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**Literary Approaches to Truth in Selected Novels  
of Carlos Gamerro**

Rolando Julián Bompadre

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the centrality of truth as the motivational force in a selection of Carlos Gamerro's novels, namely the first five (out of seven, to date) published by the author. Since Gamerro is also an essayist, a critic, and a lecturer, whenever relevant I also draw upon specific interventions by him to enrich my reading. I demonstrate that the crucial event in each of these novels are episodes leading to, or issuing from, the period of radical evil Argentina endured—the so-called 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional' (1976-1983)—through a fictional universe consistently interwoven across characters, places, and events. Furthermore, my study shows that all these novels are set in motion by the quest for a fictional truth, only to end up uttering another truth that questions the official one imposed by the dictatorship of 1976-1983 and the nationalist discourses that shaped it. I argue that, for this purpose, Gamerro's search for truth is carried out by deploying specific literary genres and traditions.

Even though the selected novels constitute a highly coherent universe—as I also prove with an Appendix summarising the most significant events in both historical and fictional realms—I develop my reading in the chronological order of publication of the novels, rather than of the historical episodes upon which they draw. Gamerro's universe begins with his first novel, *Las Islas* (1998), which has at its core the 'Proceso' and its aftermath. Here, he also introduces the main characters, places, and facts that will be further fictionalised in the ensuing novels. Like all of Gamerro's novels, *Las Islas* is developed in two times of narration—one in which the main episodes take place; the other in which truth is uttered. Because it is the only novel of the corpus that presents an equal degree of complexities at both levels, I devote the first two chapters to *Las Islas*. Chapter 3 examines the next two novels: *El sueño del señor juez* (2000) and *El secreto y las voces* (2002), both of which take place in the fictional village of Malihuel at two key moments of the creation and consolidation of an authoritarian/dictatorial state. Chapter 4 concentrates on *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (2004) and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* (2011), a diptych that follows the pattern of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* to stage the violent conflicts immediately preceding and following the coup d'état. By focusing on the actions of those guerrilla movements, my analysis shows that the armed groups disputed with the military the meaning of 'la Patria', giving thus a full view of the Argentinian nationalist field.

While Gamerro's drawing upon genres and rhetorical speech resources has been widely noticed by critics, no in-depth study of the importance of truth for his fictional universe has been made before. Therefore, my thesis is the first study that brings to the fore the cruciality of truth in his novels delving into the dictatorship of 1976-1983 as an infamous instance of radical evil in Argentina's history. In this regard, my work gives a unifying account of Gamerro's use of literary resources and traditions. In addition to the mentioned contributions, my work has also benefited from access to Gamerro's archives in Buenos Aires, giving me a unique insight into his process of composition of *Las Islas* as the starting point of his fictional universe. My thesis thus brings together a comprehensive reading of the central works of a writer developing one of the most interesting and original fictional universes in Latin American literature today.

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## NOTE ON QUOTATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

For the writing of this thesis, I have employed the most recent (and thus available) editions of the selected novels by Carlos Gamerro. They have all been published or republished by Edhasa in Buenos Aires and have suffered no modifications from their first editions. The only exception—as the author himself notes in his foreword to the 2012 edition—is *Las Islas*. All quotations from this novel come from the definitive edition. For this specific case, I have confronted this text with the first edition. I have made it clear whenever a relevant change for the purpose of my work has been identified. A list of the original editions is provided in the Bibliography.

While in the main body of the thesis the titles will be given in full or in an abbreviated form, quotations from them will be referenced as follows:

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>LI</i>   | <i>Las Islas</i> (Edhasa, 2012)                               |
| <i>SSJ</i>  | <i>El sueño del señor juez</i> (Edhasa, 2017)                 |
| <i>SV</i>   | <i>El secreto y las voces</i> (Edhasa, 2011)                  |
| <i>ABE</i>  | <i>La aventura de los bustos de Eva</i> (Edhasa, 2012)        |
| <i>YCCG</i> | <i>Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara</i> (Edhasa, 2011) |

To Andrea, Lucía, Carola, and Mateo

## INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the year that democracy was restored in Argentina, the philosopher Santiago Kovadloff published an essay in which he reflected on the use of language by teenagers at that pivotal moment of the country's history. After acknowledging that every new generation shapes its own particular use of words, terms, and expressions, Kovadloff drew attention to the specificity of the language employed by those aged under twenty in the early 1980s, observing,

el rotundo abandono de la connotación literal; la entusiasta afición a un léxico que recurre a la denigración para exaltar el afecto y se vale muchas veces de la imprecisión, la anomalía, lo repulsivo y los nombres de la muerte para enunciar sentimientos de ternura, pena o solidaridad.<sup>1</sup>

Kovadloff offered a clear explanation. He argued that the teenagers' language use reflected a disconnect between the literal meaning of words and their actual intent, as they 'crecieron en una Argentina corrompida por la demagogia y clausurada y envilecida por la dictadura militar. Aprendieron, desde niños, que cuando hablan los gobernantes hay que entender como real lo contrario de lo que dicen. [...] Los chicos que hoy no tienen veinte años todavía saben que la verdad, en el lenguaje oficial, está sepultada por la patraña.'<sup>2</sup> For the generation to which Carlos Gamerro belongs, the mere possibility of uttering a truthful word was thus definitely cancelled by the most criminal regime the country endured—the 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional' (1976-1983)—, a period categorised, after Immanuel Kant's expression, as 'radical evil'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Santiago Kovadloff, 'Paradojas del lenguaje juvenil', in Kovadloff, *La nueva ignorancia. Ensayos reunidos* (Emecé, 2001), pp. 55-9 (p. 57).

<sup>2</sup> Kovadloff, 'Paradojas del lenguaje juvenil', pp. 57 and 58.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (Yale University Press, 1996), p. vii.

or, in Hannah Arendt's, as an 'administrative massacre.'<sup>4</sup> Such events and outcomes were certainly not unknown in human history. Referring to specific massacres in classical antiquity, José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski elucidate that 'las matanzas fueron tan atroces que interrumpieron las cadenas de causas y efectos y, en consecuencia, el lenguaje u otros medios de representación fueron considerados inadecuados para describir tales episodios,' while twentieth-century mass slaughters led to the realisation that 'no existan palabras para describir lo acaecido.'<sup>5</sup> In his *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), Primo Levi refers that many survivors returned 'mute' from the concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> Maybe as a symptom of that 'interrupted chain' between words and their meanings, if not the outright lack of adequate terms, an early draft of *Las Islas* had Felipe Félix (the narrator and main character of the novel, born, like Gamerro, in 1962) suffering from aphasia.<sup>7</sup> The eventual recovery of his faculties of speech required him to draw upon languages different from that of power to elaborate truthful constructs.

This alienation of truth from power as the articulating element of Gamerro's fictions was further confirmed upon reading his other novels set in Argentina. If truth could not be stated in the language of power, what set in motion those fictions was always a question related to truth: in *Las Islas*, the Malvinas/Falklands War veteran and now hacker Felipe Félix was hired by millionaire Fausto Tamerlán to find out key information in order to conceal the truth of a crime; in *El sueño del señor juez*, the wrongdoings and offences attributed to the inhabitants of the small village of Malihuel were 'true' only because the state authority had dreamed them; in *El secreto y las voces*, Fefe returned to Malihuel with the ultimate purpose of uncovering the truth about his identity; in *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and its sequel, *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara*, Ernesto Marroné felt the moment had arrived to disclose to his son the truth

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<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin, 1992), p. 294; and Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente. Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2002), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas". *Representar masacres y genocidios* (Katz, 2014), pp. 12 and 15.

<sup>6</sup> Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, in Levi, *Opere*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, 2 vols (Einaudi, 1997), II, pp. 995-1153 (p. 1056). My translation.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communications with Carlos Gamerro, Buenos Aires, December 2015, and 3 January 2024.

about his past as a guerrilla fighter. In all of them, a purposeful quest ultimately led to a truth in one way or another involving a political (as well as economic) regime that, even in those of Gamerro's novels not taking place during the 'Proceso' itself, emerged as a state with authoritarian/dictatorial features.

Some traits of this kind of political regime—and the writer's stance towards it—are present in descriptions such as the one Gamerro gave a few years ago, in his participation in a literary festival in Mumbai, where he stated:

In times of authoritarianism, sectarianism, censorship, collective or personalized threats, all of which *may lead to or stem from varying forms of state terrorism* [...], *we tend to look towards writers as the last guarantee of truth*, which is rather paradoxical given that writers are essentially people who make up stories, i.e., liars.<sup>8</sup>

Truth in connection with fictional writing and the dictatorship has indeed been a chief concern for Gamerro since his early literary reflections. In an essay of 2005 about the decline of noir fiction in Argentina, for instance, he significantly argued that,

el Proceso no terminó del todo. Los militares abandonaron las calles y se replegaron a los cuarteles [...]. Pero antes de retirarse, le pasaron la antorcha a la policía. Y a través de ella el Proceso siguió en las calles, matando, saqueando, torturando, haciendo desaparecer a las personas.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, it is of no surprise that he ends the above-mentioned essay with a 'Decálogo del relato policial argentino' which asserts that the aim of the state offices in charge of investigating criminal deeds and enforcing law becomes 'ocultar la verdad' or 'encubrir a la policía', i.e., proceed as mere accomplices of that body thanks to which the dictatorship has outlived itself.<sup>10</sup> If post-dictatorial nations, as Martín Böhmer explains, 'tend to have their institutions dismantled and their civil societies in moral disarray',<sup>11</sup> it

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<sup>8</sup> In Pooja Pillai, 'Writers are the last guarantee of truth', *The Indian Express*, 19 November 2016 <<http://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/books/carlos-gamerro-crime-fiction-politics-writer-4383066/>> [accessed 28 August 2017]. My emphasis. All italics in quotations are mine unless stated otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> Carlos Gamerro, 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino', in Gamerro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, 2nd rev. edn (Excursiones, 2015), pp. 56-65 (p. 62).

<sup>10</sup> Gamerro, 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino', pp. 64 and 65.

<sup>11</sup> Martín Böhmer, 'Not one answer?', *African Yearbook of Rhetoric*, 3.2 (2012), pp. 3-14 (p. 5).

seems logical that ‘the last guarantee of truth’ must lie with someone other than state agencies. Writers such as Gamerro ‘hace[n] saber la verdad que nadie quiere oír.’<sup>12</sup>

Critical literature has paid relatively little attention to the weight of truth in Gamerro’s novels, even though most critics observe that all of them deal with specific historical events. Exceptions to this rule are the essays by Martín Kohan or Ezequiel De Rosso. In his analysis of *Las Islas*, Kohan grapples with the question of which literary genre best captures the experience of the Malvinas/Falklands War in a fictional narrative. Dismissing the epic form, Kohan argues that the marriage of farce and drama in *Las Islas* creates ‘un momento de verdad de la guerra de Malvinas.’<sup>13</sup> For his part, De Rosso traces sci-fi and cyberpunk elements in three Latin American novels, where in a footnote he affirms:

En *Las [I]slas*, ese régimen de verdad (el de la verdad racional que exige comprobación) es reemplazado por otro (la verdad pasional que exige fidelidad). En verdad, podría decirse que el punto central de la novela de Gamerro es el descubrimiento de esa nueva forma de la verdad.<sup>14</sup>

Inspired by analyses that connect specific historical events to suitable literary genres, I have focused on Gamerro’s novels set in Argentina. My aim is to explore the central role of truth-seeking in these five novels: *Las Islas* (1998), *El sueño del señor juez* (2000), *El secreto y las voces* (2002), *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (2004), and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* (2011). They form a tightly woven fictional universe, revolving around the tycoon Fausto Tamerlán, his corporation, and the fictional town of Malihuel, all the while keeping the events of the ‘Proceso’ at the forefront. I argue that in Gamerro’s works, truth is not just the ‘discovery’ of a ‘new kind of truth’, but the

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<sup>12</sup> Gamerro, ‘Para una reformulación del género policial argentino’, p. 63. Following Rodolfo Walsh’s pattern in *Operación masacre* (1957), Gamerro proposes that this be either a journalist or a private individual (p. 65).

<sup>13</sup> Martín Kohan, ‘El fin de una épica’, *Punto de Vista*, 64 (1999), pp. 6-11 (p. 7).

<sup>14</sup> Ezequiel De Rosso, ‘La línea de sombra: literatura latinoamericana y ciencia-ficción en tres novelas contemporáneas’, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 78.238-239 (2012), pp. 311-28 (p. 324. n31). More recent allusions to truth can be found in Esteban Espejo, ‘La voz de los verdugos: cuando la ficción escribe lo que la historia calla. A propósito de *Las Islas*, de Carlos Gamerro’, *XIII Seminario Internacional Políticas de la Memoria. Memorias y Derechos Humanos* (2022).

culmination of a story driven by a specific truth-related quest that ultimately reveals a truth about the historical event that is at the origin of the fiction.

