How the bureaucracy phrases its objectives and the language it uses hold more significance than the content of its statement. Again, the comments concerning the presence and the control of the different bureaucracies contribute to a first-track reading of the novel as a general criticism of Argentine society, as well as a more universal interpretation. Shúa's text points to the intricacies and the absurdities of life under the modern nation-state, with countless rules and endless paperwork to complete for the most elementary events in life.

Besides the obvious bureaucratic rules of control in the text, and his eventual surrender to them, the patient grows acquiescent to the members of the hospital staff as well. The relationship between the head nurse and the patient best illustrates his acquiescence:

Tan acostumbrado estoy a sus visitas de control que puedo seguir hablando . . . mientras pincha mi almohada con una larga aguja de tejer buscando algún objeto prohibido escondido en el relleno. Maneja la aguja hábilmente,

clavándola por encima y a los costados de mi cabeza con la precisión de un tirador de cuchillos. (111)

Madame Veronica, the patient's landlady, and her daughter, both present during this inspection, also submit themselves to the head nurse's authority while she searches their hair and purses with the knitting needle, and confiscates a small bottle of cognac. But, in true bureaucratic style, the head nurse gives Madame Veronica the required receipt to claim the bottle upon leaving the hospital.

In addition to obeying the head nurse without question, the patient and other characters become slavish to the different doctors. This power relationship between the nurses and doctors and the other characters arises from the medical knowledge that these members of the staff possess. This erudition forces the characters to endow the medical workers with unquestionable power over the patients and their guests. Thus, information and its usage eventually develop into the most important device to control other people. The text demonstrates how authority migrates from the usage of brute force to the possession of information.

While discussing the parameters of Argentine narrative during the Military Process, David William Foster comments briefly on Shúa's novel:

Las metáforas kafkianas de la burocracia y la justicia como sinécdoques de una sociedad trituradora se remedan y actualizan en el relato de Shúa, donde el ambiente del moderno hospital tecnológico sostiene varias posibilidades interpretivas. (Balderston, Ficción y política 104)

To expand upon Foster's observation, Shúa's text possesses the following similarities with Kafka's work. These considerations also illustrate how Shúa's novel provides a second-track interpretation and thus reveals commentary and criticism specifically about the Military Process. First, in both works, the main characters lack a concrete identity. In The Trial, the main character's name is Joseph K.; in The Castle the land surveyor only possesses the surname K. In Kafka's books, besides making the characters more universal, the lack of a complete surname reinforces their insignificant position in society. However, in Soy paciente the main character does not even possess an initial for a surname. Nor does the patient refer to himself as "the patient" or invoke his name while engaged in interior monologues. The other

characters never call him by his given name. The protagonist namelessly and aimlessly floats about the hospital and the novel. The absence of an identity in Soy paciente exceeds the impersonal characteristic of Kafka's novels. In addition, the protagonist only exists within the power dynamics of the medical profession, and the hospital, as the patient. Upon entering a hospital, a person acquires the status of either staff, patient, or visitor. Here the main character's role only matters as a patient, and his extra-hospital existence bears little significance for the staff and how they treat him. By the end, the main character has identity only as a patient waiting for his diagnosis.

Furthermore, the paperwork necessary for the desired tarjetita rosa functions as the most overt example of the Kafkaian bureaucratic nightmare. In contrast to Kafka's texts, especially in The Castle, where different parts of the bureaucracy entrap the character in contradictory rules, in Soy paciente the two governing bodies, the hospital administration and the patients' "Comisión," establish only one set of rules. But these regulations are just as chaotic and absurd as in Kafka's books. The patient uses all means possible to gather the correct forms and the signatures for the coveted tarjetita rosa. But the power of the written word reinforces the

differences in the bureaucracy between Kafka and Shúa. Since in Kafka's texts the bureaucracy consistently entraps the characters in contradictory rules and edicts, the written statement becomes useless. But in Shúa's novel the written words possess infinite authority. Indeed, before the interview with the Director, actually just the "Presidente de la Cooperadora," the patient comments:

Los papeles están un poco ajados, un poco sucios, pero no han perdido sus poderes, que no dependen de su grado de blancura sino, todo lo contrario, de la negra nitidez de las letras.

(128)

After the interview, the secretary carefully files the patient's papers in a large cabinet, just in case he changes his mind and wants to depart. This bureaucracy also appears when Madame Veronica throws the patient out of his apartment. The patient signs a series of legal documents to avoid long and costly judicial proceedings and thus Madame Veronica can evict the patient legally from his apartment.

Finally, akin to Kafka's work, in Shúa's text the persons of authority conceal themselves as well as the true intent of their decisions. When Doctors Goldfarb and Sánchez Ortiz bring the group of visiting doctors to

see the patient, they never explain to him the reason for the call. After the unneeded operation, the hospital staff refuses to inform the patient about the procedure and to tell him what organs were extracted from his body. By the end of the novel, the patient appears to have recovered from his illness but he never received a diagnosis and the doctors do not bother to give him one.

The permanent Director's consistent absence reinforces the mysteriousness and the inaccessibility of the bureaucracy. This aspect of Shúa's novel resembles the unidentified "hombre importante" in Ultimos días de la víctima. From the first pages the permanent Director stays at home while he recovers from his unmentioned sickness. Just as the patient never leaves the hospital, the permanent Director never appears. The patient only talks with the "Presidente de la Cooperadora" instead of the Director in the final interview. In his absence, the staff refers the patient to the temporary Director of the hospital, who never appears and only exists in some unmentioned office.

In a similar fashion, at first, the doctors do not treat the patient:

Me pregunto adónde estarán los médicos en esta institución. Yo todavía no vi ninguno. Lo peor es que ninguno me vio a mí, que soy el

enfermo. Al principio pensaba exigir que me atiendan únicamente profesionales diplomados y, si fuera posible, con mucha experiencia. Ahora me conformaría con un practicante. (12)

Later, the attending physicians appear, but they then disappear for long stretches of time and fail to state when they may return, especially Doctor Tracer. Upon returning to the deloused room, and from a day in the ambulance, a nurse informs the patient that Doctor Tracer visited the hospital that afternoon. The patient remarks:

¡El doctor Tracer! Escuchar su nombre en boca de una enfermera me resulta tan sorprendente como oír a un demonio pronunciando el nombre de Dios en el infierno. La noticia me sacude: el doctor ha pasado hoy por el hospital; quién sabe cuándo le tocará su próxima visita. (100)

Unlike the characters in Kafka's work, at least the patient arrives at a modus vivendi with the bureaucracy and its control over his life; he remains in the hospital.

These similarities between Kafka's and Shúa's texts can produce an allegorical interpretation of Soy paciente that deals with the individual's situation in Argentine

society during the Military Process.²³ Seen through a second-track interpretation of the text, much like the authorities in Kafka's and Shúa's works, the juntas exercised their power from afar and never explained the rationale for their decisions. In fact, many times the generals lied and did the exact opposite of what they proposed. Just as the patient trudges through the hospital bureaucracy and tries to secure the tarjetita rosa, so the family members of the desaparecidos went through government offices and police stations and filed papers and reports about their desaparecidos to no avail. Furthermore, just as the patient only exists within the discourse of medicine, during the Military Process the Argentines existed only within the confines of the military's discourse. An individual became either a subversive element or part of the regime's concept of the national family. The citizenry was lost in a bureaucratic and arbitrary system, just like the patient in Shúa's text and the characters in Kafka's literature.

In addition to providing an allegorical and second-track readings about the Military Process, Soy paciente, similar to Feinmann's novel, can also offer a general interpretation about life in the twentieth century. The increased power of the nation state and the intricate

late capitalist economic system have spawned bureaucratic rules, regulations, and licenses that can control almost all aspects of the individual's life on a daily basis. In Shúa's work the patient lives in the hospital where the medical staff watches and controls his every step and movement. In contrast to Feinmann's novel, where the bureaucratic structure and resulting allegory do not frequently appear, in Soy paciente the bureaucracy is omnipresent at every corner and door. Whereas in Feinmann's novel the bureaucratic power comes forth at the end, in Shúa's text the bureaucracy is present from the beginning.

Both Feinmann's and Shúa's texts belong to the first stage of narrative's development during the first three years of the Military Process. Since both authors wrote and published their first novels in the midst of the Military Process, this general reading about life in the twentieth century recedes behind the interpretation about Argentina during this regime. However, creating a recognizable allegory about the Military Process and its repercussions on society posed a great challenge for almost all established Argentine writers, especially in the first three years. Jacobo Timerman's tragic story, and Haroldo Conti's and Rodolfo Walsh's disappearances, all demonstrate that the government did not tolerate any

criticism and would quickly silence or eliminate any critics. Only a few well-known and respected people, like Jorge Luis Borges, Silvina Ocampo and Ernesto Sabato, were safe from the juntas' fell hand. Thus the dictatorship produced the social conditions that yielded the narrative of negation. I reiterate that Shúa confirmed this repercussion of the Military Process when she asserted her original desire to create an innocuous narrative that negated any possible connotations of subversion.²⁴ The desire, and more importantly the necessity, to avoid any possible accusation of "subversion" overrode the aspiration to create an innovative work or an overtly socially-engaged piece of literature. Shúa's text avoids references to Argentina's turbulent history, before or after 1976, and thus achieves her goal. Feinmann's novel plays and innovates the conventions of detective fiction. Even though Soy paciente and Ultimos días de la víctima do not directly speak of the Military Process, their existence and thematics bear witness to its repercussions in society.

The readers of the narrative of negation must possess a keen awareness of history to determine direct and indirect references, echoes and affinities between a novel and the historical reality of its composition.

Whereas Ultimos días de la víctima and Soy paciente at first appear to evade references to Argentine reality, readers familiar with the Military Process and its policies may begin to perceive connections between the literature produced at this time and the regime itself. Such a contextualized reading reveals layers of social commentary and criticism first about Argentina and second about the Military Process and its policies that were disguised beneath the literary strategies in both Feinmann's and Shúa's novels. Thus the contextual reading contains two different approaches or tracks. However, given the negation of historical references in these novels, a full exposition of the dual-track interpretation is not possible. Instead, contextual commentary in these texts arises from allegories. While Ultimos días de la víctima and Soy paciente display parallels and symbolism applicable to the circumstances of the Military Process, these novels overtly negate historical and political engagement.

However, while Feinmann and Shúa wrote novels that negate history and social commentary, other authors created texts with figurations and parallels of Argentine society. Such books speak of endemic problems in Argentine society and the harrowing reality of the Military Process. In the next chapter, I discuss two

novels that advanced explicitly historical allegories about the "Argentine Question." First I examine Ernesto Schóó's El baile de los guerreros (1979) to show how his novel investigates the origins of the Military Process. Second, I analyze Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980), the best-known home novel of the Military Process, to explain how his text serves as a diatribe about the dictatorship as well.

Notes

¹ Several examples of his trend include David Viñas's Cuerpo a cuerpo (1979), Humberto Costantini's De Dioses, hombrecitos y policías (1979), Osvaldo Soriano's No habrá más penas ni olvido (1981) and Cuarteles de invierno (1982), Luisa Valenzuela's Cambio de armas (1982), Marta Traba's Conversación al sur (1981) and En cualquier lugar (1984) and Mempo Giardinelli's Luna caliente (1983).

At first several home novelists published texts with similar thematics, but with limited success. Enrique Medina published El Duke (1976), which recounts how the former boxer "El Duke" actively participates as a thug in one of the many death squads. The publishing house Galerna released Medina's text in November 1976 and the government banned the book in January 1977.

Although her book does not decry the abuses of the dictatorship, the regime quickly proscribed Griselda Gambaro's Ganarse la muerte (1976). The censors deemed Gambaro's work offensive because of its portrayal of the family and the Roman Catholic Church. The fate of Gambaro's novel exemplifies the dictatorship's intolerance.

² Appendix A lists the home novels, the texts

written and published in Argentina; Appendix B registers the exile novels published abroad during the same years.

³ The neo-Latin "u," from the Greek "ou," serves as a prefix of negation and "chronic," from the Greek "chronos," means time. I thank Gustavo Pérez-Firmat for introducing me to this concept.

⁴ By the same token the term "uchronic" can also refer to a text that slips through time. For example Alejo Carpentier's Concierto barroco (1974) begins during the eighteenth century in Cuba and concludes in the middle of the twentieth century in Europe.

⁵ The second term "utopic" comes from the neologism that Sir Thomas More coined for his masterpiece Utopia (1516). Utopia derives from the neo-Latin negation "u" and the Greek "topos" which signifies place. Hence utopia means "no-place."

⁶ Enrique Medina's Perros de la noche (1978), a significant novel from these years, tests the limits of the narrative of negation. Medina's novel is uchronic but not utopic, since the plot clearly occurs in the Greater Buenos Aires area. Like the narrative of negation, Medina's text does not programmatically criticize specific social institutions, or the armed forces. Nevertheless, Medina's portrayal of the marginal

classes in Argentina, many times following the conventions of nineteenth-century realism and naturalism, provides a clear criticism of society. Because of this general social commentary, I do not place Medina's novel in the category of the narrative of negation. Such social criticism offended the members of the Military Process who banned Perros de la noche in 1978, after four editions. Alfonsín's government removed the prohibition on 2 February 1984.

Similar to Perros de la noche, Rabanal's El apartado (1975), although published before the dictatorship, also demonstrates the limits pertinent to the narrative of negation. On the one hand El apartado occurs in an undesignated city. On the other hand, the text presents graphic description of the violence between right-wing groups and left-wing guerrilla terrorists common in the early 1970s. This direct social criticism rapidly disappears as the narrative of negation emerges.

Although published in 1981, in the colophon César Aira states that he completed his first novel Ema, la cautiva in 1978, during the worst moments of the Military Process. Similar to Rabanal's text, Aira's novel also tests the definition of the narrative of negation. Since the action occurs in the middle of the nineteenth century, depicts how colonists live on the Argentine

frontier, interacts with the various indigenous tribes, and has a concrete time frame, I cannot consider Aira's text as representative of this development in Argentine narrative. Neither does Aira's novel address the Military Process by invoking the past, like Martha Mercader's Juanamanuela, mucha mujer (1980). Yet Ema, la cautiva illustrates how narrative during the dictatorship innovates previous literary traditions and models: Aira's book uses Esteban Echeverría's narrative poem La cautiva (1837) as a point of departure. In addition, Aira's work follows the 1960s boom tradition of contesting official history since the novel challenges many beliefs about the indigenous population expressed in Echeverría's poem. In this manner Aira's novel also demonstrates that the generals failed in their attempt to break completely with the past and to impose a new society in Argentina.

⁷ Personal interview, July 4 1994, Buenos Aires.

⁸ In Spanish the translation of the puzzle-novel or whodunit becomes the novela de enigma or relato problema (Simpson 10).

⁹ In Spanish the translation of hard-boiled becomes the novela dura or the serie negra (Simpson 10).

¹⁰ For a more detailed study of detective fiction during this time, see Gerardo Bra's essays "La evolución

considers Diego Keltíber's (pseudonym for the writer Abel Mateo) Con la guadaña al hombro (1940) the first true Argentine detective novel (Simpson 34).

¹³ Osvaldo Soriano began his literary career with Triste, solitario y final (1973). Manuel Puig wrote The Buenos Aires Affair (1973) and Juan Carlos Martini El agua en los pulmones (1973) and Los asesinos prefieren rubias (1974).

¹⁴ The emphasis on photography echoes Julio Cortázar's short story "Las babas del diablo" and Antonioni's 1966 film Blow-Up, inspired by the same text. In Cortázar's story the main character photographs an unknown woman and child in a park in Paris, along with a man in a car. In Ultimos días de la víctima Mendizábal takes pictures of Külpe, Amanda, and Sergio in Barrancas del Belgrano park. In both works the photographers surround themselves with their images and believe that they have captured a special moment. Furthermore, both the photographer in Cortázar's story and Mendizábal become entrapped in their photographs. In Cortázar's story the photographed persons come to life, emerge from the photo, and most likely kill the photographer. In Feinmann's novel, Külpe, the photographed victim, kills Mendizábal.

del género policial argentino" and "Orígenes de la literatura policial argentina." Donald A. Yates's doctoral dissertation "The Argentine Detective Story" (1960) covers detective fiction during the first half of this century. Amelia Simpson follows Yates's footsteps with her more extensive Detective Fiction from Latin America (1990).

¹¹ Beginning in the mid-1940s several different publishing houses initiated series of detective fiction. Jorge B. Rivera, in the introduction to his anthology El relato policial en la Argentina, mentions these different series. The Acme Agency launched its series Rastros in 1944 and competed with the series Amarilla, Wallace and Mister Reeder by Tor and Biblioteca Oro by Editorial Molino. Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares began Séptimo Círculo, published by Emecé editores in 1945. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s numerous writers, publishing houses, and magazines introduced various detective fiction series (Bra, "La evolución del género policial argentino" 68).

¹² Borges and Bioy Casares published their novel under the pseudonym H. Bustos Domecq. While Borges is the best known author of detective fiction, and is usually considered its first proponent, Donald A. Yates

The affinities between these two authors's texts increase when Peña reminds Mendizábal of Morelli, another victim from five years ago. Cortázar uses this same name for the apocryphal literary critic in Rayuela.

¹⁵ The novel suggests that Peña works in tandem with Külpe to liquidate Mendizábal. One afternoon Mendizábal returns to the residencial and discovers Peña in his room. While waiting for Mendizábal, Peña has the perfect opportunity to examine the gunman's personal belongings and photographs of Külpe as well as to place surveillance equipment.

¹⁶ Eduardo Pavlovsky's El Señor Galíndez (1971), which openly discusses the institutionalization of torture in Argentina, also uses the telephone to reinforce the remoteness of authority.

¹⁷ One evening, Mendizábal masturbates while he imagines an erotic encounter between Cecilia and Külpe. The text demonstrates constantly that Mendizábal lives vicariously in a fantasy world.

¹⁸ See Donald C. Hodges's Argentina's "Dirty War:" an Intellectual Biography and Frank Graziano's Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine "Dirty War" for more detailed information about the regime's bizarre

interpretation of world events.

¹⁹ Shúa shared the first place prize for Soy paciente in the Losada International Literary Competition in 1980.

²⁰ Doctor Goldfarb's reference to the Obelisco represents one of the few geographical markers that helps locate the plot in Buenos Aires.

²¹ In chapter four Doctor Sánchez Ortiz and students observe the patient and one flicks ashes on his sheets. That night la Ponchi, his cousin, sleeps in the hospital. The next day, in chapter five, la Ponchi complains to Doctor Sánchez Ortiz about how she treated her cousin the previous day. When she learns that the students were really doctors from an important conference, la Ponchi then chastises her cousin for his lack of knowledge and for making her argue with Doctor Sánchez Ortiz.

The use of the definite article "la" with the first name "Ponchi" underscores the oral nature of the text, the colloquial aspect of the patient's language, and his rustic, or uneducated character.

In chapter six, after more tests, the patient attempts to escape from the hospital. While leaving, the patient learns about the exit pass, la tarjetita rosa, and decides to follow the correct bureaucratic rules. Chapter seven presents the following day when, while

waiting for the photographer, an unknown nurse arrives in the room and completely shaves the patient for an operation.

²² Rodolfo Rabanal's El apartado (1975) concludes in a similar fashion. The main character Pablo decides to spend his life in a forest. Whereas Pablo speaks of how he writes down his adventures, the protagonist in Soy paciente does not discuss composing a written account of his adventures.

²³ Likewise, Soy paciente can function as an allegory of the now defunct Soviet Union, with psychiatric hospitals filled with drugged dissidents. But, at the same time, Shúa's novel can pertain to the United States. Much like the former Soviet Union, after the Reagan administration deregulated psychiatric hospitals the United States had wards filled with patients. Instead of the repressive bureaucracy holding dissidents, administrators and psychiatrists kept the healthy patients committed and lined their pockets with insurance fraud.

²⁴ Personal interview, July 4 1994, Buenos Aires.

Chapter Three

Allegories of the "Argentine Question"

The Argentines probably asked themselves many pressing questions during the Military Process. "Is there a solution to the current dictatorship? When will this regime end? Are the rumors of the disappeared and torture true? Will the police, armed forces or some other security group, come and kidnap me? Will we have enough money with the current inflation rate to survive until the end of the month? Where do we go from here? And more importantly, how did we get into this mess in the first place?"

Raúl Alfonsín's essay La cuestión argentina (1980) reflects many of these concerns. On the one hand, Alfonsín explains that the causes of Argentina's problems started when General José Félix Uriburu overthrew President Hipólito Yrigoyen on 6 June 1930. On the other hand, Alfonsín sets forth a program to conclude the current regime and revitalize the nation. Many elements from this essay later formed part of Alfonsín's 1983 presidential campaign (Hodges, Argentina's "Dirty War" 1). Donald Hodges, in his study Argentina's "Dirty War," dedicates the entire first chapter to examining the different facets and factors of "The Argentine Question,"

and the theories of its origin. Briefly, Hodges speculates on the reason why Argentina, one of the richest and most developed countries in Latin America and the world in the 1920s, slipped into economic decline, political instability and social turmoil.¹ Similar to Alfonsín, Hodges considers that the country's current situation began in the 1930s. The economic crisis of the Great Depression, the unwillingness to adapt to changes that occurred in the North Atlantic industrialized countries, and Perón's disastrous plan of autarchy help explain Argentina's economic decline. With respect to the social turmoil and the political instability, Hodges suggests that early in the century the national bourgeoisie, officially known as the oligarchy, refused to share political power with the majority of the population and enacted any means necessary to recover and maintain its control over the country. Consequently, the disenfranchised members of society responded to the ruling class's "greed of power" through the figure of Juan Domingo Perón, by voting or by launching guerrilla warfare in his name. Given the current status of Argentine politics and the economy, these problems still lack a definitive solution.

Although he published a book concerning the "Argentine Question" and used it in his campaign, Alfonsín is not the first to seriously ponder the ills of Argentina, and their sources. While exploring the commonalities in the narrative from the Military Process, Beatriz Sarlo observes that "Lo que casi siempre puede leerse son los intentos . . . de plantear el interrogante sobre la "cuestión argentina": citas, dedicatorias, epígrafes, nombres diseminados por los textos . . ."

(43). Indeed, "the Argentine Question" and the preoccupation concerning the state of the country have both been a major subject of Argentine letters since independence. Sarmiento's Facundo (1845), written during Juan Manuel de Rosas's bloody reign, stands out as the best nineteenth-century inquiry about these matters. The early twentieth century saw Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, in El hombre que está solo y espera (1931), and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, in Radiografía de la pampa (1933), both explore problems of contemporary Argentina. More recently the writer David Viñas, central figure of the 1950s generación de los parracidas, best exemplifies a writer concerned about the fate of his country.² During the years of the Military Process, the writers Ernesto Schóo and Ricardo Piglia explore the "Argentine Question"

in their novels El baile de los guerreros (1979) and Respiración artificial (1980) respectively. However, due to the repressive nature of the Military Process, neither Schóó nor Piglia could openly state that their works investigate the "Argentine Question." Hence, both authors discovered similar strategies to express their opinions and speculate on the origin of the "Argentine Question." That is, both writers fashion their highly allegorical novels and discuss the "Argentine Question" by invoking key moments from Argentine history and exploring the historical significance of the repetition of analogous events.³

Ernesto Schóó began his literary career with the short story "En la isla," in 1956, which received great attention and a literary prize, conferred by Jorge Luis Borges and Manuel Mujica Láinez (Avellaneda, "Review of Baile de los guerreros by Ernesto Schóó" 125). However, instead of pursuing a literary career, Schóó decided to dedicate his energies to art criticism, as well as theatre, until the 1970s. At this time Schóó reinitiated his literary pursuits with the first novel Fiesta de Gala, published in May 1976, shortly after the coup d'etat of the Military Process.⁴ Schóó published his second work, El baile de los guerreros, towards the

end of 1979. I have decided to discuss his second novel since Schóó wrote and published the text during the dictatorship.

As proclaimed in the title, the central plot and action revolves around the dance that Miguel Guerrero and Casiana Cabral de Guerrero host on 13 August 1896, to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary and to inaugurate their new house, or palace, built on the Plaza Libertad, in the middle of Buenos Aires. Since the gala event requires the garb of 1846, when the original marriage ceremony took place, the guests arrive dressed as federalists and unitarists, when Juan Manuel de Rosas ruled the country with a bloody hand. As the night progresses, the old rivalries slowly flare between the former factions. While two generals argue over who was victorious in the battle of "Perro Echado," which did not have any survivors to claim victory, Dalmacio Altolaquirre incites a skirmish that quickly degenerates into a "little war." By the end of the novel, when the national guard and the police invade the house and restore order, the new mansion is in complete ruins and the dead and wounded lie everywhere.

The title implies some ambiguity since "guerreros" in El baile de los guerreros, may refer to the couple Miguel and Casiana. However, besides indicating the

action in the novel, the connection between the title of the book and the surname of Miguel and Casiana produces some confusion. In English, when referring to a family or a married couple, one uses the definite article and the plural form of the surname. For example "The Clintons" as a phrase refers to William and Hillary, or even to the entire family. Following this logic, Miguel and Casiana would be "the Guerreros." However, in Spanish one uses the plural definite article and the surname in the singular. Therefore, William Clinton and Hillary Clinton become "Los Clinton" and Miguel and Casiana are transformed into "Los Guerrero." Hence "los guerreros" of the title cannot refer to the hosts themselves. To avoid confusion I will use the designation the Guerreros, with capital letters, when referring to those characters so named.

For a better understanding of Schóó's text, it is necessary to note that guerrero, a common surname in Hispanic cultures, translates in English as "warrior." Since guerreros in the title cannot refer to the Guerreros family, the guests remain as the only possible signifier. Hence the title of the novel indicates that the revelers themselves are the guerreros and not the family alone. Given that the dance is actually a costume ball, with the garb of 1846 as the theme, the guests

appear dressed as either federalists or unitarists, and eventually exhibit the relevant mentalities and behaviors. With this backdrop for the plot, baile from the title denotes the battles that the visitors stage as they revive and relive the spiteful and bloody rivalries characteristic of the Argentina of Rosas's rule.

An examination of the récit and the histoire elucidates many important characteristics of the novel. The intricate récit contains nine unnumbered chapters of unequal length. In turn, these chapters contain multiple fragments with different focalization and narrative techniques, including letters, first-person interior monologue and third-person narration. Chapter three forms an exception since it comprises a pithy and baroque description, presented in third-person narration, of the Guerreros's house and its decor.

Two golden anniversary wedding invitations frame the nine chapters of the récit. The novel opens with the invitation to the Guerreros's dance in 1896, and closes with another for the golden anniversary of Faustino Andonaegui and Rosalía Antúnez y Panelo in 1946. In addition to the structural coincidence between the two invitations, there is also a "personal" commonality. Faustino and Rosalía meet during the Guerreros's dance in highly compromising circumstances. Since the best of

Buenos Aires society attends the Guerreros's dance, it would also seem logical that the same people, or their children and grand-children will appear at the Andonaegui dance as well. Hence the readers of Schóó's novel are invited to two different dances, yet only witness the Guerreros's first dance. But, with the knowledge of the first incident and the guests, the readers can project their imagination and predict what might happen at Faustino and Rosalía's anniversary celebration in 1946.

One of the most striking aspects of the récit appears in the length of the chapters and its action. The first six chapters cover a small portion of the action, about one-third, and detail the preparations for the dance, and divulge important background information concerning most major characters. Chapter one opens with an apocryphal letter from Oscar Wilde to his friend Bossie in Europe where he gives his impressions of Argentine society at the end of the century. After the letter, the récit then focuses on the character of Dalmacio Altolaquirre, one of the most important visitors at the dance. This chapter then closes with the beginnings of the Guerreros's celebration. Chapter two provides the background information on the Guerreros, their house, and the death of the painter Carlos Porcel in 1840. As already mentioned, the description of the

house fills chapter three. The presentation of Natalia Guerrero, the family's insane member, and the scandal over the painting "Diana sorprendida" form the center of chapter four. The presence of Oscar Wilde at the dance, and the story of Manuel Aguilar, the Guerrero's son-in-law, form the material for chapter five. Chapter six abruptly presents brief interior monologues of Carlos Porcel and Natalia Guerrero and describes how these two characters, a ghost and a deranged woman, establish an eerie relationship of mutual understanding.

Whereas the first six chapters function as an introduction that explains events prior to the dance, the final three include the remaining two-thirds of the action and depict the developments of the lethal evening. Chapter seven functions as a transition since it concludes with the presentation of the different characters as the dance begins. Belén Arévalo appears at this point and evolves into a key figure since she occupies a major role in the battles, unveils her plight of poverty, and describes how she operates as a blackmailer and a seducer of Buenos Aires. The characters Faustinito Andonaegui, an ugly but very wealthy bachelor, Rosalía Antúnez y Panelo, the putative daughter from the estancia, and Panchita Otero, a beautiful but indigent maiden, all make their appearance

at this point as well. In addition to serving as the shifting point between the background information and the main action, chapter seven also hints that the dance metamorphoses into a war between the guests dressed as unitarists and federalists:

nadie ha podido dar una versión razonablemente fidedigna de la batalla (pues tal es su verdadera denominación, y o la de escaramuza o encuentro que le dan pudorosos cronistas) en casa de los Guerrero, entre la noche del 13 y la madrugada del 14 de agosto de 1896. (84)

Furthermore, this first mention of the war also acts as a prolepsis since it prefigures the length of the combat in the house and refers to the pivotal event in the hostilities:

La única certeza que surge de los testimonios contradictorios es que, salvo en el tramo final, cuando los contendientes se encontraron en el jardín, no hubo una acción central, a toda orquesta. Más bien pareciera tratarse de acciones aisladas y simultáneas, encuentros pequeños pero de gran ferocidad. . . . (85)

In addition, this description of the confrontations as sporadic and chaotic encounters refers metafictionally to the organization of the récit. The novel does not depict

in a linear or chronological fashion the events of the war. Nor does the text privilege the successes or the failures of the unitarists or the federalists. Instead, Schóó's work consists of vignettes that project scenes of the most important characters at various moments. The rest of this chapter and all of the following oscillate consistently between the adventures of the two mutually hostile factions.

Chapter eight, provides different episodes of the armed clashes and of the events leading up to the meeting in the garden, alluded to in chapter seven. Belén Arévalo learns that the Guerreros have a secret cache of weapons buried in the greenhouse, left over from the 1880 rebellion, and then uses this information to extort money and safe-conduct passes from each side. Furthermore, Belén arranges the encounter so that both the federalists and the unitarists arrive in the green house at the same time and slaughter each other. Chapter eight also contains another letter from Oscar Wilde to his friend Bossie where he recounts the events of the lethal celebration. This letter also serves as a prolepsis since it indicates that Wilde survives.

In the conclusion, chapter nine, the police and national guard invade the Guerreros's mansion to reestablish order. Later, this chapter contains a letter

from Manuel Aguilar to his son Javier Aguilar Guerrero, who is born after the dance. More importantly, a short notice explains how Javier Aguilar dies during General Félix Uriburu's coup d'etat of 6 September 1930 against President Hipólito Yrigoyen. As stated earlier, this chapter, as well as the novel, closes with the invitation for Faustino Andonaegui and Rosalía Antúnez y Panelo's golden wedding anniversary dance in 1946. Thus the novel concludes at the start of Juan Perón's presidency, another important and divisive era in Argentine history.

Reconstructing the histoire of El baile de los guerreros from its fragmentary récit poses a challenge. Given the complex nature of the histoire, focusing on Carlos Porcel, the painter from chapter two, as the fulcrum for its assemblage provides several advantages. First, given the many temporal time shifts in Schóó's text, as well as changes in the focalization and the narrative techniques, Carlos emerges as the only character whose presence spans the action of the entire novel. Second, since the events within the confines of the Guerreros's new house form the core of the plot and the thematics, Carlos Porcel again stands out as the only character who is always present in the physical space of the building.

The histoire starts with Carlos Porcel in 1840, in the midst of Rosas's dictatorial rule of Argentina. The mazorca, Rosas's secret police, ransacks Carlos's house, and interrogates and tortures him about the political affiliation of his client "misia" Cipriana Bustos de Olaguer, a suspected unitarist spy.⁵ At this moment the reason for the mazorca's visit, besides simple intimidation, remains a complete mystery. Later, the text implies that Carlos possesses unitarist sympathies since Cipriana's son, Nicolás, uses the painter's house to flee to Montevideo. In any case, the mazorca acts indiscriminately and whimsically. After regaining consciousness Carlos discovers that the mazorca has killed him:

No ve nada. O sí, algo, un vapor indiscernible, una ligera ondulación, como si el espejo fuese agua y una mano la removiera apenas. Y entonces comprende. Comprende el desmayo de la mujer, comprende su irremediable condición de espectro, comprende que está muerto pero que vive aun, con la precaria existencia de aquellas larvas de las que hablaba monsieur Lemaire al enseñarles religión

romana. Eso que los criollos, sus paisanos, llaman alma en pena. (31)

More importantly, Carlos's ghost realizes it has become a prisoner of his former terrestrial residence due to his condition as an "alma en pena." Consequently, the house then gains the reputation of being haunted, receives the title of "la Casa del Fantasma," remains vacant, and then falls into ruin.

Since Carlos unwillingly haunts his former abode, it remains abandoned for fifty years, or until 1890, when Miguel Guerrero purchases it and then proceeds to raze Carlos's house and to build the new family mansion. Since his ghost is unable to leave the limits of his former residence, Carlos witnesses the construction of the new house, its new occupants, and the events of the Guerreros's dance in 1896. Not surprisingly, Carlos's ghost acquires the ability to leave his terrestrial confines at the end of the dance, and of the novel, when he sees demented Natalia as a young woman: "En el momento en que el gran viento lo arrebató y lo hizo entrar en un vertiginoso túnel constelado, Carlos alcanzó a entender que ya tenía reemplazante" (170). Apparently Natalia has died and substituted Carlos as an "alma en pena."

Although the text ends and mentions incidents in 1930 and 1946, the histoire primarily encompasses the

years from 1840 to 1896. Between Carlos's death and the dance, the novel mentions specific historical dates and other events, both in Argentine history and in the lives of various characters. Shortly before Carlos's assassination in 1840, Casiana's brother Nicolás Cabral, the son of "misia" Cipriana, flees to Montevideo in 1840 and joins the community of exiled unitarists. Not surprisingly, Nicolás uses Carlos Porcel's house as his point of departure, since the building contains an entrance into the vast tunnel network beneath Buenos Aires. Later, Miguel Guerrero and Casiana Cabral marry in 1846 and Rosas himself graces the newlyweds with a tea set containing his portrait. The happy couple then moves to the countryside, escapes the political turmoil in Buenos Aires, and lives peacefully. The family returns to Buenos Aires, not after the fall of Rosas in 1852, but with the death of Miguel's father in 1861. Several years later, in 1870, the Guerreros flee the yellow fever epidemic, and the central neighborhood of San Telmo, to the barrio norte, or the northern neighborhood.⁶ Then, in 1890 the Guerreros purchase the plot of land of the "Casa del Fantasma" and construct their new mansion. Finally in 1896, the Guerreros host the lethal dance. During this time, details concerning several Guerreros

children surface, especially about Javier and Clara, the two youngest. During these same years the lives of Dalmacio Altolaguirre, Manuel Aguilar, Belén Arévalo, Rosalía Antúnez, and Monseñor Laguzzi, the other main characters of the novel, appear. The dance serves as a magnet since it attracts and unites all the characters in one place for the important social occasion.

As I have mentioned, El baile de los guerreros acts essentially as an allegory about Argentina and the "Argentine Question." In his review of Schóó's novel, Andrés Avellaneda briefly states this interpretation but does not further develop this possibility (126). The location of Carlos Porcel's house and the Guerreros's mansion signifies the country of Argentina since the space remains the same, but with radically different structures, as seen through the two diverse residences built on the lot. Although the text never describes Carlos's house, one can imagine the small post-colonial dwelling. Conversely, chapter three provides much information about the decor of the mansion. In the case of Argentina, the two buildings symbolize the different socio-economic and political visions and policies enacted by separate governments. Throughout the nineteenth century, Rosas's closed, autarchic economic policies and the Liberal open policy formed two distinct models for

Argentine society. Just as the unitarists dismantled the Rosas's state and system of government and then used many of the same elements to institute their own national government, so the Guerreros destroy Carlos's house and utilize the same property to build their own mansion. In both cases, by comparing the mansion with the new post-Rosas state, one discovers that both are imitations of foreign models. The Argentine Constitution of 1853, recently re-written by the Peronist President Carlos Menem in 1994, vaguely follows the United States' Constitution, and by extension the ideas of Montesquieu and the French Enlightenment. Many parts of the Guerreros's house are exact replicas of European buildings, especially the Patio of the Lions of the Alhambra (85) and the Hall of Arms, patterned after the palace of Hampton Court (89). The detailed description of the Guerreros's mansion in chapter three plays the essential role in making this comparison.