Since all of Gamerro's novels, including the two beyond the scope of this thesis (*Cardenio* [2016] and *La jaula de los onas* [2021]), engage with identifiable historical moments, my selection adheres to Luis Alberto Romero's concept of 'el pasado que duele'. This proves more fitting than 'the recent past' to highlight the enduring relevance of the chosen novels. 'El pasado que duele' emphasises the lingering impact of these historical events, as it alludes to,

*la parte del pasado en la que los conflictos del presente todavía se reconocen [...] ese pasado no es solo lo inmediato: desde 1976 han transcurrido ya más de treinta años y seguimos considerándolo reciente y, para muchos, el año 1945 también sigue estando muy presente. Ese pasado que duele, que incluye partes de lo reciente y partes de lo no tan reciente, todavía está vivo y cada tanto reaparece en las discusiones.*<sup>15</sup>

Gamerro's literary universe is imbued with real historical events, integrated to varying degrees of explicitness. As this study will show, these events are crucial circumstances that impact all the central characters and decisively influence their lives and destinies. The verbalisation of a truth about those real events thus becomes instrumental in understanding the characters' experiences and ultimate fates.

I will explore the relationship between historical events and their corresponding fictions through the lens of literary genre. This approach aligns with the growing body of scholarship on Gamerro's works of fiction, where genre analysis has become a prominent interpretive tool. Kohan's seminal essay on *Las Islas* serves as a prime example. While Kohan initially situated *Las Islas* within the then-limited tradition of Malvinas/Falklands War fictions (a reading widely accepted by other critics<sup>16</sup>), Juan Terranova offered a contrasting perspective by arguing that *Las Islas* uniquely captured

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<sup>15</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *La Argentina que duele. Historia, política, sociedad. Conversaciones con Alejandro Katz* (Katz, 2013), pp. 18-19.

<sup>16</sup> Although Silvia Barei notes that *Las Islas* 'es una larga novela [...] donde solo dos capítulos se refieren directamente a la acción en Malvinas', Oscar Hemer reports the general view, in literary and academic circles of Buenos Aires, of *Las Islas* as the 'great novel about Malvinas'. See Silvia N. Barei, 'El "monitoring" entre lo textual y lo social. Literatura y guerra como "caso" argentino', *Itinerarios*, 10 (2009), pp. 65-77 (p. 74); and Oscar Hemer, *Fiction and Truth in Transition. Writing the Present Past in South Africa and Argentina* (LIT, 2012), p. 372.

‘la transformación menemista operada en la Argentina a lo largo de los años noventa.’<sup>17</sup> Critics then draw connections between the neoliberal policies of Peronist President Carlos Menem (1989-1999) and the ‘Proceso’.<sup>18</sup> This correlation was encouraged by Gamerro himself, who said that the dictatorship and Menemism were ‘espejos uno del otro, dos procesos que no pueden entenderse uno sin el otro.’<sup>19</sup> Beyond *Las Islas*, Gamerro’s novels engage with specific historical events: *El sueño del señor juez* with the ‘Conquest of the Desert’ (1878 and 1879), *El secreto y las voces* with the dictatorship’s methods of disappearance, and *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* with the actions of guerrilla movements and state repression during the period surrounding the 1976 coup.<sup>20</sup>

Among Gamerro’s novels, *Las Islas* has attracted the most critical attention in terms of genre and rhetorical devices. Critics have identified a diverse range of influences, including elements of the Baroque, crime fiction, cyberpunk, fairy tales, historical fiction, legends, pastiche, satire, and parody.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, *Las Islas* has been linked to farce through its use of irony, parody, the grotesque, and profanity.<sup>22</sup> Genre

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<sup>17</sup> Juan Nicolás Terranova, ‘Dígalo con Mimesis’ (unpublished paper. University of Buenos Aires, 2001), p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from the already quoted essay by Terranova, other relevant studies in this vein are J. Andrew Brown, ‘Neoliberal Prosthetics in Postdictatorial Argentina and Bolivia: Carlos Gamerro and Edmundo Paz Soldán’, in Brown, *Cyborgs in Latin America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 113-44; Julieta Vitullo, ‘La performance de un padre violento’, in Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas. La Guerra de Malvinas en la literatura y el cine argentinos* (Corregidor, 2012), pp. 122-30; Julieta Soledad Heredia, ‘*Las Islas*, imaginario tecnológico y estética futurista. Un montaje anacrónico’, *Estudios de Teoría Literaria*, 4.8 (2015), pp. 79-85; and Claudia Hammerschmidt, ‘La dicotomía de lo legible e ilegible en la literatura argentina contemporánea, o El lado oscuro de Carlos Gamerro’, *Cuadernos Lírico*, 17 (2017), pp. 1-14.

<sup>19</sup> In Ángel Berlanga, ‘El eterno retorno’, *Radar*, 24 de abril de 2011 <<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/9-6995-2011-04-24.html>> [accessed 19 August 2019].

<sup>20</sup> With regard to the fictions not included in this thesis, *Cardenio* draws on a lost play by Shakespeare and Fletcher based on Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*; and *La jaula de los onas*, on a group of indigenous people from Tierra del Fuego abducted and taken to the Universal Exhibition in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. Gamerro’s shorter fiction—mostly gathered in *El libro de los afectos raros* (2005)—belongs to the realm of private life and makes little or no reference at all to historical contexts.

<sup>21</sup> Macarena Areco, ‘Imaginarios de espacio y de sujeto en la narrativa argentina reciente: las guerras, el trauma, el neoliberalismo y la culpa en *Las Islas* de Carlos Gamerro’, *Acta Literaria*, 51 (2015), pp. 13-27.

<sup>22</sup> Mariana I. Lardone, ‘*Las Islas* de Carlos Gamerro: farsa y épica en torno a la identidad nacional’, *VIII Congreso Internacional Orbis Tertius de Crítica y Teoría Literaria* (2012); and Vera

classifications for *Las Islas* extend to science fiction,<sup>23</sup> simulation and farce,<sup>24</sup> war simulacrum,<sup>25</sup> and detective novel.<sup>26</sup> *El sueño del señor juez* has been considered as a Baroque fiction aligning with Gamerro's understanding of the concept.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, *El secreto y las voces* is viewed, alongside *Las Islas*, as a 'policial [...] en su vertiente negra, para leer la historia argentina de la dictadura.'<sup>28</sup> Finally, the diptych of *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* has been seen as drawing inspiration from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*,<sup>29</sup> while also belonging to 'a lineage' of Argentine novels 'giv[ing] money a central role in fictions about crime.'<sup>30</sup>

María Laura Destéfanis' doctoral thesis remains the sole scholarly work dedicated exclusively to Gamerro's fiction.<sup>31</sup> Destéfanis analyses his first five novels through the lens of identity, focusing on three levels (national, group, and individual) within 'seis instancias clave de la historia argentina: la constitución nacional, el peronismo, la militancia de izquierda en los años setenta, la dictadura, la guerra de

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Helena Jakovkis, 'El heroísmo en la farsa: *Las Islas*, de Carlos Gamerro', *Helix*, 5 (2012), pp. 145-62.

<sup>23</sup> De Rosso, 'La línea de sombra'; and Brown, 'Neoliberal Prosthetics in Postdictatorial Argentina and Bolivia: Carlos Gamerro and Edmundo Paz Soldán'.

<sup>24</sup> María Elena Molina, 'Guerra de Malvinas: la literatura argentina y el discurso autocrítico', *Espéculo*, 1.1-39 (2008), pp. 1-13.

<sup>25</sup> Lara Segade, 'El simulacro como umbral de la memoria en *Las Islas* de Carlos Gamerro', *VII Congreso Internacional Orbis Tertius de Teoría y Crítica Literaria* (2009).

<sup>26</sup> Hernán Mertz, 'Literatura policial y policía: reflexiones a partir de dos intervenciones críticas (José Pablo Feinmann y Carlos Gamerro)', *Catedral tomada*, 9.17 (2021), pp. 197-225 (p. 202).

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Jaroszk, 'Ideas como sueños: *El sueño del señor juez* de Carlos Gamerro o las consecuencias políticas de una ficción barroca', *The Problems of Literary Genres*, 62.4 (2019), pp. 43-56.

<sup>28</sup> Victoria Torres, 'La ciudad sin Borges: avatares del género policial en una Buenos Aires acorralada', in Roland Spiller, *Borges-Buenos Aires: configuraciones de la ciudad del siglo XIX al XXI* (Iberoamericana and Vervuert, 2014), pp. 148-59 (p. 154).

<sup>29</sup> Clea Gerber and María Elena Fonsalido, 'El Quijote y la violencia latinoamericana del siglo XX: La utilización de la figura quijotesca en dos textos de Jorge Franco y Carlos Gamerro', *Imposibilia*, 11 (2016), pp. 54-79; Matías Beverinotti, 'El alma al trabajo y el trabajo del alma: apuntes para una crítica de la continuidad dictatorial en *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* de Carlos Gamerro', *Res Pública*, 24.1 (2021), pp. 43-52; and Juan Ezequiel Rogna, 'El "héroe lector" en la narrativa argentina contemporánea. Tres variaciones literarias después de la derrota revolucionaria', *Perífrasis*, 10.20 (2019), pp. 29-44.

<sup>30</sup> Ben Bollig, 'Theories of Money in Argentine Crime Fiction', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 94.3 (2017), pp. 505-25 (p. 507). Bollig (p. 519. n50) also classifies *El secreto y las voces* as 'a version of the detective novel.'

<sup>31</sup> María Laura Destéfanis, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamerro (1998-2011)* (doctoral tesis. University of Granada, 2019).

Malvinas y la posdictadura' (p. 7). Regarding genre, Destéfanis identifies 'elementos del policial negro de cuño norteamericano pero también del policial de enigma' in *Las Islas*, along with references to Elizabethan tragedy (p. 565). For *El sueño del señor juez*, she finds remnants of gauchesque literature, the Spanish Baroque, and Argentinian and English literary traditions (p. 139). *El secreto y las voces* is seen as employing the basics of a 'policial coral' (p. 372), while *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* are viewed as utilising rhetorical resources ranging from the grotesque to gore (p. 263). While both Destéfanis' genre classifications and those found in the aforementioned essays hold merit, I argue that Gamero's extensive use of these narrative tools necessitates further exploration. This analysis should acknowledge the importance of genre and literary tradition in his works, but also identify a unifying purpose for their deployment. My goal is to develop such an account, focusing on the overarching theme of truth.

This dissertation represents the first English-language doctoral analysis devoted to this particular corpus of Gamero's novels. During the final stages of the project, conducted in Buenos Aires, I gained privileged access to Gamero's archives, mainly those pertaining to the writing of *Las Islas*. Such access significantly enriched my research. In conjunction with this study, I edited a collection of essays focused on *Las Islas* that gathers previously published materials, new essays written specifically for the volume, and reproductions of Gamero's preparatory notes, drafts, outlines, and illustrations.<sup>32</sup> This comprehensive survey of Gamero's creative process provided unique insights that informed my interpretations and solidified my understanding of the intricate relationship between real events and Gamero's fictional constructs. To further enhance reader comprehension of this link, I have included an Appendix that shows a detailed correspondence between the most significant historical events and those within Gamero's novels.

As previously established, this study argues that the dictatorship of 1976-1983 serves as the central historical event underpinning all the analysed Gamero's novels. I contend that this period of state-sanctioned violence, a manifestation of 'radical evil' or 'administrative massacres', appears either as a projected future or a haunting past, while

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<sup>32</sup> *Volver a Las Islas. Lecturas sobre la novela de Carlos Gamero*, ed. by Rolando J. Bompadre (Edhasa, 2022).

it is ultimately rooted in nationalist discourses and the struggle between factions vying to define the meaning of 'la Patria'. This ideological conflict shapes the conception, development, and actions of the 'Proceso'. Given Gamero's stated commitment to 'make known the truth that no one wants to hear', I will explore the centrality of the survivor/witness figure implied in the notion of Levi's 'grey zone' of the concentration camp.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, I will draw upon Burucúa and Kwiatkowski's insightful analysis about survivors, who

se encuentran desgarrados por la insoportable tensión entre el imperativo de dar testimonio de lo ocurrido y la inadecuación de las formas de expresión para lograrlo. El mandato de la transmisión de la verdad es el criterio fundamental de los textos vinculados con la experiencia concentracionaria.<sup>34</sup>

This dissertation proposes that Gamero's novels utilise literary genres as a tool to mend the 'interrupted chain' between words and their meanings caused by radical evil. By doing so, these genres empower the survivor/witness to articulate his/her truth. Mikhail M. Bakhtin's theory of speech genres provides a valuable framework for this analysis. Bakhtin regards speech genres as 'the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language', since speech genres are '*relatively stable types*' of utterances that developed within specific 'sphere[s] in which language is used.'<sup>35</sup> Products of centuries of human interaction, in Bakhtin's view, these genres 'accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world.'<sup>36</sup> According to him, this concept establishes a dual relationship: first, with prior utterances, encompassing other literary works, traditions, and relevant political discourses; and second, with the addressee (the reader).<sup>37</sup> In essence, literary genres, through their connection to other works within a tradition and to ideological discourses, determine the link between fiction and real

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<sup>33</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, in particular chapter 2 'La zona grigia', pp. 1017-44. Also, Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 1999), in particular chapter 1 'The Witness', pp. 15-39.

<sup>34</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas", p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. by Vern W. McGee (University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 60-102 (pp. 65 and 60). Italics in the original.

<sup>36</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, pp. 1-9 (p. 5).

<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', pp. 62 and 76.

events. Gamarro himself has acknowledged Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogization' as central to his writing, as it implies a 'continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances.<sup>38</sup> This term closely aligns with the notion of polyphonic novel, '[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses', and with that of dialogic truth, in which there is no attempt to 'a merging of voices and truths in a single impersonal truth.'<sup>39</sup> Therefore, within Bakhtin's theory, dialogism is as crucial for the novel as it is for the 'work-utterances' produced within specific literary genres.<sup>40</sup>

The interaction of the real and the fictional through 'work-utterances' is thus essential for this thesis. Taking into account that the notions of the real and the fictional are perennially problematic, I will follow Bryan Greetham's definition of 'the real' as that event, fact, or utterance that is 'publicly confirmed by others [...] the inference [individuals] make as to the reality this [event, fact, or utterance] represents.'<sup>41</sup> The concept relies on the confirmation by others, thus bringing the real from the sphere of the individual into that of society. It is in this specific sense that I will employ the concept of historical ('real') event.

Similar to the notion of the real, the fictional remains a topic of debate. David Gorman proposes a merged definition of pragmatics and semantics approaches, characterising fiction as 'one kind of intendedly but non-deceptive untrue discourse'.<sup>42</sup> The qualifiers 'one kind' acknowledge other forms of non-factual language, such as metaphor and irony; 'intendedly untrue' distinguishes fiction from factual discourse; and 'non-deceptive' separates fiction from lying. For this study, I will adopt Mario Vargas Llosa's concept of 'real reality' ('realidad real') to encompass the notion of 'the real', in opposition to his concept of 'fictional reality' ('realidad ficticia'), to designate the imaginary universe created by an author within his/her texts.<sup>43</sup> Even though Vargas Llosa's notions imply a conflict between real and fictional realities, as they are seen as

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<sup>38</sup> Project Muse, '9 temas y 62 respuestas', *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, 21.41-42 (2008), pp. 59-241 (p. 131); and Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', pp. 66 and 89.

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 6 and 93. Italics in the original.

<sup>40</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> Bryan Greetham, *Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 96.

<sup>42</sup> David Gorman, 'Theories of Fiction', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (Routledge, 2005), pp. 163-7 (p. 164).

<sup>43</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio* (Barral, 1971), pp. 13 and 217.

fundamentally incompatible, I argue for the suitability of his terminology. Vargas Llosa assigns equal ontological status to both realities, treating the two as valid forms of ‘reality’.

To examine the connections between fictional and real realities that mend the ‘interrupted chain’ between words and truth, I employ a ‘no-truth’ theory of literature. As Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen argue, under this approach, fiction ‘is not defined in terms of truth (or the world or reality) so there need be no logical incompatibility between the two’, yet it allows us to ask the question of ‘whether there is anything integral to works of imaginative literature which makes the expression, embodiment, revelation, etc. of truths indispensable to their value, aesthetic or otherwise.’<sup>44</sup> Within this framework, I contend that the pursuit and eventual articulation of truth is the defining characteristic of Gamero’s novels. In conceptualising truth, I stick to Lamarque and Olsen’s predilection for Aristotle’s dictum in *Metaphysics* (1011<sup>b</sup>25-8)—“To say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true”—, as Aristotle’s definition requires a predicative structure, with truth being ‘a property of *sayings* or *something said* [...] not a property of objects or facts, nor is it something “out there” in the world.’<sup>45</sup>

Such emphasis on intellectual construction enhances Gamero’s affinity for the Baroque genre, as evidenced in his book *Ficciones barrocas* (2010). These essays reveal his preference for ‘fictional realities’ that stand in opposition to, challenge, and even anticipate ‘real reality’. Gamero describes a Baroque fiction as a device in which ‘la copia reemplaza al original, el cuadro tiene más vida que el modelo, el reflejo se impone al objeto, el soñador obedece al soñado, la verdad del mundo cede ante la del teatro’.<sup>46</sup> The interchangeability between the ‘different levels of reality’ implies, in Gamero’s conception, that the Baroque creates ‘una hiperrealidad compleja, inquieta y, sobre todo, *autocontradictoria e inconsistente*,’ to fashion a man who ‘no sabe en qué plano está (si vive o sueña, si lo que hace es acción o actuación, si ve o imagina, si es

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective* (Clarendon, 1994), pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>45</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, p. 8. Italics in the original.

<sup>46</sup> Carlos Gamero, *Ficciones barrocas. Una lectura de Borges, Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, Cortázar, Onetti y Felisberto Hernández* (Eterna Cadencia, 2010), pp. 19-20.

persona o personaje).<sup>47</sup> Beyond this interplay, I will explore the broader effects of the Baroque for analysing radical evil in Gamerro's fiction. In doing so, I will diverge from some critics who readily accept Gamerro's definition, to draw upon Jorge Luis Marzo's. Marzo characterises the Baroque as a state policy employed to conceal and embellish horrific truths, specifically those related to the annihilation of indigenous populations during the Spanish conquest of the Americas.<sup>48</sup> In line with this approach, Burucúa and Kwiatkowski's consider that the twentieth-century archetype produced a 'nueva fórmula de representación' that 'describe, narra y expone las grandes masacres históricas contemporáneas mediante el recurso a la duplicación, la réplica, el doble y la silueta'.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, in my analysis, the Baroque will serve as a specific instrument for 'fictional reality' to engage with 'real reality' (the instance of radical evil), also reinforcing Bakhtin's notion of speech genres as 'the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language'.

This thesis is structured around four chapters, following the chronological order of publication for Gamerro's novels in order to aptly reflect the interconnected characters, places, and episodes that progressively build his fictional world. Each novel employs two temporal levels of narration: the present moment of the quest for truth and the past events being recreated. Given the equal complexity of both narrative levels in *Las Islas*, I dedicate two separate chapters to its analysis.

Chapter 1 examines the real-world event that underpins the fiction: the Malvinas/Falklands War (April-June 1982). Here, I argue that the dominant literary genre at play is utopia. In my reading, 'Malvinas' has essentially been created as an intellectual expression of utopia through nationalism, in which I will discern between those who conceived the utopian construct (the intellectual/teacher) and those who tried to make it real (the military/schoolboy). I have titled this chapter 'Las Malvinas son Argentina' [*sic*], a pun on the well-known nationalist slogan 'Las Malvinas son argentinas'. Chapter 2 focuses on the present moment of narration, ten years after the war itself, to argue that the failure of the nationalist utopia has yielded a dystopia embodied by the economic empire of business tycoon Fausto Tamerlán. I call it 'the

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<sup>47</sup> Gamerro, *Ficciones barrocas*, p. 18 and 19.

<sup>48</sup> Jorge Luis Marzo, *La memoria administrada. El barroco y lo hispano* (Katz, 2010), p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas", p. 48.

dystopia of literality' as Tamerlán's power replaces the nuanced expressions, images, and metaphors of language with literal actions. Signifying an inverse mirroring of the utopian failure, this chapter bears the title of 'Argentina son Las Malvinas'.

Chapter 3 delves into Gamero's next two novels: *El sueño del señor juez* and *El secreto y las voces*. Both works are set in the fictional village of Malihuel, which functions as a metonymy for Argentina. These narratives unfold during two key moments of Argentinian history: the formation of the state at the conclusion of the 'Campaigns to the Desert' (1878 and 1879), and its consolidation during the fight against 'subversion' in the 1970s. In my reading, the dominant genre of the first novel, the gauchesque, is insufficient in isolation to capture the evolving national reality. Therefore, I further contextualise my analysis through the philosophical thought of Thomas Hobbes. I argue not only for the necessity of an agreement between the *gaucho* and the *juez de paz* to secure their positions in the new Republic, but also for the essential role of this agreement between these two archetypal gauchesque figures in articulating the concept of truth. While state authority pronounces the law, civil society retains the right to utter truth. This covenant, defying Hobbes's disapproval of non-official truths, ultimately results in a clash between the descendants of the *gaucho* and the *juez de paz* a century later. The utterance of truths related to the shared origin of landed wealth and the state leads to the disappearance of the person who voices 'la verdad que nadie quiere oír.'<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, I challenge predominant readings of *El secreto y las voces* as noir, crime, or detective fiction. Through close textual analysis, I argue that this novel belongs to the genre of tragedy. It stages an insoluble conflict—the uttering of truth versus law bestowed by the nineteenth-century agreement—, which exposes the inherent falsity of using sacrifice to justify the dictatorship's policies of disappearance and extermination. This chapter is entitled 'Hobbes in the Pampas'.

Chapter 4 studies the final two novels of the corpus: *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara*. While concurring with critics who place these novels within the Cervantine tradition of *Don Quixote*, I diverge from readings that view Ernesto Marroné, the protagonist of both stories, as a direct mirror of Cervantes's hero. Instead, I argue that Marroné's attitudes are fundamentally rooted in

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<sup>50</sup> Gamero, 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino', p. 63.

the bourgeois mindset, aptly represented by the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli; thus, the chapter title is ‘Cervantes Meets Machiavelli’. My analysis shows that Marroné’s survival through a period of extreme violence is due to the Machiavellian characteristics of his social class. I further explore the notion of the Baroque in its original religious conception, as aimed to restore the unity between celestial and earthly domains fractured during the Middle Ages. Apart from helping to understand the religious aspects of 1970s politics, I argue that this approach adheres to the Baroque’s use as a state policy to conceal mass violence. Therefore, the dominant genre under analysis in this chapter is the confession. In Christian traditions, the confession is required for the sinner’s reintegration into the (broken) order, mirroring the reintegration of the middle classes following their rapprochement with Peronism and revolutionary groups in the 1970s. In addition to exposing the pervasive complicity of civil society in instances of radical evil,<sup>51</sup> this chapter concludes my analysis of the Argentinian nationalist field, begun in chapter 1. It also completes my exploration of the literary strategies employed by a writer who views himself as ‘the last guarantee of truth’, determined to utter ‘la verdad que nadie quiere oír’ in relation to a past that remains disturbingly alive and profoundly affects the present.

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<sup>51</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, p. ix.

## CHAPTER 1

# Las Malvinas son Argentina

## The Conception of a Nationalist Utopia

The Malvinas/Falklands War between Britain and Argentina, which lasted from 2 April to 14 June 1982, constitutes the most significant historical event underpinning the events of *Las Islas*. However, the first reference to this armed conflict within Carlos Gamerro's fictional reality is a mocking dismissal by the powerful millionaire Fausto Tamerlán. During a meeting with Felipe Félix, a war veteran turned IT specialist, ten years after the war's conclusion, the mogul dismissively declares, 'eso no fue una guerra. En una guerra de verdad se hacen o se pierden fortunas' (*LI*, 25). This economic dimension of the war has further implications. Later in the novel, it is revealed that during the torture sessions that Tamerlán attended in the early years of the 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional', an officer attempted to persuade him that 'el mejor negocio inmobiliario en el país desde la Conquista al Desierto era invertir a futuro en [...] Las Islas' (*LI*, 157). An archetypal practice of state violence thus sets the stage for connecting a long-lasting nationalist mission—the occupation of a territory claimed as belonging to the nation, or, in the words of a war veteran, 'que esta tierra es 100% argentina' (*LI*, 79)—with a private business venture aimed at seizing ownership of land, as was indeed the historical pattern of the 'Conquest of the Desert'.