Clearly, the hosts and the guests represent the ruling classes and political divisions of the country. However, the revival of the differences between federalists and unitarists presents a disturbing picture of Argentine society and national character since the majority of the guests had not even been born or were still very young children, during the battle of Caseros.

Forty-four years separate the federalists' loss of control in 1852 and the dance in 1896. When Dalmacio incites the guests to arms, the text elucidates this point:

su entusiasmo, su vitalidad se transmitían insensiblemente a estos hombres mayores que él, en quienes revivían ardores de ataño. Todas las amarguras y represiones acumuladas a partir de Caseros, las humillaciones sufridas--no por ellos mismos, a veces, sino por sus padres se agolpaban ahora y pungaban por revancha, por la reivindicación. (89-90)

The majority of the guests do not experience the original disputes between the federalists and unitarists, but learn them as concepts from their elders.⁷ Hence the text implies that these divisive differences form a part of Argentines' collective memory that the succeeding generations inherit and maintain alive.

The dates, 1846, 1896, and 1946, strategically placed in the text transform El baile de los guerreros into an allegory concerning the contemporary historical and political circumstances, or the "Argentine Question." Indeed, Ernesto Schóó concurred with this general interpretation of his novel during a personal interview

on 16 June 1994 in Buenos Aires. The first date evokes the epoch of Rosas when Argentina was a country divided between the federalists and the unitarists, each with radically different concepts about the organization of the nation, and were prepared to annihilate each other without any objections. Many historians represent the federalists as the bloodthirsty, intolerant, and ignorant faction that looked inward to Argentina and the unitarists as the peaceful, tolerant, and educated party that gazed outward to Europe and the United States. The unitarists in Esteban Echeverría's short story "El matadero" (1852) and José Mármol's Amalia (1852) provide the foundations for these generalizations. Although there are economic and cultural differences between the unitarists and the federalists, both factions were equally ferocious and bloodthirsty, and neither group would have been eligible for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The second date, 1896, signals the belle époque of Argentina. By this time forty-six years have passed since the overthrow of Rosas, the victory of the unitarists, and the institution of what would be called now "national reconciliation." The politicians defused most of the divisions between the port area and the interior provinces in 1880 when they federalized the city of Buenos Aires. Argentina enjoyed great prosperity and

appeared to possess limitless potential; Buenos Aires was gaining a reputation as the "Paris of the southern hemisphere." Furthermore, the Argentines of this time strove to be more Parisian than the Parisians themselves. This date also corresponds to the moment when British influence, both political and cultural, was reaching its height in the nation and in South America.

The third date denotes the beginning of Juan Domingo Perón's first presidency and his control over the "national consciousness." Much like the Rosas period one hundred years earlier, Argentina was again a country divided between two groups, Peronist and Anti-Peronist, each with its own radical ideal for social organization. Since this date, the political, social, and cultural divisions of Argentina have been a constant, even through the Military Process. Furthermore, one could even see El baile de los guerreros as an allegory of the divisions within the Peronist movement before 1976. The massacre between the left-wing Montoneros and Juventud Peronista and the right-wing thugs of López Rega's Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, or Triple A, at Ezeiza International Airport of 20 June 1973, exemplifies how deep divisions run in Argentina (Hodges, Argentina's "Dirty War" 114, 172-173).

These dates characterize a polar oscillation between extremes in Argentine history; Argentina moves from a divided nation in 1846, to become an apparently united and reconciled country by 1896, and returns to open confrontation by 1946. However, the events at the Guerreros's dance questions whether Argentina was ever truly capable of overcoming the differences of the nineteenth century and of constructing a unified nation. This query becomes even more apparent by recognizing that the main action of the novel--the bloody battle--occurs in the midst of a major economic boom and the period of supposed "national reconciliation."

Just as the three key dates eventually create a circularity of political and social history--events and beliefs always come back to the same point--other aspects suggest circularity and the return of the forgotten or "undesired" past, and help point to the "Argentine Question." The space where the Guerrero's construct their new mansion plays an important role in these cycles of repetition. First, the house occupies a location of much violence and death. The mazorca kills Carlos Porcel for being a unitarist, or for having contacts with suspected unitarists. Fifty-six years later, during the costume dance, the guests reenact the hatred, intolerance, and violence that initially generated the

circumstances that led to Carlos Porcel's assassination. Just as the Guerreros erect their house on the locale of a murder, so Argentina of the nineteenth century attempted to construct a new European Nation in the Americas and to suppress the bloody period of Rosas.

In addition, the epithet of Carlos's house, "La Casa del Fantasma," strengthens the concept that the past never leaves but always remains latent and dormant, and re-appears at unexpected moments. Just as the wraiths of the unitarists' and the federalists' ideology surface during the dance, so Carlos's ghost materializes from time to time. Although Carlos embodies the only true ghost in the text, there are several other characters and one historical event that figuratively function as phantoms. That is, these characters and the episode illustrate the ignored, forgotten, or marginalized parts of Argentina and her past. Likewise, these latter ghosts correspond to the first-track reading of the novel, seeking and elucidating general criticism of Argentina and its long-term socio-economic problems and issues. This first-track interpretation of Schóó's novel provides the necessary groundwork for the second-track approach of the text, which reveals the presence and the influence of the Military Process in El baile de los guerreros.

The battle of "Perro Echado," the mysterious battle between the unitarists and the federalists, arises as the incident from Argentina's past that best serves as a ghost. During the dance two elder Generals, the federalist Medina, and the unitarist Gardmendis, debate the events of this battle in the then province of the Andes, which no longer exists by 1896. The discussion concerning this confrontation acquires great irony since "unitarios y federales se eliminarion mutuamente con tal saña que no quedó ninguno para saber quien había ganado" (108). But, at least forty-five years later, without any evidence concerning who won and who lost, both factions attempt to appropriate "Perro Echado" for their own glory. More importantly, the absence of a clear victor emerges as the key element that allows the members of the two factions to vent their hatred:

la línea historiográfica más moderna sostiene que el encuentro, no existió nunca; habría sido una ficción que, alimentada por el mutuo resentimiento, llegó increíblemente a adquirir carta de identidad como si se hubiera disputado. (108-109)

However, the illusory battle of "Perro Echado" floats in the collective memory and controls certain Argentines many years later. This event parallels the images of

Juan and Eva Perón and their achievements from the 1940s and the 1950s that inspire the younger generations in the late 1960s and the early 1970s to reinstate the previous Peronist triumphs and mythologies.

The character Dalmacio Altolaquirre, who belongs to one of Argentina's oldest families, personifies the best example of a "social" ghost. As the surname suggests, the family possesses Basque origin and stems from the first colonists of the Río de la Plata area. In the Iberian peninsula, the Basque region experienced the least amount of miscegenation during the Islamic rule and even the Roman Empire. Hence, the Basque people, in addition to their language, have several physical characteristics--such as especially pale skin, straight black hair, solid build, and high incidence of Rh negative blood type--that differentiate them from the rest of the population of the Iberian Peninsula, and even Europe. In spite of this heritage, Dalmacio has the dubious honor of being a mulatto, or at least showing many physical features of a mulatto:

Dalmacio mismo era un ejemplo del capricho genético. Sin duda, en algún lugar del árbol de los Altolaquirre, alguien había practicado un injerto africano y deslizado entre las sábanas patricias, un esclavo o una esclava.

Cómo, si no, se explicaba a este mulato hijo de gente blanca, más bien rubia, de aspecto europeo y tan distinguido. (19)

Hence Dalmacio symbolizes the genuine and disregarded multiracial origins of Argentina. Before the great wave of European immigration started in 1880, the majority of Argentine population was black African or had a considerable black-African heritage.⁸ Contrary to current beliefs, Argentina is not and never was completely European. Although the multi-ethnic composition of the Spanish colony and the pre-immigration era Argentina are denied, the vestiges of these different races still appear from time to time.⁹

Furthermore, Dalmacio, besides representing racial miscegenation in Argentina, also serves as a marker to demonstrate the ingrained racism of Argentine society. First, Dalmacio cannot be a suitable marriage partner in high society since "¿Quién les garantizaba [a los padres de las jóvenes] que no les saliera un nieto negro?" (19). Second, the other high-society characters consistently refer to Dalmacio as "ese mulato de mierda," even in front of his face. The ruling groups barely tolerate Dalmacio, who has to live on the margins of his social class and society.

Miguel Guerrero's sister Natalia figuratively illustrates another typical "ghost" of many societies and civilizations: an insane person. After being jilted at the altar, Natalia slowly slips into dementia and eventually full insanity:

estalló en regueros de palabras a menudos insensatas, en risas extemporáneas. Se vestía con descuido, mezclando colores y hechuras sin concierto--ella, espejo de elegancia y refinamiento--no se lavaba ni peinaba, se pintaba agresivamente. (45)

After Natalia appears nude in front of many guests and attempts to "seduce" them, the Guerreros send the deranged woman to live with an unnamed poor relative in the Barracas neighborhood, far away from the family. More importantly, to save everyone from scandal, the Guerreros arrange the proper bureaucratic procedures and declare Natalia legally dead. However, when the poor relative dies, Natalia unexpectedly returns: "un día, un sobrino de la pariente lejana se le presentó en el caserón de las Cinco Esquinas y le informó que su tía había muerto, y qué hacían ahora con la loca" (46). Hence, the Guerreros secretly construct rooms over the garage and confine the poor woman there. Although Natalia never escapes again from her rooms to create

dishonor, the Guerreros must consistently deny her existence. Natalia's presence in the mansion and in the family indicates that although society constantly attempts to ignore these "disdainful" aspects, it fails to forget or eliminate these elements completely.

Just as Dalmacio Altolaquirre exemplifies the multi-ethnic origins of Argentine society, so do the characters Tomasa and Sayupi. Tomasa, one of the Guerreros's servants, also acts as a reminder that black Africans and mulattos originally formed an integral part of Argentine society. Unlike Dalmacio, since she works as a servant, Tomasa does not threaten the "European" society and mythology in Argentina. In contrast to Tomasa, the indigenous princess Sayupi plays a more important role, both symbolically and as a character in Schóó's novel. While Natalia Guerrero slides into the abyss of insanity, Sayupi becomes the only person able to control her: "únicamente Sayupi lograba aquietarla e inducirla al sueño, o por lo menos a una cierta somnolencia; era la india quien la sosegaba en sus accesos de furor . . ."

(48). Thus Sayupi assumes the responsibility that the Guerreros refuse to accept and, along with Natalia, inhabits the secret rooms above the garage. Furthermore, Sayupi covers up Natalia's existence since the Guerreros honestly state that the indigenous woman lives in the

mysterious rooms above the garage. Sayupi's presence in the novel, the mansion, and the Guerreros family operates as a living reminder of Argentina's indigenous population and its tragic fate. More importantly, Sayupi is a survivor of General Roca's (in)famous "Conquista del desierto," or massacre of the indigenous population on the Pampa at the end of the nineteenth century. It is not surprising that the only indigenous person in Schóó's text becomes a highly marginalized person who seldom appears and never speaks.

As noted above, these social ghosts point toward the first-track reading of El baile de los guerreros since through them the text displays social criticism and commentary of contemporary Argentina. Since the setting of the novel is late nineteenth-century Argentina, at first glance an interpretation of this type may appear ineffectual. But, as Beatriz Sarlo notes in her essay "Política, ideología y figuración literaria," literature dealing with the Argentine past can be read as criticism about the present (34). In addition to the various "ghosts," El baile de los guerreros provides two other general strategies that augment the censorious remarks about Argentine society characteristic of my first-track interpretation. First, Oscar Wilde's observations and remarks on Argentine society, both in his dialogues with

other characters and in the two apocryphal letters to his friend Bossie, perform this function.¹⁰ In his first letter Wilde notices that the Argentines, besides being extremely puritanical, are very materialistic:

Todo lo que no sea hacer negocios, beneficiarse de cualquier manera, o ser un burócrata, o una persona "seria," es objeto de la burla y la persecución más despiadas. . . . Pobres, en cambio, de los artistas, los científicos o los excéntricos que nazcan en este país. . . . Esta gente se halla convencida de que tan sólo es real y valioso lo que ve y toca; todo lo demás sería enfermedad idealista. . . . El día vendrá en que los embauquen con promesas utópicas, con mentiras doradas; y las creerán con la misma inocencia con que hoy creen en su inagotable capacidad e hacerse ricos. (12)

These final lines also indirectly describe Perón's ideology in the 1940s and the 1950s, as well as the generals' vacuous discourse of the 1970s. In the same letter Wilde alludes to what he finds disturbing about his gracious hosts: "debajo de los atuendos ingleses llevado con soltura y elegancia, intuyo algo salvaje y desconocido para mí: algo abismal, tan hondo y doloroso,

tan tremendo en su fuerza, que me atrae y me espanta al mismo tiempo" (10). Wilde's statement prefigures the action--the battles in the Guerreros's mansion--later in the novel. Furthermore, the fact that the hosts are wearing imported English clothing, considered the highest quality and the most refined, bolsters the notion that the "Europeanization" of Argentina is just a veneer over its negated autochthonous.

Later, during the dance, Wilde consistently insults the other guests with his witty remarks. For example, when asked his opinion of Buenos Aires, Wilde replies that it appears like "una copia de muchas cosas, un bric-à-brac pintoresco" (50). Also, when a guest inquires about current European dress, Wilde answers "exactamente lo que ustedes usarán dentro de dos o tres [años]" (50). The general theme present in much of Wilde's criticism about Argentina centers on the lack of authenticity. That is, Argentina is not a truly organic and original society but rather a vapid simulacrum of different European countries.¹¹ After experiencing the battles in the Guerreros's mansion, Wilde continues his criticism of Argentine society in another letter to Bossie:

tal es el esplendor de esta sociedad que tan curiosamente mezcla la barbarie con el

refinamiento. . . . Bien pronto se reveló, ay, que estábamos en San Petersburgo, y que los bárbaros alentaban debajo de una superficie pulida y brillante. (¡Y cómo se parecen estos porteños, como gustan de llamarse, a los rusos! La misma melancolía . . . la misma resignación ante los abusos de poder . . . el mismo horizonte infinito, mudo, que anonada al hombre; el uso de francés como idioma elegante, que el pueblo no conoce). (145)

This statement insinuates that both countries are obsessed with attempting to copy Western European models of society and impose them over the local culture. In the case of Tzarist society, the Russians attempted to be more French than the French. The same observation holds validity for the Argentines, who, while trying to be French, also wanted to be British at the same time. Furthermore, this comparison holds validity since both Argentina and Imperial Russia were located on the fringes of Western capitalism and the industrialized countries of the North Atlantic exported raw materials and imported finished industrialized products and ideas. In 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution proposed a different course for economic development in Tzarist Russia. Beginning with Perón in the 1940s, and even through the 1960s, 1970s and

the 1980s, the Argentine government undertook an analogous course and launched a program of state-ownership of major sectors of the economy.¹²

Just as the first general strategy for critique surfaces through the character of Oscar Wilde, a second one also emerges through the other characters. In contrast to Oscar Wilde, who as a foreigner says whatever he desires, the other characters do not. Instead, their thoughts and words reveal turn-of-the-century values that clash, often to the point of absurdity, with the views held by readers in the late twentieth century. For example, the characters' opinions about marriage play an important function, since they see this institution not as a union between two different human beings, based on mutual respect, but as a method for obtaining hidden goals. Several characters see marriage as a method for resolving financial problems or gaining social mobility. Bernabé and Teodisia, Panchita Otero's parents, spend their last pesos to dress their daughter appropriately so that she can find a wealthy husband: "El baile es la vidriera donde la hermosura de Panchita atraerá, fatalmente, al candidato riquísimo" (25-26). If Panchita catches a wealthy husband, the parents hope to take up

residence in the son-in-law's large mansion, or at least receive a stipend on which to subsist.

In a similar manner Casiana Guerrero contemplates the dance as an opportunity to solve the "Rosalía question." Rosalía Antúnez is a putative daughter from one of the Guerreros's estancias. After providing for her needs as she grows up, the Guerreros eventually take Rosalía to live with the family in Buenos Aires. However, since she is not a blood relative, Rosalía's living with the Guerreros poses a challenging problem about her social position. In the house the Guerreros solve this dilemma by giving her a small room next to the servants' quarters, which signifies that Rosalía lives in a suspended position since she is not quite family, but neither is she hired help. The same situation surfaces during the planning stages of the dance, since Rosalía's true social status does not appropriately allow her to participate. However, Casiana discovers the solution in the Bible: "Cuando alguno hallare moza virgen que no fuere desposada y la tomare, y se echare con ella, y fueran hallados . . . ella será su mujer, por cuanto le humilló: no la podrá despedir en todos sus días" (102). Casiana hopes that a lascivious, young, and moneyed male will seduce Rosalía during the dance and that innocent bystanders will find the two youths in the forbidden act.

Thus the libidinous perpetrator will have no recourse but to marry Rosalía and take her from the Guerreros's house and their responsibility. Ironically, this is exactly what occurs; Faustinito Andonaegui, the wealthy but ugly bachelor, accidentally enters into a room, finds Rosalía, and both proceed to engage in sexual intercourse. When discovered, Rosalía declares that Faustinito has raped her. Hence both youths marry and later they celebrate their golden wedding anniversary in 1946.

At a brief glance, the second-track appraisal of Schóó's text for criticism specifically about the Military Process may appear unproductive. However, since I have proposed evaluating El baile de los guerreros as an allegory of the "Argentine Question," this distinctive second-track reading yields intriguing affinities. Different aspects of the novel--events, characters' attitudes or different social and racial groups--reveal facets of the Military Process. From a theoretical point of view the danger of "over-reading" an event or a character exists. Nevertheless, El baile de los guerreros tends to flaunt such an allegorical meaning in obvious examples.¹³

With respect to different social groups and events, Rosas's mazorca offers the foremost example. Just as the

mazorca terrorized and killed Rosas's opponents, real or imaginary, the terrorist groups--the military and police forces, leftist revolutionaries, right-wing thugs, and other death squads--carried out similar activities one hundred twenty years later. During the years of the dictatorship many unnamed groups attacked, intimidated, murdered, robbed and fundamentally terrorized the population of the country. Also, the fact that the mazorca attacks a painter parallels how the regime attacks almost every form of expression that it considered subversive for any reason.

Instead of transforming the text into a roman-á-clef of historical episodes and identifiable characters from the Military Process, El baile de los guerreros presents the ideologies of that moment. The character Javier Guerrero, the youngest son in the Guerreros family, evolves into the spokesperson for antiquated and chauvinistic beliefs. During the many political discussions in his home, Javier patiently waits his turn:

No lo contenía la urbanidad sino la sospecha que su tiempo no había llegado todavía, de que si esperaba, "manso como las palomas y astuto como las serpientes," arribaría el momento en que les opondría su verdad [a los argentinos liberales], la única verdad posible en América

española: la cruz y la espada, el exterminio de los usurpadores y los herejes, de los gringos, los judíos, los ingleses y los masones, que esquilaban y corrompían esta patria que debía ser una doncella eterna, una virgen consagrada al Dios de los ejércitos. (86)

More than a youth disenchanted with the social order, or a rosista, Javier is a reactionary person with intensely medieval religious beliefs. More than just imagining his revenge, Javier hopes for the day when "surgiría el nuevo aladid encargado de redimir, por la sangre y el fuego, a esta Argentina saqueada" (86). For the ultraconservative son, the entire unitarist liberal project for Argentina has ruined the country and her true destiny. Javier sees himself, and his ideas, as the last and only hope for a country that will otherwise fall into ruins. In a similar fashion, the armed forces saw themselves as the only salvation for Argentina and the embodiment of the only ideology that could restore the nation to its greatness.¹⁴ Hence when the dance transforms itself into a series of battles, Javier expresses his willingness to fight for the federalist cause. Frank Graziano, in Divine Violence, Donald Hodges, in Argentina's "Dirty War," and Diana Taylor, in Disappearing Acts,

substantiate how many military officials espoused ideas similar to Javier's and utilized them to justify their actions.

Javier, besides representing the most reactionary elements of Argentine society, experiences an extremely strange revelation, or epiphany, at the end of the novel. In the midst of a battle, Javier sees Dalmacio Altolaquirre and finally acknowledges and reveals his repressed homosexuality by attempting to seduce him. After becoming fully cognizant of his actions, Javier then commits suicide. The revelation of Javier's closeted homosexual tendencies also serves as another example of a repressed and marginalized sector of Argentine society.

Just as Javier Guerrero exemplifies the reactionary ideology latent in Argentine society at the turn of the century, Manuel Aguilar illustrates the persistence of this mentality into the twentieth century when he composes a letter to his son Javier. Not surprisingly, as his name suggests, Javier Aguilar is as just reactionary as his namesake deceased uncle. In the letter, Manuel expresses his fear about the rise of fascism in the world and especially in Argentina:

Estoy temblando, Javier. ¿Qué hemos hecho por qué el árbol que plantamos está creciendo

torcido, y bajo la fuerza de qué vientos?
 Ustedes hablan mucho de la restauración de
 antiguas virtudes (que yo, tanto más viejo,
 nunca conocí), de tradiciones latinas, toda una
 jerga que despierta en mí los ecos de una voz
 que creí callada para siempre. Una jerga que,
 para mí, es heraldo de la muerte. Donde se
 prohíben tantas cosas, se termina por prohibir
 la vida. (173)

In addition, Manuel worries about the ramifications of such an intolerant ideology. The letter stops suddenly with a quotation from the German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856): "se empieza por quemar libros y se termina quemando gente" (173). While usually used to refer to the consequences of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, this famous quotation also holds weight in Argentina during the dictatorship as well. Just like Hitler, the Argentine military held public book burnings for "undesirable" literature and other ideas, and thus hoped to purge the country of alien and harmful influences. Osvaldo Bayer, in his article "Pequeño recordatorio para un país sin memoria," describes how Lieutenant Colonel Gorleri authorized the incineration of books in Córdoba in April 1976 and rationalized his action:

a fin de que no quede ninguna parte de estos libros, folletos, etc., se toma la resolución para que con este material se evite continuar engañando a nuestra juventud sobre el verdadero bien que representan nuestros símbolos nacionales, nuestra familia, nuestra iglesia, y en fin, nuestro más tradicional acervo espiritual sintetizado en Dios, Patria y Hogar.

(211)

In addition to exalting the necessity of incinerating texts, Coronel Gorleri's declaration also expressed the military's confessional ideology and its mission to rescue the country. Not only did the government burn books, in March 1976 the new regime immediately closed the offices of Siglo Veintiuno, one of Latin America's most prestigious publishing houses, and put in place harsh restrictions on the press and other mass media (Adellach, 104).

In a similar manner, the character Carlos Porcel provides commentary about the Military Process. The first narrative sections of chapter eight summarize the action up to that moment: the initial battles between the unitarists and the federalists. At this point the third person narrator becomes manifest and posits various explanations for the origin of this conflict and states

that the ghost Carlos Porcel embodies the only reliable witness. Furthermore, the narrator incorporates Carlos's opinions directly into the text of the novel. When talking about the impetus of the battle, Carlos states:

"Así ocurrió entonces. Una vez que la máquina de los agravios mutuos se pone en marcha, ¿quién puede detenerla? Una vez que alguien se convence de que la fuerza y el terror son sus únicos aliados para conseguir lo que quiere, y sobre todo si se considera a sí mismo el cruzado de una causa, un elegido de Dios para purificar al mundo, y abdica del raciocinio y se niega a escuchar, ¿quién le devolverá la cordura? ¿Es que la necesita acaso? El límite entre la cordura y la demencia es tan frágil, tan impreciso como el que existe entre la vida y la muerte. Quien lo franquea, ya no puede volverse atrás." (110)

Taken alone, these lines become a strong moral statement about how revenge turns into a incessant pattern of death and destruction. Placed within the parameters of El baile de los guerreros, this passage appears to comment solely on the hostilities between the federalists and the unitarists guests. However, if located in the context of the Military Process, this same excerpt changes into a

severe criticism of the regime. The military officers who ruled Argentina during the dictatorship firmly believed that they were saving their country from communism and fighting the first battle in World War Three, the war against communist subversion. The officers avowed that their crusade justified the use of any and all means necessary so that they could triumph.

Schóó's novel achieves its goal to speak about contemporary Argentina and the "Argentine Question" in two fundamental ways. First, the text posits and distances the action in the late nineteenth century, during a time of national reconciliation and stability. In this manner the events of the deadly dance, when contrasted with the historical reality, appear more unlikely. At the same time plot acquires a ludicrous and entertaining tone, which also serves to temper the serious stance in the novel.¹⁵ Second, Schóó's work identifies key moments from Argentine history and creates connections among them through the two weddings and golden anniversaries, the characters, their actions, and ideologies. Through these parallel elements Schóó's text proposes that history advances as a series of repetitions instead of as a linear progression. Such recurrences suggest that under the veneer of European civilization

Argentines have not modified their barbaric mentality, as seen by the bloody battles in the Guerreros's mansion. Through these strategies El baile de los guerreros speaks about Argentine society, the Military Process, and its origins. More importantly, Schóó's work implies that to understand the present, one needs to examine the past and discover that, as the common saying goes "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

In a strategy similar to the one used in Ernesto Schóó's novel, Ricardo Piglia's first novel, Respiración artificial (1980), evokes different dates from Argentine history and establishes connections among them, and thus formulates a symbol concerning the "Argentine Question."¹⁶ However, in contrast with El baile de los Guerreros, which speaks of the Military Process indirectly and allegorically, Piglia's novel makes many more direct remarks about the regime. The time frame in both novels explains this distinction since El baile de los guerreros occurs in the nineteenth century whereas Respiración artificial takes place in the late 1970s, during the darkest moments of the dictatorship.

The novel's récit opens with Emilio Renzi, a naive porteño of thirty-something years of age and the main character, who speculates about an epistolary

relationship with his uncle Marcelo Maggi, a professor of Argentine history in Concordia, the province of Entre Ríos. Marcelo begins corresponding with Emilio in the hopes that he may correct certain errors in Emilio's "novel" La prolijidad de lo real, published in April 1976.¹⁷ For his "novel," Emilio uses the failed marriage between Marcelo and Esperanza Ossorio as the substratum for the plot. In the following months and missives, Marcelo describes his life and more importantly outlines his project of writing a biography about Enrique Ossorio, a nineteenth-century politician, based on the latter's autobiography and letters. Later, Marcelo requests that Emilio visit his ex-father-in-law, Senator Luciano Ossorio, almost a century old and confined to a wheel chair. Coincidentally Enrique Ossorio is Luciano Ossorio's grandfather and Esperanza's great-grandfather. After a year of correspondence (1977), Emilio finally travels to Concordia to meet Marcelo personally and to discuss different inconsistencies in Emilio's "novel" and other issues. While waiting for his uncle, Emilio meets Vladimir Tardewski, an old friend of Marcelo's.¹⁸ After a night filled with conversation, Tardewski tells Emilio that his uncle will never return and then entrusts the nephew with Marcelo's personal papers. Two years later

(1979), attempting to comprehend better his epistolary relationship with his uncle, Emilio writes a "manuscript" and begins: "¿Hay una historia? Si hay una historia comienza hace tres años. En abril de 1976, cuando se publica mi primer libro, él me manda una carta" (13).¹⁹

Respiración artificial starts with the enigmas of Marcelo's identity and of Emilio's understanding their epistolary friendship. However, the novel omits a final resolution of this enigma.

An examination of the text's structure helps to disentangle the intricate plot and sheds light on the allegory of the "Argentine Question." The récit of Respiración artificial consists of four different chapters, separated into two different parts. The first part contains three chapters, which are each divided into four sections, with sections further divided into narrative fragments. The first chapter functions as an introduction to Respiración artificial by revealing the basic details of the histoire. In addition to functioning as the narrator and as the agent of focalization, Emilio, in a Proustian endeavor, organizes the correspondence between Marcelo and himself to arrive at some understanding of what happened to his uncle. More importantly, Emilio demonstrates his naiveté since

he only comments on the different moments of the relationship and letters, but he does not strive to analyze their content nor propose a plausible solution. The second chapter, also narrated by and focalized through him and written like a letter, describes Emilio's visit, or interview, with Senator Luciano Ossorio. The third chapter consists of an omniscient narration, focalized through the cryptographer Francisco José Arocena. Mentioned in the previous chapter by the Senator, Arocena encloses himself in a room and deciphers documents, including various people's letters, and endeavors to unearth a conspiracy against the nation.²⁰ Enrique Ossorio's papers, both his letters for his autobiography and his novel about a utopia, are interpolated among the texts that Arocena decodes and considers as contemporary documents and not as nineteenth-century writings.²¹

In contrast to the first three chapters in the first part, the second part of Respiración artificial includes the fourth chapter, which in turn contains only three sections. The narration and the focalization change among the three sections. Vladimir Tardewski, a Polish exile, narrates the first section and also serves as the focalizer and presents the conversations among Emilio,

Tardewski, and other people in the "Club" of Concordia. However, in the last two sections Emilio again becomes the narrator and agent of focalization and recounts the conversations between himself and Tardewski in the latter's house, while waiting for Marcelo until dawn. Curiously, in these sections, when functioning as the narrator and the agent of focalization, the character acts as an observer and rarely participates in the conversations. In the first narrative section Emilio dominates the conversation; in the second and third Tardewski unfolds as the main speaker. At the end, Marcelo never appears and Emilio returns to his home, entrusted with his uncle's papers, and the enigma.

While Schóó's and Piglia's texts address the "Argentine Question," both novels use distinctive strategies. El baile de los guerreros begins with the dance and the Guerreros's mansion and then draws connections among specific historical dates and the diverse characters, and in this manner invokes the "Argentine Question." Instead of using a social occasion like a dance and a building, Piglia's novel utilizes primarily the characters Enrique Ossorio and Luciano Ossorio, and through the figure of Marcelo Maggi the text creates commentaries about the "Argentine Question." Yet similar to Schóó's text, Respiración artificial also

employs history. Mario Cesáreo, in his study "Cuerpo humano e historia en las novelas del Proceso," observes that three key historical moments emerge and represent the crisis of rational thought necessary to understand Respiración artificial: Rosismo with Enrique Ossorio, the birth of Nazism with Adolph Hitler and Franz Kafka, and the Military Process with Emilio's "manuscript" (503). Interestingly, both Schóó's and Piglia's texts include references to Rosas and his bloody epoch as the dictator of Argentina. In addition to these three, two other moments in Argentine history also play equally significant roles: first the coup d'etat of General Uriburu in 1930 and the following "Infamous Decade," represented by the assassination attempt of Senator Luciano Ossorio, and second the first "Peronism," beginning in 1943, symbolized by Emilio's "novel" about Marcelo Maggi and Esperanza Ossorio's marriage. Marta Morello Frosch, in her article "Ficción e historia en Respiración artificial de Ricardo Piglia," includes these latter two dates among the three periods of Argentine history--Rosas, Uriburu and Perón--that she considers as fundamental dates in the development of contemporary Argentina (249).

In a similar manner to Schóó's text, many important connections exist between these key epochs from Argentine

history and the characters and their lives. Enrique Ossorio, who worked for Rosas, also supposedly acted simultaneously as an agent for the unitarists in exile. But, instead of living happily after the battle of Caseros in 1852, Enrique fled Argentina to California and became rich during the 1849 gold rush. Later, Enrique traveled to Chile where he committed suicide just before the fall of Rosas and the inception of "modern" Argentina began: the post-Rosas, pro-foreign capitalism, and "European" nation. Later, his grandson Luciano Ossorio became a Senator under the Sáenz Peña Election Law. Just as Enrique died when "modern" Argentina was about to be born, Luciano almost perished just after "contemporary" Argentina--cyclical military regimes with democratic elections and economic stagnation--had been born. The death and near death of two members of the same family, the Ossorios, mark drastic changes in the historical trajectory of Argentina. "Modern" Argentina, with Enrique Ossorio, refers to the period beginning in 1852 and "contemporary," with Luciano Ossorio, denotes the time after 1930.

Like the gala events and the mansion in El baile de los guerreros, the character of Senator Luciano Ossorio functions as an allegory of the "Argentine Question." The Senator was born in 1879, two months after his

father, whose name is never revealed in the novel, died in a duel defending the honor of his own father, Enrique Ossorio. Later, the other duelist is tried and convicted for killing Luciano's father. The Senator then states that the trial itself represents an important event in Argentine social history since for the first time a duelist was convicted of murder. The new notions of the supremacy of order, justice, and equality before the law triumph over the old European ideals of family honor, privilege, and exceptions. The Senator then explains:

Por primera vez, en el juicio llevado adelante contra el duelista que mató a mi padre, contra ese mandria asalariado de los Varela, la justicia se separó y se independizó de una mitología literaria y moral del honor que había servido de norma y de verdad. Por primera vez la norma de la pasión y del honor dejan de coincidir . . . y se instala una ética de las pasiones verdaderas. (63)

For the Senator, this trial connotes the changes that led to the election of President Julio Argentino Roca (1880-1886). Just as Enrique's death marks the inception of the "modern" Argentina--post-Rosas--the death of Enrique's son and the birth of his grandson comprises part of this "modern" order.

In addition to the triumph of justice, the duel symbolizes the end of the national elites' internal divisions and the inception of their cooperation. Luciano Ossorio notes: "[']Habían descubierto . . . que tenían otro modo de probar su hombría . . . uniéndose entre ellos para matar a quienes no se resignaban a reconocerles su condición de Señores y de Amos[']" (63; emphasis in original). This unification of the upper classes produced the conclusion to the "Conquest of the Desert," or the eradication of the indigenous population beyond the frontier in 1880, and inaugurated the colonization of the Pampa region. Julio A. Roca's presidency signaled the massive nineteenth-century European immigration to Argentina and the export-orientated economic boom. In addition, the status of the city of Buenos Aires, the main issue for the provinces, was resolved with the creation of the Federal Capital District in 1880 (Skidmore and Smith, 73).²² The unification of the country became complete and Argentina started to resemble a European country and economy, with the oligarchy completely in charge.

Just as Enrique Ossorio's birth in 1879 or 1880 parallels the inception of modern Argentina, the assassination attempt against the Senator's life in 1931

corresponds to the virtual death of "democratic" Argentina. While presenting a speech during the 25th of May celebration, akin to Independence Day in the United States, in the presence of the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, a jockey shoots Luciano Ossorio. Although the Senator survives, he remains paralyzed and confined to a wheel chair. Almost nine months prior to this date, General José Felix Uriburu overthrew President Hipólito Yrigoyen in order to install a government of, by, and for the oligarchy. Many historians, such as Donald Hodges, and politicians, as Raúl Alfonsín, consider Uriburu's coup d'etat as the death of democracy in Argentina. In addition, Uriburu's intervention also marks the beginnings of a long cycle of military governments and intermittent constitutional rule. Just as Senator Ossorio became paralyzed, so did Argentina at almost the same time. The failed assassination also symbolizes the first sign of a country that would be polarized, and many times immobilized, for the next fifty-three years. Through the correspondence to Emilio Marcelo quotes the Senator at one point and makes a similar declaration:

Al verlo uno tenía tendencia a ser metafórico y él mismo reflexionaba metafóricamente. Estoy paralítico, igual que ese país, decía. Yo soy la Argentina, carajo, decía el viejo cuando

deliraba con la morfina que le daban para aliviarle el dolor. Empezó a identificar la patria con su vida, tentación que está latente en cualquiera que tenga más de 3.000 hectáreas en la pampa húmeda. (24)

Although it is never mentioned in the novel, at the time of the attempted assassination in 1931, the Senator is at least fifty-one years old; by the time of Emilio's visit in 1976 or 1977, Senator Luciano is almost one hundred years old. Senator Ossorio's life symbolizes the historical trajectory of Argentina since 1880, a hopeful youth and middle age followed by a sorrowful old age symbolized by his paralysis.