Felipe holds a contrasting perspective. When he finally feels prepared to confront his war experience, he expresses a sense of resignation to fate: 'si mi mala suerte había logrado hacer coincidir mi colimba con nuestra única guerra en cien años no iba a ser para darme un susto nomás' (*LI*, 327).<sup>1</sup> Despite the ironic tone regarding

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<sup>1</sup> The previous one was 'Triple Alianza' War (1865-1870) that Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay held against Paraguay, which ended with advantageous territorial gains for Argentina and Brazil at the expense of Paraguay. See Carlos Alberto Floria and César A. García Belsunce, *Historia de los argentinos* (Larousse, 2001), pp. 628-38. Regarding World War II, Argentina

both personal and historical destinies, these words suggest the profound significance that ‘Malvinas’ (as a political, ideological, and cultural construct) has had in shaping the country’s history and identity. Like the previous conflict, ‘our only war in a century’ once again revolved around a key concept for the nation: territory. As Luis Alberto Romero and others emphasise, territory is taught as ‘la garantía de la unidad del origen de la nación’, since ‘desde siempre es *portador de la argentinidad* [...] mucho antes de que la misma idea de argentinidad hubiera sido pensada.’<sup>2</sup> Nation, its ideology, and state converge in the concept of territorialism. This, in the words of Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, ‘se presenta como una misión del Estado por excelencia; el territorio, silencioso, habla con la voz de la nación y *corrobora la unidad y la armonía que los nacionalismos postulan*.’<sup>3</sup> Paraphrasing Jens Andermann, such a ‘voice of the nation’ is possible ‘gracias a imaginaciones en gran parte literarias’, as ‘precisamente porque el territorio es representado como base silenciosa e irreductible de las naciones, es ahí donde se inscribe el aparato de reglas y de prohibiciones que posibilitan y delimitan la construcción de un determinado tipo de comunidad, su *estatuto discursivo*.’<sup>4</sup> Since 1833, the year British forces expelled the authority appointed by the then Governor of the Buenos Aires Province, Juan Manuel de Rosas, ‘Malvinas’ condenses two features intrinsic to Argentinian nationalism: the perception of the nation as a severed territory, and the belief in irredentism, a term of religious echoes that means, for those nationalists, ‘recuperar algo que siempre fue nuestro.’<sup>5</sup> If, in Federico Finchelstein’s words, Argentinian nationalism ‘was presented as a God-given theory and its practice a

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broke relations with the Axis powers only in January 1944, and this declaration of war had diplomatic and commercial motives and consequences, rather than military ones. See David Sheinin, ‘Argentina: The Closet Ally’, in *Latin America during World War II*, ed. by Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), pp. 183-204. Finally, Vitullo (*Islas imaginadas*, p. 12) remarks that the Malvinas/Falklands War was ‘el único conflicto internacional del país que involucró a conscriptos’, that is, non-professional soldiers.

<sup>2</sup> *La Argentina en la escuela. La idea de nación en los textos escolares*, ed. by Luis Alberto Romero and others (Siglo XXI, 2004), pp. 50 and 199.

<sup>3</sup> Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983. Del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Paidós, 2002), p. 437.

<sup>4</sup> Jens Andermann, *Mapas de poder. Una arqueología literaria del espacio argentino* (Beatriz Viterbo, 2000), pp. 16-17. Italics in the original.

<sup>5</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *La Argentina que duele. Historia, política, sociedad. Conversaciones con Alejandro Katz* (Katz, 2013), p. 181.

reflection of what God wanted for the country,<sup>6</sup> it is only logical that the redemption of the national territory by the occupation of ‘Malvinas’ became a sacred mission for Argentinian nationalists.

This chapter contends that, from the Argentinian perspective, the 1982 armed conflict stemmed from the concept of ‘Malvinas’ as a utopia constructed by fervent nationalist groups. These groups sought to articulate the ‘voice of the nation’ within a territory imagined, in many ways, as the ‘desert’ of the nineteenth century mainland. To distinguish them from a ‘cultural, diffuse, more social than strictly political’ nationalism (which Novaro and Palermo term ‘nacionalismo *de los argentinos*’), I shall follow their designation of these groups as ‘nacionalismo ideológico, militante’,<sup>7</sup> as well as Hugo Vezzetti’s observations that during the 1960s and 1970s ‘la disputa ideológica [de los militares] con la oposición, incluso con el conglomerado de la acción revolucionaria, era una disputa sobre el significado mismo de la idea de *Nación*.’<sup>8</sup> Therefore, I posit that the Malvinas/Falklands conflict arose from an ongoing contest within the militant nationalist sphere to establish their own definition of the true Fatherland. Far from founding a utopian society, this venture materialised into the ultimate expression of radical evil—the concentration camp—with lasting consequences to victims, survivors, and the limitations of language to fully express the truth of those events.

#### THE REAL REALITY: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NATIONAL(IST) CAUSE

By 1981, when General Leopoldo Galtieri assumed the presidency under the ruling military junta, the dispute over the Malvinas/Falklands Islands neared a significant date for Argentines: the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of British occupation. As Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya, a member of the three-man junta responsible for the 1982 occupation, stated in 1998, ‘la cuestión Malvinas, su recuperación e integración al territorio nacional y a la

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<sup>6</sup> Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War. Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar*, pp. 436-7. Italics in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente. Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2002), p. 73. Italics in the original.

sociedad argentina constituye un interés nacional desde el 3 de enero de 1833.<sup>9</sup> This anniversary of ‘la cuestión Malvinas’ produced two divergent effects. In the international sphere, the passing of time stressed the *uncertainty* of Argentina’s rights to the islands; in the domestic field, time only solidified the *certitude* encapsulated in the slogan ‘Las Malvinas son argentinas.’<sup>10</sup> I will address the domestic aspect in the next section, to focus, in the present one, on the weakening of Argentina’s international position.

The controversy surrounding the Malvinas/Falklands Islands extends back to their very discovery. Argentina maintains that the islands were probably first sighted by either Amerigo Vespucci sailing for Spain, navigators on Magellan’s 1520 expedition, or, most likely, by a bishop from Plasencia in 1540. Conversely, Great Britain aligns itself with British historian Mary Cawkell, who credits John Davis’ landing during a storm on 14 August 1592, when his ship, the *Desire*, was caught in a storm while on Sir Thomas Cavendish’s last expedition.<sup>11</sup> In his canonical work about the islands, Paul Groussac dismisses both accounts, asserting that Dutch navigator Sebald de Weert holds the true claim to discovery on 24 January 1600.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of the precise first sighting, the islands remained uninhabited until 1764, when Frenchman Louis de Bougainville established a settlement with 150 colonists as part of the French government’s plan to rebuild its colonial presence. Bougainville also bestowed the name ‘Malouines’ upon the archipelago, in homage to Saint-Malo, the port from which his ships had set sail.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, Britain established a colony after the French but abandoned it in 1774. Although British settlers left a plaque with the intention of maintaining legal title, in Lowell S. Gustafson’s words, Britain ‘made no objections for almost sixty years when Spain and then Argentina publicly claimed sovereignty over

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<sup>9</sup> In Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar*, p. 411.

<sup>10</sup> Vitullo significantly notes that the claim ‘es más expresión de deseo que afirmación veraz [...] adopta una forma aseverativa [que coincide] con el modo en que se repudia la desaparición de miles de personas durante la dictadura, “aparición con vida”, el cual reclama que se revierta aquello que se sabe definitivo (la muerte de los desaparecidos).’ See Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Lowell S. Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Groussac, *Las Islas Malvinas* (Comisión Nacional de Bibliotecas Populares, 1936; facsimile repr. Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, p. 8.

the entire set of islands. When Argentina formally declared its independence in 1816, the Spanish colony had been evacuated for a few years.<sup>14</sup>

Issues of discovery and effective occupation have historically been central factors in determining territorial sovereignty under international law. Summarising the question of the Malvinas/Falklands, Gustafson explains:

Argentina has a superior historical right because either it inherited Spain's sovereignty over the islands under the principle of *uti possidetis*—by which newly independent Latin American nations claimed to replace former Spanish administrative boundaries with national ones—or it established its own title to islands that had been *res nullius*, or no one's property [...]. Britain's claim to the islands has increasingly been based on the right o[f] acquisitive prescription, which states that after all nations have acquiesced to one nation's de facto control of territory for a period of time, often fifty years, that nation gains legal title to that territory.<sup>15</sup>

The British reasserted control of the islands on 3 January 1833, through an expedition that ousted Luis María Vernet, the military and political commander appointed four years prior by Juan Manuel de Rosas. While 'la cuestión Malvinas' has since become a core national interest for Argentina's military, at the time Argentina existed as a loose confederation of provinces known as 'las Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata'. The Province of Buenos Aires managed international affairs on behalf of the others, but Argentina was not yet a politically organised nation. This political ambiguity surrounding the nascent nation, which only after the defeat of Rosas in 1852 and the subsequent passing of the Magna Carta in 1853, would become the Argentina Republic, further clouded the legal status of the islands.<sup>16</sup>

The notion that the passage of time would solidify British claims to the Malvinas/Falklands while weakening Argentina's position was challenged in 1965 with the passing of United Nations Resolution 2065. This declaration acknowledged the existence of a sovereignty dispute between Argentina and Great Britain and invited the two parties to start negotiations, considering the interests of the islanders.<sup>17</sup> However,

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<sup>14</sup> Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, p. xii.

<sup>15</sup> Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, pp. 62-4.

talks did not materialise. Some Argentine scholars attribute this to British diplomatic indifference,<sup>18</sup> while others cite domestic opposition within the United Kingdom due to the Falklanders' strong resistance to negotiations since the mid-1960s.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the cause, the lack of progress led to an escalation of tensions. A decade later, Argentina's view of British actions have shifted from 'indifference' and 'misperception' to 'deliberate premeditation.'<sup>20</sup> The 'Proceso', then, started to address both military and civilian sectors demanding a forceful resolution to the dispute, bolstered by a perceived United States backing.<sup>21</sup> This aggressive penchant, that, in Romero's words, stemmed from a rooted 'strain of Argentine nationalism [drawing] sustenance from strong chauvinist sentiments,'<sup>22</sup> had manifested internationally in disputes with two bordering countries: the conflict with Brazil over hydroelectric resources on the Paraná River that was, as Andrea Oelsner terms it, a 'covert nuclear race',<sup>23</sup> and a near-war situation with Chile in late 1978 regarding the sovereignty of three small islands in the Beagle Channel.<sup>24</sup>

Motivated by Argentina's historical claims to the Malvinas/Falklands, while under increasing amount of pressure, both domestic and international, due to its appalling human rights and socio-economic records, the military junta orchestrated the occupation of the islands in 1982. The junta likely viewed 'Malvinas' as the only national cause that could unite the country, capable of diverting public attention away from internal problems and strengthening the regime's dwindling legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> Yet,

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, Floria and García Belsunce, *Historia de los argentinos*, pp. 1019-20.

<sup>19</sup> Martín Abel González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict. Argentina, Britain and the Failed Negotiations of the 1960s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 3-6.

<sup>20</sup> González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Floria and García Belsunce, *Historia de los argentinos*, p. 1019.

<sup>22</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. by James P. Brennan (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 242.

<sup>23</sup> Andrea Oelsner, *International Relations in Latin America. Peace and Security in the Southern Cone* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 133-4.

<sup>24</sup> Both conflicts were peacefully ended in 1979. See Carlos Washington Pastor, 'Chile: la guerra o la paz', in *La política exterior argentina y sus protagonistas. 1880-1995*, ed. by Silvia Ruth Jalabe (Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales and Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1996), pp. 259-308 (p. 268); and Oelsner, *International Relations in Latin America*, p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> Between 9,000 and 30,000 people have been disappeared in the years of 1976-1978, while the government's program of 'disinflation, deregulation, and destatization' had intensified the recession, and with it the protests of the unions and business. See Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 218 and 241.

Novaro and Palermo explain that ‘la idea de recuperar las Malvinas [...] era un proyecto de larga data, sustentado en motivaciones sinceras del régimen militar, que se descontaba que contaría con un amplio respaldo civil,’ which, in addition, would reinforce the ambition of Argentina of becoming a regional power, as,

[s]e utilizaría la fuerza, lo que indiscutiblemente legitimaría a las Fuerzas Armadas al demostrar lo imprescindible que eran para la nación, pero no habría que combatir, ya que las islas serían tomadas por la fuerza[,] pero para negociar.<sup>26</sup>

The Argentine military disembarkation on the Malvinas/Falklands on 2 April 1982 unsurprisingly escalated tensions and ultimately resulted in war. The stated objective was to occupy the islands to pressure Great Britain into negotiations under United Nations auspices. In the meantime, the junta established a provisional government and renamed Port Stanley ‘Puerto Argentino’. The Argentine public reaction was swift and overwhelmingly positive. The public support was reflected not only by massive demonstrations but also by the fact that political parties and trade unions (all proscribed at the time) were invited and sent their representatives to the islands to attend the inauguration of the new governor, General Mario Benjamín Menéndez, on 7 April. Further reflecting the perceived national unity, General Galtieri addressed a jubilant crowd in Buenos Aires’ Plaza de Mayo from the balcony of the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace, on 10 April. A Gallup poll conducted around that time indicated overwhelming public support for the action, with 90% of Argentines reportedly in favour of the war effort, whereas just 8 percent rejected it.<sup>27</sup>

The Argentine occupation of the Malvinas/Falklands transitioned into a full-fledged war on 1 May with the arrival of the British Task Force and the subsequent bombing of the islands’ airport. Key military engagements included the sinking of the cruiser General Belgrano by a British submarine on 2 May; the bombing of the British destroyer Sheffield by Argentine aircraft on 4 May, followed by its sinking on 10 May; and the destruction of Argentine Pucará aircrafts stationed in northern Gran Malvina/East Falkland on 15 May. British troops landed at Port Saint Charles on 21 May and

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<sup>26</sup> Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar*, p. 412.

<sup>27</sup> Juan José Sebrelli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas. Los orígenes de la crisis* (Sudamericana, 2002), p. 335.

subsequently captured Port Darwin and Goose Green within two days, forcing Argentine withdrawals. The conflict culminated in the surrender of General Menéndez to his British counterpart, General Jeremy Moore, on 14 June 1982. Beyond the war's political, economic, and diplomatic ramifications, it resulted in a significant loss of life, with 649 Argentine casualties, 255 British casualties, and 3 civilian casualties on the islands. Grasping the persistent impact of this event on Argentine society, particularly for veterans, Federico Lorenz has depicted the Malvinas/Falklands War as 'el doloroso relámpago de 1982 (tan breve en esa historia multiseccular como eterno en las vidas individuales).'<sup>28</sup>

#### THE FICTIONAL REALITY: A NATIONALIST UTOPIA

Argentina's defeat in the Falklands War shattered the illusion of a triumphant outcome meticulously cultivated by the dictatorship and media until the very last moment. It is underscoring that note of falsity that Gamero asserts that '[l]a primera ficción de la guerra de Malvinas fue la guerra misma,' and that, once the British fleet arrived in the archipelago and it became evident that the war was an imminent reality, for the dictatorship 'fue necesario pasar no a la verdad [...] sino a un nuevo régimen de ficción.'<sup>29</sup> This 'new regime' refers to the period from 1 May to 14 June 1982, during which British forces achieved repeated victories at sea and in the air, landed on the islands, captured key positions, and pushed Argentinian troops back towards Puerto Argentino/Port Stanley. Despite these setbacks, Argentine government and media pronouncements continued to insist on imminent victory with slogans like 'Estamos ganando' or 'Seguimos ganando'.<sup>30</sup> If Gamero's use of the concept of 'fiction' is not only as the opposite of 'truth', but also as that which 'involves "fabrication" or "making" [...], a creation of some kind',<sup>31</sup> the war was possible because a pre-existing

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<sup>28</sup> Federico Lorenz, *Las guerras por Malvinas. 1982-2012*, 2nd rev. edn (Edhasa, 2012), p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Carlos Gamero, 'Las ficciones de la dictadura', in Gamero, *Shakespeare en Malvinas y otros ensayos malvinosos* (Espacio Hudson, 2018), pp. 93-129 (pp. 95 and 96).

<sup>30</sup> Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective* (Clarendon, 1994), p. 16.

national ‘creation of some kind’ had established ‘Malvinas’ as an essential component of Argentine identity and their re-union with the mainland as a necessary condition for fulfilling the nation’s glorious destiny. While the passing of time stirred a feeling of unrest among the military and nationalists, due to the increasingly uncertain position of the country’s rights on the international scene, in the domestic field the islands were acquiring an idealised status that, in combination of real with imaginary elements, such as the implied promise of an idyllic future, developed the characteristics of a utopia. By framing the annexation of this utopia as a required step towards national fulfilment, the nationalistic rhetoric placed both destiny and the nation itself in an untenable position, a situation further exacerbated by the war.

The concept of ‘utopia’ denotes an idealised and, by definition, unachievable society or socio-political state. This inherent impossibility is further emphasised by its contrast with ‘dystopia’ or ‘anti-utopia’, a concept explored in greater detail in chapter 2. As Gary Saul Morson observes, ‘whereas utopias describe an escape *from* history, [...] anti-utopias describe an escape, or attempted escape, *to* history, which is to say, to the world of contingency, conflict, and uncertainty.’<sup>32</sup> This distinction seemingly eliminates the possibility of pursuing utopias beyond the realm of the feasible. However, as Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel explain, ‘Utopia also came to denote general programs and platforms for ideal societies, codes, and constitutions that dispensed with the fictional apparatus altogether,’ while, since nineteenth century, ‘the means of reaching utopia was transformed [...] into a question of *political action*: How do you change a present misery into a future happiness *in this world*?’<sup>33</sup> Etymologically, of the two Greek prefixes that form the Latin term (*eu*, good or happy, and *ou*, not), only one directly suggests the unreal nature of ‘utopia’. The prevalent interpretation has focused on the negative prefix, seeing a ‘pun’ in Thomas More’s neologism. In this view, utopia may be thus ‘defined as both a good place, an ideal (or, at any rate, more perfect) society, yet at the same time one that does not exist—desirable, perhaps, but

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<sup>32</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre. Dostoevsky’s Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Northwestern University Press, 1981), p. 128. Italics in the original.

<sup>33</sup> Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 2 and 3.

at the same time unattainable'.<sup>34</sup> Other readings, such as Jenny Mezcicms's, argue that the translation from Greek to Latin may have obscured an ironic nuance: that 'the good place ought *not* to be unreal [...] the essence of a utopia [being] that it cannot be realized.'<sup>35</sup> This perspective gained traction in the twentieth century, where the main concern surrounding utopia shifted from its unrealisability to the potential dangers of its actualisation.<sup>36</sup>

The tensions between the desirable and the unattainable underlying the idea of a utopia are accentuated by the fact that the utopian construct is usually located in this world. As Darko Suvin explains,

Utopia is an Other World immanent in the world of human endeavor, dominion, and hypothetic possibility [...]. It is a nonexistent country on the map of this globe, a "this-worldly other world."<sup>37</sup>

The concept of utopia is frequently associated with geographically isolated locations, serving as alternatives to existing realities. More's foundational work placed utopia on an island, establishing a recurring trope within the genre.<sup>38</sup> 'Malvinas' conveniently share this characteristic. While not geographically remote from the continent, they became distant due to both political separation and the time elapsed since British occupation. This distance provided fertile ground for nationalist discourse to construct its own utopia based on the intricate interpretation that envisages in it 'a good place that ought *not* to be unreal.'<sup>39</sup> In addition, as Elisabeth Wesseling observes, utopia 'inevitably entails the privileging of one set of values over others.'<sup>40</sup> Drawing parallels with the dictatorship's 'Conquest of the Desert' ideology, I argue that Argentine

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<sup>34</sup> Chris Ferns, *Narrating Utopia. Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature* (Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. by Ralph Robinson; ed and intro. by Jenny Mezcicms (Everyman, 1992), pp. xii-xiii. Italics in the original.

<sup>36</sup> M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature. Fiction as Social Criticism* (Greenwood, 1994), p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Darko Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow. Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology* (Peter Lang, 2010), p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ferns, *Narrating Utopia*, p. 2. The author remarks that some recent utopian creations develop in the future, on other planets, or in both.

<sup>39</sup> Mezcicms in More, *Utopia*, p. xii. Italics in the original.

<sup>40</sup> Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet. Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel* (John Benjamins, 1991), p. 12.

militant nationalism constructed ‘Malvinas’ as a seemingly attainable utopia. They equated the islands with elements of this ideal place, perceived as achievable, a sort of another ‘desert’ defined by ‘la ausencia de textualidad, de escritura’, in Andermann’s words, that eventually becomes ‘una categoría que naturaliza la *inevitabilidad del propio proyecto*.’<sup>41</sup> In my view, for militant nationalists, utopia becomes their articulation of truth about the ideal Fatherland. The following sub-sections will analyse the development of this nationalist utopia, first within the real reality actions of militant nationalists and subsequently through their portrayal in the fictional universe of *Las Islas*.

#### (I) NATION AND NATIONALISM IN ‘MALVINAS’

This study argues that the core tenet of militant nationalism in Argentina is the belief in the sacred mission to redeem the national territory by occupying ‘Malvinas’ through military action. From the mid-1960s to 1982, only two political factions demonstrably pursued this objective: Peronist armed organisations (later to be merged) and the Argentine military itself. These two expressions of militant nationalism are the sole political groups depicted in the fictional universe of *Las Islas*.

‘Malvinas’ as a nationalist construct is brought to the fore by Romero, who stresses that ‘el tema [Malvinas] como tal *se fue construyendo* hace no tanto tiempo, alrededor de principios del siglo XX’, when,

*se inventan unas Malvinas ocupadas antes por los argentinos, cuya nacionalidad estaba muy presente en Luis María Vernet, nombrado en 1829 primer comandante militar y político de las Islas Malvinas, y en Antonio “el gaucho” Rivero, ejemplo de los pobladores que resistieron y fueron subyugados. Su gesta —no llegamos a decir “la sangre derramada”, porque no la hubo— nos obliga desde entonces a recuperar a la “hermanita perdida”.*

[...]

Por esos dos lados [...] Malvinas *se construye* como tema en el siglo XX, *con el crecimiento del nacionalismo*, y es el ejemplo paradigmático que cierra el argumento de un país que ha sido perjudicado, que *no puede realizarse plenamente como nación porque le*

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<sup>41</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, pp. 37 and 39.

*falta una porción de su territorio, y cuyo futuro depende de la recuperación de esas islas.*<sup>42</sup>

Similar to the geographically isolated location typical of utopias, ‘Malvinas’ also provide the ideal, or at least improved, social element, the inhabitants. While this population may not fully constitute ‘an imaginary community in which relations are organized more perfectly than in the author’s community’,<sup>43</sup> as envisioned in utopian ideals, these inhabitants are nevertheless portrayed as embodying the idealised traits of the *gaucho*: a deep sense of national identity and a noble willingness to defend the nation’s territory.<sup>44</sup>

While territory was understood as the unifying factor for nation and nationality, essential for achieving the country’s ultimate destiny, the *gaucho* supplied the archetype of the ‘Argentinian’ inhabitant. As Sebreli argues, with the formation of Argentina as a nation-state in 1880, ‘se hizo necesario *crear* a los argentinos.’<sup>45</sup> Prior to this, the dweller of the *pampas* was often disregarded by the elites. The rise of expansive agricultural capitalism forced a transformation for which, in Andermann’s words, the *gaucho* transitioned to a ‘paisano [...] padre de familia en lugar de vago, pastor en lugar de

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<sup>42</sup> Romero, *La Argentina que duele*, pp. 180 and 182. Antonio Rivero was a rural labourer who, in August 1833, led a rebellion of 14 workers against the 17 men left by the British administration. They killed three of these men, took the Commander’s House and, after hauling down the British flag, hoisted the Argentinian one. The situation lasted for four months. With the arrival of a British ship, some of the rebels deserted Rivero. He escaped to the interior of the island, where he was eventually captured. Although his uprising was against working conditions, his figure began to be revindicated by revisionist authors after Martiniano Leguizamón Pondal’s work added nationality concerns to Rivero’s action and called it the ‘Revolución del 26 de agosto’. For Riverist historiography, Rosana Guber states, ‘la rebeldía de Rivero venía de su conciencia de enajenación económica por la ocupación británica, [de] la traición de los colonos de Vernet y de la indiferencia del Estado de Buenos Aires.’ See Rosana Guber, ‘El gaucho Rivero y las interpretaciones de una historia’, in *Pensar Malvinas. Una selección de fuentes documentales, testimoniales, ficcionales y fotográficas para trabajar en el aula* (Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, 2009), pp. 77-8 (p. 78); and Martiniano Leguizamón Pondal, *Toponimia criolla en las Malvinas* (Raigal, 1956), in particular pp. 47-67.

<sup>43</sup> Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> As will be analysed in chapter 3 of this thesis, those features were attributed to the *gaucho* only after his taking part in armed actions for the benefit of the Fatherland. The *gaucho*, until that moment considered to be a ‘delincuente’, was thus transformed into a subject of a civilisation ‘liberal y estatal.’ See Josefina Ludmer, *El género gauchesco. Un tratado sobre la patria*, 2nd edn (Eterna Cadencia, 2019), pp. 38 and 39.