In addition, the Senator's life and circumstances after the assassination both function as part of the allegory of the "Argentine Question." Luciano Ossorio's paralysis and marginal status within his family parallels Argentina's decline. Before the world-wide depression, subsequent to the 1929 Wall Street stock market crash, Argentina figured as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, ranking among the top ten. With vast natural resources, human capital, and economic potential Argentina was the envy of many nations. However, since 1930 Argentina has fallen into a secondary position within Latin America and a marginal position within the

world economy. Ossorio's political life mirrors these changes as well. Before 1930 Senator Ossorio had attained a position of power and prominence in Argentine politics and society, through his electoral victory by the Sáenz Peña Election Law of 1916. The Senator lost his political power first with Uriburu's coup d'etat and later his ability to act with the attempted assassination. Finally, the family marginalizes the Senator from their daily life and he remains alone in remote quarters in the house.

Just as the text creates an allegory about the "Argentine Question" through the characters of Enrique and Luciano Ossorio, Piglia's novel also uses the repetition of the characters' actions, dates, and other elements of Argentine history to comment on the Military Process, its sources, and its abuses. The presence and mention of Rosas and his rule symbolize the foremost example of repetition. In chapter three, the first letter that Arocena reads comes from Roque, perhaps an exile in Venezuela who speaks of the Argentines "en el exterior," or abroad, and finishes his missive with the post-script: "A veces, (no es joda) pienso que somos la generación del [18]37. Perdidos en la diáspora. ¿Quién de nosotros escribirá el Facundo?" (94). The reference to the Argentines abroad is a clear indication of Roque's

status as an exile of the contemporary dictatorship. Furthermore, in addition to signalling the famous nineteenth-century Argentine writers in exile, the reference to the "Generación de 37," suggests that political conditions similar to those that affected the Generation of 1837 with the dictatorship of Rosas also exist in the plot of Respiración artificial and in extratextual reality for Piglia and his readers. Furthermore, mentioning Facundo, Sarmiento's seminal criticism of Rosas and an agenda for a post-Rosas Argentina, highlights Roque's exile for political reasons, just like Sarmiento. Likewise, citing Facundo insinuates that the Argentines abroad and at home must imagine plans for a new society in the post-dictatorship future.²³

The phenomenon of repetition also surfaces by the condition of many characters in the novel. Almost all the people that Emilio meets as a result of his epistolary relationship with Marcelo are exiles in some fashion. Emilio begins his "manuscript" by talking about his uncle Marcelo Maggi, a lost, forgotten, and marginalized relative of his mother's family; metaphorically Marcelo is exiled from the family history. From his uncle's letters, Emilio discovers the existence

of the enigmatic Enrique Ossorio, an exile at the end of the Rosas epoch. Furthermore, Enrique Ossorio is also marginalized, or exiled, from the official Argentine historiography because of his status as a traitor and spy for both Rosas and the unitarists. Through his papers interpolated in Emilio's "manuscript," Enrique Ossorio constantly speaks of his condition of exile in the United States. Emilio concludes that both Marcelo Maggi and Enrique Ossorio are exiles after learning about them through written documents.²⁴

Emilio also meets exiles of flesh and blood as well. In addition to the Senator, who still takes an interest in the affairs of his country and his personal estate, during his voyage to Concordia Emilio meets various Europeans exiled for political reasons: the noble Antón Tokray who left post-Tzarist Russia because of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Tardewski who could not return to Poland because of the Second World War, and Rudholf Von Maier who fled Germany because of his past as a Nazi bureaucrat. Furthermore, Tokray is the illegitimate son of a nobleman, which makes him a marginal person in the Tzarist Russia of his youth, before his spatial and cultural banishment. In addition to being exiles, these last three characters are also

figures marginalized from the official historiography of their countries. When Emilio visits Concordia in 1977, the three characters embody historical and ideological periods antithetical to the then current dominant political doctrine in their home countries. The presence of Tokray, Tardewski, and Von Maier affirms exile as a common phenomenon in many parts of the world and diverse historical periods.

The structure of the récit and the events of the histoire in Piglia's text also display the phenomenon of repetition. When he begins to write his "manuscript" in 1979, Emilio declares that he does not personally know his uncle Marcelo. In addition, Emilio adds that he still has many doubts about the veracity of his "novel" La prolijidad de lo real. Upon completing the "manuscript" Emilio still does not personally know Marcelo and lacks the knowledge of his fate after he has completed the trip to Concordia. Before returning to Buenos Aires, Tardewski entrusts Emilio with several portfolios containing Marcelo's notes. When opening the first folder, Emilio encounters Enrique Ossorio's suicide note from 1852. The final moment of the récit of Respiración artificial, the opening of Marcelo's portfolio in 1977, marks the end to the epistolary relationship between Emilio and Marcelo. At the same

time, this act marks the beginning of Emilio's "manuscript" in 1979, which starts with and poses the fundamental question "¿Hay una historia?" (13). The text never resolves the enigma of Marcelo's fate, which continues to exist, perhaps indefinitely, like the Military Process. During the time frame of Piglia's text, 1976-1979, the military government proposed to govern the country for an indefinite period of time and the eventual return to democracy was unimaginable.

A very brief examination of the literary criticism concerning the home novels reveals that Respiración artificial has received the most attention. Indeed, many critics and literary aficionados declare that Piglia's novel is the most important novel of this period (Colás, Hopkins, Payne, Morello Frosch, and Balderston "Significado latente").²⁵ In a similar manner, the dual-track interpretation leads to the conclusion that the Military Process is the main focus of the novel. The first-track analysis of the novel provides many instances of general criticism about Argentine society. Unlike Schóo's El baile de los guerreros where the dual-track approach reveals assorted criticisms about Argentina, the commentary uncovered by the first-track reading of Piglia's text contains inextricable connections and

affinities to the circumstances of the Military Process. For example, Senator Ossorio mentions the 1920s and Leopoldo Lugones and thus remarks indirectly on Lugones's role in the fomentation and the persistence of fascistic ideology in the country. The first-track reading considers these remarks as a veiled strategy for commenting on pervasive extremism in Argentina, during the 1920s as well as the 1960s and 1970s. But, the second-track reading views this same statement as an explanation of the origins of the dictatorship, its ideology, and the contemporary intolerance and repression.

The presence and the consequences of the Military Process surface continually throughout Respiración artificial. The opening lines clearly situate the action during this regime: "En abril de 1976, cuando se publica mi primer libro, él me manda una carta" (13). Significantly, the coup d'etat occurred on 24 March 1976, one month before the publication of Emilio's "novel," La prolijidad de lo real, and the arrival of Marcelo's first letter. Two years prior to publishing his text in 1980, Piglia published an extract in the third issue of the journal Punto de vista (July 1978, 26-28).²⁶ A comparison of the extract of 1978 and Piglia's text of 1980 reveals

two fundamental differences. First, the titles are inverted; the extract is titled Prolijidad de lo real and Emilio's "novel" about Marcelo and Esperanza is called Respiración artificial. The second divergence is the fact that Marcelo's letter arrives in April of 1968 and not 1976. The change in this initial date to 1976 anchors the text firmly in the historical reality of the Military Process. Nevertheless, Lori J. Hopkins observes that the novel does not present any overt elements of the state terror of the Military Process (31). In a personal interview on 29 July 1991 in Buenos Aires, Piglia stated that he did not include any direct references to the regime since the time frame, given by the date on the first page, provided the obvious and necessary information for readers.²⁷ Hence, in this fashion the text incorporates commentary on the military government and its policies by roundabout means.

Respiración artificial employs three different strategies to speak about the Military Process. Primarily, in addition to Marcelo's fate, the novel connects several characters' destiny to political circumstances extraneous to the dictatorship. The aforementioned references about the exiles, the Generation of 1837, and about Facundo in Roque's letter

all exemplify this phenomenon. Prior to these instances, Emilio's visit to Senator Luciano Ossorio provides the space where the text introduces this recurrent theme. At one point the Senator requests that Emilio write a letter to Juan Cruz Baigorria, and Ossorio inquires about the predicament of Cruz's unnamed son:

"Señor Don Juan Cruz Baigorria," dictó el Senador. "Querido compatriota y amigo. Conozco su situación y tiene usted, esté seguro, mi solidaridad. He recibido una carta suya no dirigida a mí y por eso conozco su desdicha." dictó el Senador mientras se paseaba en su silla de ruedas por el cuarto. "La pérdida de un hijo es el mayor dolor que un hombre puede recibir. Pero ¿es que su hijo ha muerto o se ha extraviado?" (77-78)

This passage marks Cruz's reticence about disclosing the whereabouts of his son and introduces uncertainty about whether he is exiled or disappeared. The Senator's mention of his friend's son, in addition to serving as a intratextual connection between chapters two and three, also foreshadows the content of Juan Cruz Baigorria's letter.

The text further develops this situation in chapter three. The cryptologist Francisco José Arocena reads

Juan Cruz Baigorria's letter to his unnamed son in Winesburg, Ohio, the fourth of the seven letters analyzed.²⁸ Whereas the Senator's mention of the son presents several possibilities, the father's letter indicates that the son is in political exile. When Cruz speaks of the son's mother he comments: "Espero esta carta la recibas de buena salud. Tu madre cada vez más nerviosa. De noche casi no pega los ojos" (104). At the end of the letter Cruz adds: "Tu madre siempre te extraña y a veces la encuentro llorando en la cocina, pero me hago el disimulado y ella se pasa una mano por los ojos, como si le hiciera mal el humo de las ornallas" (106). In these lines the text insinuates that the son's absence causes the mother's nervous conditions. Later, when the father mentions a neighbor, it becomes clear that the son's absence is involuntary: "El más grande de los Weber me pregunta por vos cada vez que me ve: él es el único que se anima y se me acerca. . ." (105). The other neighbors' refusals to inquire about the son illustrates their fear of discovering the truth. Furthermore, the fact that only one person has enough courage to ask about the son's fate reinforces the reality that the Cruz Baigorria family lives in a precarious situation. During the years of the dictatorship, the witnesses and

bystanders of the kidnapping and other acts of state terrorism learned quickly to ignore what they saw and to never speak publicly. These conditions illustrate what Diana Taylor calls "percepticide," learning not to question and to disregard the validity of seen events, and ultimately not perceiving anything at all (119-138). More importantly, Juan Cruz's continual references to General Perón characterize him, and his son, as having a high political consciousness. Furthermore, these references also explain why Cruz's former friends dissociate themselves; the Cruz Baigorras are political and thus deemed subversive according to the military's ideology.

Other letters also allude to the Military Process in addition to Juan Cruz Baigorria's correspondence. Before considering Cruz's letter, the cryptologist Arocena examines a missive from Angélica Inés Echevarne, clearly an insane or schizophrenic person, who writes to an unknown governor, or Intendente, after seeing his photograph in a newspaper. In this letter Angélica describes an operation in which a Dije (capitalized in the original), or transmitting device, has been implanted next to her heart.²⁹ According to Angélica, this gadget

allows her to see remote events and objects. She comments:

Una ve este descampado y no se imagina lo que yo he visto: cuánto sufrimiento. Al principio sólo podía verlo al finado. Acostado sobre una cama de fierro, tapado con diarios. Hay otros ahí, al fondo de un pasillo, piso de tierra apisonada. Cierro los ojos para no ver el daño que le han hecho. No quiero verlo sufrir y entonces canto porque soy la cantora oficial. Si yo digo las imágenes que pasan por el Dije nadie me cree ¿Por qué a mí? (98-99)

Read within the context of the Military Process, Angélica's description parallels a torture center and one of the victims. In a similar manner, her "operation" indicates that Angélica herself may have suffered in a torture center and consequently has slid into insanity because of the traumatic experience. Later in the same letter Angélica speaks of the Shoa under the Nazi Germans and rambles:

Yo ví las fotografías: mataban a los judíos con alambre de enfardar. Los hornos crematorios están en Belén, Palestina. Al Norte, bien al Norte, en Belén, Provincia de Catamarca. (99; accent in the original)

Through her erratic writing, Angélica meshes the Nazi atrocities with the horrors of state-sponsored terror during the dictatorship. Again, Piglia's text invokes the past and then surreptitiously reveals the truth about the dictatorship.

In the first half of the novel, Cruz's son and Angélica Inés Echevarne illustrate the circumstances of the Military Process. However, in both situations the information about these characters is presented as a written text and not as part of the action involving the main character Emilio Renzi or his search for his uncle Marcelo. Neither Juan Cruz Biagorria nor his son ever speak directly to Emilio or to any other character. Likewise, Angélica writes her experience to an unidentified government official. In the first case Emilio hears about the predicament of Cruz's son through Senator Ossorio. But in the second case Emilio never reads Angélica's letter. The text distances these critiques of the dictatorship from the central plot and places them in an apparently irrelevant position. To understand the significance of these references, the astute readers must draw connections between chapter three, where they are located, and the other three chapters of Piglia's text. Here condemnation about the regime exists deeply meshed in the narration.

In contrast to the first part, the reality of the Military Process merges with the plot and with Emilio's life in the second part. This is the second way that Piglia's novel adroitly incorporates references to the dictatorship. While going to Tardewski's house, the two characters enter a bar so that Emilio can purchase cigarettes. Troy, one of the men in the bar, begins talking to Emilio in a highly elliptical and possibly inebriated speech filled with lunfardo, about how the "Triste Goñi" committed a mass murder in Concordia. The narrator Tardewski reports Troy's statement:

Algo anda mal, le digo [Tardewski] a Troy, acá hay algo que anda para la mierda. ¿[Troy responde] O ustedes [Emilio y Tardewski] no saben que de un viaje liquidó a cinco de sus hermanos, el Triste Goñi? Los limpió a los cinco, de un viaje, con una aguja de colchonero y ahora resulta que los fue liquidando uno por uno, a los cinco, mientras apoliyaban, con un alfiletazo. . . . (185)

Troy babbles and explains the fratricide of the five Goñi brothers and how the youngest survived. Remarkably similar to Angélica's letter, Troy's language creates a large amount of ambiguity about what actually occurred and when. This visit to the bar in Concordia operates as

a foil to Emilio's visit to the bar Ramos in Buenos Aires, described in chapter one where Emilio watches several drunk people elegantly toast señorita Giselle for her birthday. In contrast to this bar scene in Buenos Aires, Emilio encounters a scene of cruelty and death in Concordia. Although this mass murder occurs before the Military Process--the youngest Goñi was seven at the time: "tenía siete ocho años en ese entonces, ahora labura de camionero, hace la ruta Santa Fe--Resistencia, Chaco--Santa Fe" (187)--the description of the dead resemble the carnage left by the forces of repression. Again, the abuses of the dictatorship appear through a veiled and complicated narration.

After several cryptic references and analogous depictions, the Military Process emerges through Emilio's failed rendezvous with Marcelo. These examples form part of the second way that Piglia's text deals with the dictatorship. Following almost a year of correspondence, Emilio at last travels to Concordia to meet his uncle Marcelo Maggi. But, Emilio never meets Marcelo or discovers if his uncle simply crossed the river to Uruguay in order to escape possible persecution or if the regime disappeared him. Johnny Payne in Conquest of the New Word observes that the text never gives a definitive

answer (104-105).³⁰ Conversely María Josefa Barra concludes quickly that Marcelo is disappeared and murdered (28).³¹ An attentive examination of the text reveals the ambiguity of this question. When Emilio arrives in Concordia, Tardewski states to his housekeeper Elvira: "Es simple; el Professor [Marcelo] decidió irse de viaje. Habló con su sobrino, le dijo que me viera. Posiblemente, le digo, el Profesor regrese hoy" (131). Tardewski then explains that ten days prior to Emilio's arrival Marcelo paid him a visit and entrusted him with a portfolio containing his research on and biography of Enrique Ossorio. Furthermore Tardewski states:

Me dijo también que posiblemente cruzara esa tarde al Uruguay para despedirse de una mujer con la que había vivido en otra época. Quería despedirse de ella porque pensaba irse de viaje y no estaba seguro de poder volver a verla.

Quedamos en encontrarnos dos días después, a la hora de siempre, en el Club. Si por algún motivo no llegaba, trataría, dijo de estar de vuelta a más tardar el 27. (132)

Tardewski makes this statement soon after the nephew's arrival, which in turn creates the expectation that

Marcelo may return at any moment. When both Tardewski and Emilio check Marcelo's hotel to see if he has returned, they only find papers, books, one suit, and various personal belongings.³² The absence of clothes suggests that Marcelo has gone on a trip. But, the fact that the hotel maintains a room for Marcelo underlines the possibility that he may come back.

However, at the same time Tardewski insinuates that Marcelo has disappeared, or at least departed for a long time. The first instance is a Freudian slip while talking about Elvira and Marcelo:

El Profesor la quería mucho, dijo Tardewski[.]
 Enseguida se rectificó: había querido en
 realidad decir que el Profesor la quiere mucho.
 A veces, dijo, basta que alguien falte unas
 horas para que hablemos de él como si hubiera
 muerto. Al revés de lo que pasa en los sueños.

(197)

This is the only reference that Tardewski makes about Marcelo's possible death.

While waiting for his uncle to arrive, Tardewski explains to Emilio his theory about the connection between Kafka and Hitler. During this conversation, Tardewski reveals elusively that as time has passed,

Marcelo evolved from a radical to a Marxist: "El Profesor por su parte se interesaba cada vez más en el filósofo que pasó años trabajando en una sala de la biblioteca del British Museum" (240). Edna Aizenberg, in addition to showing the importance of Kafka in Argentine literature, astutely reminds her readers that Karl Marx spent years researching Das Kapital in the British Museum (426-27). During the Military Process, the government considered any hint of Marx and Marxism as highly subversive and as a basis for arrest or, even worse, for disappearance. This political association explains Marcelo's request: "Debo pedirte, por otro lado, la máxima discreción respecto a mi situación actual. Discreción máxima. Tengo mis sospechas: en eso soy como todo el mundo" (20). This supplication reinforces the notion that Marcelo became a Marxist while researching the biography on Enrique Ossorio.

At the end of the conversation, Tardewski hands over Marcelo's papers to Emilio, hints that his uncle may never return, and adds:

si hemos hablado tanto, si hemos hablado toda la noche, fue para no hablar, o sea para no decir nada sobre él, sobre el Profesor. Hemos hablado y hablado porque sobre él no hay nada que se pueda decir. (273)

Tardewski never reveals what he may know about Marcelo, his predicament, or his whereabouts. Emilio, two years after the failed rendezvous, still lacks any clue about what transpired in Concordia in 1977. During the two following years, even when he reaches the end of his "manuscript," Emilio cannot provide a plausible explanation for the mysterious voyage to Concordia. More importantly, Emilio realizes that the circumstances of the Military Process have penetrated his hermetic existence as a literary scholar through his uncle's unknown fate.

After using several characters' fates in Respiración artificial to speak about the Military Process and to invoke the "Argentine Question," the novel then utilizes literature as the third way to address specifically the conditions of the dictatorship. Roberto Echavarren, in "La literaridad: Respiración artificial de Ricardo Piglia," observes that the first half of the novel discusses the difficulties of being a writer and that the second half presents literary criticism (998). There are three different literary discussions among the characters in the second part of the text. In the first conversation at the Club of Concordia, Tardewski and Emilio discuss the phenomenon of Europeanism in Argentina while they wait for Marcelo. At the end of this

conversation they interpret Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" as a parody of the intellectual endeavors of the Frenchman Paul Groussac (1848-1929) who lived and wrote in Argentina for many years. The second conversation takes place between Emilio and Bartolomé Marconi, which soon develops into a lecture where Emilio expounds Jorge Luis Borges's and Roberto Arlt's significant role in the development of Argentine literature.³³ Emilio asserts that Borges forms part of and closes nineteenth-century Argentine literature because of his European outlook and his attempt to integrate that view with the autochthonous Argentine tradition of gaucho literature. In contrast to Borges, Emilio proposes that Arlt's ability to capture the nuances of popular Argentine speech makes him the first true novelist of the twentieth century and the only modern Argentine writer. By discounting Borges as a nineteenth-century author and placing him before Arlt, Emilio, and by extension Piglia, reinterprets the literary tradition to privilege Arlt as the most important writer of the twentieth century and fashion his own personal opinion of the Argentine literary tradition.³⁴

The third literary conversation displays a close relation to the last letter read by the cryptographer Arocena at the end of chapter three. In this letter an unidentified person describes his peculiar experiences in New York. After witnessing the literature that he has just read duplicate itself in reality, the letter-writer declares briefly: "La naturaleza imita el arte . . ."

(121). After several more experiences, the letter-writer chooses a book by chance, reads a few pages, then travels to Central Park and again beholds that the recently read literature reproduces itself in reality. Completely dumbfounded by his experiences, the letter-writer concludes:

Pienso: he descubierto una incomprensible relación entre la literatura y el futuro, una extraña conexión entre los libros y la realidad. Tengo solamente una duda: ¿Podré modificar estas escenas? ¿Habrà alguna forma de intervenir o sólo puedo ser un espectador?

(123)

This deduction, or theory, completely subverts the traditional concept that literature imitates reality that surrounds the author, or at least reflects/refracts reality to some degree. If an event can be written in fiction, or even in oral language, then that same

incident may come to fruition in reality. This theory also foreshadows Tardewski's conjectures about the connections between Kafka and Nazism.

While waiting for Marcelo in Tardewski's house, Emilio and Tardewski engage in the third literary conversation. Analogous to the second conversation that becomes Emilio's lecture about Argentine literature, this discussion evolves into Tardewski's explanation of his theory about Nazism, Hitler, and Kafka. While describing his ideas, Tardewski states that he discovered these unseen connections because "Nadie sabe leer, nadie lee. Porque para leer, dijo Tardewski, hay que saber asociar" (260). In addition to illustrating his strategy, Tardewski's declaration also serves as a key to fathoming Respiración artificial and its thematics. While researching his doctoral dissertation on Wittgenstein, Tardewski learns that Hitler plagiarizes his ideas and symbols after an ex-priest, Adolf Lanz, and his bizarre "Castillo de la Orden" in Austria. Later, by noticing connections among Kafka's diary and letters, an edition of Hitler's Mein Kampf annotated by an anti-fascist German historian, the Times Literary Supplement, and Max Brod's biography on Kafka, Tardewski concludes that Hitler, while evading military conscription, met Kafka in the coffeehouse Arcos in Prague between 1909 and 1910.

In addition to this conclusion, after associating details from Kafka's papers and the glossed edition of Mein Kampf, Tardewski asserts that Hitler already possessed his malevolent plans for the world over a decade before penning his autobiography, and proclaimed them to Kafka in Arcos. Hitler's ideas first existed as Adolf Lanz's fantasies, published in his Theozzologie. More importantly, Hitler's scheme so frightened Kafka that it compelled him to create his literary universe. But, Hitler's projects are so horrendous, or indecibles to use Tardewski's word--like the Military Process--that Kafka could only express Hitler's horrors in a highly indirect way, similar to the way home writers reacted to the Military Process. Toward the end of the conversation Tardewski asks Emilio about his familiarity with Kafka's The Trial, whose original German title Der Procez, and Spanish title El proceso, coincidentally and literally mean in English "The Process":

Usted leyó El Proceso, me dice Tardewski.

Kafka supo ver hasta en el detalle más preciso cómo se acumulaba el horror. Esa novela presenta de un modo alucinante el modelo clásico del Estado convertido en un instrumento de terror. Describe la maquinaria anónima de un mundo donde todos pueden ser acusados y

culpables, la siniestra inseguridad que el totalitarismo insinúa en la vida de los hombres, el aburrimiento sin rostro de los asesinos, el sadismo furtivo. Desde que Kafka escribió ese libro el golpe nocturno ha llegado a innumerables puertas y el nombre de los que fueron arrastrados a morir como un perro, igual a Joseph K., es legión. (265)

Akin to the unknown letter-writer in New York who announces his theory that reality imitates art, Tardewski discovers this same theory almost forty years prior. Tardewski considers Kafka's oeuvre as a representation of what people like Hitler are able to do with the mechanisms of the state during the twentieth century. As Edna Aizenberg asserts, Piglia's novel skillfully manages to speak about the horrors of the Military Process by utilizing Kafka's literature and by associating disparate elements and thus creates cohesive and coherent systems of coded connections (421-30). In addition, as Lori J. Hopkins observes, Piglia connects Kafka's novel, the Nazis, and Argentina in order to speak about the military regime then in power in Argentina (62-83). In addition to invoking Kafka as a figure through which to speak, Piglia's text also quotes Joseph K's final line as he describes himself during his execution "Like a dog"

(Kafka, The Trial 229). After long discussions, Piglia's novel finally makes this significant association.

Ironically, through their lofty name for the dictatorship the generals unknowingly formulated the perfect symbol so that the opposition could discredit the regime.

To discuss, to understand, and, more importantly, to denounce the Military Process, both Ernesto Schóó's El baile de los guerreros and Piglia's Respiración artificial employ a similar strategy of exploring nineteenth-century history. At the same time both novels establish connections among diverse dates and episodes, explore the origins of the dictatorship, and contribute to the debate concerning the "Argentine Question" through extensive allegories. Schóó's text uses the Guerreros's new mansion and golden wedding anniversary dance as the central components of the allegory. In contrast, Piglia's work evokes this allegory through the three generations of the Ossorio family and through analogous circumstances of different characters who live both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, since these works indirectly display this important theme, it falls upon the perceptive readers to discover these elements and--as Tardewski declares while discussing the connections between Kafka and Hitler--to know how to associate disparate features in the text. In addition,

the readers must possess a keen awareness of the historical circumstances surrounding the creation of the novels. A familiarity with Argentine and world history plays an equally important role in comprehending these texts. Otherwise readers may overlook this important discussion.

Although the "Argentine Question" surfaces as the dominant concern in both works, they also address other issues. Schóó's novel, while employing much humor, also reminds readers of forgotten or ignored aspects of Argentina, especially her multi-racial heritage and persistent divisions and fanaticism. Just as Schóó's text indirectly presents the "Argentine Question," it also introduces these concerns by quoting other sources such as Oscar Wilde's apocryphal letters to his friend Bossie and the German poet Heinrich Heine. In a similar fashion, Piglia's text uses the same strategy while it explores and discusses Argentine literature. Indeed Santiago Colás bases his entire analysis of Respiración artificial on how the text always quotes others to communicate its message. In contrast to Schóó's novel where the usage of literary sources plays a minimal role, Piglia's work constantly encompasses philosophy, linguistics, autobiography, historiography, critical theory, and several different literary traditions--the

epistolary novel above all--and incorporates these academic matters to augment the allegory and to denounce the dictatorship. In this manner Piglia's novel also participates in the third stage of narrative's recovery from its comatose state. As the dictatorship waned, Argentines grew more intrepid and denounced the regime more directly, as seen in Juan Pablo Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final and Rodolfo Fogwill's Los pichiciegos. Similar to Piglia's work, these texts utilized and innovated literary traditions as the primary strategy for deliberating and denouncing the consequences of the Military Process.

Notes

¹ I see the term "political instability" as not explicit enough to describe the true chaos that pervaded the country at times, be it during a democratic or a military regime.

² The titles of Viñas's novels indicate his concern about Argentina as illustrated by Los dueños de la tierra (1958) and Hombre de a caballo (1968).

³ Martha Mercader follows a similar strategy in Juanamanuela, mucha mujer (1980) to allude to the contemporary dictatorship and social problems. Mercader's novel presents the life of Juanamanuela Gorriti de Belzú, a nineteenth-century writer and historical figure. The novel opens when Juanamanuela returns to the city of Buenos Aires from exile in Peru in 1880. This occurs when the governor of the province of Buenos Aires, Carlos Tejedor, rebels against President Nicolás Avellaneda and President-elect Julio A. Roca. While enduring Tejedor's uprising, Juanamanuela writes her autobiography and starts when Facundo Quiroga expelled her father from Salta to Bolivia in 1831. In this manner Mercader's novel incorporates key moments in Argentine and South-American history. In contrast to Schóó's and Piglia's novels, Juanamanuela, mucha mujer

does not develop an extensive allegory on the "Argentine Question." Yet the commentary concerning political infighting and abuses parallel many circumstances of the Military Process as well. In this manner Mercader's novel also denounces the dictatorship.

In contrast, while not using Argentine history as the backdrop for the action, the exile writer Juan Carlos Martini creates an allegorical setting about Argentina during the Military Process in his novel La vida entera (1981). The text portrays the villa, or shantytown, of Rosario, during an undetermined moment of the twentieth century. Two different factions endeavor to dominate Rosario and the residents, through assassination and intimidation, while they prostitute women to earn a living. Yet in a similar manner to Mercader's, Piglia's and Schóó's texts, Martini's novel indirectly depicts the horror of the Military Process.

⁴ In addition to the publication date, many novels published in Spanish America contain information in a colophon that states when the authors wrote the text, when the printing ended, and the number of copies produced. Given the historical concerns of my project this information is significant.

⁵ Mazorca translates into English as an "ear of

corn" or "spindleful of yarn." At the same time this term plays on phonetics since the pronunciation of mazorca resembles más horca, roughly translated as "more hanging." The mazorca was a cruel and bloody force under Rosas. 1840 marks a year when Rosas greatly increased his intolerance of the unitarists and dissent in general and marks an exceptionally bloody period in Argentine history.

⁶ The yellow fever epidemic of 1870 and 1871 fundamentally transformed the urbanization of Buenos Aires. The affluent residents abandoned the San Telmo neighborhood and moved to the Barrio Norte (Rock 143). The wealthy's mansions and palaces then became housing for the extremely poor, or the conventillos of Buenos Aires. To this day San Telmo bears witness to its once glorious past with monumental buildings.

⁷ Rodolfo Terragno, in his foreword to Eduardo Crawley's A House Divided, asserts: "Argentines are capable of keeping alive the bitter confrontation between rosistas and antirosistas . . . and prolonging the nineteenth-century debate between Federalists and Unitarists" (xviii; capitalization in original).

When I discussed the action of El baile de los guerreros with several friends in Buenos Aires, they

expressed similar observations, agreeing with Terragno, and stated that many old Argentine families still identify themselves as originally federalists and unitarists. This should not seem strange since many Southerners in the United States continue to fight spiritually the Civil War.

⁸ When Doris Sommer spoke at Duke University in 1988, she mentioned this fact. Sommer also makes reference to this racial heritage in her study on José Mármol's novel Amalia in Foundational Fictions (83-113). Furthermore, George Reid Andrews documents the black presence in Buenos Aires in his study The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires. Indeed, the presence of the Black-Africans can even be seen in the great gaucho epic Martín Fierro by José Hernández. In the first part published in 1872, Martín Fierro kills a black gaucho in a knife-duel (Canto VII, 55-58).

⁹ In Argentina, to be called "un negro," literally "a black one," stands as one of the worst insults. Enrique Medina skillfully illustrates this in his Con el trapo en la boca (1983) with a fight between Maxi, one of the main characters, and a taxi driver that Maxi calls "negro" (209).

¹⁰ Oscar Wilde never visited Argentina. Furthermore,

in 1896 the famous Irish writer was involved in the infamous law suit for corruption of minors in Great Britain. These facts augment the fictionality of Schóó's novel. At the same time through Wilde's presence and conversations, the text incorporates the theme of homosexuality, a completely taboo subject during the Military Process.

¹¹ Indeed, this lack of genuineness and credibility appears frequently in Argentine literature. Jean Franco, in Spanish American Literature since Independence, observes that the lack of authenticity is one of the central themes of Eduardo Mallea's 1938 novel Fiesta en noviembre (230-231).

¹² Schóó consistently uses different European cultural situations to elucidate contemporary Argentina. In this same letter, Wilde comments that the dance: "Se transformó de pronto en una lucha tan enconada y sangrienta que no me creerás, tal vez si te aseguro que ni turcos y griegos se han aniquilado mutuamente con tanto odio y tanta crueldad" (146). The comparison to Greeks and Turks, bitter enemies, reinforces the Argentines' brutality.

¹³ Is it mere coincidence that Jorge Luis Borges, in his brief essay "Kafka y sus precursores," (710-712),

develops the notion that one can always look backwards at the past and find what one desires?

¹⁴ Javier also possesses an extreme hatred of the immigrants and their descendants. When Clara marries Manuel Aguilar, the son of Spanish immigrants, Javier becomes resentful. On one occasion Javier even calls Manuel a "galleguito," at times a pejorative term for Spaniards in Argentina and other countries of Spanish America.

¹⁵ Etelvina Egusquiza's adventure exemplifies this comic tone. Several unitarists are trapped on the roof and Etelvina volunteers to seek reinforcements from the exiled unitarists in Montevideo. Instead of climbing down the house, Etelvina leaps into the air and uses her skirts and mantilla to fly. The narrator comments on her fate:

A poco volar, Etelvina entró en uno de esos pozos de aire donde el espacio se vuelve tiempo y el tiempo, espacio. Por eso, en vez de aterrizar en Montevideo el 14 de agosto de 1896, descendió sobre Tokio en un día de primavera del año 2879. Pero esa es otra historia. (153)

In this manner the text augments Etelvina's absurd flight

to Montevideo for unitarist support with a rift in the space-time continuum, an element from science fiction.

¹⁶ Piglia first published La invasión, a collection of short stories in 1967, and then Nombre falso, also a collection of short stories, in 1975.

Both Lori J. Hopkins and Santiago Colás observe allegorical interpretations of Respiración artificial. Hopkins, in "Writing through the Proceso: The Argentine Narrative, 1980-1990," briefly mentions that Piglia's novel presents the "Argentine Question," but does not systematically explore how Piglia's novel treats this topic. In contrast to Hopkins, Colás, in Postmodernity in Latin America, asserts that Piglia's text projects an allegory about disappearance through and about Marcelo Maggi. Colás proposes that the extensive usage of citas, the extensive quotations of other texts and speeches, denotes the absence of the enunciators, and consequentially the absence, or disappearance, of Marcelo.

¹⁷ For this study I use the term "novel," between quotation marks, to refer to La prolijidad de lo real, the "novel" that Emilio writes concerning the scandal of Marcelo and his wife Esperanza. In contrast, I use the term "manuscript," between quotation marks, when I refer

to the text that Emilio writes as an attempt to understand his relationship with Marcelo. When the word novel appears, free from quotation marks, I refer to Ricardo Piglia's novel Respiración artificial.

¹⁸ Johnny Payne sees Tardewski as a representation of the German Jewish intellectual Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and provides lengthy comparisons in his study Conquest of the New Word (120-124). Daniel Balderston, in his article "El significado latente en Respiración artificial de Ricardo Piglia y En el corazón de junio de Luis Gusman," briefly declares that Tardewski is based on the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969), who lived in Argentina and learned to write literature in Spanish (112). Lori J. Hopkins also reaches the same conclusion (66). In a similar manner Fernando Cittadini also compares Tardewski with Walter Benjamin in his study "Historia y ficción en Respiración artificial. Cittadini also observes that Tardewski resembles Witold Gombrowicz (39). Such comparisons are well founded due to Piglia's penchant for plagiarism, imitation, and the creation of composite characters.

¹⁹ Throughout the novel Piglia does not make a distinction between the double meaning of "historia" in Spanish: story (or story-line) and history. In my

opinion this lack of distinction between the two meanings is intentional. After all, many times history, the study of past events, is mainly just a story, a narrative account.

²⁰ The letters in chapter three are interpolated among the narrative fragments that describe Arocena and Enrique Ossorio's papers: 1. Marcelo to the Senator, 2. Roque to an unmentioned addressee in Argentina, 3. Angélica Inés Echevarne, an insane woman, to an unknown Governor, 4. Juan Cruz Biagorria to his son in Winesburg, Ohio, 5. Emilio to Marcelo, 6. an insane sister to her brother in Great Britain, and 7. a man in New York City to an unknown addressee in Argentina. Arocena confuses Enrique Ossorio's papers as letters from Marcelo to Emilio. In this manner the novel demonstrates the dangers of reading texts without recognizing their historical context.

²¹ Enrique Ossorio proposes to write an epistolary novel about a utopia, entitled simply 1979. According to Ossorio's plans, the events of his novel transpire between 1837 and 1838, during the French blockade of the port of Buenos Aires and several of the worst years of Rosas's terror. An unnamed person begins to receive letters, without being the addressee, from the Argentina

of 1979. In chapter three, the fourth and final section is a fragment of Ossorio's utopic novel: "30.7.1850. Escribo la primera carta del porvenir" (126). This first letter from the future refers to the Argentine's contemporary lives and to the circumstances of the Military Process of 1979. Furthermore, to speak about a utopia becomes another ironic, or perhaps ingenious way, to speak critically about Argentina. Since Thomas More wrote Utopia in 1516, any utopian novel is actually an implicit criticism of the writer's contemporary society.