<sup>45</sup> Sebreli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, p. 63.

delincuente y, sobre todo, *nativo del país en lugar del no-ciudadano*.<sup>46</sup> This newfound status as ‘native of the country’ became a source of reverence for the *gaucho*. Sebreli highlights the paradox: the elite, with their European ancestry, French cultural aspirations, and British connections, ironically ‘comenzó a reivindicar lo criollo, para diferenciarse de la masa inmigratoria. El recién descubierto arraigo a la tierra era una forma de denigrar la ciudad “gringa”’.<sup>47</sup> Beyond these characteristics, the *gaucho* myth offered the nation a heroic past upon which to build its national identity. Nationalist figures like Ricardo Rojas and, more prominently, Leopoldo Lugones, emphasised this epic aspect, who, in Beatriz Sarlo’s words, consecrated the ‘*fundación mítica de la nacionalidad [argentina]*’ based on the reading of ‘*Martín Fierro en términos de épica nacional comparable a los poemas homéricos*, interpretando a su personaje como símbolo de virtudes y valores argentinos.’<sup>48</sup>

The elite leveraged the education system as a tool to homogenise the population. The curriculum, imbued with extreme nationalist and even militaristic ideology, fostered not only a citizenry inclined towards nationalist authoritarianism but also a specific connection between primary school and military service (both mandatory). Sebreli describes this continuum as follows:

El ceremonial patriótico escolar tenía características de culto religioso y de ritual militar: solemne jura de la bandera, marchas marcando el paso, canciones patrióticas y saludos diarios a la bandera, tendían a *identificar al niño con el soldado y a la escuela con el cuartel*. Significativamente, en ese mismo momento se implantaba el servicio militar obligatorio.<sup>49</sup>

In Pilar Calveiro’s words, military service became a tool, in the hands of the Armed Forces, for ‘el disciplinamiento de la sociedad, para modelarla a su imagen y semejanza’ through ‘el castigo físico —virtual tortura— sobre militares y conscriptos, es decir sobre toda la población masculina del país.’<sup>50</sup> Formal military instruction, including

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<sup>46</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> Sebreli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, p. 84.

<sup>48</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, un escritor en las orillas* (Ariel, 1995), pp. 86 and 85.

<sup>49</sup> Sebreli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, pp. 77 and 71. Military service was imposed in 1904 for all men aged 21; in 1973, the age was lowered to 18; in 1995, military service was abolished. See Lorenz, *Las guerras por Malvinas*, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup> Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (Colihue, 1998), p. 11.

shooting practice, was introduced in secondary schools from 1895 onwards, while unsuccessful attempts were made to extend this program to the primary level.<sup>51</sup> These initiatives were part of a broader movement, as Tulio Halperin Donghi terms it, of ‘*renacionalización por la escuela*’ intended to counter the perceived ‘*graves influencias desnacionalizadoras*’ of immigration.<sup>52</sup>

Unsurprisingly, then, primary education became a key instrument in inculcating ‘*la pasión colectiva por las Malvinas*’, an issue that had previously been ‘*un problema menor del siglo XIX sólo interesante para historiadores y juristas*.’<sup>53</sup> From the late 1920s, however, a combination of the country’s solid economic position and the deep implantation of nationalist ideas led the Argentine government, González explains, ‘to display a growing measure of irredentism towards the islands’ and, particularly after the coup of 1930, it actively ‘promoted the indoctrination of public opinion through the dissemination of maps and school textbooks with explicit references to the nation’s rights over the Malvinas.’<sup>54</sup> Yet, it was in the 1940s and 1950s that Argentine nationalism’s ‘finest interlocutor, Juan Perón,’ stirred a revitalisation of ‘*la causa Malvinas*’ through ‘Peronist propaganda [articulating] and [disseminating] an imaginary sense of territorial loss which, it is argued, emboldened Argentina to seek the recovery of the islands.’<sup>55</sup> Perón’s administrations (1946-1955) mandated the teaching of the Malvinas issue in schools, established a National Day of the Malvinas, created a

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<sup>51</sup> Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas. La construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), pp. 235-6. Bertoni (p. 220) outlines ‘la amplia difusión de esa capacidad entre la población masculina, importante para la capacitación de potenciales soldados del ejército nacional y para la formación moral nacional’. Sebrelí also notes the contemporaneous creation of civil societies that, among their purposes, assumed ‘formar ciudadanos fácilmente transformables en soldados’. See Sebrelí, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, p. 79. Aligning with such conceptions, in Fascist Italy the ‘ideal “Fascist man” was the warrior-disciple of a religion, and that was the model proposed from infancy to each new generation.’ See Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. by Keith Botsford (Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> Tulio Halperin Donghi, *El espejo de la historia. Problemas argentinos y perspectivas hispanoamericanas* (Sudamericana, 1987), p. 227.

<sup>53</sup> Sebrelí, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, p. 335. Even Juan Manuel de Rosas considered the matter a minor issue. In 1838 he instructed his minister to London to negotiate a cancellation of an 1824 loan in exchange for the Malvinas/Falklands sovereignty. The proposal was refused in 1841 by the British government and ‘Rosas let *the relatively unimportant matter* drop.’ See Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, p. 23.

dedicated government department for Antarctica and the Malvinas Islands, and Perón himself frequently made public references to the occupied territory.<sup>56</sup>

Argentina's most substantial diplomatic achievement on the Malvinas claim was the 1965 United Nations Resolution 2065 during the administration of Radical President Arturo Illia (1963-1966). However, as previously seen, a growing conviction within militant nationalist circles held that military intervention was the solution to reclaiming the islands. This preference for force was foreshadowed by two thwarted attempts planned by Peronist nationalist groups prior to the 1982 military action.

The first attempt occurred in 1964, when Argentine authorities foiled a plot by the 'Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario Tacuara' (MNRT). In González's words, the MNRT was an 'extremist, ultra-nationalist youth organisation whose militants had experienced a meteoric ideological conversion from Neo-Nazism to Leninism and a simultaneous rapprochement not only to Castro's revolution but also to the exiled Perón.'<sup>57</sup> Their plan, codenamed 'Operación Rivero', involved a staged malfunction of a fishing vessel to facilitate the disembarkation of 20-30 Tacuaras militants in Stanley. After expelling British authorities, they envisioned 'offering' Perón the islands as a base for his definitive return to the Argentine mainland.<sup>58</sup>

The second, thwarted nationalist attempt to seize the Malvinas/Falklands, called 'Operación Cóndor', occurred on 28 September 1966, just weeks after the coup that ousted President Illia. This operation was orchestrated by the 'Movimiento Nueva Argentina' (MNA), a nationalist youth organisation with strong Catholic leanings. González describes it as 'the right-wing equivalent to the MNRT [that] shared its faith

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<sup>56</sup> González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, pp. 23-4. Several political traditions contributed to the formation of the nationalist feeling about 'Malvinas'. One of the most enthusiastic was socialist Senator Alfredo Palacios who, in 1939, founded a 'Junta de Recuperación de las Islas Malvinas' that awarded a prize to 'Marcha de Malvinas'—an anthem still sung in schools and events related to the islands. See Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, p. 28. n7. In *Las Islas*, when the veterans sing it, Felipe significantly alters the line 'No las hemos de olvidar' with 'Nos las hemos de olvidar' (LI, 349).

<sup>57</sup> González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, p. 95. This group would play a key role within the militant nationalist field in their supply of members, methods, and ideology to the most emblematic armed organisations of the 1970s—the parapolic force 'Triple A' and the insurgent group Montoneros. See Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, in particular chapter 5 'Bombs, Death, and Ideology. From Tacuara to the Triple A', pp. 93-121.

<sup>58</sup> Daniel Gutman, *Tacuara. Historia de la primera guerrilla urbana argentina* (Vergara, 2003), p. 190.

in Perón's leadership.<sup>59</sup> The action entailed the hijacking of a commercial plane from Buenos Aires en route to Río Gallegos and diverting it to the Malvinas/Falklands. The operation was led by Dardo Cabo, a young Peronist activist with prior ties to the MNRT.<sup>60</sup> Upon landing, Cabo's group took a small number of hostages, including civilians, two Royal Marines, and the local police chief. Two leftist nationalist authors depict the scene as the group, 'se atrincheró para llevar a cabo una simbólica ocupación del territorio patrio [y] en rigurosa formación', raised the Argentine flag and sang the national anthem.<sup>61</sup> Mirroring a symbolic gesture from 1833 by Antonio Rivero, they planted seven Argentine flags and renamed Port Stanley as 'Puerto Rivero' before surrendering to the Falkland Islands Defence Force.<sup>62</sup> María Sáenz Quesada aptly characterises this 36-hour event as a 'mini' invasion, which garnered a degree of sympathy within Argentina.<sup>63</sup>

Summarising, then, for militant nationalist groups, 'Malvinas' represent a convergence of key utopian elements: a geographically isolated ideal territory, a perfect (*gaucho*) community, and the promise of a better future for the nation upon achieving this utopian ideal. The unwavering certainty that 'Las Malvinas son argentinas', coupled with the perceived sacred mission of redeeming them for the glorious destiny of the Fatherland has, in my view, fuelled a fervent competition amongst these groups to be the first to realise this utopia. As the intellectual/teacher taught them, those

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<sup>59</sup> González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, p. 161. Vitullo remarks that on 14 April and 2 May 1982, a group of exiled leftist Peronists published, in Mexico, two documents in support of Argentina's position while denouncing the dictatorship's crimes and illegitimacy. The first of the two publications—'Ante la recuperación de las Malvinas como argentinos y peronistas'—considered 'Operación Cóndor' a precedent of that military action: "Recuperar Malvinas es una vieja aspiración nacional cuyo *primer intento* fue realizado en 1966 por el *militante peronista* Dardo Cabo, quien encabezó la primera implantación de la bandera nacional en suelo malvinense y fue asesinado por esta misma dictadura en 1977." [...] Se trata entonces de no permitir que el repudio a la dictadura ensombrezca *una vieja reivindicación peronista*.' See Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, pp. 48-50. n21.

<sup>60</sup> Vicente Palermo, *Sal en las beridas. Las Malvinas en la cultura argentina contemporánea* (Sudamericana, 2007), p. 165.

<sup>61</sup> Gregorio Levenson and Ernesto Jauretche, *Héroes. Historias de la Argentina revolucionaria* (Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1998), p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> Palermo, *Sal en las beridas*, p. 168; and González, *The Genesis of the Falklands (Malvinas) Conflict*, p. 160.

<sup>63</sup> María Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina. Historia del país y de su gente* (Sudamericana, 2001), p. 672. Sáenz Quesada also observes that Cabo's project 'respecto de Malvinas tuvo una sorprendente continuidad' in Galtieri's invasion in 1982.

schoolboys sought to actualise the interpretation that envisions ‘Malvinas’ as ‘the good place that ought *not* to be unreal.’<sup>64</sup> If, as is characteristic of the genre, the ‘ideal society’ of utopia aspires to directly impact the originating community, the military’s proceedings on the islands ultimately subverted the logic of the tradition. This will be studied in the next sub-section through Gamerro’s fictional reality.

## (II) NATION AND NATIONALISM IN *LAS ISLAS*

*Las Islas* unfolds over a two-week period between 1 and 14 of June 1992, precisely ten years after the conclusion of the Malvinas/Falklands War. Felipe Félix, the protagonist, is tasked by Fausto Tamerlán to identify the witnesses to a recent murder involving Tamerlán’s only surviving child, César. The crucial information resides within the computer system of the SIDE (‘Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado’), though accessing this data necessitates physical entry into SIDE’s headquarters. Felipe’s pretext to gain access is a videogame about the war that he promised to develop for Colonel Héctor P. Verraco, his former commander and current head of the Malvinas intelligence department. Research for the game also compels Felipe to reconnect with circles of war veterans and officers, all while pursuing Tamerlán’s investigation. As Ben Bollig observes, this intricate plot situates *Las Islas* within the tradition of ‘the best detective fiction’, yet ‘what is actually being investigated keeps slipping out of view.’<sup>65</sup> Indeed, while initial focus on a fictional crime scene gradually morphs into the revelation of a nationalist plot to re-occupy ‘Malvinas’, this fictional pursuit of truth leads to the uttering of truth vis-à-vis state crimes committed by the dictatorship at the real reality level.

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<sup>64</sup> Further similarities between nationalist militant factions are found by Vezzetti, who highlights that the Army’s motto is ‘El Ejército nació con la Patria’ while that of Montoneros was ‘Patria o Muerte’, ‘una consigna, en sí misma vacía salvo en la amenaza mortal, que bien podrían haber proclamado los represores que finalmente los exterminaron’. See Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 85. During the Malvinas/Falklands War one of the commando battle cries was indeed ‘Dios y patria, o muerte’. See Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar*, p. 451. n48.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Bollig, ‘Carlos Gamerro’s historical fiction reveals stories of facts once hidden’, *The Guardian*, 10 July 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jul/10/carlos-gamerro-open-secret-islands>> [accessed 19 August 2019].

The irredentist plot in *Las Islas*, aiming to achieve the nationalist utopia and ultimately to make real the motto that assures the *certainty* of Argentina's pretensions ('Las Malvinas son argentinas'), can only rest on the annulation of the passing of time since, as seen in the previous section, time only increased the *uncertainty* of the country's rights. In my analysis, such a cancellation is achieved through a zone of impunity within the militant nationalist field. This zone essentially ignores the broad societal consensus established by the report elaborated by the 'Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas' (CONADEP), *Nunca Más*, and the Trial of the Juntas (1985) 'no sólo acerca de lo sucedido, sino, sobre todo, de *lo que debía quedar atrás*.'<sup>66</sup> This consensus condemned the atrocities of the dictatorship and advocated for moving forward as a nation under the rule of law. Building upon Gamarro's observation that the legacy of the 'Proceso' persists in the actions of security forces, I argue that the '*corte con el pasado*', in Vezzetti's formulation,<sup>67</sup> never took place nor is even acknowledged by nationalists in *Las Islas*. What Argentine society views as the past, or at least something to be left behind, remains a defining aspect of the present for these militant nationalists.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 115. Italics in the original.