For Enrique Ossorio writing about utopia is his method for criticizing Rosas's dictatorship. In a similar fashion, for Ricardo Piglia, as author of Respiración artificial, to talk about utopia allows him to criticize the Military Process.

Also, the use of a date for Ossorio's utopian novel resembles George Orwell's 1984. Orwell created the title by inverting the last two digits of 1948, the year when he composed the text. Furthermore, the title of Orwell's dystopia has become synonymous with totalitarian society and state terror. Ossorio's title 1979, when Piglia finished Respiración artificial, also becomes an ingeniously veiled attack against the Military Process.

Similar to these literary references, Piglia's text also exhibits several metafictional features in addition

to Emilio's comments about writing his "manuscript." At one point Emilio states to his uncle Marcelo that he desires to write an autobiography consisting only of correspondence. Ironically, the first chapter of Respiración artificial is Emilio's autobiography. Later, Marcelo states that his friend Tardewski wants to write a novel made up of citations from other works. As Santiago Colás observes, Piglia uses the dynamics of the quotation as the main structure for the narrative in his novel.

²² Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith in Modern Latin America mark the year 1880 as a watershed for the development of Argentina. Likewise Eduardo Crawley, in A House Divided, begins his study of modern Argentina at the year 1880. Conversely, David Rock in Argentina: 1516-1982 uses the dates 1852-1890 as the formation of the Nation-State and 1890-1930 as the epoch of maturity.

²³ See Nicolas Shumway's The Invention of Argentina for a panoramic study of the Generation of 1837, and of Domingo Fausto Sarmiento and Argentine political ideas prior to 1880.

²⁴ Respiración artificial exhibits the phenomenon of repetition in many ways. The study and the deciphering of other persons' documents also develops into another example of this strategy. After Enrique Ossorio's

suicide in 1852, his widow attempts to read and organize his papers so that she can understand her late husband better. Over one hundred years later Marcelo repeats this action when he endeavors to write a biography about Enrique Ossorio. Emilio also duplicates this activity when he writes his "manuscript" about his epistolary relationship with his uncle Marcelo. Finally, Arocena's occupation of deciphering letters also strengthens this characteristic of the novel.

In addition, Tardewski's actions also reinforce the repetition in the text. Before leaving, or being disappeared, Marcelo arrives at Tardewski's house and gives him the portfolios filled with the research on Enrique Ossorio. Both Marcelo and Tardewski spend the entire night talking until dawn. While Emilio waits for Marcelo at Tardewski's house, again these two characters converse until sunrise.

The phenomenon of posthumous sons also contributes to this repetition motif in the text. Enrique Ossorio's son is born after his death. In a similar manner Enrique's son dies in a duel after which his son Luciano Ossorio enters the world. Fortunately Luciano does not perish after the failed assassination attempt. In a different vein, Santiago Colás interprets this series of posthumous children, and destruction of direct family

lineages, as a response against the military's patriarchal discourse and to the concept of the "traditional Christian family" (128-30).

²⁵ The vast majority of the people that I interviewed during my residence in Argentina stated that, in their opinion, Respiración artificial was by far the most important novel of the Military Process.

²⁶ Piglia also published several other articles in Punto de vista. Coincidentally, in the first issue Piglia wrote "Hudson: ¿un Güiraldes inglés?" (23-24) and signed it "Emilio Renzi." Lori J. Hopkins cites an interview between Piglia and Marina Kaplan in which Piglia admits that his second name is Emilio and his second surname is Renzi (98). Again, Piglia creates fiction out of reality.

²⁷ Lori J. Hopkins emphasizes the importance of these dates (36).

²⁸ The mention of Winesburg, Ohio, brings associations to the writer Sherwood Anderson. The use of Winesburg, Ohio as the location of the son's exile underscores Piglia's predilection for the literature of the United States.

²⁹ Roberto Echavarren concludes that this Dije greatly resembles a Borgesian "Aleph" (1005).

³⁰ Mario Cesáreo, in contrast, believes that Marcelo has escaped to Uruguay (507).

³¹ Kathleen Newman, in her article "Historical Knowledge in the Post-Boom novel" (216), and Hopkins (62-63) conclude that the security forces disappeared Marcelo.

³² Among the books Emilio finds is Revolución y guerra by the eminent Argentine historian Tulio Halperín Donghi. The presence of this work helps characterize Marcelo as a leftist intellectual. Ironically, Halperín Donghi published his study in 1979, two years after the main action in Piglia's text.

³³ For a complete discussion of Roberto Arlt's work see Christopher Towne Leland The Last Happy Men, Beatriz Pastor Roberto Arlt o la rebelión alienada and Aden W. Hayes Roberto Arlt: la estrategia de su ficción. Jacobo Timerman, in Preso sin Nombre, celda sin número, considers Arlt's Los siete locos as the prefiguration of Argentine politics between 1930 and 1980.

³⁴ Djelal Kadir's Questing Fictions: Latin America's Family Romance proposes that Latin American narrative constantly re-creates its own literary tradition.

Chapter Four

Play and Tell: Literary Traditions and More Overt Revelations about the Military Process

In the early 1980s, narrative adopts a more defiant stance and begins to criticize the Military Process in a more candid manner. This bolder perspective parallels dramatic developments in the social climate. In contrast with the allegorical novels, which use Argentine history as their foundation and take a broad panorama of the contemporary situation, these more explicit texts continue and manipulate established literary traditions as their backdrop and focus on a more immediate or local view of reality. José Pablo Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final (1981) and Rodolfo Fogwill's Los pichiciegos: visiones de una batalla subterránea (1983) exemplify these transformations in narrative and the changes in Argentine society during the waning years of the dictatorship.

Unlike the allegorical novels discussed in chapter three, Feinmann's and Fogwill's texts exhibit divergent thematics. Ni el tiro del final details a story of corruption, drug trafficking, and personal ambition during the late 1970s. Los pichiciegos recounts the recent Malvinas War from the perspective of a surviving

eyewitness. While the plots are completely different, both texts coincide in their narrative strategy and play with established literary conventions and traditions to express and simultaneously veil their examination of the Military Process. In Feinmann's novel, the manipulation of hard-boiled detective fiction lays the groundwork for general criticisms about society and specific commentary concerning the military regime. At the same time Ni el tiro del final employs other narrative traditions by presenting a self-conscious novel, which in turn tempers the social criticism present in the text. Los pichiciegos evokes many characteristics of the Latin American testimonial genre, but at the same time meshes these conventions in a psychotherapeutic dialogue. Fogwill's text boldly denounces the military and its incompetence during the Malvinas War, and through this context reveals the most unsavory aspects of the dictatorship. In both cases the dual-track reading of the texts highlights the social and political criticism in the text, but partially cloaked by the other aesthetic concerns. At the same time the dual-track approach shows that these aesthetic concerns also enhance Feinmann's and Fogwill's ability to report the truth about Argentina's plight.

The more overtly political and documentary nature of Feinmann's and Fogwill's novels parallels the transformation in Argentina during this period. Indeed, the many dramatic changes that occur in the country, and more importantly in Argentine culture, mark 1980 as a major watershed.¹ By this year a certain level of relative stability has returned to Argentine society. The military government clearly achieves its primary objective and concludes the "Dirty War" by eradicating the different guerrilla groups. But the junta also loses its main *raison d'etre*. As a result, the number of human rights abuses begins to decline. More importantly, as early as 1979 several key political figures call for a return to democratic rule.

However, the regime does not enjoy the same success with the economy since double- and even triple-digit inflation still plagues the country. Paradoxically, the government's economic policies, buoyed by large international loans, also generate an overvalued peso and in turn an inexpensive dollar. This monetary situation, combined with an open importation policy, placates the middle and upper classes with plenty of inexpensive foreign consumer goods and the opportunity to travel abroad. Yet this newly achieved stability also produces

negative effects since the economic program depends on cheap foreign loans and, consequently, a stable economic situation in the northern industrialized countries. As soon as those economies start to falter, Argentina's experiences major problems. The Argentine situation of 1980 hardly resembles the pervasive social and economic chaos of 1976.

Non-violent opposition continues growing both inside and outside Argentina. Most importantly, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, a major worker in the campaign for human rights inside Argentina, receives the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 which demonstrates to the military government that the world community recognizes the dire situation in Argentina and acknowledges those intrepid people who work to ameliorate the situation.² Moreover, the award legitimizes Pérez Esquivel's human rights work, and by extension the efforts of all human rights workers as well as resistance to the regime. By the same token, Pérez's Nobel Prize discredits the military's discourse and its self-adopted justification to oust the democratically elected government and to rule Argentina.

By 1980, the Military Process has exhausted all large-scale efforts to garner the general population's support, or at least to divert its attention from human

rights abuses and economic problems. In 1978, the military orchestrates and manipulates the World Soccer Cup Tournament in Argentina and later exploits the national team's victory as a departure point for exaggerated nationalism and for negating the international boycott of Argentina and the World Cup, or the "Anti-Argentina" campaign.³ At the same time the regime capitalizes on the long-standing disagreement with Chile over the Beagle Canal in Tierra del Fuego and successfully diverts the population's attention for the same ends. The following year, 1979, the government manipulates the visit of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights as evidence of further international interference in Argentine affairs. Just before the Commission's arrival, the slogan "Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos" quickly covers Buenos Aires and every available automobile bumper. Finally, General Leopoldo Galtieri's invasion of the Malvinas Islands on 2 April 1982 represents the government's last possible alternative to gain the population's attention and support.⁴ Argentina's humiliating defeat and surrender on 14 June to the British forces signals, in addition to the conclusion of the war, the ultimate failure of the Military Process and its goals. The long awaited return

to democracy changes from a hypothetical question to reality. General elections and a new president symbolize the beginning of a new democratic era at the end of 1983.

As Adolfo Pérez Esquivel's Nobel Peace Prize suggests, this relative stability also opens a space where the opposition can criticize the Military Process more consistently and openly. By 1980 Argentine culture has recovered from its deep comatose state inflicted by the coup d'etat in 1976. Furthermore, Argentine culture has acquired a sensibility concerning the limits imposed by the military government and commences to stretch and perforate those restrictions.

Developments in the cultural milieu, some more noticeable than others, also indicate 1980 as a watershed year in Argentine letters. Various playwrights, directors, producers and actors begin organizing the first season of Teatro Abierto for 1981, which proves to the military rulers, and to the general population, that Argentine theatre has not died, but only languishes from a lack of government support and media coverage. More importantly, Teatro Abierto demonstrates that Argentines have discovered the courage and the knowledge to circumvent the constraints imposed by the government; they successfully transform the wall of silence into a veil through which they can speak.

The publishing industry and, more importantly, the literati sponsor several important events in 1980 as well. First, the publishing house Losada and the soft drink corporation Coca-Cola (the paragon of cultural Maecenas) both convoke their own literary contests. Ana María Shúa shares the Losada prize for her novel Soy paciente (1980) and Rodolfo Fogwill earns Coca-Cola's award for his collection of short stories Mi muchacha punk (1980). Second, on a more noticeable scale, Jorge Asís's Flores robadas en los jardines de Quilmes (1980) becomes a triumph for Argentine literature. Losada publishes over 100,000 copies between 1980 and 1982. After years of imported fiction, popularly known as "best-sellers," Argentine letters yields its own domestic literary success and focuses attention on a younger, lesser known writer.⁵ In addition to being a commercial success, this novel helps transform the wall of silence on Argentina's recent past, after four years of official and unofficial censorship, into a veil. Asís's novel openly discusses the political turmoil of the early 1970s, General Juan Perón's return from exile, the various urban guerrilla groups, and the subsequent military government, all subjects previously perceived as too dangerous.

During the Military Process Flores robadas en los jardines de Quilmes appeared and emerged as a defiant declaration against the government and its policies, which explains its great commercial success. However, Andrés Avellaneda (in his article "«Best-seller» y código represivo en la narrativa argentina del ochenta: el caso Asís") convincingly argues that Asís's novel actually dovetails with the government's policies and discourse. Avellaneda asserts that Flores robadas en los jardines de Quilmes presents characters who consistently discredit the political movements of the late 1960s and the early 1970s and regret their past associations. In this manner, Asís's text reconfirms the government's interpretation of the era before the Military Process and validates the current regime and its *raison d'être*. The success of Flores robadas en los jardines de Quilmes, even though it is a mediocre work of fiction, lies mainly in its moment of publication and in its being the first novel that addresses the realities of the Military Process, as slight as that treatment may be.⁶ A falling pin creates more noise and captures greater attention in a completely silent room than in the midst of a tornado. Thus, in spite of its defects, the success of Asís's novel unequivocally points to the Argentine public's

desire to read about the contemporary historical situation. Avellaneda astutely observes that Asís's accomplishment pointed to "un mercado de lectores ávidos de textos que hablen de la crisis histórica reciente . . ." ("«Best-seller» y código represivo en la narrativa argentina del ochenta" 83). Furthermore, the popularity of Asís's text forms part of a larger continuum of the Argentines' resistance to the military regime, beginning in 1977 with the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.

While Asís's book places the plot and the action mainly before the coup d'etat, during the final three years of the military government--1980 to 1983--other authors publish works that focus their plots on the dictatorship and discuss the regime more directly and critically than the allegorical novels, written and published between 1976 and 1980. Both José Pablo Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final (1981) and Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill's Los pichiciegos (1983) serve as distinctive examples of these developments in Argentine narrative.⁷ Akin to his first novel, Ultimos días de la víctima (1979), Feinmann again manipulates the conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction.⁸ In Ultimos días de la víctima, while plotting the assassination of his victim Külpe, Mendizábal also mimics

how a detective investigates and solves a homicide. At the conclusion, the novel inverts the killer/victim role when the intended target Kúlpe slays the hit man Mendizábal. In a similar manner, Ni el tiro del final describes the adventures of Ismael Navarro and Susy Rivas, two minor nightclub performers in Mar del Plata, Argentina's largest and swankiest resort city. Unlike his first novel, Feinmann's second work harshly criticizes Argentine society at large and the Military Process through his use of certain conventions of the hard-boiled detective genre. Fogwill's first novel, written about and during the final days of the Malvinas War, depicts a group of military deserters who create their own primitive capitalistic society in an artificial cave, steal from the Argentines and barter military intelligence with the British for other goods. In addition to commenting on the Argentine debacle in the Malvinas, Fogwill's text also details corruption and human rights abuses pervasive in society during the Military Process.

Ni el tiro del final revolves primarily around the staging of an amateur crime. Reconstructing the complicated histoire reveals the sequence of events leading up to and following this malfeasance. The histoire centers on three weeks in the lives of Ismael

Navarro and Susy Rivas in Mar del Plata in October 1978. Thanks to Pedro Bernstein's influence, Ismael's friend, the two singers acquire a job performing in Douglas, a local nightclub, and live at Pedro's resort Corto Maltés. On opening night, Ismael delivers an acrimonious monologue about the upper classes in Argentina, and about his audience. After the first performance, Anselmi, the owner of Douglas, reprimands Ismael. But more importantly the proprietor informs Ismael that the important patron Alejandro Salas, a wealthy parvenu architect and businessman, enjoys his monologue so much that he desires to meet the performers. Salas befriends the musicians, presents his twin nephews Sergio and Leonardo, and then invites the couple to spend the following Saturday afternoon at his large mansion. This peculiar friendship provides the background for the rest of the novel.

Before visiting Salas's house, Fernando Ortiz, Ismael's college friend and amateur private investigator, pays the singers a surprise visit. Fernando explains to Ismael that Achával Junco, his most recent client, has instructed him to follow her husband Alejandro Salas and to uncover his suspected heterosexual philandering. While following Salas, Fernando discovers that the presumed playboy spends more time on business than on

women. Instead of working for Achával Junco, Fernando proposes that Ismael and Susy collaborate to blackmail Salas, using Susy as the decoy. Thus the three characters spend the following ten days planning to entrap Salas during his large birthday party. While conceiving their plot, Susy and Ismael visit Salas's mansion and discover as much information as possible about their mysterious friend and soon-to-be victim.

Unknown to Ismael and Fernando, Susy initiates a romance with the architect to discover if Salas is worth more as a victim or a lover. Like Fernando, Susy also explores all her options for her personal benefit. Meanwhile, Ismael spends his free time writing a horror short story "El primo Matías" for Pedro Bernstein's crime magazine. When the moment finally arrives to entrap Salas, Susy takes control by thwarting the plan, choosing Salas and simultaneously abandoning Ismael. Sergio, really Salas's body guard and assassin, discovers Ismael and knocks him unconscious.

After the birthday party, Ismael learns that Salas is really a powerful drug trafficker, and that Anselmi is his partner. More importantly, Ismael finds out that Achával Junco, Salas's demented wife, repeatedly hires private detectives to follow her husband and then never pays them. Fernando, determined to extort money from his

desired victim any way possible, goes to speak to Salas and later washes up dead on the beach. Pedro Bernstein returns and asks Ismael to spend the summer writing and finishing an incomplete novel. The histoire concludes when Ismael describes another novel about his most recent adventure in Mar del Plata.

An examination of the récit, which contains as many twists and complications as the histoire, shows how Feinmann's text plays with literary traditions and techniques and thus incorporates many innovations from the previous decades. The novel consists of six parts, each with its own title. In turn, each part includes many chapters and centers on the different developments of the bungled blackmail. Ismael Navarro functions as the central character and the predominant narrative voice. The récit interpolates different micro-narrations in his version of the events in Mar del Plata, such as Ismael's three monologues at the nightclub Douglas, letters between Ismael and Pedro about "El primo Matías," and the short story itself. Throughout these different micro-narrations, except for Pedro's one letter, Ismael functions as the main focalizing agent and narrator. In addition, the récit intersperses fragments of Susy's farewell monologue to Ismael. These micro-narrations appear in the first five parts of the novel, which

recount how Ismael, Susy and Fernando weave their web of (self)deception and crime. The sixth part of the novel functions as an epilogue, containing only Ismael's narrative voice, since it presents the events following the botched blackmail attempt.

Although the placement of micro-narratives in the first five parts does not form a recognizable structural pattern, Ismael underscores the importance of his short story, the monologues, and letters through repeated intratextual allusions. Frequently these intratextual references create brief analepses and/or prolepses. But, as in detective fiction, these chronological oscillations do not divulge, nor intimate, the climax or the denouement. Instead, the text tantalizes readers with subtle hints, but also forces readers to wait until the end to discover the characters' fates.

However, Susy's monologue, divided over the first five parts, and by extension her narrative voice, introduces key information concerning her life, her relationship with Ismael, and her own plans to deceive him. Also, through her narration, the histoire includes details, previous to October 1978, which become central to the plot, to the development of several characters, and their interactions. More importantly, Susy's account acquires more significance when seen through the first-

track reading, which brings to light social commentary about Argentina, and the second-track interpretation, which reveals criticism specifically about the Military Process and its abuses. Susy opens her monologue, located in the first part, with the declaration:

Te juro, Ismael, que nunca pensé que lo nuestro iba a terminar de este modo tan, no sé, raro. Claro que, aunque creo que vos nunca te diste cuenta, siempre hubo algo raro en lo nuestro. Y lo primero es, justamente, que haya sido yo quien se dio cuenta. Yo y no vos que sos tan inteligente. . . . (16)

Although Susy speaks after the blundered blackmail attempt and the central events in the novel, the placement of her monologue among the first five parts complements Ismael's narration of the events. At times Susy describes the same events as Ismael, but from her own point of view, and at other times her account relates events absent from Ismael's narration. Thus Susy's narrative voice supplements Ismael's and gives the readers a perception of simultaneity as well as a broadened sense of full retrospective knowledge. In contrast with the intratextual connections among Ismael's narrative fragments, Susy's monologue provides the

readers with privileged insinuations concerning the climax and the denouement: abandoning Ismael.

By centering on blackmailing Salas, the text manipulates and inverts the general narrative structure and characteristics of detective fiction, and especially the hard-boiled story. In this sub-genre a private-eye conducts an investigation at the request of his/her clients, and discovers the sordid underside of society where corruption, organized crime, prostitution, and betrayal are common. Many times the private-eye resolves the crime, but does not report his/her findings to the authorities, and allows the evil forces to destroy each other. More importantly, the use of these elements creates the backdrop of a corrupt and sordid society, where diabolic persons and activities flourish and profit. In this manner Ni el tiro del final indirectly criticizes the Military Process fosters a government and society populated by corrupt and heinous individuals and organizations.

Feinmann's novel establishes the affinities with hard-boiled detective fiction from the first page. Just as a hired private-eye opens his/her account by referring to the offense, so does Ismael in his first retrospective narrative segment: "Fue en octubre de 1978, en Mar del Plata, cuando decidí transformarme en un chantajista"

(12). But, instead of solving a committed violation, the text inverts the genre convention and details Ismael, Susy and Fernando's crime. After this declaration, Ismael regresses to a moment before becoming a blackmailer and then recounts the events in Mar del Plata chronologically.

In addition to inverting the conventions of detective fiction through creating an illicit transgression, Ni el tiro del final also parodies stock characters and situations that reinforce the affinities and the ambiance of a corrupt society, standard in the hard-boiled genre.⁹ Fernando, the instigator of the entire affair, and a lawyer by training, works as a self-employed private investigator with two former police officers as his assistants. When Fernando arrives, Ismael describes his friend as a man who lives on the margins of society, like many private investigators. Later, when Fernando recounts the details of his first meeting with Achával Junco, Ismael jokingly invokes cliché situations and elements. Although Ismael's parodies seem overused, these sub-genre components parallel many elements in Dashiell Hammett's and Raymond Chandler's works:

--Hace unas dos semanas estaba en mi oficina, solo, tomando un café bien cargado y mirando por la ventana.

--¿Quién eras, Marlowe o Sam Spade?

--Era yo, como todo el tiempo, por desgracia.

--Seguí. Estás mirando por la ventana. ¿Qué ves?

--Un auto de novela, un Mercedes claro que estaciona en la vereda de enfrente a la de mi oficina.

--Una rubia abre la puerta y cruza la calle.

--Carajo, sí. Una rubia abre la puerta y cruza la calle.

--A los cinco minutos está tocando el timbre de tu oficina.

--Ni más ni menos. Yo estoy solo, ya te dije. Le abro y la hago pasar.

--Es joven, bonita y millonaria.

--Ni por joda. Carga con más de cincuenta años, se maquilla bien pero tiene el cuello apergaminado y muchas pecas en las manos. Eso sí: es millonaria. (56)

During the conversation, both Fernando and Ismael endlessly drink whisky and smoke cigarettes, much like the characters in Hammett's novels. Instead of finding Salas with other women, Fernando discovers that Salas occupies himself with his business deals and many contacts, consistent with the plots of Hammett's and Chandler's novels. The detective, originally hired to investigate and/or solve a simple matter, unknowingly discovers more complex and sordid circumstances that exceed the initial intention for his/her investigation. Ni el tiro del final parallels this convention here with Alejandro Salas: first Fernando learns about Salas's businesses and contacts and later he discovers his drug trafficking.

Similar to these affinities, the character Alejandro Salas and his identical twin "nephews," the bodyguards and assassins Leonardo and Sergio, also take after elements from the hard-boiled sub-genre and even from contemporary United States Mafia fiction and Hollywood cinema. The incorporation of these latter genres demonstrates that narrative continues to innovate throughout Argentina's darkest hour and that the Military Process fails in its attempt to establish a new society and mentality. During Susy and Ismael's first visit to Salas's estate, Sergio shadows Ismael throughout the

house, suspects his actions, and constantly questions him about his activities. The serene and successful businessman Salas employs thugs to protect himself from possible danger. At the same time, Leonardo and Sergio's presence undermines Salas's image as a respectable and honest entrepreneur and suggests that the architect may possibly conduct illegal ventures. Lastly, Feinmann's text also mirrors this hard-boiled tradition through Susy and her romance with Alejandro Salas. Susy sways between Ismael and Salas throughout the entire novel; she successfully exploits her femininity and sexuality for her own benefit. Unlike traditional gender representations, here the female character maintains complete control over her own destiny and does not become helplessly entangled between competing men. The woman decides freely and the man becomes her trophy.¹⁰

While parodying many characteristics of hard-boiled detective fiction, Ni el tiro del final does faithfully follow other aspects. In contrast to his first novel, Ultimos días de la víctima, and to the "novels of negation" discussed in chapter two, Feinmann's second novel displays a precise historical time frame: "Fue en octubre de 1978 . . ." (12). Later Ismael reiterates and expands this moment: "Llegamos a Punto Mogotes a las dos

de la tarde, en uno de los días más calurosos de ese mes de octubre" (12). This date marks the entire action of the novel and situates the events during the conclusion of the "Dirty War." Although Ismael never directly refers to the Military Process--nor the "Dirty War," nor the recent World Soccer Cup in Argentina, nor the preparations for war with Chile--stating October 1978 immediately and implicitly evokes the recent past and calls upon readers to recognize the importance of this juncture in contemporary Argentine history and to fill in the necessary information.¹¹

After placing the arrival in Punto Mogotes in October 1978, Ismael meticulously documents the passage of the next three weeks, and presents detailed information about the events. Ismael's account becomes so exact that readers can deduce that the text opens on a Tuesday, when Susy and Ismael arrive in Mar del Plata, and closes seventeen days later on a Thursday, when Pedro Bernstien returns early from Buenos Aires. This attention to chronology and to the precise date also demonstrates how Ni el tiro del final falls within the parameters and manipulates the conventions of detective fiction; in order to understand and reconstruct the

crime, one must possess precise knowledge of the characters' actions.

While resembling Ultimos días de la víctima with the commission of a felony and the assassin Mendizábal's failure because of his lack of knowledge, Ni el tiro del final also places the characters in an analogous situation vis-à-vis organized crime. In both novels the characters confront hidden and powerful organized crime syndicates. As discussed in chapter two, in Ultimos días de la víctima, the assassin Mendizábal realizes that he does not know the intricate operations of the crime organization for which he has worked during many years. Furthermore, Mendizábal discovers in the precise moment of his death that his former associates usurp his method of operation, turn them against him, deceive him with a false hit, and finally assassinate him. Mendizábal's ultimate and final realization resembles a Joycean epiphany, since he understands the underlying truth of the contract against Külpe, his supposed victim.¹²

Similarly, in Ni el tiro del final, Ismael experiences several realizations, or quasi-epiphanies, when the well-planned extortion fails. First, Susy reveals her betrayal when she decides to join Salas and thwarts the blackmail plot. Second, during her

monologue, Susy tells Ismael the truth about Salas's deranged wife and her incessant investigations of her husband and his assassin "nephews." Hence Fernando, and by extension Ismael, have unknowingly fallen into Junco's demented mind-games. Third, several days later Fernando tells Ismael that Salas is the biggest drug trafficker in the province of Buenos Aires, and possibly in Argentina. Behind the façade of his legitimate businesses, Salas has important contacts and controls money, drugs, influence, and ultimately power.

In both classical "whodunit" and hard-boiled detective genres, the investigator, based on the facts at hand, proposes a hypothesis, or a fiction, and then attempts to explain the crime. In this manner, the detective functions like an author who fashions a narrative. An inverted situation occurs in Feinmann's two novels. When the characters plan and carry out their plots, they also weave a hypothesis, or a fiction, around the intended victim to justify their crime. However, the characters entrap themselves unconsciously in their own designs and ultimately become their own victims. In Ultimos días de la víctima, Mendizábal concludes that Kúlpe, his victim, has previously committed murder and that the contract against Kúlpe will avenge that slaying. In Ni el tiro del final, Fernando and Ismael believe that

Salas has amassed so much wealth that blackmailing him will not cause Salas any serious financial harm.

Furthermore, Fernando reasons that since the architect has usurped Achával Junco's wealth, and thus committed an immoral act, his illegal appropriation of Salas's wealth lacks any true moral ramifications. This assumption demonstrates Ismael and Fernando's belief that society is a jungle, and one must abuse another or be abused.

Ismael states:

La idea no fue mía, pero--lo confieso sin pudor--apenas me la propusieron me gustó. Qué joder: ya era hora de salir de perdedor y empezar a reventar a los demás, en lugar de que lo demás lo revienten a uno. . . . (12)

While Ismael survives his plan, Fernando and Mendizábal die at the hands of their intended victims. This assertion about Fernando and Ismael's lack of guilt point to the first-track reading since it presents broad commentary about Argentine society; in order to survive, one must trounce and abuse others without remorse. Furthermore, the blackmail plot suggests that society needs a more competent justice system, and that the current one does not function well.

While both Mendizábal and Ismael manufacture elaborate justifications for their crimes, Ni el tiro del

final differs greatly from Ultimos días de la víctima since the former describes how Ismael later produces a novel from his villainous experiences. Indeed, at the beginning, Ismael is conscious that he writes his adventure a posteriori of the blackmail and compares himself with Melville's character in Moby Dick:

Pero empecemos por el principio.

Pongamos que me llamo Ismael.

Un comienzo ilustre, sin duda. Aunque hay una diferencia: yo no me estoy por embarcar en un ballenero de nombre Pequod, bajo las órdenes de un vengativo, implacable y mutilado capitán Ahab, en busca de una metafísica ballena blanca llamada Moby-Dick. (12; emphasis in original)

This introduction represents the first explicit self-conscious moment when the narrator Ismael sees himself as the author and also as a character in the same text.

After this declaration, Ismael continues narrating the events, but postpones to the end of the novel further theoretical discussion about his role as narrator and his writing the text that becomes Ni el tiro del final.

These comments about Ismael's role as author illustrate how Feinmann's text incorporates elements from the metafictional popular in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In the epilogue Ismael again illustrates his narrating activity when he introduces metafictional commentary about his writing. But these meditations lack the simultaneity found in the initial self-reflexive moment in the first part. Bernstein returns to Corto Maltés and praises Ismael for his short story "El primo Matías" and encourages him to spend the summer writing. At this moment, Ismael defines the narrative structure and the plot of his future novel about his experience in Mar del Plata:

La estructura ya casi la tengo. Vos abrís y cerrás la novela. Te vas al principio y llegás al final, cuando la tragedia ya está consumada, si me permitís decirlo así. En el medio pasa todo. Mis monólogos en el Douglas, nuestras cartas sobre El primo Matías, el largo chamuyo que me enchufó Susy antes de despedirme, y la historia central, la que organiza las otras: una historia de chantajistas, drogas y gente con poder. (266; emphasis in the original)

Ismael summarizes the novel that the readers have just finished. In the final chapter, Ismael continues his self-consciousness and incorporates the same simultaneity found in the first part: "dudando entre empezar a caminar más adentro, bien adentro, tipo Alfonsina digamos, o

volver a la casilla y prepararme un café con leche con bizcochitos. Una de dos" (269). The text never explicitly states if Ismael commits suicide or continues to live. But, the existence of Ni el tiro del final implies that Ismael decides to drown his sorrows with coffee and cookies instead of in the Atlantic Ocean.

Just as Feinmann's text engages with and manipulates the tradition of detective fiction in Argentina, it also continues other metafictional literary characteristics by including Pedro's and Ismael's discussions about the literary merits of the latter's short story "El primo Matías." Ni el tiro del final merges contemporary and established Argentine and Spanish-American literary trends, especially innovations from the 1960s "boom." These affinities demonstrate that narrative during the military dictatorship preserves the previous literary traditions and incorporates their innovations. Furthermore, these similarities between Argentine narrative written before and after the coup d'etat indicate that the regime fails in its attempt to break with the recent past while it tries to impose a new social and political structure and mentality.

Feinmann's text also continues previous literary customs and includes political and social commentary concerning Argentina. The text uses the hard-boiled

detective genre as the backdrop to present acute remarks about the Military Process. In both cases the dual-track interpretation brings to light these aspects of the text. Then, unlike many novels published in exile, Ni el tiro del final weaves these observations and criticisms within the other literary traditions.¹³ In contrast to contemporary home novels such as Enrique Medina's Los perros de la noche (1878) or Jorge Asís's Calle de los caballos muertos (1982), Ni el tiro del final lacks explicit and consistent commentary about endemic social problems in Argentina. Feinmann's novel does not openly address the problems of the indigent and the poor working classes, gender roles, prostitution, the disproportionate distribution of income, the circumstances of underdevelopment, as in Medina's texts, or the disparity between the capital region, el Gran Buenos Aires, and the other provinces, as in Asís's novel. Through describing Susy's and Ismael's life as itinerant musicians, Ni el tiro del final addresses the middle classes' circumstances and concerns with social mobility and even the marginal positions of performing artists. In this manner the first-track approach indicates that Feinmann's text deals with general social criticism, but centers such remarks on the middle classes instead of the lower

classes. Yet, unlike other texts, the first-track reading proves even more apt for Feinmann's novel since these concerns are latent in Ismael's and Susy's narration and in the playing with literary conventions.

In a similar manner, when seen through the first-track interpretation, Ismael's monologues provide a space where he unleashes exasperations about society and where the novel indirectly brings forth abundant social commentary. Again the novel provides general criticism about Argentine society and the middle classes. The first speech posits Ismael as an alienated artist and explains how the mediocrity of the professional classes and the debasement of "true art" for commercial ends both disgust him greatly:

yo estoy aquí, sentado en este taburete, frente a este triste piano, dispuesto a ganarme el pan de este día prostituyendo aquello que una vez fue la más intensa pasión de mi vida. Pero las cosas, salvo para unos magníficos privilegiados, son así: uno nunca termina por ser aquello que soñó, sino--justamente--su caricatura. (9)

This speech resembles more the polemic about art and the artist's role in society current during the historical

vanguard of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, than in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Also, related to the first complaint about the corruption of "true art" for monetary ends, this talk portrays the professional classes' lack of authenticity, their banality, and their mindless self-reproduction:

Abogados hijos de abogados, arquitectos hijos de arquitectos, dentistas hijos de dentistas, contadores públicos nacionales hijos de contadores públicos nacionales, y así hasta el infinito. Con algunas variantes, quizá. . . . Pero lo mismo todos: buenos hijos, obedientes, escuela primaria, día del maestro, día de la raza, himno a Sarmiento, bachillerato. . . .

(9-10)

This opening monologue, placed as chapter one of the first part, suggests that the text may focus on alienated artists and the role of art in contemporary society and thus may evolve primarily into a Künstlerroman.¹⁴ Indeed, both Ismael and Susy's life as poor traveling musicians and the former's contempt for the middle and upper classes constitute part of the plot and motivate blackmailing Salas. Furthermore, Ismael's writing the short story "El primo Matías," and the remarks about

creating fiction echo these motifs. However, after the beginning chapter, these Künstlerroman aspects dwindle into a minimal role as the hard-boiled detective fiction elements quickly emerge and dominate the narration.

As in his first monologue, Ismael begins his second talk by commenting about his position as a poor artist: "No estoy aquí por placer. Sería un infame mentiroso si les dijera que hago esto porque me gusta. Estoy aquí porque me pagan" (84). Rather than concentrating on his social position as an indigent musician, Ismael maneuvers this entrance as a point of departure and comments on the unequal distribution of wealth in the world: "la humanidad se divide en dos grandes clases: los herederos y los no-herederos. Yo obviamente pertenezco a la segunda" (85). Since he divides humanity into two diametrically opposed groups, Ismael insinuates that his audience belongs to the wealthy class. Although Argentina reputedly possesses the largest middle class of any country south of the Río Grande, poverty still remains a central fact of life, especially in many of the northern provinces.¹⁵ The military government does not tolerate comments on the destitute sectors and considers such statements as "Anti-Argentine" and as products of "Marxist" and "subversive" foreign ideology. Thus

Ismael's remarks rejoin the military's ideology, propaganda, and image of Argentine society as one happy and wealthy Christian family. Furthermore his remarks illustrate how at times criticism about the country can belong to both the first-track reading concerning society as well as the second one about the Military Process.

Just as Ismael candidly attacks the upper classes, he also directly assails Alejandro Salas when he states that "la mejor manera de hacerse heredero es casarse con uno de ellos" (85). Ismael then recounts his supposed affair with Vanessa, a wealthy quintagenerain, and how he almost marries her for money. This monologue evokes choices made by other characters since elements of Ismael's story parallel Salas's marriage to Achával Junco, the source of his current wealth and social status. Though this is an attack against Salas, Ismael's comment also focuses a veiled assault against the capitalist system and its presupposition of equal economic opportunity for all citizens. Ismael insinuates that one is born into wealth or marries it, and one rarely earns it through hard work.

While Ismael enjoys launching diatribes against the monied classes, Anselmi abhors these talks and threatens to terminate the singers' contract. Anselmi's immediate reaction demonstrates the upper classes' and the

military's hyper-sensitivity to their position in society, and their willingness to censor any controversial material. Conversely, Salas surprisingly enjoys Ismael's wit and prevents Anselmi from reprimanding or firing the singers. Unlike the generals, parvenu Salas maintains a sense of humor about himself and his life. Besides criticizing society, these monologues provide many of the intratextual references and help unify the totality of the text.

In addition to the remarks in Ismael's first two monologues, the text presents several brief examples of frank social criticism. During the performers' first visit, Ismael sees the house and observes: "los lustrosos cedros y las californianas tejas del antidemocrático chalet, alto y majestuoso . . ." (111). Much later, while speaking to Boris, the bouncer from Douglas, at Salas's birthday party, Ismael offers him a cigarette: "--¿Usted por aquí?--pregunté mientras extendía hacia él mis democráticos Jockey Club" (202). Jockey Club is an inexpensive domestic brand of cigarettes. Although Ismael does not elaborate further what he means by "democrático" and "antidemocrático," the context of the novel and the time frame both suggest significance for these terms. Given Salas's tremendous wealth and its trappings--large houses, bodyguards, Mercedes-Benz,

Chivas whisky--the term "antidemocrático" reflects on his money and his taste for imported items. In contrast, the term "democrático" refers to the lower classes in Argentina and national products. But, in the confines of the Military Process, which constitutes the background for the plot, the usage of "democrático" and "antidemocrático" can also imply a citizen's complicity, or lack thereof, with the military government and ideology. The interpretation of these terms functions as a nexus between the first-track and the second-track readings.

Ni el tiro del final circuitously presents information through Pedro, Ismael, and Fernando's conversations concerning the years preceding the military coup d'etat in 1976 and their political ideas and activities. These conversations establish a foundation for a more elaborate second-track interpretation of the text that reveals censorious commentary about the Military Process and its abuses. Similar to the criticism revealed through the first-track reading, these remarks pertinent to the second one are imbedded in the text. When Ismael and Susy arrive at Pedro's Corto Maltés the two male friends reminisce about their college days:

--¿Te acordás de la facultad?--preguntó Pedro.

Me acordaba. Durante cinco años estudiamos y rendimos juntos exámenes de filosofía. Pedro hizo su licenciatura y se recibió en el 69. Yo abandoné dos años antes. Me había aburrido, simplemente.

--Fueron lindos esos años--continuó Pedro--. El futuro estaba lejos y todo parecía posible.

Me puse de pie.

--Bueno, Pedrito--dije--. Terminá con la telenovela. Sabés que no hay nada más parecido a un hinchapelotas que un melancólico. (15)

Both characters experience the hopeful late 1960s and the early 1970s, when many young people, especially university students, believed that they could install a socialist and Peronist revolution and state in Argentina. Furthermore, many young adults overtly politicized all aspects of society and culture.¹⁶ However, after Perón's return in 1973, and his opting for the Peronist right wing, many of this generation became disillusioned with Peronism and politics in general. Ismael's refusal to

speaking about politics implies his complete disillusionment with the subject and repudiation of his previous beliefs.

Like Pedro, Ismael and Fernando both study philosophy at the university and more importantly, they spend many hours discussing, and deciphering, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. Although neither Ismael nor Pedro expounds on his import in the trajectory of philosophical and political thought, the study of Hegel leads directly to his most famous and controversial student, Karl Marx. The mention of Hegel's work further indicates that Ismael and Fernando belong to the 1960s generation of people who explore Marxism and maintain that revolution and a new society are at hand. But the characters' silence about Marx is understandable since during the Military Process any mention of Marx, or the possession of his work, like the usage of política, serves as sufficient evidence to detain an individual person for being an active guerrilla, supporter or sympathizer.¹⁷ Ismael briefly comments that, after finishing the university degree, Fernando actively participates in politics during the early 1970s: "Supe que ejerció su profesión, que se metió bastante en política y vivió siempre al día . . ." (53). Fernando embodies an entire disillusioned generation of Argentines

who become involved in politics and then withdraw after the 1976 coup d'etat.

When Fernando arrives and explains his new adventure, Ismael immediately and emphatically retorts: "Cualquier cosa menos política" (54). Later, when Fernando explains his plan, Ismael repeats:

--Perdí la cuenta ya. Pero las cosas pueden cambiar, Ismael. Nunca es tarde.

--Te avisé: nada de política.

--¿Quién habló de política?

--Mirá, la palabrita cambio pronunciada por vos me huele mal. Es casi pavloviano el asunto.

--Te equivocás. De otro cambio hablo yo.

Nada que ver con la política. (55)

Ismael's hesitance and fear about politics and change, and Fernando's insistence about the apolitical nature of his plan, signal how the words política and its synonym cambio acquire such negative and dangerous connotations in Argentina before and during the Military Process. The mere enunciation of these terms causes people to panic. Also, Ismael and Fernando's effacement of the subject and even the utterance of política and cambio, in the privacy of the house, illustrate the climate of paranoid fear that the military regime creates and how Argentines

adjust to living in such an ambiance. That is, they refuse to speak openly about themselves, their ideas, and their past even in the privacy of their homes and limit such conversations to one or two intimate friends.

In contrast to insinuating his involvement by conversing with Fernando, Ismael speaks more explicitly about his former political activities with Susy. While explaining the blackmail plot, Ismael comments:

"[Fernando y yo] compartimos otras cosas. La política, por ejemplo. Somos dos perfectos ejemplares de la generación de los cornudos: engañados por arriba y por abajo" (83). Later, during her monologue Susy reiterates this important element concerning Ismael's repressed past:

Tenías tus amigos, la literatura, la música y la política. Te creías destinado a grandes cosas. Después vinieron los fracasos.

Algunos--los de tu generación--te voy a ahorrar el dolor de recordarlos. Otros, son de tu absoluta propiedad. . . . (71)

After these reflections, the text does not repeat the fact that Ismael belongs to a highly politicized generation whose ideals flop. Furthermore, as seen in Susy's reluctance to mention the "fracasos," the text does not reveal the nature of the failures nor explain

how la política of the 1960s and early 1970s all eventually lead to the Military Process. Although the text does not elucidate política, during the 1960s and 1970s the vocable includes anything from party politics to urban guerrilla activity. Hence the characters' reluctance to speak about politics and their and the text's effacement of current political events both connote the presence and the consequences of the Military Process in Argentina. Cognizant readers can fill in the gaps and thus understand the truth behind these references.

In a similar manner Ismael reveals and hides his political past during a conversation with Alejandro Salas. During his first visit to the architect's house, Ismael states: "Me preguntó si participaba de alguna ideología. Le contesté que no (debí decir: ya no; debí decir: no sé; debí decir cualquier otra cosa en lugar de no, ¿pero importaba acaso?)" (121). Again, Ismael censors himself about politics. Furthermore, Ismael's avoidance of discussing his youth parallels how the text omits precise historical circumstances beyond the initial declaration of October 1978. As the narration progresses, the text disregards additional remarks about the month or the year, or other contemporary events. But through the singular concrete date, Feinmann's text

allows astute readers to furnish the necessary historical and political circumstances, and to recognize the larger context.

Ismael and Fernando's censored recent lives suggest the presence of the dictatorial regime and provide the foundations of the second-track reading--criticism specifically about the Military Process. Through these characters the text hints at the pre-dictatorship political turmoil of the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In a similar manner Feinmann's novel uses the civilian Salas to evoke the Military Process, its ideology and its self-adopted *raison d'etre*. Indeed Salas surfaces as the key element for a thorough second-track interpretation of Ni el tiro del final. During the singers' first visit to the house, Salas speaks *tete-à-tete* with Ismael and launches into a long political discussion:

--Observe, Ismael--continuó--que lo que aquí faltan no son ideas sino hombres. Ideas sobran, y en todo caso, no hacen más que embarullarlo todo más de lo que está. En cambio, en la Argentina desde el [18]80 que no existe una generación lúcida y organizada. Una verdadera clase dirigente, me comprende, una élite política. Mientras no se resuelve semejante problema, es absurdo hablar de

democratización. La democracia, para la mayoría de nuestros políticos, sigue sinónimo de populismo. Y Dios nos libre del populismo.

(121)

Salas's contempt for "populismo" represents a lightly cloaked assault against Peronism. More openly, Salas introduces the notion that the Argentines cannot govern themselves and consequentially that representative democracy cannot function. This opinion dovetails perfectly with the military, who believe that they embody the only solution and proper government for Argentina.¹⁸

Salas demonstrates his contempt for bourgeois liberal democracy not only in Argentina, but also in the entire Western world: "Sólo hacen faltan dos cosas. Una ya se la dije: crear una élite dirigente. La otra, renunciar al prejuicio democrático. Porque la democracia es el vicio de Occidente, Ismael, y estoy seguro que será su perdición" (121). Here Salas couches his ideas in the military leaders' cosmovision. Frank Graziano, Donald Hodges, and Diana Taylor explain how the generals believe that the West must triumph over the threat of the other, the communist and subversive East Europe, and the first battle of this struggle takes place in Argentina. Ismael sarcastically points to the institutionality of these

concepts when he comments that Salas learns these ideas from Jorge Luis Borges and the IDEA and implies that the oligarchy and the middle classes embrace and support the Military Process. Furthermore, Ismael's remarks imply that the supporters have learned the military's ideas and parrot them nonsensically.

In this manner the novel posits Salas as the regime's spokesperson. Indeed, the architect demonstrates the vacuousness of his ideas, and his--and ultimately the military's--ideology, during his birthday party the following week. After dinner, Salas situates himself impressively in an armchair and speaks about the current political circumstances and unsurprisingly he repeats his previous discussion with Ismael word for word, but this time he enjoys an agreeable and captive audience. Ismael observes: "[r]eposaba sobre la ideología oficial como quien hace la plancha de cara al sol en una lujosa piscina. Era un hombre que creía apasionadamente en aquello que le habían enseñado a creer" (207). Salas's verbatim repetition reinforces the artificial nature of his ideology; he reiterates almost automatically his ideas like the numerous cliché advertisements and other political slogans current during the military dictatorship, such as "la campaña anti-Argentina," "los argentinos somos derechos y humanos,"

and "subversivos." While Salas's convictions seem elegant and sophisticated, they lack concrete substance and meaning.

More importantly, Ismael's remark that Salas uses "la ideología oficial" leads directly to criticism of the Military Process. By designating the architect's views as "oficial," Ismael reiterates that Salas functions as a spokesperson for the military regime's ideology. In Argentina the term "oficial" designates beliefs, policies or events that a military or democratic government sanctions. Not only does Salas agree with these concepts, but so does the majority of his guests at the celebration. The large crowd gathers and loudly praises the sagacious Salas for his supposedly authentic and profound ideas: "Frenéticos aplausos aquí. Quizá, ahora alguno propusiera el linchamiento de cierto indefenso político radical de la zona" (208). The guests evolve into a microcosm of Argentina who blindly supports the government. But while these people appear concerned about the state of the country, the text suggests the opposite by means of Ismael's monologues in Douglas and his observations at Salas's house. Ismael perceives and portrays these classes as insensitive and unaware of Argentina's problems.

In addition to positing him as the spokesperson for the military regime's ideology, Salas also exemplifies the large amount of corruption and organized crime rampant during the Military Process. This characterization of Salas contributes greatly to the criticism present in the novel and to the second-track reading. The playing with the hard-boiled genre creates the conditions and prepares the readers so that this long-delayed revelation does not appear shocking. After the failed blackmail plot, Fernando announces to Ismael that Salas controls and directs the largest drug trafficking network in the province of Buenos Aires, and that Anselmi, the owner of Douglas, works as Salas's right hand man:

es el más grande pasador de falopa de la provincia de Buenos Aires. Y me quedé corto: también se extiende por el interior y alcanza--de esto no tengo pruebas aún peor estoy casi seguro--varios países de nuestra querida América unida y dominada. (250)

During the military government corruption develops into an epidemic among many sectors of the military and civil society.¹⁹ Since the regime lacks a dominant person, as in Franco's Spain or Pinochet's Chile, political and

legal authority becomes highly fragmented among and within the different branches of the armed forces and the police. This division of power, in turn, provides perfect circumstances for graft, bribery²⁰ and extortion.²¹ In the lower ranks of the military and police, while detaining alleged subversives, the soldiers and/or police agents sack and pillage their victims' homes. In the upper ranks, officers cooperate with or turn a blind eye to drug traffickers and contraband smugglers, and as a result they suddenly gain extreme wealth overnight and at times even acquire the children of their victims.²²

Feinmann's novel asserts that Salas has connections with military officials who willingly condone and cooperate with his drug trafficking. When Fernando initially describes his blackmail plan to Ismael, he briefly states that Salas "está lleno de contactos" (62). Later the architect's contactos surface during his birthday party: bankers, industrialists, actors, artists and even a few military officers. During Salas's speech, Ismael notices one assenting guest and comments: "--formidable, arquitecto--elogió un hombre alto y delgado, prominente nariz, finísimo bigote y sonrisa socarrona. Un militar, en suma. Y más aún: una réplica exacta del Gral. Montgomery . . ." (207-208). Ismael's observations

reinforce the connections between the party's host and the armed forces.

In addition to their questionable appearance, Salas's guests also interact strangely with him as well. While deciding between betraying either Salas or Ismael, Susy notices that the architect may have shady friends. During her farewell monologue to Ismael, Susy recounts and interprets a bizarre encounter:

Alguien, un tipo (no me preguntes quién, pero tenía pinta de militar: alto, casi rapado, nariz aguileña, delgado y seco) pasó a nuestro lado y solamente dijo: "Buenas noches, arquitecto". Frase que, si lo pensás--yo, al menos, así lo hice--, era totalmente absurda: ¿cómo buenas noches, arquitecto? ¿Era posible que alguien aún no hubiese saludado a Alejandro a esa altura de la fiesta? Y suponiendo que fuese alguien que acababa de llegar: ¿era esa la manera de saludarlo? No: algo pasaba. Buenas noches arquitecto no era un saludo. Era una amenaza, un aviso, una contraseña o cualquier otra cosa. (210; emphasis in the original)

The text again states that Salas's contactos are more than friends or acquaintances among the upper classes and

the armed forces. More importantly, this scene provides the information to conclude that Salas and his contacts work in tandem to permit his illegal activities throughout the country. Although the architect Salas does not erect any buildings, he designs and constructs a highly crafted image of a respectable businessman over his equally developed underground drug-trafficking network.

Ni el tiro del final presents a story of organized crime and drug trafficking with the armed forces' involvement during the Military Process. But the novel does not expound Salas's illegal activities since they constitute a small portion of the main plot concerning Ismael and Fernando's blackmail scheme. More importantly, the playing with the conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction, in addition to being an aesthetic concern, contributes to depicting the underworld and its connections to the government. Yet the other literary aspects in the text--the debates about literature, the interpolated short-story "El primo Matías," and the existential ending--and the intricate récit veil and prevent a complete description of corruption in the military and in the government.

Feinmann's second novel serves as an intermediary point between the allegorical novels and the more overt

texts that begin appearing after 1980. Through Ismael's monologues, the text openly critiques the dominant classes and society in Argentina. More importantly, the novel obliquely discusses recent Argentine history and presents circuitous declarations against the Military Process. However, unlike Piglia's Respiración artificial, Feinmann's novel omits references, direct or indirect, about the taboo political topics of human rights abuses and the disappearances and only suggests indirectly criticism about the military. This hesitance to discuss freely and denounce the Military Process points to the pervasive danger and paranoia created by the military government. Still, Ni el tiro del final demonstrates how narrative participates in Argentine culture's recovery from the comatose state imposed by the 1976 coup d'etat.

Between 1980 and 1983, other books criticize more candidly the government and its policies and invoke the condition of Argentine culture as the basis for considering the dictatorship. In contrast to Feinmann's second work, these novels utilize the Künstlerroman literary tradition more explicitly as seen in both Enrique Medina's Las muecas del miedo (1981) and Marta Lynch's Informe bajo llave (1983).

Medina's text presents the interactions between LooSanty, an Argentine expatriate on vacation in Buenos Aires, and his unnamed friend, a painter, who also operates as the first-person narrator. LooSanty's visit functions as a foil that contrasts his successful life in Paris as a theatre producer with his nameless friend's penurious existence. Akin to the novels published during this time, the action of Medina's novel occurs during the Military Process and consequently contains a tangible time frame.²³ Unlike Feinmann's novels, Las muecas del miedo presents clear and consistent examination and critique of the dictatorship and posits these reflections vis-à-vis the state of contemporary Argentine painting. Furthermore, Medina's text develops these remarks by portraying characters who live daily with the consequences of the government's policies.

Whereas Medina's novel portrays how the Military Process penetrates Argentine culture on a national and far-reaching scale, Lynch's novel examines how the regime attacks and destroys culture on a more personal level. Framed as a patient's personal confession to her psychiatrist, Informe bajo llave depicts the self-inflicted sado-masochistic relationship between Adela G., a famous writer, and Señor Vargas, a wealthy member of

the ruling junta.²⁴ After a brief meeting, Adela grows increasingly obsessed with Señor Vargas and dedicates her life to following and waiting for him. This dysfunctional fixation obstructs Adela's thinking and paralyzes her right arm and in turn both afflictions destroy her ability to write and silence her. Furthermore this mania eventually ruins her life as an accomplished novelist. The novel concludes when the unnamed editor reveals the disappearance of Adela in August of 1980, another victim of the military government.

In contrast to many other novels, Informe bajo llave comments openly about Adela's disappearance and other flagrant human rights abuses, and thus reveals the horrendous and hidden side of the Military Process. Published during the transition from dictatorship to democracy, Lynch's novel prefigures future developments in Argentine narrative: the remembering, recounting, and reexamining the terror and atrocities of the dictatorship. History, key events, and persons return to their former positions of importance in Argentine letters.²⁵

Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980), Medina's Las muecas del miedo (1981) and Con el trapo en la boca

(1983), and Lynch's Informe bajo llave (1983) prove that the silence prevalent at the onset of the Military Process in reality lasts only a brief time. Soon many novelists focus on the military government and its most obvious outcome: the damage on Argentine culture. While these Künstlerroman narratives appear during these final years of the dictatorship, other novelists start to delve into the darkest side of the military regime: human rights abuses and disappearances. Whereas many of the exile novels address human rights abuses, this theme is noticeably absent from many home novels.²⁶ Only during the final days during the democratic transition in late 1983 does narrative candidly deal with these taboo subjects. Rodolfo Fogwill's first novel, Los pichiciegos (1983), presents a speculative account of events concerning the Malvinas War. Through this imaginary version of the historical event, Fogwill's text also includes intermittently details concerning the Military Process and its human rights abuses.²⁷

Los pichiciegos presents the adventures of a renegade group of four Argentine military officers, or Reyes Magos, and conscripts who excavate a large cave in a mountain on the Malvinas and hide themselves from both the Argentines and the British. The soldiers steal

supplies from the Argentine armed forces and also exchange military intelligence and Argentine goods with the British expeditionary forces for other items in short supply. In this manner the deserters establish a proto-capitalist barter economy and thus hope to subsist and to survive the war. Since their living conditions imitate South-American armadillos, or pichiciegos, the deserters eventually baptize themselves as pichiciegos, or pichis, and their cave as la Pichicera (capitalization in the original). Towards the end of the war, snow blocks the gas stove exhaust vent and the occupants die, except for one pichi, the Rey Mago Quiquito, who discovers the other dead pichis. To erase their existence, Quiquito covers the entrance with mud and snow, which will seal the cave the following spring, abandons the mountain and surrenders himself in the nearest village. At some undetermined moment in the post-war and post-dictatorship future, the surviving pichi recounts his war experiences to an unidentified interlocutor. In this manner Fogwill's novel resembles a first-hand version of the conflict between the United Kingdom and Argentina.

Although Los pichiciegos includes imagined events of the Malvinas War and post-war period, it also incorporates information pertinent to the Military Process and human rights abuses. On the one hand,

Fogwill's text presents itself as Quiquito's eyewitness account of the war, and thus projects a high level of veracity and verisimilitude. Like Feinmann's play with literary forms, Fogwill's novel engages the conventions of testimonial literature and innovates this genre by including the dynamics of a psychotherapy session. In this manner the text achieves a degree and semblance of authenticity. On the other hand, various textual elements undermine this factualness and reaffirm the fictive, or false, nature of Los pichiciegos. According to the dates after the text, Fogwill writes his novel between 11 and 17 June 1982, just as the Malvinas War ends--Argentina surrenders on 14 June, 1982--and before the survivors begin returning and telling stories about the military debacle. Thus these dates reveal that the text cannot represent a survivor's account since the troops still have not returned to the continent, and Argentines are unaware of the true nature of the military fiasco. Although the action occurs in the Malvinas, the dual-track interpretation reveals abundant commentary about society and the Military Process.

Whereas the récit of Los pichiciegos centers on the Malvinas War, the histoire continues into some time during post-Malvinas War Argentina, which ultimately questions the veracity of the text. The récit consists

of two different parts, each divided into eight numbered chapters of unequal length. In turn, each chapter contains various unnumbered narrative fragments. Some chapters contain only one or two narrative segments while other chapters contain many more.

The first part opens in media res when the pichis already inhabit their artificial cave and the narrative sections oscillate between presenting the dialogues among the different soldiers and recounting the soldiers' daily lives. This first part documents the pichis' daily life and explains the origin of their barter and exchange society. A third person narrator presents the majority of the events.

Just as the segments fluctuate between the soldiers' conversations and narrative summary, the narrator's identity varies toward the end of this part, when, at the end of chapter seven, a first-person narrator suddenly emerges. This occurs when several pichis explain their phantasmagoric encounter with two French shepherd nuns in the middle of the mountain:

Viterbo [un Rey Mago] seguía hablando. Ya había convencido a todos de que no mentía, que era verdad.

--¿Y vos, Quiquito, creés que yo creo lo que me contás?--le pregunté.

--Vos anotalo que para eso servís. Anotá,
pensá bien, después sacá tus conclusiones--me
dijo. Y yo seguí anotando. (82)

This abrupt appearance of a first-person narrator, or "yo," may indicate the presence of a chronicler among the pichis, and also may imply the existence of a written account of their lives, and contributes to the impression of authenticity. Since the pichi Pipó registers and guards the soldiers' provisions, the change in narrator suggests that Pipó may also record their adventures. But instead of signaling the presence of a chronicler among the pichis, this momentary change in narrative technique prefigures the setting of the second part of the novel: the survivor's psychotherapy sessions in Buenos Aires. In the second part this first-person narrator gradually emerges as the psychotherapist treating the survivor Quiquito.

In addition to foreshadowing the emergence of the first-person narrator, the first part of the novel also establishes the distance, both temporal and spatial, between the narrating survivor and the narrated events. That is, the psychotherapist's presence indicates that the pichi Quiquito recounts the events when the war has become a fait accompli and the defeated armed forces have returned home. Further emphasizing the passage of time

after the war, at the end of chapter eight, the text presents a coincidental encounter between several pichis and the Argentine army while searching for supplies. One evening three pichis discover an Argentine officer sexually abusing and humiliating a conscript. Dorio, one of the three, kills the officer with a green flare and the conscript flees. After describing his horrible and painful death, Quiquito, via the third person narrator, states:

Si el chico aquel no se murió y vive en alguna parte, hoy debe creer que vio una aparición y el recuerdo de aquello verde saltando y arrastrándose [el oficial] nunca se le va a ir de la cabeza, porque esas cosas, de la cabeza, en una vida, no se borran así nomás.

(88)

This passage comments on the conscript's fate and designates the survivor's cognizance of the passage of time since the described incident. Furthermore, these lines indicate that the war has ended and that the histoire continues after the war and includes some moment in the future of Argentina.

Just as the narrative fragments fluctuate between dialogue and depictions about the soldiers' lives in the first part, the second part shifts between the survivor's

experiences during the final days of the conflict and his post-war life and psychotherapy. These differences between the two parts of the novel gradually emerge in the latter half of the text. Yet these distinctions between the two different parts--the metamorphosis of narrator from third to first-person and the shifting from the Malvinas to Buenos Aires--make Los pichiciegos resemble two novellas instead of one novel.

The psychotherapist's presence in the novel has several other functions in addition to marking the passage of time. His emergence and constant interventions help legitimize the events told by Quiquito. In the first part Los pichiciegos portrays imagined events in recent Argentine history, by means of a third-person narration, which suggests that the plot may be based on true historical events or may be pure fabulation. But, in the second part, the surviving pichi, the first-person narration, and his conversations with the psychotherapist all generate a setting that reinforces and validates the background of the soldier's story. A witness, Quiquito, recounts what he sees to another party, the psychotherapist, who accumulates and orders the information into a coherent account. Initially the psychotherapist limits his subjective presence using a third-person narrative technique.

Later, in the second part, the therapist reveals himself and the setting of the sessions, a social act dedicated to exfoliating the excess of the mind and to revealing the past and the truth. This first-person narrative position, besides countering the doubts present in the first part, further strengthens the legitimacy of the conversations and the plot as the search for truth and saturates the text with verisimilitude vis-à-vis the recounted events. In this manner the text acquires an increased appearance of an eyewitness story.

Besides underscoring the search for truth, the psychotherapist's presence and his conversations with the survivor evoke a narrative situation that resembles the Spanish-American testimonial novel, since the conversations during the psychotherapy session parallel the latter's narrative framework. Los pichiciegos deals with historical events, the Malvinas War, as seen and experienced by Quiquito.²⁸ The psychotherapist becomes the interviewer who records the words of a witness of a seminal historical event. This testimonial strategy appears briefly at the end of the chapter seven and becomes central in the second part of the novel. During the sessions, the psychotherapist takes notes and tape

records Quiquito's discourse. During one meeting

Quiquito comments:

[--] . . . ¿Qué anotás?

--Nada, eso que me decís.

--¡Si está grabando . . . !

--Pero igual anoto, no es lo mismo lo grabado que lo escrito--le aclaré.

--¿Y eso qué es . . . ?--preguntó

--Nada . . . un remedio para la sinusitis.

--¿Y así te lo ponés?--quiso saber.

--¿Por qué?

--Porque es mejor, más directo--le dije y recomencé a escribir.

(118; ellipses in original)

The tape recorder reappears in the conversations between the psychotherapist and Quiquito and its presence bolsters the testimonial aspect of the text. This characteristic can be seen in two ways: in the general sense of an eyewitness's account, who presents his/her story as legal testimony in a court room or during an interview for the mass media, and also in the specific Spanish-American testimonial genre, a survivor who provides his/her version for an author. Furthermore, the emphasis on the recording underscores the necessity to preserve Quiquito's exact words and strengthens the

legitimacy of the narrative as the account of a true lived experience.

The psychotherapist's overt role and emergence also explain the production of the written text itself. While commenting on the Chilean testimonial novel, Ariel Dorfman presents a succinct description of the general creative process of testimonial literature, which also resembles the psychotherapeutic setting:

when the witness reveals his experience, he does not feel at the same time the responsibility to give literary expression to it; he does not review it critically; there is an organizer of what is said, who without having witnessed himself what he will transcribe, resolves, eliminates, orients and annuls, making decisions about what should be the point of conflict and of plot, as well as the order of events. (134)

During the sessions the psychotherapist passively listens to Quiquito and simultaneously takes notes. But, at the same time, both Quiquito and the psychotherapist realize that the latter also performs an active role in the creation of the text. The first time that the first-person narrator appears, Quiquito states: "Anotá, pensá bien, después sacá tus conclusiones--me dijo. Yo seguí

anotando" (82). Later, the psychotherapist reflects on his patient's progress and observes that: "[Quiquito] [h]abía comenzado a salir con mujeres. Durante esas horas libres yo procuraba redactar o pensar" (119). Whereas he acts passively in the therapy sessions, the psychotherapist admits that he participates actively and creates the written text. The conclusion with the death of the pichis, instead of with Quiquito's final therapy session, magnifies the psychotherapist's dynamic role. The text omits Quiquito's surrender, his repatriation and readjustment to civilian life and overpasses how both Quiquito and the psychotherapist meet and decide to discuss his life during the war. Also, the organization of the second part--the oscillation between Quiquito's life as a pichi in the Malvinas and his therapy sessions in Buenos Aires--indicates the psychotherapist's conscious selection of events and meshing of two disparate historical moments and circumstances. These omissions of characteristic elements from testimonial narrative separate and distance Fogwill's text from this genre and also diminish the authenticity of the text.²⁹

As in the testimonial genre, orality plays a significant role in Los pichiciegos and also reinforces the psychotherapist's role as the transcriber of

Quiquito's account. The text displays a great amount of self-consciousness about the importance of language and portrays this preoccupation graphically and thematically. First, many narrative fragments focus on the pichis' conversations in pure dialogue, many times without indicating the speakers' identities. At these moments, the text becomes a panoply of anonymous voices that speak among themselves. Their Argentine dialect surfaces as their only noticeable and distinguishing attribute. In this manner the pichis lose their individuality and acquire a collective personality and presence. To distinguish themselves, the soldiers use their place of origin, which also reflects on their regional accents, calling themselves porteño, tucumano, rosarino and putano. In this way, Fogwill's novel encompasses the entire nation and becomes a metaphor for Argentina in the final days of the Military Process.

While portraying orality through organizing the soldiers' dialogue on the page, oral language emerges thematically as a topic of discussion among the pichis. The first-track interpretation considers these comments on the social usage of language as an initial component since they show how Los pichiciegos incorporates general criticism about Argentine society while simultaneously discussing the Malvinas War. Although the majority of

the characters employs the Argentine voseo, a self-consciousness about the difference between the standard Spanish tú and the Argentine vos appears intermittently. The first lines of the novel introduce this preoccupation when a returning pichi passes the checkpoint:

--¡Presente!--dijo una voz agotada.

--Pasa--respondió. No "pasá" sino "pasa".

Así debían decir.

Entonces la voz de afuera dijo "calor," y haciendo ruido rodó hacia él un muchacho enchastrado de barro. (11)

Framed as the third-person narrator's comments, the conscripts consciously avoid using voseo while engaging in official communication amongst themselves. To be good pichis, the soldiers must not only follow orders, but also change their language and speak standard Spanish. Not only does this self-consciousness indicate that the characters are Argentine, and underscores the oral nature of the text, but also points toward and comments on the Argentines' latent inferiority complex about their distinctive national language, and their existence as a reproduction of Europe in South America.

Similar to usage of voseo, the characters' usage of lunfardo, or Argentine argot, also expresses their awareness of its uniqueness and its difference from

standard Spanish.³⁰ In the first part of the novel the narrator observes that not all pichis speak alike:

Como oficiales, ese modo de hablar. Los tipos llegan a oficiales y cambian la manera. Son algunas palabras que cambian: quieren decir lo mismo--significan lo mismo--pero parecen más, como si el que las dice pensara más o fuese más. (67)

This difference between Argentine and standard Spanish, and the implications of the latter, consistently annoy the characters. After a conversation about returning home after the war, Quiquito notices how another conscript pichi speaks, and also ponders the possible return and his future life:

Hablaba así, como los oficiales. Igual que en su pueblo: salen dos del colegio, juntos. Uno se ubica a trabajar con el padre--como él--, se hace mecánico, chapista, trabaja, vende uno que otro coche, hace guita y sigue hablando como se habla [el voseo], como es él. El otro se va de empleado, un corretaje, algo. Anda vendiendo cosas con un auto lustroso pero ajeno y empieza a hablar distinto. Dice "empleo"--no "laburo"--, "madre"--no "vieja"--, tutea a los

mayores y gana un sueldo miserable, que se caga de hambre. (67-68)

Using standard Spanish and avoiding the voseo and lunfardo both form a dominant operation in adopting the trappings of a higher social class. Speaking standard Spanish still denotes that one belongs to the upper classes and possesses a high level of education. Here, Fogwill's novel indirectly comments on the significance that "correct Spanish" still plays in Argentine society as a symbol of class status and education, and as a necessary requirement for social mobility.³¹ These remarks also form part of a first-track interpretation of the text since they expose and criticize the elitism prevalent in Argentine society.

In a similar manner both the presentation and the explanation of the soldiers' argot, beginning with the title Los pichiciegos, illustrate the key role that language and orality play in the soldiers' micro-society and in the text, and also reinforce the affinities with the testimonial genre. One day during the British bombing, the soldiers crowd in the area closest to the exit of la Pichicera and one pichi from the province of Santiago del Estero says: "Con qué ganas me comería un

pichiciego . . ." (27). Since no one else understands pichiciego, the Santiagueño clarify the mysterious word:

--El pichi es un bicho que vive abajo de la tierra. Hace cuevas. Tiene cáscara dura--una caparazón--y no ve. Anda de noche. Vos lo agarrás, le das vuelta, y nunca sabe enderezarse, se queda pataleando panza arriba. ¡Es rico, más rico que la vizcacha!

--¿Cómo de grande?

--Así--dijo el santiagueño, pero nadie veía. Debió explicar--: como una vizcacha, hay más chicos, hay más grandes. ¡Crecen con la edad! La carne es rica, más rica que la vizcacha, es blanca. Como el pavo de blanca.

--Es la mulita--cantó alguien.

--El peludo--dijo otro, un bahiense. (28)

From this discussion the soldiers adopt the names pichiciegos, or pichis, for themselves and la Pichicera for their cave dwelling. Like the pichiciego, the soldiers burrow in the ground, live nocturnally and in this manner hope to escape danger and to survive the war. Thus, the pichis create their own argot that designates their world of la Pichicera and also of the Malvinas Islands during the war. When the pichis use their argot, the narrator--the psychotherapist--interprets the slang.

Since the Argentines reclaim the Malvinas Islands during the fall and winter, the soldiers use the current climatic conditions and recast the word helados for the dead and fríos for the wounded. The Reyes Magos call useless pichis dormidos and use pelear as a euphemism for murdering when they decide to eliminate the dormidos. Since human societies create or modify specific words according to circumstances, the creation and the inclusion of the pichis' jargon augments the legitimacy and the supposed authenticity of the events told by Quiquito. Furthermore, including this specific pichi language strengthens the similarities with the testimonial novel.

Yet while Los pichiciegos simulates a psychotherapist's report and Spanish-American testimonial novel, a closer comparison with both genres elucidates important differences. Emile Benveniste observes that during psychoanalytic treatment,

The analyst is thus in search of a "historical" datum which lies hidden and unknown in the memory of the subject, whether or not the latter consents to "recognize" it and identify himself with it. It might be objected that this bringing to light again of an actual fact, of a biographical experience, is really

equivalent to the discovery of a "cause." But one sees immediately that the biographical fact cannot bear the burden of the causal connection all by itself, chiefly because the analyst cannot recognize it without the aid of the patient, who is the only one to know "what happened to him." (66)

Both the patient and the analyst determine one or several problems considered important by the patient, and then the former attempts to uncover the origins. But Fogwill's text never presents this fundamental patient-doctor agreement since the psychotherapist never alludes to Quiquito's reason for seeking treatment or proposes a possible diagnosis for his patient. Instead, the psychotherapist assembles an account without any explicit therapeutic goal. Furthermore, the psychotherapist fails to offer an interpretation of his conversations with the patient throughout his narrative. Benveniste also asserts that while reviewing the patient's verbal evidence the analyst

must be attentive to the content of the discourse, but no less and especially to the gaps in the discourse. If the content informs him about the image which the subject [the patient] has of the situation and about the

position in it that he attributes to himself, he searches through this content for a new content: that of the unconscious motivation that proceeds from the buried complex. (67)

While the text indicates that he does reflect upon Quiquito's case, the psychotherapist only presents the information and does not draw any conclusions. While Los pichiciegos may resemble a medical report because of the narrative situation, the omission of key elements concerning Quiquito's treatment produces an incomplete psychological text and problematizes its veracity. Thus Los pichiciegos cannot even approach the status of a psychological report or document like Marta Lynch's novel Informe bajo llave.³²

While utilizing the testimonial genre as a strategy to talk about the Military Process, the narrative structure lacks key characteristics that distance Fogwill's text from this genre. John Beverley, in "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio" succinctly enumerates several salient characteristics of the testimonial genre. Beverley considers both the narrator--that is the survivor and the teller of extraordinary events--and his/her intention to be fundamental features of testimonio. In addition, the

presence of the compiler does not emerge as a central element in the narration but allows the survivor-teller to assume the role of narrator. In contrast, in Los pichiciegos the psychotherapist, or the collector of the information, slowly emerges as the narrator as Quiquito provides the necessary material and dominates the second part of the text. Also diverging from testimonio, Fogwill's novel lacks any concrete intentionality. That is, neither the psychotherapist nor Quiquito states why the two convene. Furthermore, while the psychotherapist includes self-conscious comments about creating the text, he omits describing attempts to publish the survivor's account. As a consequence of this dissimilar narrative structure, the first part does not center the "I" as representing the survivor, but rather replaces this "I" with a third-person narration. Furthermore, the second part repositions this "I" permanently on the psychotherapist and not on the survivor.