<sup>67</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 28. Italics in the original.

<sup>68</sup> Transitions to democratic regimes from dictatorships responsible for mass crimes brings to the fore the matter of retroactive justice—an extremely complex question that involves legal, political, and moral aspects whose full analysis is certainly far beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a quick overview shows that the most relevant cases of human rights violations in the twentieth century generally ended, as Carlos Nino elucidates, in 'blanket amnesties or pardons, widespread silence, and failure to prosecute anyone.' Nino calls these situations 'failures of the law,' and summarises Argentina's case by saying that Alfonsín's government 'tried and investigated some of those most responsible for the human rights violations committed by the military dictatorship from 1976 until its collapse in 1983 [...] an extraordinarily difficult process, with different actors pressing for different courses of action; it ended when all the accused, even those convicted or sentenced, were granted presidential pardons.' See Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (Yale University Press, 1996), p. viii. Indeed, concerned with the application of retroactive justice but also 'to subordinate the armed forces to civilian rule once and for all', President Alfonsín decided 'to concentrate punishment on the leadership and the most notorious perpetrators and to apply to the others the concept of "due obedience".' After the sentence was pronounced, in 1985, the 'Punto Final' law established a time limit of two months on suits against the military, and, in 1987, the 'Obediencia Debida' law exonerated *en masse* the subordinates in the 'dirty war'. In late 1989, President Menem granted pardons to the military that had mutinied against Alfonsín (the *carapintadas*) and, in 1990, to the incarcerated ex-junta members. See Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 262, 263, 265, and 301.

Tamerlán commissions Felipe with that investigation not only because of his capacity as an IT specialist, but specifically because of ‘sus contactos’ (LI, 25), that is, for his having been in ‘Malvinas’. ‘Malvinas’ literally appears the key to gain access to a state that is the guarantee of the territory as ‘portador de la argentinidad’.<sup>69</sup> It is evident once Felipe phones coronel Verraco:

—¡Argentinas en el 2000! —dijo en lugar de “hola”, lo que me confundió hasta que entendí que se refería a Las Islas.  
—Argentinas, mi teniente coronel. Aquí el soldado Felipe Félix reportándose (LI, 46).

The state agency slogan, a reformulation of the traditional motto guaranteeing that ‘Las Malvinas son argentinas’, presents a notion of time that is, at least, convoluted. While it subtly introduces a date in the future (‘Malvinas’ *will be* Argentine in 2000), Felipe is still a ‘soldado’ (as in 1982) and Verraco has risen in rank from ‘capitanejo’ (LI, 124) to a ‘teniente coronel’ only to become again ‘su viejo comandante’ (LI, 46). Earlier, Felipe identifies himself to SIDE as ‘[s]oldado clase 62 Felipe Félix, Regimiento 7 Compañía B, apostado en La Plata, Puerto Argentino y Monte Longdon’ (LI, 45), fixing thus in the present his three subsequent destinations during a war that, according to the historical timeline, ended a decade prior. Yet again, this is not the case for militant nationalists. Consequent to that ‘break with the past’ that for them never took place, they believe in a ‘mítico jefe de comandos en Puerto Argentino’ (LI, 67) still actively fighting on the islands. If for them the war is not over, an ironic hint at the absurdity of the nationalists’ beliefs is given by the physical location of ‘Argentinas en el 2000’, the official department in charge of redeeming the national territory: ‘[l]a esquina de Córdoba y Paraguay’ (LI, 121), where it is situated in the novel, does not exist in real reality; the two streets run in parallel and never intersect.

Within the militant nationalist field, the distorted perception of time, leading to a negation of its passage, finds an advocate in old-fashioned Peronist Don Benito.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Romero (ed.), *La Argentina en la escuela*, p. 199.

<sup>70</sup> Don Benito’s name recalls Mussolini and the fascist components of Peronism, as was the predominant criticism of leftist parties during the first periods of Juan Domingo Perón in office. See Carlos Altamirano, ‘Una, dos, tres izquierdas ante el hecho peronista (1946-1955)’, in Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, 2nd rev. edn (Siglo XXI, 2011), pp. 19-34. Sebreli documents several interventions in which Perón acknowledged his fascist political inclination. See Sebreli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, p. 230. Finchelstein also

Employed at the ‘Argentinas en el 2000’ solely to investigate ‘la conexión entre la pérdida de Las Islas y el robo de las manos de Perón’ (LI, 130), Don Benito essentially serves as a shield for the military’s suspected role in both events, as Felipe observes. Don Benito’s Peronist interpretation of the islands’ loss is presented in a brief text titled ‘Esas manos’, a clear allusion to Rodolfo Walsh’s short story ‘Esa mujer’ (1965) about Eva Perón’s kidnapped corpse. Don Benito equates the nation’s body politic with Perón’s mutilated body (‘el cuerpo de un hombre tan ancho que todos creyeron que podía contener al país entero en su abrazo’ [LI, 130]) in which the severed hands become symbolic of the islands (‘dos mariposas heridas [...] que, muy al sur, agotadas, decidieron posarse sobre el mar’ [LI, 130]). When Felipe points out the glaring impossibility of the metaphor, as ‘Galtieri invadió Las Islas en el 82, y a Perón las manos se las cortaron recién en el 87’, Don Benito expresses the nationalist conception of time, reflecting a quasi-Platonic ideal of identity:

—Lo que usted ha tenido el privilegio de leer es una fábula, y las fábulas son *atemporales* —me retó con acento de maestro ciruela—. Los *hechos patrios* ya existen todos, *eternamente*, en una Identidad de la cual sólo gradualmente podemos desprenderlos y *hacerlos reales*, y a veces en una *sucesión inadecuada* (LI, 131).

Beyond the veiled accusation against the military of having ‘kidnapped’ the Malvinas, similar to Eva’s corpse or even Perón’s hands, Don Benito’s ‘fábula’ not only dismantles historical chronology but also reinforces a crucial concept that sustains the nationalists’ zone of impunity: only events deemed ‘hechos patrios’ are, or may be, real. Nationalists reserve the power to grant reality to events by classifying them as such. Conversely, their silence regarding actions that established the ‘*corte con el pasado*’<sup>71</sup> effectively validates the zone of impunity. This selective memory is equally significant in the abolition of time, since, as Vezzetti argues, ‘la consigna *Nunca más* [estableció]

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outlines that ‘the original Peronist populist movement was not fascist but Perón’s “mentality” was.’ See Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 73. My considering Don Benito as an ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘traditional’ Peronist is based on his primary identification with the figure of Perón, while—as will be studied in chapter 4 of this thesis—revolutionary Peronism in the 1970s tended to associate itself with Evita.

<sup>71</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 28. Italics in the original.

ante todo la voluntad de *no olvidar lo que no debe repetirse*.<sup>72</sup> Integral to their pursuit of impunity, then, militant nationalists have shaped a zone of amnesia that fosters a cyclical, potentially endless repetition of precisely those events that Argentine civil society deems must not be repeated.

*Las Islas* portrays two distinct spaces frequented by militant nationalists, highlighting both their extreme ambitions and their marginalisation within the broader irredentist movement. In addition to the aforementioned state agency dedicated to reclaiming ‘Malvinas’, Felipe encounters the ‘Asociación Virreinal Argentina’. This organisation harbours the extravagant goal of ‘restaurar las fronteras nacionales a los límites históricos del Virreinato del Río de la Plata (para lo cual propone, entre otras cosas, reconquistar Bolivia, Paraguay y Uruguay e invadir Chile y Brasil)’ (*LI*, 52).<sup>73</sup> While the titles of these spaces evoke the territorial aspirations of Argentine nationalism, their physical locations underscore their marginality and anachronism. The state office resides in the ‘oficialmente inexistente tercer subsuelo’ (*LI*, 121) of a recently opened shopping centre. This placement suggests the opacity of its activities and stands in stark contrast to the clear ascendancy of the private sector over the state. The ‘Asociación Virreinal Argentina’, for its part, operates from a rickety third-floor office in an ageing building in downtown Buenos Aires. However, the most significant distinction between these spaces lies in their relationship to Peronism. According to Finchelstein,

[m]any nacionalistas saw in Perón and the movement that bore his name the continuation of imperial and vernacular Argentina, heir of Rosas, and the Argentine history of “religion

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<sup>72</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 30. Italics in the original. Romero (*A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, p. 261) states that the *Nunca más* report was ‘absolutely incontrovertible, even for those who wished to defend the military,’ while Vezzetti (p. 187) outlines that ‘el informe de la CONADEP y el Juicio [...] se proponía[n] determinar *hechos* antes que debatir juicios morales o evaluaciones políticas.’ Italics in the original. This is certainly the opposite to what nationalists do in *Las Islas*.

<sup>73</sup> This preposterous scheme was in the 1920s, as Finchelstein reminds us, a nationalist update of ‘the myth of “the restoration of the Viceroyalty.” According to them, the era of independence was the moment in which Argentina’s rightful dominions in Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia were stolen.’ This ‘rebirth of an Argentine viceroyalty’ would consist in a ‘somehow liberated under Argentine imperialism [...] Argentine-led consortium of five nations (Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Chile) whose territories made up the old viceroyalty of the River Plate.’ See Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, pp. 24 and 41.

or death” and the “Holy Federation,” the nacionalista union of the Cross and the Sword. But nacionalistas also complained that Perón had stolen their slogans, their social program, their hegemonic plan of Catholic and military education, their state corporatism, and their defense of fascism’s legacy.<sup>74</sup>

This conflictive perception of traditional nationalists is settled in *Las Islas* by their thoroughly erasing Perón and Peronism from their narrative of ‘hechos patrios’. In my analysis, however, the most significant trait uniting the two nationalist institutions is a distinction central to understanding the disputes inside this ideological field, i.e., the contrasting figures of the teacher/intellectual who conceived the nationalist utopia, on one side, and the schoolboy/soldier who attempted to materialise it, on the other.<sup>75</sup>

The two nationalist teachers/intellectuals portrayed in *Las Islas* are Peronist Don Benito and classic nationalist Professor Citatorio. Don Benito lectures Felipe ‘con acento de maestro ciruela’ (*LI*, 131) in an office whose name, ‘Argentinas en el 2000’, recalls Perón’s famous dictum of 1951: ‘El año 2000 nos encontrará unidos o dominados.’<sup>76</sup> While the year became synonymous with a distant, idealised future, seemingly excusing the department’s ineffectiveness, the state’s Peronist identity is further emphasised by the use of ‘una versión soft en órgano Yamaha de la marcha peronista’ (*LI*, 45) during phone calls. Mirroring the Peronist teacher/intellectual stands the antisemitic Professor Citatorio, the ideological anchor of the ‘Asociación Virreinal Argentina’. Though Felipe considers both Don Benito and Professor Citatorio to be part of the same generation of old nationalists, Citatorio’s concerns align with late nineteenth-century nationalism, evident in his antisemitism and xenophobic views regarding Chilean territorial ambitions. Furthermore, this classic nationalist archetype lives on teaching ‘cursos de historia nacional, política nacional, folklore nacional, música nacional y cuanta disciplina pueda cargar con el adjetivo’ (*LI*, 52) at the aforementioned association, while the Peronist intellectual reflects the (at

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<sup>74</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> This seems to be a distinctive trait of all nationalisms, as Andermann observes that ‘la escisión del significante popular es la condición misma de los discursos nacionalistas: presunto sujeto enunciador del *performance* de lo nacional, el “pueblo” se torna objeto y destinatario del mensaje pedagógico pronunciado por una autoridad letrada.’ See Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 231. Italics in the original.

<sup>76</sup> Perón’s quote is reproduced in Norberto Galasso, *¿Cómo pensar la realidad nacional? Crítica al pensamiento colonizado* (Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 2008), p. 307.

least ideological) ascendancy of Peronism over the state by drawing a salary from the public sector.

Don Benito and Professor Citatorio, representing the two strands of nationalist teachers/intellectuals in the novel, both utilise the image of a mutilated body to depict the country's condition. This suggests that militant nationalism, either Peronist or classic, has no new concepts to offer beyond irredentism. While Don Benito invokes a Peronist image, stating that '[e]l día en que sus manos vuelvan a estar unidas a su cuerpo, el día en que Las Islas estén unidas al continente, volverá a ser una nuestra patria dividida y castigada' (*LI*, 132), Professor Citatorio resorts to a rather vulgar metaphor, referencing the male genitalia, to express an identical idea. A frequently quoted passage from the novel has him prophesying:

La Argentina es una pija parada lista para procrear y las Malvinas son sus pelotas. ¡Cuando las recuperemos volverá la fertilidad a nuestras tierras, y seremos una gran nación como soñaron nuestros próceres! (*LI*, 58).