Beverley also notes that in testimonial literature the narrator adopts the position of spokesperson for a larger group or community and thus hopes that his/her story, or testimony, will call attention to and ameliorate the dire situation explained in the account. On this last point Beverley invokes René Jara's view that testimonio represents a "narración de urgencia" (73). On

the one hand, Los pichiciegos does not exhibit these characteristics of testimonial literature since Quiquito speaks only for himself and not for all pichis. Also, the text does not display explicitly the sense of "narración de urgencia" since the Malvinas War has already ended, both historically and textually.

Yet the setting of Los pichiciegos metaphorically refers to most Argentines' lives during the Military Process. The pichis exist on a daily basis and do the necessary actions to survive, just like most Argentines persist, subsist, weather the incessant political, social and economic storms spawned by the dictatorship. While Los pichiciegos does not function as a testimonial novel on a visible or tangible level, it behaves as a metaphorical testimonial about Argentina during the Military Process, and thus reflects the general urgency to confront the immediate past to move into the future and to avoid the same mistakes. In this sense the text establishes the foundations upon which one can construct a second-track interpretation that reveals criticism specific to the Military Process, its repercussions on society, and its abuses.

Certainly Fogwill's Los pichiciegos stands out as one of the most overtly political and censorious novels written and published in Argentina during the Military

Process. While emulating testimonial literature, a literary genre prevalent throughout Spanish-America since the 1960s, Fogwill's text also shares much with the Spanish-American literary tradition of contesting official history. Although Fogwill finishes his novel just after the end of the hostilities between the United Kingdom and Argentina, and before the returning soldiers disclose the details of the debacle, the text eerily prefigures many circumstances of the war. Indeed, the entire plot of Los pichiciegos severely questions and criticizes the military and their intentions. More importantly, the plot as well as the 1960s convention of contesting official history both play major roles in assembling the second-track reading of the text. The characters' desertion and their establishment of la Pichicera to outlast the war both point towards a deep pessimism about the invasion and also indicates the Argentine armed forces' incompetence. Whereas Galtieri, the leader of the ruling junta, and other officers embellish the invasion of the islands, manipulate the Malvinas War, and thus stimulate as much patriotism as possible among the population--and momentarily stifle dissent--and later minimize their own defeat, Fogwill's text does the complete opposite.³³ After returning to the

continent, the survivors divulge the pathetic conditions of the Argentine military forces and the corruption they have observed.³⁴

Los pichiciegos presents this cynicism through El Sargento, one of the Reyes Magos, who quickly sees the futility of the invasion of the Malvinas and their defense, and opts to escape:

Les explicó [a los primeros pichis] que las trincheras estaban mal, que las habían hecho en el comando: dibujadas arriba de un mapita. Decía que esas trincheras, con la lluvia, se iban a inundar y que todos se iban a ahogar o helar como boludos y que los vivos tenían que irse lejos a cavar en el cerro, sin decir nada a nadie. (24)

In addition to illustrating the negative outlook among the officers, this passage displays the importance of orality and lunfardo. El Sargento's discourse plays with the concept of boludos and vivos. In lunfardo, boludo means "dunce," and "stupid" and vivo, means "clever," and "cunning," in addition to "alive." When El Sargento speaks about the vivos, he means not only the people who will not perish in the war, but the clever ones who will survive by deserting before open hostilities begin.

Thus, from the start of the invasion, El Sargento, and other officers and soldiers, surmise that the British possess superior armed forces and will eventually defeat the Argentines and easily re-occupy the Malvinas Islands because of the latters' ineptitude and stupidity. Acting on this assumption, and on the desire to live and to avoid certain death in the trenches, El Sargento establishes the entire Pichicera project to outlive the conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom. Fogwill's text thus directly attributes Argentina's defeat to the incompetence of the military even from the beginning of the invasion. More importantly, Los pichiciegos insinuates that General Galtieri invades the Malvinas for his own benefit and glory, and not for the glory of Argentina.

While Los pichiciegos contests the military's optimism about the Malvinas War by a pessimistic portrayal of the Argentine occupation and defense forces, it also rejoins the military's discourse by referring to the complexities and the paradoxes of Peronism. This contestation constitutes an integral part of the second-track reading since they specifically center on how the government affects the nation by distorting reality and by spreading lies. These commentaries about Peronism also refute many mistakenly held notions concerning

Perón's relationship with the different armed political movements. While conversing about the defeated guerrilla movements, a soldier from the northern province of Tucumán mentions Mario Roberto Santucho, the leader of the Ejército Revolucionario Popular and describes Santucho's participation in Perón's Day, 17 October:

--Haber, había miles. En Tucumán--contaba el tucumano--, cuando venía Santucho para el 17 de octubre, llegaba con trescientos Peugeot 504 negros, cada uno con cinco monos [militantes o guerrilleros] adentro y desfilaban.

--¿Desfilaban?--no lo podía creer el Turco.

--Sí, ¡desfilaban!

--¿Y la cana [la policía] los dejaba?

--La cana se escondía. Si eran mayoría ellos . . .

--¿Y la gente?

--La gente aplaudía, les tiraba flores, les daba plata para las colectas.

--¿Aplaudía?

--¡Si estaban con ellos! ¡Cinco a uno era la ventaja que les daba Perón a los otros . . . !

--Pero Santucho no era peronista,
;animal!--dijo Viterbo.

--Sí, ;era peronista!--dijo el tucumano--.
Lo que pasa es que no la iba con Isabel
(54; ellipses in original)³⁵

Originally a Peronist union leader, Santucho establishes the Ejército Revolucionario Popular in 1970, develops the group into a dominant left-wing terrorist organization and centers its activities in the province of Tucumán (Hodges, Argentina: 1943-1987 233).³⁶ Viterbo's negative reaction to the tucumano's claim reflects how labyrinthine and paradoxical both the Peronist movement (with left- and right-wing factions) and the guerrilla groups became before the Military Process. Many Marxists, socialists, Trotskyists, Guevarist militants, and the right-wing Alianza Anti-comunista Argentina (Triple A), all identify themselves as Peronist. Also, Viterbo's reaction reveals how the Argentine population does not comprehend the complexities of the Peronist movement and of the different guerrilla groups.³⁷ Likewise, this lack of knowledge and the confusion demonstrate how the dictatorship changes political and guerrilla leaders' identities, and by extension current reality and history, to coincide with its requirements.

By eliminating Santucho's Peronist associations, and enhancing the Marxist--and thus foreign ideology--the government bolsters the view of a world-wide conspiracy against Argentina; Moscow, via Havana, stages the initial battle for the Third World War.

The lack of awareness about Santucho, in addition to showing the complexities of Peronism, also symbolizes one of the Military Process's few successes: the depoliticization of society. That is, when assuming power the junta plans to change the average Argentine from an active political citizen to a passive economic and consumerist resident of the country. While discussing how the military originally promises a pluralistic society and how some intellectuals believe the new government, Beatriz Sarlo, in her essay "El campo intelectual: un espacio doblemente fracturado," argues that behind the junta's guarantees exist complex circumstances that affect all parties and concludes:

De todas maneras, estas complicaciones no marcaron el rasgo principal del período, que sí podría caracterizarse como el de la despolitización en todos los niveles, acompañada por la destrucción de las instancias alternativas de la sociedad civil. (103)

While speaking about tolerance and acceptance of divergent points of view, the rulers underhandedly destroy any possible popular political participation. To assure their position, the government spreads disinformation about current events, which in turn plays a fundamental component in the military's depoliticization of society.³⁸

This eradication of knowledge refers not only to contemporary events and people, but also to prominent political figures from the beginning of the twentieth century. The military's imposition of forgetfulness, or olvido, appears several times throughout Los pichiciegos. Most notably, while discussing the different regional names for a pichiciego, the Rey Mago Viterbo mentions Hipólito Yrigoyen:

--Es peludo--dijo otro, un bahiense.

--"El Peludo" le decían a Yrigoyen--dijo Viterbo, que tenía padre radical.

--¿Quién fue Yrigoyen?--preguntó otro.

Pocos sabían quién había sido Yrigoyen.

Uno iba a explicar algo pero volvieron a pedirle al santiagueño que contara cómo era el pichi, porque los divertía esa manera de decir. . . . (28)

Between 1890 and 1930, Yrigoyen dominated politics as much as Juan Manuel Rosas or Bartolomé Mitre during the nineteenth century (Rock, 162-64 and passim). Yrigoyen headed the Radical party after 1890 and launched numerous rebellions against the corrupt political system before becoming the first freely elected president by universal male suffrage in 1916, and again in 1928. Indeed, Yrigoyen became synonymous with the hope and triumph of democratic politics before 1916 and during the 1930s, until Juan Perón won the presidency in fair elections in 1946. The soldiers' ignorance demonstrates how the military government keeps the country uninformed of self-governance, its key proponents, and how people used to believe in, work for and with the democratic process. By eliminating the examples of democracy and notable politicians, the Military Process hopes to eliminate the beliefs in democratic government as well.

Likewise, through the soldiers' commentary, Fogwill's novel reveals another predominant goal of the dictatorship: the structural and institutional elimination of bourgeois liberal democracy. While discussing the fate of Mario Firmenich, the leader of the montonero guerrillas and government informant, the conversation turns to elections and then to democracy:

--Sí, ¡lo van a dejar venir!--dudó el
Turco.

--Y por ahí . . . Si hay elecciones . . .

--Nunca más va a haber elecciones aquí.

--¡Ah no . . . !

--No, ¡Nunca más! ¿No viste que no hay
libretas de enrolamiento? Antes, había, tenían
un espacio para poner el voto, ya ni las hacen.
Mi viejo tiene--dijo Viterbo. Era un político.

(58; ellipses in original)

In 1976 the Military Process prophesies that it will maintain political power for an indefinite amount of time, and some officers even propose never returning power to civilians. Abolishing voter registration lists and other bureaucratic structural elements of the democratic process operates as an indirect psychological message pertaining to the future of the nation. The regime partially succeeds in erasing both recent and long-term memory of Argentina's history in its quest to reorganize the country and to impose its own interpretation of Argentina on the people. Yet while the Military Process eliminates the formal framework of liberal democracy, it fails to purge the collective democratic conscious from the Argentine population, as seen by the multipartidaria coalition organized in 1981.

Just as the pichis' conversations demonstrate how the government misinforms the country about the different guerrilla movements and attempts to abrogate the tenuous democratic traditions, as seen through the second-track interpretation, their discussions also reveal the darkest and most sinister facet of the Military Process: human rights abuses. During a long conversation about what the British may do to the prisoners of war, el putano, a conscript from the city and the province of San Luis, affirms that Videla has murdered 15,000 people:

--Videla dicen que mató a quince mil--dijo uno, el putano.

--Quince mil . . . ¡no puede ser!

--¿Cómo, Videla?--preguntó el Turco, dudaba.

--Sí, Videla hizo fusilar a diez mil--dijo otro.

--Salí, ¡estás en pedo vos . . . !--dijo Pipo.

--¡Qué pedo! ¡Está escrito!--hablaba el putano--. Yo lo vi escrito en un libro, en la parroquia de San Luis está. ¡Quince mil!

--¡Estás mamado!

--Qué mamado, están los nombres de todos, uno por uno, los que mandó fusilar Videla.

--No pueden haber sido tantos--dijo el Turco.

--Vos te callás, Turco--dijo Luciani--.
 Vos sabés de mandar y de comprar y vender pero de esto no sabés una mierda, ¡así que te callás . . . ! (52; ellipses in original)

Placing these facts in several soldiers' mouths indicates that rumors and other information about human rights abuses exist. Some people in Argentina realize, partially or fully, the horrors of the Military Process and even venture to speak about what they know. At the same time the other soldiers' disbelief demonstrates that the majority of the population remains unaware of these details, and simply discounts them as sensational exaggerations or considers them untrue. Although some people may know what the military and police forces do in the detention centers, maintaining silence becomes the only alternative for survival for these people.

Using the pichis' conversation to transmit the truth about the Military Process establishes rhetorical distance between the characters and the narrator, and even the author and the novel. Los pichiciegos divulges this information in a simultaneously direct and circuitous manner. It is circuitous because neither the narrator--the psychotherapist--nor the teller--Quiquito--

undeviatingly documents or speaks of human rights abuses. Instead, the text conveys the information through other semi-anonymous persons who have heard or read about these atrocities elsewhere. At the same time, it is straightforward, since the narrator does not use oblique allusions or allegories, but rather employs clear and plain language. Thus, through several layers of narration the truth emerges about the dictatorship. This strategy also demonstrates how the Argentines transform the wall of silence into a veil.

Just as gossip exists about how Videla murders thousands of people, more inconceivable hearsay also circulates about the military and how they disappear prisoners by throwing them into the Río de la Plata from aircraft flying at high altitudes. During the same conversation when the putano affirms that a book lists the names of the victims, another pichi professes the existence of the deadly flights:

--Yo sentí que los tiraban al río desde aviones.

--Imposible--dijo el Turco, sin convicción.

--No lo creo, son bolazos de los diarios --dijo el pibe Dorio, con convicción.

--Yo también había oído decir que los largaban al río desde los aviones, desde doce mil metros pegás en el agua y te convertís en un juguito espeso que no flota y se va con la corriente del fondo--indicó el Ingeniero.

--No puede ser, ¿cómo van a remontar un avión para tirarte?

--Dicen que aviones de Marina eran, los tiraban.

Se escuchaban las vibraciones del polvorín. Seguía explotando.

--¡Lástima que no esté el Sargento! El sabía eso.

--¡Y cómo no iba a saber eso si él trabajó de eso! ¡Si tenía una medalla del Operativo Independencia!--dijo Acosta.

--Pero de aviones no puede ser: por más locos que sean, ¿cómo van a remontar un avión, tomarse ese trabajo?--dijo Rubione--. Calculá: cien tipos por avión podrás tirar: son cien viajes. ¡Un cagadero de guita!

--¿Y a ellos qué les importa la guita?

Suben, te tiran, ¡chau! (53)

Not only does this conversation describe the military's most unimaginable and oneiric act, but also displays the

population's reaction to the rumors: they consider the entire scenario impossible.³⁹

But one year after the publication of Los pichiciego, the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas confirms these soldiers' declarations, framed in the fiction of Fogwill's novel. When referring to these flights in its report Nunca más (1984) the Commission states:

Cuesta creerlo. Sin embargo hay numerosas declaraciones que hacen mención a ello.

Algunos por haberlo oído, otros por referencias directas de sus captores; y también están los cuerpos que las corrientes marinas arrojaron a las costas. Cuesta creerlo, pero en el contexto general de esta salvaje represión es lícito pensar que para sus autores no fue otra cosa que un método más de los tantos utilizados con la misma finalidad. (235)

However, only in 1995, twelve years after the return to democratic rule, does a military official publicly confirm the existence of these unimaginable one-way flights. The renowned journalist Horacio Verbitsky publishes El vuelo where he documents Captain Franciso Scilingo's confession about his participation in these

grisly flights. These confirmations, the Commission's and Scilingo's, provide evidence that Fogwill's text, while formulating an imaginary society, also encompasses and divulges true facts about the Military Process. Also, while representing a severe criticism of the regime, Los pichiciegos initiates part of the long healing process still occurring in Argentina, since it discusses these years openly.

By 1980 Argentine culture has completely recovered from its profound comatose state, imposed by the Military Process in 1976. Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final and Fogwill's Los pichiciegos illustrate and corroborate this recuperation by presenting plots firmly located in contemporary reality and by detailing the hidden aspects of the regime. While being more openly engaged and containing an agenda to expose and denounce the dictatorship, these two novels avoid the possible danger of committed literature and are not unidimensionally political nor dogmatic tracts. To do this, both texts innovatively employ well established literary genres; Feinmann's uses primarily hard-boiled detective fiction and Fogwill's utilizes the testimonial narrative genre. But these literary manipulations, instead of representing gratuitous ornaments to the texts, perform a vital function in revealing the heinous side of the

dictatorship. The hard-boiled genre elements in Ni el tiro del final provide the background upon which the text portrays a sordid and corrupt society that in turn permits Salas's drug trafficking and his complicity with the military government. The affinities with the testimonial novel in Los pichiciegos supply credibility to the plot and a narrative structure so that many different characters can speak simultaneously. In both cases, the playing with genre conventions contributes to the telling--in the sense of denouncing--of the Military Process. Furthermore, these manipulations provide codes so that readers may supplement many details in the texts and arrive at a more complete understanding of their political traits.

While looking back at the dictatorship, both texts also look forward and beyond the regime by contributing a confessional facet. In both novels the main characters refuse to remain silent and divulge how they survived their horrible experiences and thus hope to carry on with their lives. This is most apparent in Fogwill's text since it meshes the testimonial genre with the psychotherapeutic situation. Or in other words Los pichiciegos becomes a hybrid, what I designate as pseudo-testimonial narrative, that follows some of the conventions of this genre. In this manner both works

point to the long process of healing since they demonstrate the necessity of remembering and acknowledging the horrors, instead of suppressing the memories. This final issue also becomes an act of defiance against the Military Process since the generals' policies of silence also include forgetting and erasing remembrances. Argentina took this concern seriously and tried and convicted the former junta members in 1985.

Unlike most novels written and published in Argentina during the Military Process, the overt historical and political themes in Los pichiciegos signal how far the government's control over society has weakened during the final years. Likewise, Fogwill's novel suggests how intrepid the Argentines become during the last three years of the dictatorship. However, before Fogwill's novel reaches the bookstores and the kiosks, Argentines continued defying the military government's censorship as well as their own self-censorship as seen by the publication and the market success of Oscar Hermes Villordo's openly queer novel La brasa en la mano (1983).

Notes

¹ For more complete and detailed historical information see Hodges Argentina, 1943-1987 and Argentina's "Dirty War," Adellach Argentina: cómo matar la cultura, Graziano Divine Violence, Rock Argentina: 1516-1982, Andersen Dossier secreto, Taylor Disappearing Acts, and Luna's "El 'Proceso'."

² Félix Luna, asserts that Esquivel's Nobel Peace Prize represents a huge moral and public-image defeat for all the generals (153).

³ Osvaldo Bayer demonstrates how the military exploits the World Soccer Cup in "Pequeño recordatorio para un país sin memoria." See especially Bayer's citing of newspaper headlines and articles on the popular fervor (214).

⁴ I shall only use Malvinas when referring to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands.

⁵ While Ernesto Sabato, Jorge Luis Borges and other members of the Sur generation did not experience any problems during the Military Process, many younger writers suffered greatly. Generally they did not receive much attention from literary critics or journalists and experienced difficulty in publishing their work. In a similar manner, many members of the parricidas generation

of the 1950s--David Viñas, Pedro Orgambide, Humberto Costantini--went into exile, and their works were censored in Argentina. Unfortunately, Rodolfo Walsh and Haroldo Conti, also members of this generation, remained in Argentina and were disappeared.

⁶ David William Foster comments that "Es lamentable que la crítica haya enfocado tanto en Flores robadas en los jardines de Quilmes (1980), en parte porque la novela es lamentable y en parte porque no ejemplifica el tono predominante de la novelística de Jorge Asís" (Vidal 107).

⁷ Fogwill originally spells the title of his book as Los pichy-cyegos. I follow the orthography of the most recent edition from 1994.

⁸ For a more detailed study of detective fiction during this time, see Gerardo Bra's essays "La evolución del género policial argentino" and "Orígenes de la literatura policial argentina."

Donald A. Yates's doctoral dissertation "The Argentine Detective Story" (1960) covers detective fiction during the first half of this century. Amelia Simpson follows Yates's footsteps with her more extensive Detective fiction from Latin America (1990).

⁹ The name of Pedro's resort, Corto Maltés,

establishes a connection with Hammett's classic novel The Maltese Falcon, and the milieu of Hammett's work. The changing of the name to Pedro's own liking further underscores this connection: "había obtenido la concesión (aquí, en Mogotes) de un balneario que se llamaba Sirena y que él rebautizó Corto Maltés" (13; emphasis in the original).

¹⁰ Abbreviating the names of Cuca and Lola, two nymphish female characters, into "Cu y Lo," provides the text with a resemblance to Ian Fleming's James Bond, and also a perverse comical element.

At the same time the novel assimilates many other American popular culture items such as jazz, Hollywood movies and biographies. In this manner Ni el tiro del final shows its Bakhtinian hybrid side.

¹¹ Piglia's novel Respiración artificial opens in a similar manner: "¿Hay una historia? Si hay una historia comienza hace tres años. En abril de 1976, cuando se publica mi primer libro, él me manda una carta" (13). Both novels rely upon readers to understand the importance of the date and to supply, without any help from the text, the necessary information.

The lack of concrete references concerning the contemporary historical reality reveals how extensively

fear permeates through Argentine society while Feinmann writes Ni el tiro del final.

¹² Mendizábal's final realization parallels Lönrött's epiphany in Borges's short story "La muerte y la brújula," which serves as the model for Feinmann's first novel.

¹³ Humberto Costantini Dioses, hombrecitos y policías (1979) and La larga noche de Francisco Sanctis (1984), David Viñas Cuerpo a cuerpo (1979), Osvaldo Soriano's Cuarteles del invierno (1982) and Marta Traba's Conversación al sur (1981) and En cualquier lugar (1984) exemplify narrative that places political and social commentary in the foreground.

¹⁴ Also, this monologue takes after the opening of Gabriel Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres (1967), and further demonstrates that Argentine narrative carries on previous literary innovations.

¹⁵ The Military Process's economic policies only exacerbated the unequal distribution of wealth. In fact, these policies resulted in the "de-industrialization" of the country. As William C. Smith observes, by 1981 total industrial production had declined seventeen percent since 1975 (253). More important than the desired "modernization" of the economy, these policies also

destroyed the cohesiveness of the working classes, and the possibility of alliances between the working classes and sectors of Argentine capital, and in turn the traditional base of Peronism (Smith 262-263).

¹⁶ With respect to the zeitgeist of Ismael's and Pedro's university years, Beatriz Sarlo, in her essay "Strategies of the Literary Imagination," observes: "In Argentina (and I believe in all of Latin America) in the early through mid-1970s, the actors in the intellectual field wove aesthetic and ideological themes into the design of a cultural utopia in which the aesthetic and political revolutions were more or less identified with one another. Although we know that this was only utopia, like all utopias, it had profound aesthetic and political consequences." Sarlo later expands her observations: "I mentioned a utopia, the Argentine utopia of the 1970s. Revolution was not only thought possible, it was the order of the day, and moreover, it was deemed beautiful, aestheticizable" (236-237).

¹⁷ Daniel Divinsky, the owner of Ediciones de la Flor, told the following story that illustrates the pervasive fear instilled by the coup d'etat in 1976. One of Divinsky's friends possessed a vast collection of Marxist and Marxian works and feared that these books

could lead to his detention and possibly his death. Instead of burying the collection for safe keeping like many people, he burnt his entire library. Since carrying a large bundle of books would draw attention, the friend destroyed his library one book at a time in another friend's furnace. This kind of fear explains why Ni el tiro del final never mentions that the characters eventually must have studied Karl Marx after Hegel. (Daniel Divinsky, personal interview, Buenos Aires 14 June 1991).

¹⁸ Guillermo Gallardo, in his article "La forma tradicional de gobierno en la Argentina" in Revista nacional de cultura, argues these same ideas; he tries to justify the Military Process and all previous regimes. Since the military government establishes Revista nacional de cultura in 1978, it is not surprising that the editorial board publishes such an outlandish article.

¹⁹ Martin Edwin Andersen addresses this widespread corruption in Dossier secreto: "According to Time magazine, by 1980 Argentina led the world in costs of bribes for doing business, with 20 percent the average required above the price of the contract" (299).

²⁰ Bribery, or coima in lunfardo, still persists in society and has become so prevalent that Argentines even

parody this illegal activity. For example, in 1991, the mid-day television talk show "Tele-Fax" consistently made jokes about how prevalent and common bribery was in Argentina and even parodied the comic book super-heroes by creating "Super-coima," the latent briber in every Argentine.

²¹ While conducting research in Buenos Aires during 1993 and 1994, many friends recounted how military officials became wealthy almost overnight by cooperating with drug traffickers and smugglers. Furthermore, these friends explained that during the transition period, from the Malvinas debacle to Alfonsín's election, these same officials "whitewashed" their illicit earnings.

Looting the belongings of the detained and the disappeared also formed an essential role in the military's sudden wealth. The Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas, in its report Nunca más, states that the military considered their victims' belongings as botín de guerra, or war booty (22-23). Several friends even told me stories of how military officers at times would find an elderly couple without any children or grandchildren, disappear the couple, and change the titles and deeds from the couple's name to their own.

²² Jacobo Timerman, in Preso sin nombre, celda sin

número, describes in detail how his captors took his personal belongings and then flaunted them in front of his face during the torture sessions. Frank Graziano observes that the military's ideology condoned the sacking of victims' property as the botín de guerra as well (37).

²³ In contrast, Medina's previous novel Perros de la noche (1978) does not contain a concrete historical time frame.

²⁴ Ricardo Piglia briefly mentions that Lynch's novel describes many intellectuals' dilemma at the beginning of the military dictatorship. That is, does one try to ignore or resist the new regime or does one acquiesce to the government? According to Piglia, Informe bajo llave shows what happens to intellectuals who attempt to coexist with the new government (Ricardo Piglia, personal interview, Buenos Aires 29 July 1991).

²⁵ Tomás Eloy Martínez's La novela de Perón (1985) and Santa Evita (1995), Ana María Shúa's El libro de los recuerdos (1994), Mempo Giardinelli's Que solos se quedan los muertos (1986) and Sagrado oficio de la memoria (1991), and Liliana Hecker's El fin de la historia (1996) exemplify the return of history as one of the dominant themes in Argentine letters. Furthermore Giardinelli's

and Hecker's texts indicate the persistence of the Military Process in the literary imagination.

²⁶ Humberto Costantini's Dioses, hombrecitos y policías (1979), David Viñas's Cuerpo a cuerpo (1979), Luisa Valenzuela's Cambio de armas (1983), Marta Traba's Conversación al sur (1981) are all written and published in exile and represent many of the novels that deal with human rights abuses.

²⁷ Carlos Gardini also publishes a short story concerning the Malvinas War, with speculative events, titled "Primera plana" in 1982.

²⁸ Mempo Giardinelli's La revolución en bicicleta (1980) also illustrates the influence of testimonial narrative in Argentine narrative and employs many of its characteristics.

²⁹ The psychotherapist's presence also reveals his active role in creating the text in a metafictional manner. As Quiquito tells his story, the psychotherapist states how many pages he has already finished: "A la mañana siguiente le mostré las primeras ciento dieciocho páginas del libro mal tipiadas por Lidia y él las miró y preguntó si podía quedarse con una copia. Dije que sí" (119). Later, the narrator comments that "Quise ver las primeras ciento cuarenta páginas con Thony, que comenta

libros en el diario de la Marina" (141). Quiquito and the psychotherapist examine the same text as the readers of Fogwill's novel. But, the psychotherapist omits an explanation about Thony's identity or role in creating the final text, and fails to comment further about finishing or publishing Quiquito's account. Still, these metafictional references help to reinforce the veracity of Quiquito's adventures since they indirectly indicate a progression of time.

³⁰ Some examples of lunfardo present in Los pichiciegos consist of "faso," cigarette; "mina," chick/girl; "afanaron," robbed; "colimba," military conscription; "cana," police force and police officer; "encanar" and "ir en cana," to imprison and to go to prison; and "morfar," to eat.

³¹ During the Military Process the government banned lunfardo as the names of public establishments. Susana González Sambrano tells the story of the old established pizzeria "El amasijo Fuli y Lulu," which had to change its name (S. González, personal conversations, 1993-1994). Clearly, this prohibition of lunfardo underscores the Process's attempt to destroy the people's common language, identity and other shared experiences and replace it with a "State-sponsored" language and thus

insure control over the population.

³² Yet its narrative strategy contains several elements that Peter Brooks considers characteristic of psychoanalytical writing in his book Reading for the Plot. While discussing the narrative structure of Freud's case study "the Wolf Man," Brooks asserts that:

There is a tension between spatial and temporal form, neither of which can ever wholly "saturate" the other, which exposition must recover in a relationship of complementarity through its own successive ordering of evidence, story and solution.

But the plot of exposition cannot itself be simple or linear. (272)

Brooks's observation on Freud's text explains the lack of chronology and of temporal markers in Fogwill's text. The action of both parts shifts in time and lacks any corresponding chronology to the actual events of the Malvinas War. The characters inhabit a uchronic reality, similar to the patient in Ana María Shúa's novel Soy paciente.

³³ In typical Orwellian double-speak, the government annually celebrates the surrender of the Malvinas as "La revindicación de las Malvinas" every June 15.

³⁴ In a similar manner, the novel asserts that the military behaves like a chameleon and takes advantage of any possible situation. Quiquito recounts a political rally where the military officers praise the soldiers for their bravery during the Malvinas War and explain the fruits of their triumph:

Que la batalla terminaba, que ahora se iba a ganar la guerra por otros medios, porque la guerra tenía otros medios: "La diplomacia, la contemporización," decía, y que nosotros íbamos a volver a los arados y a las fábricas . . . que ahora, luchando, nos habíamos ganado el derecho a elegir, a votar, porque íbamos a votar. . . . (140)

The military gives its own "spin" to all events whenever possible.

³⁵ The 17th of October, or "Perón's Day," has its origins in 1945. Alarmed with Perón's growing power, the military junta defrocked Perón of his power as the Secretary of Labor and imprisoned him on a small island located in the Río de la Plata. Vox populi states that Eva Duarte rallied the workers who then congregated in the Plaza de Mayo and demanded Perón's release. Many historians debate Eva's actual role in rallying the workers. The Justicialist Party officially recognizes

this day as its foundational moment.

³⁶ Tucumán experienced the worst repression when the armed forces launched "Operativo Independencia," an open battle, under Isabel Perón's authority in 1975.

The military assassinated Mario Roberto Santucho on 19 July 1976, just before he left for Havana. After his death his brothers Julio, and then Amílcar, took over the leadership of the Ejército Revolucionario Popular (Hodges, Argentina, 1943-1987 233).

³⁷ While Fogwill's novel touches the enigma of Peronism and provides some information concerning the complexities of the political party and the different guerrilla factions, Manuel Puig's Pubis angelical (1979) treats these issues more completely.

³⁸ Other literary texts also show the military's successful depolitization of society, especially the youth. Alina Diáconu's Enamorada del muro (1982) presents a typical porteña teenager who only worries about eating ice cream every five minutes and searching for her supposedly true love, a "taxi boy" (male gay prostitute) named King Kong. Likewise Enrique Medina's Con el trapo en la boca (1983) presents a female teenager only concerned with having a good time. In both cases the young people do not care about politics but rather

concentrate on enjoying themselves.

³⁹ Ana María Shúa reacted in a similar manner when she first heard rumors during the dictatorship about these death flights (personal interview 4 July 1994, Buenos Aires).

Chapter Five

Coming out of the closet

In 1983 Argentina experienced the return to and of democracy. The latter preposition denotes the reappearance of liberal bourgeois democratic institutions: elections, political parties, trade unions and other public forums. The former preposition signals Argentines' willingness to use the revitalized democratic institutions to govern the country and to carry out rational discussion of controversial matters. In the months before the elections of October 1983, along with the democratizing program against the Military Process, many people in and outside Argentina expected and hoped for a liberating destape, or opening, of society and for a renaissance of national culture, as in post-Franco Spain. Part of the destape, and the return to democracy, included explicit and genuine dialogue about the previously taboo subjects of sexuality and "lifestyles." In 1983 Oscar Hermes Villordo published La brasa en la mano, which speaks openly about male homosexuality. After seven years of fanaticism and repression, I consider La brasa en la mano as an integral manifestation of Argentina's return to democracy.

Throughout this study I have explored how the home novels, the texts written and published in Argentina between 1976 and 1983, expressed criticism of the dictatorship through two levels of historical reference, or the dual-track readings. The first-track approach concentrates on general social criticism of Argentine society, attending to the kind of commentary frequently censored during these years. In contrast the second-track interpretation traces references to and reactions directed specifically against the Military Process. In chapter two, my interpretation reveals how Ultimos días de la víctima and Soy paciente addressed social ills and exhibited elements of the dictatorship through highly veiled allusions. In chapter three, my examination follows the intricate patterns of historical events, family genealogies, and chronological dates and illustrates how these elements formed allegories concerning the "Argentine Question" as well as display censorious remarks about the regime in El baile de los guerreros and Respiración artificial. Finally, in chapter four, as censorship and the validity of the generals' discourse begins to wane, my scrutiny, through the dual-track readings, reveals how Ni el tiro del final and Los pichiciegos include harsh commentary about the regime.

The 1983 publication of Villordo's La brasa en la mano continues this tradition of social criticism and resistance against the Military Process, but through different strategies. The public circulation of La brasa en la mano itself indicates how literature can become a social act, that performs a social critique of the dictatorship, which corresponds to the second-track approach. At the same time, from the perspective of the first-track interpretation, the thematic emphasis on gay identity in Buenos Aires during the 1950s and the 1960s resists the military's culture of silence on male homosexuality; by bringing queerness out of the closet, La brasa en la mano provides a critique of the complex issues of heterosexism and homophobia in Argentina.

Similar to how Feinmann's novels employ detective fiction and how Piglia's and Schóó's texts utilize history as their main strategy to address social ills, Villordo's novel invokes literary and philosophical references, such as The Thousand and One Nights and Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving, that provide important codes for interpreting and understanding the text. In addition, many contextual circumstances indicate that La brasa en la mano evolved into a significant cultural event during 1983. Most importantly, following an illustrious career as a writer and literary critic,

Villordo publicly recognized his homosexuality, before the transition to democracy. Given the regimes's record of human rights abuses, bigotry, and intimidation, Villordo's coming out of the closet showed his personal courage and integrity, and signified an intrepid action of defiance. Villordo's declaration counters many prejudices in Argentine society and coincides with the first-track interpretation of the texts included in this study. After receiving much acclaim for La brasa en la mano, Villordo continued to write and publish books with explicit homosexual themes such as La otra mejilla (1986), El ahijado (1990), and Ser gay no es pecado (1993). Similar to Manuel Puig, Villordo broke significant ground in Argentine society and literature while he wrote and spoke about his sexuality. Unfortunately, Villordo continued this trend when he became the first well-known figure in Argentina who acknowledged his HIV status and later died from AIDS on 1 January 1994.

The circumstances of the publication and reception of Villordo's novel merit consideration before analyzing the text. In the early 1980s the Spanish publishing house Bruguera launched the series "Narradores de hoy" that encompassed contemporary Spanish-American writers in

addition to many home and exiled Argentine authors.¹

This collection also included Oscar Hermes Villordo's La brasa en la mano (number 124). When Bruguera published and distributed Villordo's work in June 1983, four months remained until democratic elections (October) and another six months before the military relinquished its power and allowed the return to democratic rule (December). The de facto regime would finally disappear and give way for a de jure democratic government. Since General Reynaldo Bignone's care-taker reign did not officially lessen the censorship restrictions, the publication of Villordo's work at this moment constituted both a dangerous venture and an act of defiance.² According to Carlos Jáuregui, the government proscribed the mere mention of homosexuality in any media (170). Furthermore, the years 1982 and 1983 witnessed a series of assassinations of gay men, most of which were never properly investigated (171-172). Similar to its repression of "subversives," the Military Process did not tolerate homosexuality in any form. Given these circumstances, the publication of La brasa en la mano appears even more risky and noteworthy.

Hence, La brasa en la mano becomes emblematic of the return to democracy since its publication signaled that many people, both publishers and readers, again decided

to test the limits of state-imposed censorship before the official return of democracy in December 1983. Throughout most of the dictatorship (1978-1983) the lampoon Humor successfully challenged and defied the military's ideology and patience. Also the triumph of Teatro Abierto in 1981 and 1982 demonstrated the Argentines' courage to speak against the regime. Hence, instead of arising as a single act of recalcitrance, Villordo's novel forms part of a long continuum of defiance against the government, its policies, and its ideology. In this manner the existence of Villordo's novel parallels the second-track interpretation employed in this study since the text's thematic critiques the regime and its ideology. In addition, Bruguera's series foreshadowed the expected and hoped for, but never realized, destape. La brasa en la mano went through five different impressions by February of 1984, which illustrates that Villordo's novel enjoyed great commercial success and also serves as a sign of the return to democracy. Argentine readers expressed their interest in the highly taboo and controversial subject of male homosexuality. Villordo's text indicates that authors endeavored to free themselves from the confines of self-censorship and to allow their creative energies to flow forth. Instead of eliminating unusual subjects,

as during the Military Process, readers, publishers, and writers decided to discover, to read about, and to discuss differences.³

The lampoon magazine Humor played a fundamental role during the transition from the dictatorship and to democracy as well as breaking the silence of taboo subjects such as the disappeared, male and female homosexuality, corruption in the government and society, and other social ills. During this time Humor included Villordo and commentary about his novel on several occasions. Villordo's coverage in Humor probably augmented the initial magnitude of La brasa en la mano's emergence, its market success, and magnified this cultural milestone. I will center my discussion on Villordo's presence in Humor because of the magazine's important position in Argentine culture and society at that time.

Prior to appearing in Humor, Villordo was already a well-known person and writer. In addition to several books of poetry and novels, Villordo had worked for the cultural section of La Nación, one of the premier Argentine newspapers, and also actively participated in the journal Sur.⁴ By 1983 Villordo enjoyed a prominent position in "high-brow" cultural society and maintained

friendships with such important literary figures as Silvina Ocampo, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Jorge Luis Borges.

The appearance of La brasa en la mano in itself embodied a profound cultural event, along with the entire Bruguera series, and denoted, in the confines of the Military Process, the complete recuperation of Argentine culture after the shock imposed by the 1976 coup d'etat. The publishing industry was prepared to extend its activities beyond the parameters maintained during the dictatorship. Furthermore, Bruguera's new collection participated in and also strengthened the redemocratization trend since it included previously banned books by home and exile authors.

Bruguera released the first edition of La brasa en la mano in June 1983. Soon after the completion of the first edition, Bruguera ran an announcement for Villordo's novel, along with Jorge Maciangioli's novel Buenaventura nunca más (1983) in issue 108 of Humor (July 1983, 23). This short advertisement states openly that the main plot of the novel is "la reprobación que pesa sobre un hombre enamorado de otro." Coincidentally, besides being direct about the content of the novel, the publicity repeats a brief quote by Borges where he states that Villordo is "un verdadero poeta." By citing Borges,

Bruguera implicitly, and intentionally, places Villordo, and his literary work, among a group of well known and highly regarded Argentine writers. This declaration by Borges protects both Villordo and his novel from knee-jerk attacks because of his public acknowledgment of his homosexuality, the candid and non-judgmental depiction of two men in love, and portrayal of the gay underworld.⁵

Fortunately, Bruguera's short blurb marks the beginning of Villordo's presence in Humor. The following month R.V., probably the journalist Raúl Vera Ocampo, briefly reviewed La brasa en la mano in edition 110 (August 1983) under the column "Libros que no muerden." After mentioning Villordo's public acknowledgment of his sexuality, R.V. commented on the high quality of the text's prose and on the courage needed to publish a work on such a taboo subject:

El asunto está muy bien escrito--Villordo narra excelentemente y engancha al lector desde la primera página--y seguramente puede llegar a ser un best-seller. Hay que reconocer que no cualquiera se anima, en un país como éste, a describir y ensalzar los amores pan con pan. Y por ese lado, aunque uno no comparta sus

inclinaciones, hay que concederle al autor el mérito de la valentía. (112; sic)

The small amount of space allotted for book reviews in Humor, not the volatile thematic of La brasa en la mano, explains the brevity of R.V.'s comments.

Then in the following issue, 111 (August 1983), Mona Moncalvillo published a six-page interview with Villordo.⁶ Throughout 1983 and 1984 Moncalvillo interviewed mainly exiles and people who had played a visible role of opposition against the Military Process and who would play an important role in the post-dictatorship society.⁷ In the first part of the interview, Moncalvillo and Villordo conversed generally about his life and his literary and critical writings. In the second part of the interview, Moncalvillo questioned Villordo openly about his recent revelation of his homosexuality and his novel La brasa en la mano. Villordo's public recognition of his sexual orientation represented a defiant act against the regime's puritanical ideology and merited serious attention, as demonstrated by Moncalvillo's interview in Humor. Fortunately this was just the beginning of Villordo's contribution to the magazine. In December of the same year Villordo took charge of the literary section for

Humor (issue 118), a position that he held for at least a full year, and reviewed a great number of previously unmentioned works. In addition to becoming a permanent member of the staff, Villordo also joined a long list of well known and regarded writers, intellectuals, and journalists who contributed to Humor during its apogee of fame and influence in Argentina.⁸

Given the high profile of the magazine, Villordo's collaboration and coverage in Humor probably magnified the public's awareness about and the success of La brasa en la mano. After Villordo's interview in August, Bruguera ran another edition of the novel in September, and two more in October; La brasa en la mano went through four printings in five months. Later, in February of 1984, Bruguera released a fifth printing of Villordo's book. The five separate editions in nine months clearly indicate that La brasa en la mano was a literary success for Villordo as well as for Bruguera.

The commercial achievement of Villordo's novel is even more impressive when placed in the context of the publishing industry in Latin America in general, and specifically in Argentina, during these same years. Angel Rama, in his "El 'boom' en perspectiva," describes how many Latin American publishing houses changed their

marketing strategy away from Latin American authors and toward prepackaged first-world pulp fiction, or to use the Latin American term, the "Best Seller" in the 1970s (66-67). In Argentina José Martínez de Hoz's economic policies created an open economy and highly overvalued peso which in turn accelerated the contraction of the Argentine publishing industry. This decline also reduced the distribution and the promotion of Argentine Literature. Naturally, the lampoon magazine Humor took notice of the decline in the local publishing industry and the following repercussions on the status of Argentine letters. In issue 46 of Humor (November 1980) Juan Sastuarin published two articles that detailed the deplorable condition of the Argentine publishing industry. Furthermore, Sastuarin lamented the reduction in the distribution and the promotion of Argentine literature by the remaining publishing houses. The worst consequence of the decline of the publishing industry affected the Argentine writers, who lost a great percentage of their readers to the imported "Best Sellers," a situation that persists even today.⁹

In addition to the commercial success of Villordo's novel, the pre-publication history of La brasa en la mano reinforces my emphasis on its 1983 publication as an

indication of Argentina's return to democracy, and as an intrepid act against the dictatorship, similar to how other texts discussed in this study criticize the regime. During his interview with Mona Moncalvillo, Villordo disclosed that he had written and completed the manuscript of La brasa en la mano many years prior to its publication in Argentina:

la novela está escrita hace unos años, la pasé en Estados Unidos cuando me dieron la beca "Fulbright," en el 76; la pasé sin retoques. Un novelista mexicano amigo mío, Jorge Ibargüengoitia . . . conoció el original y me propuso que [Joaquín] Mortiz lo editara. Nos escribimos varias veces, entregó el original al editor y éste le pidió un plazo para decidir, algo así como un año. Yo estaba encantado, quería editarla afuera. (115)

For better or worse, Joaquín Mortiz, at that time one of the premier publishers in Mexico and in Spanish America, never published Villordo's novel. Possibly Joaquín Mortiz found La brasa en la mano too daring or too polemical to print in Mexico or simply could not include Villordo's novel since the staff consistently considered so many manuscripts. In fact, Joaquín Díez-Canedo, the director of the company in 1976, stated that the review

board received at least one manuscript daily, about three hundred fifty to four hundred annually, and could only publish about ten percent in a given year (Martín). Given these conditions, a negative response was more common than an offer to produce the submitted manuscripts.¹⁰ During the interview with Moncalvillo, Villordo never explained why Joaquín Mortiz declined to print his novel, nor why Bruguera decided to accept La brasa en la mano as part of its "Narradores de hoy" series.

To analyze La brasa en la mano in a study of narrative written and published during the Military Process may seem out of place since Villordo finished writing the manuscript in 1976.¹¹ But this inquiry also considers the milestone cultural events that took place during the dictatorship as well. Just as the triumph of Teatro Abierto illustrates a seminal cultural event and serves as a barometer to measure the transformations occurring in society, so does the success of Villordo's novel. Furthermore, Teatro Abierto exemplifies the almost complete recovery of culture from its comatose state inflicted by the 1976 coup d'etat. In a similar manner the public's favorable response to Villordo's text shows that great changes were occurring in the social and

cultural spheres and in the national consciousness. This indicates that Argentines were preparing to move away from the dictatorship and to democracy.

After years of violence, contentious politics, and narrow-mindedness, La brasa en la mano, with its frank and non-polemical treatment of sexuality, pointed to a new beginning in Argentina. Pajarito, the main character and first-person narrator of the novel, describes his relationship with Miguel, supposedly his most recent boyfriend. He begins with the declaration: "Trato de recordar" (7). This opening declaration signals that the entire narration consists of a reconstruction of the past; Pajarito recalls two summer days of his life in Buenos Aires during the late 1950s or early 1960s. But, the text omits the time interval between those two summer days and Pajarito's act of remembering. The lack of specificity about the length of the time interval leaves open the possibility of distortions and uncertainties in Pajarito's memories. Although he assumes the role of narrator and functions as the sole focalizing agent of the text, the narration presents numerous analepses prior to the two days. At the same time many other characters recount their stories and adventures, which are all interpolated in Pajarito's recollections. Thus,

Pajarito's memories serve as the narrative frame through which the other characters speak.

An elaboration of the récit and the histoire of the text explains the complex levels of narration. As mentioned above, the overarching histoire comprises two summer days of Pajarito's life. The first day begins when Pajarito accompanies Miguel in a taxi and the former interprets the latter's remarks as his declaration of love:

"No tengo derecho a pedírtelo, pero si sé que te acostás con otros . . ." Era su declaración de amor. Lo había perseguido durante meses y, al fin, se decidía. A su manera . . . "Tenés que comprender. Es difícil para mí. Si te dijera que estoy enamorado de vos, mentiría. No es eso." No; no era eso. Y sin embargo, insistía (aunque era la primera vez) que sufría si yo me acostaba con otros, que no estaba enamorado de mí que: "Soy un egoísta; perdoname" (7; ellipses and emphasis in original).

Not only do Miguel's words establish that the text deals with gay love, but they also validate the tone in the novel; Pajarito relishes Miguel's statement. After their parting, Pajarito proceeds to Beto's house to share

with him Miguel's declaration. Before arriving, Pajarito must verify that Beto is unoccupied, since the latter earns his living as a homosexual prostitute. Later, Adolfo and Myriam, two mutual male friends, visit Beto to help celebrate his fortieth birthday. Afterward, all four men spend the night cavorting about the gay haunts of Buenos Aires. While Adolfo and Myriam stay together, Beto, accompanied by Pajarito, exercises his profession and also pursues two young military conscripts. Beto absconds with one while Pajarito and the second soldier spend time together. During the evening, Pajarito leaves the serviceman, searches for Beto, and later both friends visit Andrea, who later ejects them from her apartment so that she can be alone with her boyfriend. The dynamic duo then return to the streets and again encounter the same two servicemen in a bar. In spite of Miguel's declaration of love, this first day ends with a liaison between Pajarito and the previously mentioned soldier.

The following day commences when the two paramours eat breakfast in a café near Pajarito's pensión. Pajarito carefully conceals the fact that the conscript was his tryst from the other men, or "boyz" in gay parlance, in the café, who coincidentally are Miguel's friends. Pajarito then returns to his room and awaits for the agreed upon time to telephone Miguel. In the

meantime Pajarito listens to music, tries to read and reflects on his current lover and his previous boyfriend Esteban. When the magic moment arrives, Pajarito contacts Miguel and the two lovers spend the rest of the afternoon and early evening together. Surprisingly, Pajarito does not recount any of the afternoon spent with his beau and only briefly comments: "La tarde con Miguel había sido perfecta, tan perfecta que no había dejado recuerdo, a no ser la vaga sensación que deja la felicidad, y que se parece, precisamente, al olvido" (100). Upon returning to his pensión, Pajarito discovers Beto in his room, biding his time so that the two can travel together to Babá's dinner party, where Pajarito listens attentively to Adolfo, Myriam, and the other guests' stories and adventures. When dinner is served, fifteen people take seats at the table and all pay attention to the guest of honor Asunta de la Gracia, an elderly and almost deaf opera diva. After the party, Pajarito makes the customary nightly telephone call to Miguel who then informs Pajarito of his impending trip and the termination of their relationship. After this devastating news, time collapses and Pajarito laments the loss of Miguel and his desire to re-initiate their relationship. The novel ends as it begins with an expression of love, but also of loss.

Pajarito's adventures appear too numerous for one person in such a short time. Yet his active social life operates as a representation of the gay ambiance in Buenos Aires. In this manner Pajarito symbolizes an entire community, akin to Jim Willard in Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar (1948), and acquires the air of a documentary text and also implicitly criticizes Argentine society and challenges its stereotypical concepts of homosexuality.

While the lengthy synopsis may suggest that the text contains an orderly chronological histoire, as previously mentioned, the narration of La brasa en la mano contains many long analepses, some of which are complex, and several short analepses, all interpolated in Pajarito's narration. The action consistently oscillates between the two days and earlier events, which operate to foreshadow the denouement of the text and Pajarito and Miguel's relationship. A explanation of the récit, with its twelve narrative sections, helps untangle the intricate temporal shifts and levels of narration. The first ten narrative segments cover the developments of the first summer day, when Beto and Pajarito carouse through Buenos Aires, and the final two sections present the episodes of the second day. However, text emphasizes the second day since the final two sections comprise

almost two-thirds of the narration. In fact, section twelve encompasses half of the novel.¹² Given this distribution, the first ten sections operate as an introduction for the last two, and provide the background information necessary for understanding the plot and the characters.

Among the first ten narrative sections of La brasa en la mano, two are complete analepses and detail Pajarito's relationship with Esteban, and with another boyfriend, previous or perhaps contemporaneous to Miguel. Section eleven bridges both days and covers mainly the second summer day, and twelve centers exclusively on the events of Babá's extravagant dinner party. However, both the length and continuity of this final section do not imply that the narration remains linear. Whereas the text detaches the analepses in the first third into separate narrative sections, the analepses of the final section are embedded and integrated in Pajarito's long narration. Furthermore, instead of emerging from Pajarito's recollections, these analepses emanate from the other characters' stories. But, the other characters do not acquire their own voice since Pajarito's narration always frames their accounts. In this manner the novel includes adventures and actions, mediated by the central

character. Also, the text displays two diverse strategies for incorporating previous events: the narrator's flashbacks and other characters' stories framed in the narrator's tale. The importance of this difference will become evident below.

The first three pages establish that Pajarito will focus the narration on his relationship with Miguel. In fact, this first narrative section contains the majority of the prolepses in the novel and mentions the termination of the relationship. In addition to distancing the recounted events from the moment of narration, Pajarito hints that he will reveal the reasons behind Miguel's ending their romance:

El tono de tristeza que puedan tener estas palabras es de ahora; entonces, yo era feliz. Piensen en que él me había dicho que me quería, en que yo no lo sabía. Esta es una historia de amor (o lo que es lo mismo: una historia de contradicciones) y debo decirlo desde el comienzo: el que no haya amado no podrá entenderla. Piensen en el amor y díganme si había o no motivos para estar alegres. (8)

Yet Pajarito never explains Miguel's motivation nor proposes his own interpretation. Just as Pajarito states that love is also a contradiction, so too is La brasa en

la mano. As the lengthy synopsis reveals, the relationship, and by extension the love story, between Pajarito and Miguel fades into the background of the former's social life and appears only sporadically. Instead of being a love story, La brasa en la mano evolves into an account of everything but the romance between the two men. The novel consistently defers presenting any details of the relationship, hiding it behind the events of those two summer days that Pajarito decides to remember and to relive. Is this novel a gay romance, or just a pretext for something else?

Although it may appear a contradiction, the text's obscuring Pajarito and Miguel's romance parallels how Pajarito camouflages his relationship from the other characters in the novel. When he enters Beto's apartment to tell him that Miguel has just declared his love, Pajarito states: "'Me ha dicho que me quiere,' insistí. 'Quién?' 'Esteban,' le mentí, porque a Beto no podían contársele las cosas. 'Ufa, la vieja historia,' terminó [Beto]" (10). Pajarito uses the name of his past boyfriend Esteban and veils Miguel from the others' knowledge. Later Pajarito explains that Beto can act horribly and is capable of almost anything, and at times is completely untrustworthy.¹³ Pajarito comments:

Yo tenía la experiencia de Esteban y le mentía en la necesidad de contarle lo que me pasaba. Miguel, para Beto, era Esteban, lo fue desde el momento en que me di cuenta que había ido a decirle lo que no podía decirle. (10; emphasis in the original)

When Pajarito introduces Esteban to Beto, Adolfo, and Myriam, Beto wastes no time in attempting to steal Esteban and to take advantage of him sexually. For this reason Pajarito never returns with Esteban to Beto's apartment. Neither does Pajarito give correct information to Beto nor to his other friends about the status of his relationship with Esteban, and by extension Miguel. As far as the other characters know, Pajarito and Esteban both still form a couple, although their love affair had ended some time prior to the main action. Hence, much like the text disproves itself as a love story, so Pajarito contradicts himself about the identity of his boyfriend and about his relationships in general. Likewise, this merging of Miguel's identity with Esteban's causes problems for the readers of the text, who invariably mistrust Pajarito, and leaves them with the uncertainty at times if Esteban is Esteban or Miguel veiled as Esteban.

Pajarito fathoms the implicit danger he runs when he uses Esteban's identity as a veil when he speaks about Miguel, which indicates that Pajarito chooses to let some parts become visible but only through the porous filter that he creates. While talking about Miguel as Esteban, Pajarito intentionally distorts the details of their meetings and of their conversation. This becomes apparent when Adolfo and Myriam arrive and Beto tells them about Pajarito's newfound happiness. Suddenly Adolfo doubts Pajarito's story:

"Te he visto en el cine con un muchacho que no es Esteban." Temblé. "Te habrá parecido," le dije. "No, como sufrías tanto por él." Y acentuó la palabra "sufrías." "¡Pero si Esteban acaba de decirle que lo quiere!" intervino Beto. "¿No ves la cara de felicidad que tiene? Están en plena luna de miel." Volví a temblar, pero esta vez con verdadero miedo. "Puede ser que esté equivocado," insistió Adolfo. Y siguió: "Vos sabés, uno mira rápidamente." (23)

In addition to Beto's insistence, Pajarito quickly changes the subject away from Miguel, and thus silences Adolfo and saves himself from embarrassment. Pajarito comments that "había pasado el peligro para mí, en la

confusión entre Miguel y Esteban . . ." (24). Beto also yields on challenging Pajarito because of Beto's insistence on the truth. Still, both Pajarito and Adolfo realize that they cannot trust Beto with certain topics. To avoid confusion and awkward situations, Pajarito does not mention Miguel or repeat Miguel's recent declaration to any other characters.

Since the majority of the text consists mainly of remembered conversations and recounted adventures among the characters, Pajarito's reticence about Miguel becomes understandable. Nevertheless, many lacunae about Miguel surface in the text. Readers only briefly glimpse the enigmatic boyfriend through Pajarito's eyes and narration and they never learn Miguel's identity, domicile, or employment. In fact, Miguel is absent from the majority of the action and the novel. In section twelve, Miguel only appears indirectly at the end when Pajarito makes the routine telephone call.

Another inconsistent aspect of the love story centers on the identity of the lover himself. The beginning of the novel implies that Pajarito's account focuses on the relationship between the two men. Although he tells readers to believe that the love story is about Miguel, Pajarito spends more time recalling Esteban and their adventures, and again in essence he

contradicts himself. In turn, readers may wonder if Esteban embodies the true subject of the narrative. Furthermore, readers may come to question whether La brasa en la mano tells Miguel's story via the veil of Esteban or vice-versa. More importantly, with the quantity of narration dedicated to other characters besides Miguel and Esteban, and of events devoid of both boyfriends, possibly the main inconsistency of La brasa en la mano involves Pajarito's declaration of his intention to tell his long saga or to recount two typical days of gay life in Buenos Aires.

Because of the constant shifts of focus between Miguel and Esteban, and between the two boyfriends and the other characters, La brasa en la mano exhibits a large amount of slippage in the narration. That is, the text states that La brasa en la mano is a love story between Pajarito and Miguel, but the plot consistently meanders into different episodes and presents other characters and time frames. As my analysis of the textual order and the organization makes evident, the text slides away from the presumed main point, covers other matters and intermittently returns to this supposed central subject and plot: Miguel.

On the one hand, Villordo's work differs from the "boom" novels of the 1960s and other later texts since it

does not consistently discuss or problematize the act of writing or language. In this manner La brasa en la mano does not become an intellectually charged novel, like Piglia's Respiración artificial (1980) or even Marta Lynch's Informe bajo llave (1983), where the divisions between the plot and literary analysis and theory disappear. Nor does the text engage in historical revisionism like many Spanish-American novels since the 1960s. Instead, La brasa en la mano resembles a "reader friendly" book, placing emphasis on the plot, characters, and events. In brief, the text tells a good story that employs ornate descriptions and fluid and poetry-like prose. Perhaps for these reasons Villordo's work in general has received such little critical attention in the United States, especially La brasa en la mano.¹⁴

On the other hand, Villordo's book resembles the "boom" novels since it displays metafictional elements, such as references to other works of literature that contribute to the readers understanding the inner working of the text. In a circuitous fashion, La brasa en la mano reveals a possible metafictional scheme for understanding and appreciating the slippage prevalent throughout the novel. After spending the afternoon and early evening with Miguel, Pajarito returns to his

pensión and discovers Beto perusing his library.

Pajarito then divulges his opinion of Beto's lack of literary competence and his fascination with The Thousand and One Nights.¹⁵ After purchasing "la versión de Mardrus . . . creyendo que era la que leían sus tías," Beto becomes completely enthralled with this literary classic:

[Beto], que no leía un libro hasta el fin, y cuyos juicios eran impertinencias, disparates según su humor, convirtió al libro maravilloso en libro de cabecera y fuente inagotable de citas. "Cómo te comprendo!," me decía melancólicamente, compadeciéndose de mí, después de leer el episodio de la fuente que canta y el pájaro que habla. Sin embargo, yo no podía hacerle comprender que Simbad era un símbolo y Scherezada un pretexto, porque siempre recordaría de aquél la astucia . . . leyendo una y otra vez las páginas finales para comprobar que el cruel visir no la había matado. Su imaginación, además, transformaba los cuentos, y por eso no era de fiar en sus apreciaciones, como tampoco en sus "reproducciones." (99-100)

The location of this reference in the récit, almost exactly at the center, underscores its importance. In addition to representing a standard example of literature's tendency to speak about literature, this citation of The Thousand and One Nights also functions as a guide for understanding and for appreciating La brasa en la mano and also its narrative structure and slippage in several different ways. Just as Scheherazade re-tells tales to delay her execution, so Pajarito narrates his stories, and includes other characters' accounts, and thus defers arriving at the bitter moment when he must recount his telephone call to Miguel and the depressing news about their breakup.

In a similar manner, Pajarito's interpretation of Scheherazade's role as the pretext for the narrative structure of The Thousand and One Nights sheds light on Miguel's, and perhaps also Esteban's, slippery position in the novel. While La brasa en la mano begins and ends by focusing on Miguel, this character consistently disappears and reappears briefly throughout the rest of the text. Furthermore, the constant digressions from Miguel to Esteban, not only with respect to identity but also with respect to narrative space, calls into question the assertion that La brasa en la mano is a gay romance. As stated above, Pajarito claims that this is a love

story, but also a tale of contradictions. If Scheherezade and her precarious fate become the pretexts upon which the narrative structure of The Thousand and One Nights is built, as Pajarito suggests, then one can conclude that both Miguel and Esteban operate as the pretext upon which La brasa en la mano is based. Through this pretext of the love story with Miguel, Pajarito weaves together the disparate characters and their stories into a coherent account, and depicts gay Buenos Aires instead a queer relationship.

Furthermore, if Miguel functions as a pretext for the narrative construction of La brasa en la mano, then this fact facilitates understanding the panoply of characters and levels of narration throughout Villordo's text. Although Pajarito operates as the main focalizing and narrative agent, the text includes many others who relate events prior to the two summer days. Throughout the novel Pajarito's narration encompasses other characters' voices and anecdotes retold aloud. As time passes, the story grows more complex with multiple levels of narration in the final section--the last half--of the novel. While waiting for the elderly Asunta de la Gracia's arrival, Pajarito incorporates other characters' adventures, especially Myriam and Lucho's. Instead of acting as a narrator, Pajarito almost resembles a

recording device through which the other characters speak. At one point Pajarito comments: "La historia se iba enredando, entrelazándose con otras, como esa del sastre y de Myriam, sin que Myriam dijera nada, salvo la displicencia con que iba amontonando los porotos y jugando" (131). Several times the text projects so many different characters' conversations that the identity of the speaker, or narrator, almost becomes lost in the words spoken.

Lastly, just as Scheherezade recounts stories to Shahriar that contain characters who in turn narrate stories to other characters, so does Villordo's novel. Many times the narrative structure suggests that Pajarito retells to an unknown interlocutor the two summer days about people who in turn tell stories to other people. Furthermore the fluidity of the narration connotes an informal and relaxed atmosphere, reminiscent of oral story-telling. But La brasa en la mano omits a similar Scheherezade-Shahriar structure; the text does not designate an identifiable receiver for Pajarito's accounts. Instead, the readers evolve into the implied listener for the many tales recounted in the text. This narrative structure and the emphasis on oral story-telling in Villordo's text also resemble the Spanish-American testimonial genre, where the narration presents

openly a witness who retells his/her experiences to an identifiable second party.

The similarities between Villordo's text and The Thousand and one Nights may appear exaggerated, but this literary work is referred to later in the text. During Babá's dinner party Adolfo refers to Myriam's stories about his boyfriend Hugo:

Beto se reía cuando yo le daba detalles como estos y comentaba satisfecho, en voz alta para que lo oyera Adolfo: 'Son Las Mil y una Noches de Myriam.' Pero había más de 'mil y una noches' en la vida de Myriam, aunque nadie lo creyera (156).

Beto is not the only character who has an interest, or a familiarity, with this classic work of fiction.

If one takes into account Borges's high opinion of The Thousand and One Nights, the position that this work play in Borges's short stories, Villordo and Borges's friendship, and their active participation in Sur, the significance of this work grows even more evident. I do not claim that Villordo rewrites the entire The Thousand and One Nights in La brasa en la mano the way that James Joyce rewrites and superimposes The Odyssey in his Ulysses, but rather that Villordo's novel effectively utilizes the narrative structure of the Arab classic when

it portrays gay life in Buenos Aires during the 1950s and the 1960s. The affinities between both texts are more than gratuitous and coincidental.

Another point of commonality between both texts centers on the oral quality, as mentioned above. The Thousand and One Nights exhibits this characteristic openly when Scheherezade spends the nights telling stories to Shahriar. In a similar manner, the language in Villordo's novel intimates an analogous verbal attribute. For example, when Pajarito begins narrating by stating "Trato de recordar" (7). This strategy creates a ambience of immediacy and presence, common in spoken story-telling and in Spanish-American testimonial literature. The text also displays this trait when Pajarito has a rendezvous with Beto: "¡Visión seráfica!, me saludó, parándose y soprendiendo a sus amigos. ¡Qué cara tenés! ¿De dónde venís? ¡Te hace falta una copa![']" (86). However, in contrast to the classic Arab story that describes how Scheherezade sits down and actively tells her stories to Shahriar, Villordo's novel never depicts a scene when Pajarito positions himself to relate his and others' adventures to an audience. Unlike many of the novels I have studied, with their explicit portrayal of a narrative situation that produces the récit, the narrator in La brasa en la

mano never self-consciously refers to his act of telling or of writing. That is, the main narrator excludes references to transferring his account in written form.

At the same time, the text also displays another metafictional aspect when several characters assert that Pajarito is a fiction writer. While waiting for Pajarito before going to Babá's house, Beto comments: "¿[']Por qué no escribimos un libro juntos? Yo te doy el material y vos le das la forma" (99). Ironically, Beto's suggestion for writing a book resembles the general narrative structure of La brasa en la mano; the characters spin their yarns and Pajarito weaves them within the text of his love story. The text later develops this notion that the narrator is an author during Babá's dinner party when several characters remark about Pajarito's articles published in different magazines. Babá complains about the exaggerated sentimentality in Pajarito's stories: "'¡Lo cursi de la novela rosa sólo a vos se te puede perdonar!' (De paso criticaba mi última publicación aparecida en la revista que me pagaba para escribir historias sentimentales . . .)" (142). Pajarito acknowledges that he crafts fiction for a living, which in turn explains his textual competency and also his ire about Beto's naive understanding of The Thousand and One Nights. The text develops further Pajarito's profession

during his discussion with El Muchacho que Hacía

Cinenovelas:

Babá le había hablado de mis cuentos y me dijo que creía haber leído uno, pero lo disuadí contestándole que no, que hacía mucho que no publicaba, que lo que ocurría era que el dueño de la casa [Babá] me "leía" en revistas viejas. . . . Yo, para él, estaba siempre de moda, porque no renovaba su stock de revistas, como ocurre en las peluquerías (esta explicación, claro, es de Adolfo, que me la dio en cierta oportunidad en que apareció el mismo tema). (162)

Pajarito grows reticent and anxious about his authorship, which suggests that instead of a consummate novelist Pajarito works as a pulp-fiction short-story writer who considers himself passé. In addition to characterizing Pajarito, these comments about the exaggeration of sentimentality also shed light on the final scenes of the novel where Pajarito's emotions of remorse and loss inundate the narration.

Just as Miguel's and Esteban's presence slips in and out of the text, so does Pajarito's status as a writer. In spite of his constant negations, the narration again divulges more contradictions when Pajarito reveals that

he still writes. While describing the different guests present at the dinner party, Pajarito speaks of Lucho and remarks:

aunque no lo encontraba casi nunca, se acercaba a hablarme cada vez que me veía, con una secreta admiración hacia mí que me confundía. (¡Sólo a él podía ocurrírsele, como me confesó por fin, que todo lo que me contaba, las muchas confesiones que me hacía, eran para que yo las pusiera en una novela!). (128)

Ironically, this is what eventually occurs in La brasa en la mano. Throughout Babá's gala feast, not only does Pajarito incorporate Lucho's stories into the novel, along with the other dinner guests' tales, but also his own confession about Miguel. However, after these interventions Pajarito omits any additional concrete references to his profession as a writer.

Similar to the way The Thousand and One Nights provides cues to understanding the narrative structure and the presence of the love story in La brasa en la mano, the mention of Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving furnishes suggestions for interpreting Villordo's text.¹⁶ While perusing Pajarito's books, Beto notices several titles that he believes to be erotic: "'Pero mirá:

siempre son un engaño. La moral sexual, y resulta que son consejos. La mala vida en Barcelona, y resulta que son crónicas policiales'" (99). Pajarito observes Beto's reactions and later adds: "los títulos acabaron por confundirlo y apartó uno con una sonrisa de complacencia: El arte de amar, de Erich Fromm" (99). Before leaving for Babá's house, Beto places the book in his pocket so that he can read it at home since he probably believes that Fromm's book explains how to improve one's sexual techniques.

While not alluding to Fromm's book again, this single reference in Villordo's text contains great significance. The presence of Fromm's work frames the action of La brasa en la mano in the late 1950s, or the early 1960s, since he first published The Art of Loving in 1956 in the United States and a Spanish translation in Buenos Aires by 1964. In fact, Fromm's book emerges as a historical marker in Villordo's novel and may function as a veiled roman-à-clef strategy to situate La brasa en la mano in a precise historical moment.¹⁷ However, the text omits other distinctive time indications. Instead of pointing to a specific date or year, the mention of The Art of Loving places La brasa en la mano in the zeitgeist of the 1950s and the 1960s, when Erich Fromm's readings

of Karl Marx enjoyed much popularity and countered the dogmatic Soviet and Chinese interpretations and subsequent political agendas.

In the intellectual context of contemporary psychology, the presence of Fromm's work helps to characterize Pajarito as an erudite person. As mentioned above, Pajarito works as a fiction writer for different magazines, and possibly as a novelist, and possesses sophisticated mental capacities. The presence of Fromm's work among his many books denotes that the protagonist is more than a hack writer. In a similar manner, the attention to the specific translation of Beto's copy of The Thousand and One Nights, "la versión de Mardrus," strengthens the notion that Pajarito is also a thinker and possibly a scholar.¹⁸

Finally, analogous to the role of The Thousand and One Nights, the inclusion of The Art of Loving can function as an intertext that assists the readers in comprehending better and/or interpreting Villordo's novel. Hence, a summary of Fromm's ideas becomes useful. Rather than propose a facile formula, method, or rules for a healthy sexual relationship, Fromm outlines the basic tenets for establishing and achieving a true intimate relationship between two human beings.

According to Fromm in The Art of Loving, in contrast to many of Freud's ideas, the innovation in his thought asserts that a good sexual correlation emanates from a true love relationship: "Love is not the result of adequate sexual satisfaction, but sexual happiness--even the knowledge of the so-called sexual technique--is the result of love" (89). By emphasizing that love depends primarily on mutual communication and understanding between two people, which subsequently manifests itself in the healthy sexual aspect of the relationship, Fromm, most likely unknowingly, begins the long process of separating love as the domain of the traditional heterosexual relationship. Fromm states that the basis of true love has its origin in respect, which is

the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his unique individuality. Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is. Respect, thus, implies the absence of exploitation. (28)

Thus social conventions should not force two people to establish, or maintain, a relationship or marriage if they do not mutually attract and love each other. More importantly, neither should one person completely dominate the other in the relationship. Permanent union represents the culmination of love, not the social or

religious institution in which two persons try to develop romantic feelings. From the 1990s, after the sexual revolution and the feminist movements the of 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Fromm's concepts seem very obvious. But before these dramatic changes in society, Fromm's ideas probably appeared novel and challenged many people's beliefs. In this sense the reference to Fromm's works contributes to a first-track interpretation of Villordo's text since it provides the point of departure to question and to criticize traditional societal beliefs about heterosexual and homosexual identities and relationships.

However, by no means did Fromm endorse, explain or advocate homosexuality in any form. On the contrary, Fromm only briefly comments negatively on homosexuality as a deformation of what he views as the psychic polarity between male and female. Since Fromm's time, feminist and queer theory have questioned and rewritten the traditional concepts of sex, sexuality, and gender. In all fairness, Fromm developed his ideas in the first half of this century before the advent of much feminist thought and when psychiatry and psychology still classified homosexuality as a "curable" disease or psychological condition.¹⁹ In spite of these problems,

Fromm's ideas had a great impact during his time throughout the world. More importantly, in the context of the Military Process, after the generals' chauvinist discourse and their attempt to instill traditional gender roles in society, as Diana Taylor details in Disappearing Acts, Fromm's theories still present significant insights in human relations and help debunk the dictatorship's impact on society, and indirectly criticizes the Military Process.

Just as Fromm's recommendations place the sexual aspect below, or secondary to, the human and personal facet of an intimate relationship between two people, so does La brasa en la mano. While speaking about Esteban and Miguel, Pajarito minimizes their sexual activities and highlights the personal component of their interactions. This emphasis on the personal side appears clearly when the novel closes with Pajarito's lament for Miguel:

yo digo (me digo a mí mismo), doblado por tanto dolor, que daría mi vida para que todo volviera a suceder, para esperarlo, para repetir el nombre de Miguel, para oír su voz (ahora, sí que ya no está); para que el tiempo volviera, el mismo tiempo, cuando yo no sabía hacer otra cosa que amarlo. (191)

Throughout the novel characters place as much importance on the human facet of their relationships as on their sex life. Babá and the "housekeeper" Escobar constitute a couple, but neither ever mentions the sexual side of their attachment. Much of the final section of narration focuses on Myriam and his relationship with Hugo and with another man nicknamed El Príncipe entre Lirios. When Myriam realizes that Hugo will never belong to him, he cries because

comprendió desde ese día le darían una inmensa piedad los muchachos como Hugo; los que ni siquiera venden su belleza; los que tal vez "buscan" sin saber y ponen en juego sentimientos o formas del sentimiento, como la bondad y la nobleza, ignoradas en el mundo que les toca vivir. . . . (155-56)

By showing different gay men in love, La brasa en la mano professes that being homosexual goes beyond a mere sexual act between men but rather denotes deep feelings of affection and reciprocal respect. The most important element does not involve the sex and/or gender of the loved human being, but rather that one human being requites the emotions from another. Again Villordo's work implicitly condemns the generals and their sexist ideology.

At the same time La brasa en la mano never problematizes homosexuality, nor functions as an apology, nor presents any scientific or psychological justifications for the subject, like Manuel Puig's El beso de la mujer araña (1976). From its first page the text candidly presents male characters who are homosexual, and promises to discuss Pajarito and Miguel's love affair. The novel directly treats all the characters as unique individuals at all times. While overflowing with gay characters and situations, it also eliminates possible barriers between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The characters move about Buenos Aires freely and uninhibitedly, and during their daily lives they never display signs of internalized homophobia, heterophobia, or the anxiety of living in a heterosexual world. In addition, the characters never express remorse for acknowledging and accepting their sexuality or make declarations against their heterocentric society. During his interview with Mona Moncalvillo, Villordo makes this point clear: "pero en mi libro te aseguro que no. No es una apología, es una trágica verdad que enseña un hecho, y nada más" (116; emphasis in original). Alongside the stylistic and literary considerations presented above, it is crucial to keep in mind that La brasa en la mano is unequivocally a gay novel. In this manner the text

offers the beginnings of a more complex critique of society and its views concerning homosexuality.

Although it accentuates the human aspects of the homosexual characters, at the same time Villordo's novel does not obscure the realities of the gay male subculture, or marginal society, in Buenos Aires. While celebrating his birthday, Beto, Pajarito, Adolfo and Myriam frolic in the center of Buenos Aires, mainly in the port area of El Bajo and Retiro, on the street and in the bars and confiterías. Pajarito portrays in detail how and where the gay men interact. In fact, Pajarito reveals that he has a rendezvous with Beto in an unnamed "cruising area" of Buenos Aires. During Babá's dinner party, the characters describe moments of seduction and tragic events in their tales. Myriam recounts how one night a man followed him home and attempted to seduce him, and adds that when he conceded and took the man home, the paramour then sexually assaulted him. When Myriam refused to give the pick-up the demanded money, he then proceeded to create a scandal and awoke everyone in the house. As a result, his aunts ousted Myriam who then lived on the street as a rogue and prostitute until Babá "adopted" him. In a similar manner Lucho, who also lives in Babá's house, recounts his escapade and later affair with the neighbor boy "Gallito." While remembering his

relationship with Esteban, Pajarito freely admits that Esteban, and possibly Miguel, works as a male prostitute. La brasa en la mano does not present a sanitized or platonic version of male gay life in Buenos Aires but rather depicts gay lifestyle in all its many facets. As mentioned earlier, in this manner Villordo's work acquires a documentary characteristic about homosexual men.

In addition to portraying the gay male subculture of Buenos Aires, La brasa en la mano includes a wide range of characters who generally do not enter the stereotypical notions of homosexual men or circumstances. When Beto and Pajarito first become acquainted with each other they meet in the unnamed "cruise area," and Beto recalls how he had just finished a sexual encounter with a soccer player. Also, the above synopsis notes how both Beto and Pajarito court and have sexual relations with two young military conscripts. In addition, throughout the novel other characters recount stories involving liaisons with soldiers. Given the generals' puritanical outlook, such episodes fly in the face of the military's discourse and probably disturbed many of the regime's supporters. Myriam confesses that he meets his beau Hugo while the latter completes his military service. In fact the two men meet when Hugo guards a military site and

follows Myriam into a church so that the two can make contact. Later, during Babá's dinner party, four truck drivers arrive and partake in the dinner, and probably enjoy other worldly pleasures. In fact Beto tries to seduce one of the drivers. Myriam's boyfriend, El Príncipe entre Lirios, works as a truck driver and figures among the four exceptional guests in these scenes as well. All these characters represent types of men who traditionally do not figure among the stereotypical definition of a male homosexual. If Villordo's text had been replete with transvestites, drag queens, or libidinous and highly "effeminate" men, it would have reinforced the typical societal belief that all homosexuals are deformed men longing to be women, or pederasts waiting to corrupt the unsuspecting youth of Argentina. Although the novel includes several brief sex scenes, this is not its focus. In the interview with Mona Moncalvilo, Villordo himself states that scandal does not play a role in the novel. Thus, by dissociating gay men from these cliché images, by including gay characters outside of those stereotypes, and by portraying the gay subculture of Buenos Aires, intentionally or unintentionally, La brasa en la mano acquires a documentary-like quality. More importantly, these scenes and depictions of gay men challenge many prejudices

common in a traditional heterosexual society. Thus the novel puts into doubt many stereotypes and also offers general criticism about Argentine society for a first-track interpretation. At the same time, these same comments and descriptions form the basis for a second-track reading of the text that criticizes the Military Process.

An overview of the cultural and social atmosphere of 1983 underscores the impact and the importance of the publication of La brasa en la mano. As previously stated, during this time Argentina was emerging from one of the bloodiest military dictatorships ever in Latin America. Simultaneously the country was also preparing for the return of and to democracy. Not only did the Military Process attempt to reorganize the country along different social, economic, and political lines, but the armed forces also considered themselves the saviours of the nation. Furthermore the military strove to purge society of what it considered foreign and dangerous beliefs, and the believers. To justify their "mission," the military consistently invoked "Western and Christian Civilization" and "Family Values." Frank Graziano, in his study Divine Violence, investigates the juntas' discourse and world view and he concludes that the different generals envisioned themselves as the heirs,

the protectors, and the defenders of a long Christian tradition in Argentina and the Western World.²⁰ The regime refused to tolerate any differences:

The Process "reorganizing," among other things, what it meant to be Argentine regarded anyone even passively opposed to the Junta's agenda as a traitor, as a "subversive" who disowned the country's historical achievement and who was therefore being reciprocally disowned by the State. (217-218; capitalization in original)

The dictatorship denied that there would be any neutral space. According to the generals, Argentines fell into two diametrically opposed camps: "patriots" or "subversives." Any dissent against the government's ideals automatically relegated people to the "subversive" group. Osvaldo Soriano's Cuarteles del invierno (1982) illustrates this polarized situation where the armed forces transform a boxing match into a metaphorical war of the military against the civilians.

Furthermore, in the generals' eyes, any act against the Military Process ultimately became a transgression against God. If a citizen did not fully agree, then that citizen must be eliminated. As General Ibérico Saint-Jean, governor of the province of Buenos Aires, stated at

one point: "Primero vamos a matar a todos los subversivos; después a sus colaboradores; después a los simpatizantes; después a los indiferentes y por último a los tímidos" (Avellaneda, Censura 237). This much-quoted declaration demonstrates the dictatorship's tunnel-vision perception of the world. With such a definition, anyone and anything could become "subversive" and subject to "elimination," especially gay men, lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgendered persons, not to mention a heterosexual woman who refuses marriage and motherhood as her *raison d'être*.

In addition to prohibiting open discussion on political, social, and economic topics, the regime also prohibited the mere mention of homosexuality. As Carlos Jáuregui asserts, the military regime ran propaganda aimed at the parents so that they would control their children and prevent them from falling into "subversion" or "perversion," i.e. masturbation, pre-marital sex or experimentation with homosexuality (168). Given these circumstances, in addition to a very conservative Roman Catholic mentality, the discussion of homosexuality was still a highly risky venture in 1983. Moreover, the publication of a novel that openly and non-judgmentally depicts gay men like La brasa en la mano clearly

transforms itself into a defiant rejoinder of the Military Process and its ideology.

When La brasa en la mano arrived in the bookstores of Argentina in 1983, it entered a society recovering from a nightmarish, highly charged, violent, and polarized period. In addition, Villordo's text also ingressed into an equally politicized literary tradition. As Beatriz Sarlo observes in her essay "Strategies of the Literary Imagination:"

In Argentina . . . in the early through mid-1970s, the actors in the intellectual field wove aesthetic and ideological themes into the design of a cultural utopia in which the aesthetic and political revolutions were more or less identified with one another. Although we now know that this was only a utopia, like all utopias, it had profound aesthetic and political consequences. (236-237)

Though she does not provide an example, Manuel Puig's El beso de la mujer araña (1976), with its discussion and combination of Marxist politics and homosexuality, undoubtedly conforms with Sarlo's observations. In contrast to Puig's novel, Villordo's novel does not engage in any lengthy discussion or explanation of homosexuality. In fact, La brasa en la mano is a highly

non-polemical work of literature, which concentrates more on the events of the story than a political agenda. Perhaps this non-argumentative character of La brasa en la mano, combined with a reading public recuperating from a highly pugnacious time, may help to explain the success and the significance of Villordo's text. After decades of divisive discourses that classified Argentines as pro-Peronist or anti-Peronist (canguros or gorilas respectively in 1970s argot) true-Argentine or subversive, revolutionary or reactionary, vendepatrias or patriot, oficialista or independent, the non-judgmental and undogmatic tone in Villordo's novel, along with flowing and poetic prose, probably appeared as a welcome relief for many people.

During these transition years to democracy other authors, besides Villordo, explored the previously prohibited topics of sexuality. In 1984 Ana María Shúa published her second novel Los amores de Laurita. In this coming-of-age novel, the narration focuses on Laurita through her different heterosexual experiences before marriage. Similar to La brasa en la mano, Shúa's novel presents human sexuality in a non-judgmental and non-moralistic form. The ending of the novel, with the emphasis on the pleasures available in masturbation,

denotes another innovative aspect of Los amores de Laurita.

To fully appreciate the achievement reached by Villordo's novel, one must take into account its readers. After all, Bruguera would not have produced five editions if there had not been readers, or consumers, who expressed an interest in Villordo's work with their pesos. During the Military Process, self-censorship was just as prevalent and damaging to Argentine cultures as state-sponsored censorship. Possessing a copy of a banned book, like Karl Marx's Capital, Mario Vargas Llosa's La tía Julia y el Escribidor, or even Saint-Exupery's Le Petit Prince also became a crime. Shortly after the coup d'etat in March 1976 many Argentines performed acts of self-censorship by burying or burning books that might be viewed as indicators of "subversion." Just as the regime considered expressing certain views and opinions as hazardous, so the government deemed possessing and reading certain books as dangerous and clear grounds for detention and disappearance. In these circumstances, purchasing and reading a possible "subversive" book like La brasa en la mano constituted an act of defiance against the Military Process. I repeat that the appearance of Villordo's book slaps the generals in the face, and is tantamount to how the other texts

analyzed in this study criticize the regime and its abuses. Furthermore the success of Villordo's book forms part of a long continuum of Argentines' resistance against the regime, as first noted by the triumph of the lampoon Humor and by the impact of Teatro Abierto during the dictatorship, and, after the restoration of democracy, the many editions of Nunca más, the report by Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas.

When Argentina emerged from over seven long years of the Military Process, the country faced the challenge of reconstructing a civil and democratic society. Clearly, this process would not be easy or painless after the many traumatic events of the past two decades. But, before the institutional transfer of power from the military to the civilian sector of society, certain developments in the cultural sphere indicated that the Argentines were already changing their consciousness and were willing to return to democracy. The success of Villordo's novel La brasa en la mano points toward this broader social trend. The literary and documentary aspects of La brasa en la mano serve to explain its attractiveness and commercial success. More importantly, the triumph of La brasa en la mano implies that the Argentines had begun to rethink their identity and other important social issues, long silenced by the repressive government. Its appearance

and its market success provided a harsh critique of the military and many societal stereotypes about homosexuality. Perhaps at no other time in Argentine history was there a need to look at people as people and not through preconceived stereotypes such as Peronist, "subversive," or "homosexual." Fortunately, La brasa en la mano appeared at this crucial moment in Argentina and contributed to the society's process of healing and regeneration after the disastrous Process of National Reorganization.

Notes

¹ This series included the works of well known and established writers such as Pedro Orgambide, Humberto Costantini, and Antonio DiBenedetto as well as younger authors like Mempo Giardinelli and Juan Carlos Martini. At the same time Centro Editor de América Latina introduced several different series of home libraries that emphasized Spanish-American and Argentine literature and intellectual thought.

² In early 1983 the government confiscated the issues of several magazines, including issue 97 of Humor (January) and threatened to close down the respective printing companies. Although they knew their days were numbered, the generals still acted with impunity.

³ During 1984 Humor published two articles that demonstrate that Argentine society was developing an intense interest about male homosexuality. In issue 122 (February 1984) Aníbal Vinelli, in his column "Cortes y confesión. Censura: en busca del tiempo afanado," wrote positively about the United States film Making Love by Arthur Hiller, translated to Spanish as Su otro amor.

Later, in issue 133 of Humor (August 1984), Daniel López published a three-page article that discussed homosexuality in Argentine cinema. In the introduction

López summarized the great amount of information about homosexuality currently available in the mass media. Hence, the response to La brasa en la mano forms part of a much broader interest in homosexuality. Unfortunately, neither article commented on lesbianism.

⁴ Shortly before his death due to AIDS on 1 January 1994, Villordo successfully launched his recent novel Sergay no es pecado in November of 1993. Villordo continued his creative pursuits literally until he died as seen when Planeta published his study El grupo Sur: una biografía colectiva. I thank Christopher T. Leland and Osvaldo Sabino for introducing Villordo to me during my Fulbright grant in Argentina.

⁵ Bruguera uses this same quotation on the inside covers of La brasa en la mano. At the same time the book includes positive evaluations about Villordo's prose and poetry made by Juan Carlos Ghiano, Manuel Mujica Láinez, and Eduardo González Lanuza.

⁶ Mona Moncalvillo had joined the staff of Humor in October 1979. After that date Moncalvillo acquired a reputation as a serious journalist who interviewed important figures such as Raúl Alfonsín, Jorge Luis Borges, Ernesto Sabato, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Hebe de Bonafini as well as foreign celebrities, such as Joan

Baez, during their visit to Argentina.

⁷ Daniel Divinski, the owner of Ediciones de la Flor, became the director of Radio Belgrano after his return from exile in Venezuela. During the Military Process the government arrested Divinski and his wife and detained them for four months after his publishing house released El puño, a children's book that the regime considered subversive.

⁸ The writers Osvaldo Soriano and Aída Bortnik, and the journalists Luis Gregorich and Norberto Firpo represent only a few of the many people who worked for Humor and published articles and interviews throughout the Military Process.

⁹ Ana María Shúa commented on this situation to me in a personal interview on 4 July 1994, in Buenos Aires.

¹⁰ I thank Professor Danny J. Anderson for this information about Joaquín Mortiz.

¹¹ Curiously, 1976 saw the publication of El beso de la mujer araña, by Manuel Puig, Fiesta de gala, by Ernesto Schóó, and Ay de mí, Jonathan, by Carlos Arcidiácono, all three with gay characters. In addition, Reina Roffé finished Monte de Venus about a woman coming to terms with her lesbianism. Puig published his novel outside of Argentina whereas Schóó, Arcidiácono, and

Roffé published their novels in Argentina, just after the March coup d'etat. Because of the military regime's prohibition of homosexual topics, Schóó, Roffé and Arcidiácono received brief critical attention.

Unfortunately, after the Military Process the critics never "recuperated" these novels from the closet. I thank Christopher T. Leland and Osvaldo Sabino for this important information.

¹² The following is the breakdown of the récit of La brasa en la mano. The preponderance of the action on the second day becomes very obvious.

1: Miguel and Pajarito (7-9): Day 1

2: Pajarito and Beto (9-31): Day 1

3: Pajarito's thoughts about Miguel (31-32):

Previous to Day 1

4: Soldiers in the plaza (32-41): Day 1

5: Andrea's apartment (41-48): Day 1

6: Andrea, Esteban and Pajarito on the beach

(48-52): Action previous to Day 1

7: Andrea's apartment (52-56): Day 1

8: Recollections in Andrea's apartment (56): Day 1

9: Esteban--his relationship (56-58): Reflection

previous to Day 1

10: Beto and Pajarito on the street with the

conscripts (58-61): Day 1

11: Pajarito's pensión (61-98): Day 1 and Day 2 (67)

12: Babá's dinner party (98-191): Day 2

¹³ During the interview with Moncalvillo in Humor, Villordo explained that the character Beto was a complete invention and not modeled after a friend or an acquaintance. Moncalvillo comments: "De esa novela [La brasa en la mano] hay un personaje que me impresionó mucho, Beto; vos lo considerás un personaje monstruo. . . ." Villordo rejoins: "Me gusta que te haya impresionado. . . . Es un personaje absolutamente inventado. Si salió mal, paciencia, pero hay que quererlo" (115; emphasis in the original).

¹⁴ David William Foster is the only critic who has paid any attention to Villordo's work. I have only uncovered two published references to La brasa en la mano, first is a short review in World Literature Today and the second a brief analysis in "Los parámetros de la narrativa argentina durante el 'Proceso.'"

¹⁵ I will use Scheherezade instead of the more current transliteration of Shahrazad. For a brief explanation of the history of The Thousand and One Nights, see the first chapter of Sandra Naddaff's Arabesque.

¹⁶ Villordo is not the only novelist who cites Fromm's work. Carlos Arcidiácono also begins his novel Ay de mí, Jonathan by citing Fromm:

Buen día. Buen día a todos los días de tu vida. Porque un señor que escribió un libro sobre "el arte de amar" (así nomás, como si fuera una habilidad circense) dice que amar quiere decir eso. (9)

This passage demonstrates the importance of Fromm's ideas during the 1960s and the 1970s in Argentina.

¹⁷ In a sense La brasa en la mano becomes a "uchronic" novel since the action appears to float in time, without any historical references to anchor the text in historical reality.

¹⁸ For a concise history of the different translators and translations of The Thousand and One Nights see Jorge Luis Borges's essay "Los traductores de las 1001 noches," originally published in Historia de la eternidad (1936).

¹⁹ It was only in 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association declared that homosexuality was not a disease or a disorder, but a natural part of the human condition.

²⁰ Graziano creates a chart that contrasts the juntas' definition of themselves and of the subversives:

<u>Junta</u>	<u>"Subversives"</u>
West	East (Marxist)

Christian	Atheist
Good	Evil
Christ	Antichrist
Natural Order	Anarchy/Disorder
Argentine (<u>patria</u>)	Alien (<u>apátridas</u>)
Freedom	Enslavement
Soul/Spirit	Flesh/Matter
Peacelover	Warmongers
Life	Death
Love	Hate/Lust
Truth	Lies/Deceit
Protect	Destroy
Home/Family	Communal binds/Party
Mature	Immature
Political Right	Political Left (115)

The strict binary opposition prevalent in the military's thought did not leave any neutral space or the possibility of discussing alternatives. Although the category "Heterosexual--Homosexual" does not figure in Graziano's analysis, other such groupings as "Christian--Atheist," "Good--Evil" and "Home/Family--Communal binds/Party" appropriate this classification.

Conclusion:

After the end?

Between 1976 and 1986, the Military Process profoundly affected Argentine culture much more than any previous military dictatorship of the twentieth century. The novels analyzed in this study demonstrate this fact clearly. My original hypotheses went through multiple mutations as I encountered problems with generational definitions and periodization. Furthermore, my investigation revealed the existence of many novelists who published many works during these years but who were almost unknown in the United States. Initially, my project proposed to explain how the unstable political situation had influenced narrative production and how the younger generation of writers who had remained in Argentina and written "home novels" (in contrast to the "exile novels" written and published outside Argentina) denounced and condemned the policies of the military regime while they simultaneously eluded censorship. In brief, I was romantically yearning to discover the rebel artists, located on the margins of society, who valiantly saw the truth and risked losing their lives in the face of tyranny. I longed to unearth a large and intricate network of resistance to the military government.

Watching too many late-night Hollywood World-War II movies as a child and adolescent, as well as reacting to the crass Cold-War ideology in the United States probably fomented this idealized cosmovision. In short, I wanted to find the porteño Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

After realizing the misconceptions, my attention returned to Argentina and broadened the question about how the Proceso Militar altered Argentine culture as well as narrative. Gradually, I perceived several important points that seem quite obvious to me now. Considering and comprehending how popular culture vigorously rejoined the military government aided my understanding of how narrative evolved. The lampoon magazine Humor registrado, or Humo[®], became central to my understanding since it broke the military's imposed silence, first by recognizing obvious social and economic problems, and later by slowly opening a space to let alternate cultural voices speak. With this broad knowledge of Argentine culture, I discerned that the Military Process, unlike its expressed desires, did not mark an ending or a beginning to forms of cultural and artistic expression. Instead, culture persevered through the dictatorship, as seen in preceding chapters which underscore three fundamental dynamics. First, they have illustrated the implications of the medical metaphor of the "coma" to

depict the evolution of cultural production during these years. Second, the analyses of representative novels have focused attention on the interaction between text and the changing context, between aesthetics and ethics. And third, among these disparate novels, a fundamental social function for literature emerges that I have recognized as testimonial or pseudo-testimonial writing.

When the military installed the first junta on 24 March 1976, Argentine culture entered a profound coma. Beginning in 1977, culture slowly emerged from this comatose state and by 1980 had fully awakened. This medical metaphor is preferable to the images of "dormancy," "death and rebirth" or the "phoenix rising from the ashes" for several reasons. Argentine culture did not cease to exist in 1976, but rather became inactive, or in some cases went underground, until the regime's policies were known. The culture that appeared after 1977 was not something new, like a new incarnation, but rather a permutation or a continuation of the cultural activities that had existed prior to 1976. The same authors reappeared and carried on Argentine and Spanish-American literary trends. "Dormancy" denotes part of a natural cycle of rest and regeneration. This is not the case since the military imposed unnatural conditions. Similarly, the "phoenix" metaphor implies a

sudden brilliant resurgence of culture from a vacuum. Rather than experience a sudden recovery, Argentine culture gradually recuperated after 1977.

The Military Process did not give rise to a generation of new writers. Instead, many of the same authors of the pre-dictatorship period were instrumental in the continuation of Argentine culture after the March 1976 coup d'etat; yet their new works showed marks, traces and the influence of the Military Process. Both Abelardo Castillo and Liliana Hecker's re-founding the journal El escarabajo de oro as El ornitorrinco in 1977, and Carlos Altamirano's reorganizing of Los libros as Punto de vista in 1978 attest to the continuation of earlier cultural institutions. But the new names for these previous journals indicate the presence and the influence of, as well as resistance to, the Military Process. Founding a literary journal in 1977, amid economic and political difficulties, was as incongruous and out of place as the duckbilled platypus (ornitorrinco) in zoology. Punto de vista indicates a plurality of voices, opinions and interpretations, none of which the military government tolerated. Argentine culture awoke from this coma, mainly intact, but suffering from tremendous aftereffects or a serious hangover.

In summary, cultural life did not end on 24 or 25 March 1976, but continued on various different levels. Culture--high or low, mass or popular, escapist or critical--did not cease abruptly. Soon after March 1976, Argentine critical culture suffered attacks in the form of governmental censorship, blacklists and prohibited subjects and topics. Eduardo Galeano closed his journal Crisis four months after the coup d'etat in July of 1976, and then went into exile in Spain. Similarly, the initial publication and later prohibition of Enrique Medina's El Duke and Reina Roffé Monte de Venus in 1976 indicate that the new military government needed some time to organize itself and did not immediately clamp down on all aspects of society since the junta concerned itself initially with the different guerrilla groups.

In spite of governmental policies and economic restraints (or polic(i)es since the police are central in enforcing governmental policies), Argentine writers produced a large body of literature, especially novels, short stories and drama. The Military Process marked its presence, or left its "traces," in this extensive body of narrative, which constitute the aspects that my "dual-track" readings of these texts have revealed. The first track considers general criticism about Argentine society

and the second track explores condemnation specifically about the regime.

This "dual-track" approach still possesses elements of my original Romantic hypothesis, since it posits the authors as rebellious voices, valiantly explaining the abuses of the military dictatorship under and through different veils. I discovered that some novels, mainly the narratives of negation analyzed in chapter two, lacked conspicuous references to the military regime. For example, Ana María Shúa's Soy paciente avoids direct comments about the military government or the consequences of its policies. Yet the text portrays a patient's dealings with an incomprehensible hospital bureaucracy, which can be seen as a veiled critique of the modern nation-state, and only tangentially of the military regime.

At the same time, the dual-track reading did not explain the literary dynamics of all the novels published during the Military Process. Many texts, even the most political or critical, especially those studied in chapters three and four, also displayed other literary characteristics. For example, Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial, Juan Pablo Feinmann's Ni el tiro del final and Rodolfo Fogwill's Los pichiciegos have obvious political content and themes, yet they also

express complex philosophical, literary, or aesthetic concerns and questions. These texts make apparent the continuation of a long standing polemic in Argentine letters over "ethics" versus "aesthetics." While these three novels include "ethics," since they discuss the dictatorship, they also take into account "aesthetics" by crafting a work of art. In other words, these novels attempt to resolve the dilemma of creating a political work of literature and avoiding pure pamphleteering.¹ The reality of the Military Process slowly emerged as a candid part of the novel, but the aesthetics of literature remained a central interest as well. That is, the texts still project an overt consciousness of the importance of being works of art and a hesitation to be completely political.²

By aesthetics, I refer to both the form and the content of the novels. Of the home novels, Ricardo Piglia's Respiración artificial serves as the best illustration of how a text combines these two issues. Piglia's text presents multiple narrative voices within the general framework of an epistolary novel. At the same time, while detailing Emilio Renzi's futile search for his disappeared uncle Marcelo Maggi, Piglia's novel also includes discussions on Argentine literature (about

the import of Arlt and Borges, for example), self-reflexivity, history and the problems associated with historiography and a possible encounter between Hitler and Kafka in 1910.³

While resolving the aesthetic and ethic quandary in an original manner, and creating a space through which to discuss and criticize the Military Process, narrative, instead of breaking with the past, continued using and modifying Argentine and Spanish-American literary traditions. Narrative took several detours instead of commencing an entirely new trajectory. Many texts incorporated characteristics from the 1960s Boom, such as the totalizing novel, the metafictional novel, the contestation of official history and the testimonial novel. Likewise, the Argentine tradition of the historical novel and of detective fiction provided many models that the novelist could follow. Yet the narrative structure of the testimonial novel, or a pseudo-testimonial variant, emerges as a dominant attribute of many texts. In Los Pichiciegos Quiquito recounts his Malvinas War experiences to a psychologist. Similarly, Emilio Renzi in Respiración artificial and Ismael Navarro in Ni el tiro del final both remember and disclose unique incidents during the military dictatorship. In

these three novels the main characters, as in Emilio's and Ismael's cases, or another party, as in Quiquito's situation, pen their adventures into a written account.

Because of the fragmentation of society and the elimination of the public areas of discourse, the private and/or individual story remained as the only possible venue through which Argentines could express their experiences. Of course there were great differences in personal experiences. While the economic circumstances touched the entire population, the Military Process and its repressive policies affected many people, but it also left others completely unscathed. Only the major incidents such as the March 1976 coup d'etat, the 1978 World Cup and the 1982 Malvinas War were truly "national" experiences in the sense that these events captivated the entire nation, regardless of the citizens' political awareness. This fragmentation of society, while abolishing collective interaction and communication, such as political parties, trade unions, professional organizations and even personal interest groups, appears to have influenced writers to create narratives that center on the individual and his or her experience, rather than on several characters or an entire family. Of the seven novels analyzed in this study, Soy paciente, Respiración artificial, Ni el tiro del final, Los

Pichiciegos, and La brasa en la mano project part or all of their action through first-person narration. In a similar manner, Ultimos días de la víctima bases its plot exclusively through the assassin Mendizábal. Only in Baile de los guerreros does a third-person narrative voice emerge, present a multitude of characters, and dominate the majority of the text. From all my research I conclude that the narrative structure of the testimonial novel provides the best narrative techniques to communicate and represent the individual. This becomes even more evident since the military destroyed almost all possibilities and means for communicating and expressing collective opinions and beliefs, and forced the Argentines to distrust everyone and everything, except for each person's experiences and reality.

The Argentine armed forces returned the government and the state apparatus to Raúl Alfonsín and the Unión Cívica Radical on 10 December 1983, after democratic elections the previous October, and thus formally ended the Process of National Reorganization. However, before the generals and other officers left the governmental ministries and bureaucracies--national, provincial and municipal--Argentine letters had already begun the difficult task of restoring democracy and freedom to the cultural realm. The publication of Fogwill's Los

Pichiciegos, Marta Lynch's Informe bajo llave and Enrique Medina's Con el trapo en la boca had already taken into account the repercussions of the bloody dictatorship on society through individual characters. Also, these texts illustrated that narrative had survived the Military Process and had initiated a crucial step in the recovery of the public sphere. Furthermore, the market success of Villordo's La brasa en la mano further signaled that the Argentine public had not succumbed to the regime's pressures and attempts to change their mentality. In addition the existence of Villordo's novel and its thematics both questioned and contested the military's discourse. This de-processing of the Military Process will continue for decades to come.

Notes

¹ I thank Professor Jon Vincent for emphasizing this distinction between aesthetic and ethics in his Brazilian short story course.

² While writers in Argentina lived under the terror and searched for ways to speak about their experiences, authors in exile faced other challenges. Although government censorship did not directly affect them, exiles could not publish nor openly distribute their works in Argentina. The treatment of the military's policies emerged as the central difference between home writers and exile writers. Whereas the former home novelists were more reticent, the latter centered their narratives on this point. Yet while many exile novels are more overtly political than the home novels, the "ethics" versus "aesthetics" polemic still emerged as well. Humberto Costantini's De dioses, hombrecitos y policías best illustrates how the exile novels deal with this dilemma.

³ Marta Lynch's Informe bajo llave deals with similar kinds of concerns. The aesthetic aspect of Lynch's text comes through the narrative structure. The novel presents the life of the writer Adela and her sado-masochistic obsession with Señor Vargas, a member of the

ruling junta, as a psychological report. The ethical issues appear when Adela begins questioning Señor Vargas's businesses and contact with the military government. Eventually both concerns merge when Adela's relationship prevents her from writing literature, and she begins a discussion about writing. These questions also converge when the editor of Adela's report states that Adela has disappeared as another victim of the government.

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Apendix A

Writers and their novels 1976-1984

Authors in Argentina

Absatz, Cecilia

Té con canela (1982)

Aira, César

Ema, la cautiva (1981)

Aguinis, Marcos

La conspiración de los idiotas (1978)

Profanación del amor (1981)

Arcidiácono, Carlos

Ay de mí, Jonathan (1976)

Asís, Jorge

Flores robadas en los jardines de Ouilmes (1980)

Carne picada (1981)

Calle de los caballos muertos (1982)

Belgrano Rawson, Eduardo

Naúfrago de las estrellas (1979)

Castex, Mariano

El otro (1983)

Casullo, Nicolas

El frutero de los ojos radiantes (1984)

Catania, Carlos

El pintadodos (1984)

Cohen, Marcelo

El país de la dama eléctrica (1984)

Demitrópulos, Libertad

La flor de hierro (1978)

Río de las congojas (1981)

Diánocnu, Alina

Buenas noches, Profesor (1978)

Enamorada del muro (1981)

Dal Masetto, Antonio

Fuego a discreción (1984)

Etchenique, Nira

Persona (1979)

Feinmann, José Pablo

Los últimos días de la víctima (1979)

Ni el tiro del final (1981)

Firpo, Noberto

Cuerpo a tierra (1984)

Foguet, Hugo

Pretérito perfecto (1983)

Fogwill, Rodolfo

Los Pichiciegos (1983)

Fontanarrosa

Best Seller (1981)

El área 18 (1982)

Gorostiza, Carlos

Los cuartos oscuros (1976)

Gusman, Luis

Cuerpo velado (1978)

En el corazón de julio (1981)

Heker, Liliana

El resplandor que se apagó en el mundo (1977)

Larra, Raúl

La conspiración del gran Bonete (1984)

Levinson, Luisa Mercedes

El último Zenoflote (1984)

López, Fernando

El mejor enemigo (1984)

Lynch, Marta

La penúltima versión de Colorada Villanueva (1979)

Informe bajo llave (1983)

Manzur, Jorge

Tinta roja (1981)

Martelli, Juan Carlos

El cabeza (1977)

Martínez, Carlos Dámaso

Hay cenizas en el viento (1982)

Martini Real, Juan Carlos

Copyright (1980)

Masciangioli, Jorge

Buenaventura nunca más (1983)

Medina, Enrique

Strip-Tease (1976)

El Duke (1976)

Perros de la noche (1978)

Las muecas del miedo (1981)

Con el trapo en la boca (1983)

Mercader, Martha

Juanamanuela, mucha mujer (1979)

Orphée, Elvira

Las viejas fantasiosas (1981)

La última conquista de El Angel (1984)

Osorio, Elsa

Ritos privados (1982)

Piglia, Ricardo

Respiración artificial (1980)

Posse, Abel

Daimón (1978)

Los perros del paraíso (1983)

Rabanal, Rodolfo

Un día perfecto (1978)

En otra parte (1981)

El pasajero (1984)

Rivera, Andrés

Nada que perder (1982)

En esta dulce tierra (1984)

Schóó, Ernesto

Fiesta de gala (1976)

El baile de los guerreros (1979)

Shúa, Ana María

Soy paciente (1980)

Los días de pesca (1981)

Los amores de Laurita (1984)

Steimberg, Alicia

Su espíritu inocente (1981)

Tizón, Héctor

La casa y el viento (1983)

Torchelli, Américo

Bosta de paloma (1983)

Torre, Javier

Quemar las naves (1983)

Uhart, Hebe

La luz de un nuevo día (1983)

Ulla, Noemí

Ciudades (1983) (Cuentos)

Vázquez, María Carmela

Luna sangrienta (1984)

Villordo, Oscar Hermes

La brasa en la mano (1983)

Zamorano, Francisco

Bisieto viene de golpe (1983)

Apendix B

Writers and their novels 1976-1984

Authors in exile

Battista, Vicente

El libro de todos los engaños (1981)

Siroco (1983)

Bianco, José

Las ratas / Sombras suelen vestir (1978)

Bonasso, Miguel

Recuerdos de la muerte (1983)

Cohen, Marcelo

El país de la dama eléctrica (1984)

Costantini, Humberto

Dioses, policías y hombrecitos (1979)

La larga noche de Franciso Santis (1984)

En la noche (1984)

Gambaro, Griselda

Ganarse la muerte (1976)

Dios no nos quiere contentos (1979)

La malasangre (1981)

En teatro (1984)

Giardinelli, Mempo

Revolución en bicicleta (1976)

El cielo con las manos (1981)

Luna caliente (1983)

Goloboff, Gerardo Mario

Criador de palomas (1976)

Kociancich, Vlady

La octava maravilla (1982)

Martini, Juan Carlos

El cerco (1977)

La vida eterna (1981)

Composición de lugar (1984)

Masciangioli, Jorge

Buenaventura nunca más (1983)

Molloy, Silvia

En breve cárcel (1981)

Moreyra, Federico

Anónimo del siglo XX (1982)

El desangradero (1984)

Moyano, Daniel

El vuelo del tigre (1981)

Libro de navíos y borrascas (1983)

Orgambide, Pedro

Arrabal del mundo (1983)

Pura memoria (1983)

Hacer la América (1984)

Puig, Manuel

El beso de la mujer araña (1976)

Pubis angelical (1979)

Maldición eterna a quien lea estas páginas (1981)

Sangre del amor correspondido (1982)

Rabanal, Rodolfo

Un día perfecto (1978)

En otra parte (1981)

El pasajero (1984)

Roffé, Reina

Monte de Venus (1976)

La rompiente (1984)

Saer, Juan José

Nadie nada nunca (1980)

El entonado (1983)

Soriano, Osvaldo

No habrá más penas ni olvido (1980)

Cuarteles del invierno (1982)

Szichman, Mario

A las 20:25 la Señora entró en la inmortalidad
(1980)

Timerman, Jacobo

Preso sin nombre, celda sin número (1981)

Traba, Marta

Conversación al sur (1981)

En cualquier lugar (1984)

Valenzuela, Luisa

Cambio de armas (1982)

Cola de lagartija (1983)

Viñas, David

Cuerpo a cuerpo (1979)