The similarities between the two teachers/intellectuals extend beyond their use of metaphorical rhetoric. Neither figure possesses a concrete plan for taking back the islands. While Felipe observes that Don Benito's writings have become of a 'naturaleza cósmica [...] que pocos aquí podían apreciar' (*LI*, 130), i.e., they are useless within the confines of the SIDE agency, Professor Citatorio's audience consists solely of former conscripts, i.e., those who lack the power to influence strategic decision-making. The waning influence of nationalist discourse in Argentine society is further underscored by the financial situation of the 'Asociación Virreinal Argentina'. Citatorio's classes barely generate enough income to cover basic maintenance costs, as his only students are those conscripts who repeatedly take the courses because they are 'gratis con certificado' (*LI*, 53).

Echoing Don Benito's disregard for chronology, Professor Citatorio interprets all significant historical events through the same lens: the ever-expanding power of Jews since the establishment of 'la serpiente' in Palestine, in 959 BCE (*LI*, 53). This distorted criterion allows him to selectively choose historical dates relevant to Argentina and 'Malvinas', ultimately injecting antisemitism into his conception of 'hechos patrios'. He can thus conveniently omit events like the rise of Peronism and

explain the British occupation in 1833 by claiming that the secretly Jewish Viceroy ‘Sobremonsky, un falso converso’ (LI, 56), hid a treasure somewhere on the islands. Citatorio’s warped logic leads him to declare the Malvinas/Falklands War was the first ‘liberación completa del territorio nacional’ (LI, 57), as, according to his explanation,

a principios del 82 los ingleses se estaban retirando de Malvinas para que las poblaran colonos chilenos e israelíes. La primera etapa del Plan Andinia. Después nos invadirían desde los dos frentes. Según él, el haber logrado impedir este plan en el 82 indica que en realidad ganamos la guerra (LI, 58).<sup>77</sup>

Citatorio’s construal is endorsed by the veterans with a note of the indoctrination characteristic of Argentinian education, expanding to the *literal* justifications based on territorialism:

—Y... si mirás el mapa de Chile realmente parece una serpiente. Mirá, la cola sería Tierra del Fuego. Pudo poner sus huevos en el Atlántico después de lo del Beagle. Y no me vas a negar que Las Islas parecen dos huevos estrellados (LI, 58).

Despite omitting any direct mention of Perón in his lectures, Professor Citatorio incorporates elements from the populist leader’s repertoire, underscoring thus the inextricable links between nationalism, ‘Malvinas’, and Peronism. Citatorio envisions that the desired reunification will produce ‘la Argentina potencia que todos anhelamos’ (LI, 59), blatantly appropriating Perón’s 1973 slogan upon his return, ‘la Argentina potencia.’<sup>78</sup> Following their teacher/intellectual’s procedures, the military, too, rely heavily on Peronist iconography. They draw upon both the image of crowds supporting a national cause in Plaza de Mayo and a general on the Casa Rosada balcony, evoking a Perón-like figure. This double usurpation (rather than the war itself) is Don Benito’s core critique of the military. For him, ‘[l]a patria existe a nivel simbólico [...], es una metáfora,’ and, consequently, the mistake the military made in 1982 was ‘trata[r] de hacerla real toda de golpe [porque] se le evaporará de las manos’

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<sup>77</sup> This elaborated construct seeing a positive effect in an evidently adverse situation is not new for nationalist groups. In *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara*, for instance, immediately after the coup of 1976 a Montonero leader expresses: ‘La correlación de fuerzas favorece por el momento al enemigo [...]. Pero eso mismo a la larga *constituye nuestra ventaja* [...]. Si para el primer año logramos estabilizar la relación caídas / incorporaciones, en el segundo *damos vuelta el resultado*’ (YCCG, 262).

<sup>78</sup> Juan Domingo Perón, *Discursos completos*, 4 vols (Megafón, 1987), III, p. 142.

(LI, 132), that is, to redeem the national territory abruptly by employing appropriated Peronist symbolism. However, if the masses gathered in the quintessential Peronist space mistake that ‘payaso con hielo en las narices y fuego en el estómago’ (LI, 130) for its true leader, Don Benito views this confusion as temporary, ultimately upholding the Catholic-Peronist maxim: ‘el pueblo nunca se equivoca.’<sup>79</sup>

While the nationalist teachers/intellectuals, Don Benito and Professor Citatorio, express irredentism on a metaphorical level, their student counterparts, the schoolboys/ soldiers, are those who made the symbolic real. Lieutenant Hugo Carcasa, whose celebration Felipe joins after visiting SIDE and Citatorio’s class, has lost his legs in the war, leaving thus parts of his physical being in the islands. In line with both teachers/intellectuals’ lesson, the officer ‘había llegado a identificar [sus piernas] sin más con las dos Islas,’ stirring in his mind the belief that the hypothetical repossession of ‘Malvinas’ would entail for him ‘encontrarse con dos piernas suaves y rosadas como las de un recién nacido’ (LI, 349). This conviction leads Carcasa to make the exalted promise that ‘volveremos a dejar *nuestras huellas* sobre la tierra de Malvinas, a *pisotear* a los ingleses, a *recuperar* todo lo que nos quitaron’ (LI, 349), which pathetically highlights the impossibility of the nationalist utopia, not merely because of the bodily unfeasibility of their concretion, but of the falsity of their foundations: Carcasa’s mutilation was the outcome of a military misstep, since ‘desembarcando en la *playa equivocada*, su lancha rozó una de *nuestras minas* y la proa voló por el aire junto con sus *dos piernas segadas*’ (LI, 347). By equating his physical loss with the loss of the islands, the military position themselves as the only ones with the *right* to pursue the nationalist utopia, even though this claim rests on the military’s own errors and ultimately on false premises.

Carcasa’s party also exposes the unsolvable situation of the other schoolboys/ soldiers involved in the Malvinas/Falklands War: the conscripts. If at the war’s outset they were civilians who had just completed mandatory military service or received

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<sup>79</sup> Perón’s original dictum was ‘la razón es lo que el pueblo quiere’, later reformulated in the phrase that expresses ‘*el ethos católico de la sabiduría del pueblo.*’ See Fortunato Mallimaci, Humberto Cucchetti and Luis Donnatello, ‘Caminos sinuosos. Nacionalismo y catolicismo en la Argentina contemporánea’, in *El altar y el trono. Ensayos sobre el catolicismo político iberoamericano*, ed. by Francisco Colom and Ángel Rivero (Anthropos and Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2006), pp. 155-90 (p. 166). Italics in the original.

basic training in the preceding weeks, neither upon their return nor even a decade later have they fully transitioned into military personnel. Most attend Citatorio's courses and participate in military celebrations, yet they find no place in the nationalist discourses. These discourses abolish the passage of time, as previously noted, while for them, instead,

[e]l futuro es lo que importa, no el pasado. Y en el futuro nos espera *nuestro hogar*. Cuando llegemos, todo esto no va a tener importancia (LI, 372).

Whereas the classic nationalist teacher celebrates the Malvinas/Falklands War as a victory, and the Peronist one posits the islands' reunification as an inevitable future event (rendering 'Malvinas' a non-urgent, 'cosmic' concern), the veterans are trapped between these contrasting narratives. They are unable to envision a future that does not involve reclaiming their 'homeland', nor can they imagine a return without their former officers. Their sense of homelessness is poignantly expressed in the question: '¿Quién va a llevarnos de vuelta, si no?' (LI, 372). With the nationalist intellectuals/teachers having abandoned the cause, it seems logical for the veterans to hold onto those who attempted the irredentist act and provided them, even if fleetingly, with a sense of belonging: the schoolboys/officers.

Vitullo argues persuasively that the inherent uncertainty of paternal identity, compared to the certainty of motherhood, implies that 'al padre sólo le resta mandar a morir a esos hijos porque lo acecha la duda sobre su paternidad,' with the effect of an 'interrupción del crecimiento' at the age of eighteen, that of the mandatory military service, when those conscripts were sent to 'Malvinas'.<sup>80</sup> Those who survived this ordeal, marked by a reversal of Oedipal expectations, are left to grapple with a double failure: the failure to die for the nation and the failure to graduate from school. Forced into a perpetual state of childhood, their adult life becomes an impossibility. The novel highlights this notion by depicting all activities related to 'Malvinas' as belonging to the realm of school-age children.

The group of veterans attending Citatorio's lectures commemorate the tenth anniversary of the 2 April by disembarking on an artificial island in the Lagos de

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<sup>80</sup> Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, pp. 119 and 156.

Palermo. This act evokes the school picnics organised every 21 September, on Argentina's 'Día del Estudiante'. While their conclusion is definitive, 'fue fantástico', reality quickly intrudes, with a hint at the invading army's defeat: 'Decí que hay tantos árboles, parece más Vietnam que Malvinas' (LI, 62). Cimatorio's lectures further resonate with the schoolyard. Some veterans attend solely for the opportunity to share a mildly vengeful joke on the nationalist teacher: 'Habían venido *sólo para gozar* de este momento (LI, 57). Even their after-class activity harks back to childhood. The veterans gather at a bar to watch a ritualistic fight between a British paratrooper and an Argentinian conscript on the popular children's television program *Titanes en el ring*. The fight predictably ends with the Argentine's victory, complete with the American referee getting punched for unfairly aiding the Briton. The climax arrives when the veterans erupt in joy as the ring's fabric is ripped away, revealing '¡[...] grabadas debajo las Malvinas!' (LI, 76).

The most significant activity, however, is the veteran's scale model of

la *efímera y eterna* capital de Las Islas, la villa de Puerto Argentino [...] una mañana tranquila de *fines de abril*, cuando todavía ningún cráter, ningún edificio con todo desparramado a la vista, ningún árbol desgajado andaban anunciado que *la historia había llegado de visita al pueblo* (LI, 77).

In line with the 'eternal' moment outside of history that the veteran seeks to solidify, he endlessly refines his artwork. Felipe presses him to finish it once and for all, an act that Felipe perceives as 'como hacer sufrir a un chico, fácil y sin riesgos' (LI, 83). In addition to endorsing the pausing of time of nationalists, the veteran's categorical refusal ('no voy a entregarlas nunca' [LI, 84]) permanently links their conscript age with the idyllic moment when the Fatherland was complete and perfect. His method for halting time is fittingly territorial:

Ignacio había descubierto [...] que *el espacio es infinitamente divisible* y que mientras uno profundice en esta división puede obligar a *mantenerse inmóvil al tiempo* (LI, 80-81).

Since the Fatherland was supposedly redeemed when they were eighteen, the passage of time would only distance them from that moment of perfection. This creates a central conflict for the conscripts, caught between a 'futuro [en el que] nos espera

nuestro hogar' and the idealised instant that equated them with the nation. If the veteran's meticulously crafted scale model signifies the day when 'Las Malvinas *eran* argentinas', this dedication also implies that the slogan's promise can only hold true as kids, when the war, and the subsequent loss of the islands, were out of question.

Perhaps it is the military's incapacity to move towards any time different from the motionless present of the slogan 'Las Malvinas son argentinas' that compels the conscripts to cling to them. Their guiding figure, Major X, 'el mítico jefe de comandos en Puerto Argentino' (*LI*, 67) who is still fighting in the islands after vowing 'no volver hasta recuperarlas' (*LI*, 73), guarantees that immobility, despite his having written a diary that is supposed to contain 'la clave del *futuro* de Las Islas, que es el *futuro* de la patria' (*LI*, 74). As with other matters concerning 'Malvinas', Major X's *real* identity appears irrelevant to the veterans. His biography begins in the islands, a fully formed product of the nationalist utopia. While Major X's pseudonym mirrors that of the well-known character in Walsh's 'Esa mujer' and his squad resembles 'el pelotón fantasma' in R. E. Fogwill's *Los pichiciegos*,<sup>81</sup> these intertextual connections are lost on the veterans. Similarly, an intratextual association eludes them later in the novel, when Felipe recalls his friend Carlitos' torture through stakes as 'la X tirante que era mi amigo sobre el barro' (*LI*, 367). These literary echoes, hinting at connections between the military's abduction of Eva Perón's corpse and 'Malvinas', the war's defeat, and the dictatorship's repressive methods, are overlooked by the veterans. They perceive only Major X's mythical status. According to J. A. Cuddon, myth is 'a fiction, but a fiction which conveys *a psychological truth* [...] a story which is not "true" and which involves (as a rule) *supernatural beings* - or at any rate *supra-human beings*.'<sup>82</sup> The fact that news about Major X arrives through unreliable sources (rumours, sparse pages of his war diary, indecipherable words of an aphasic veteran in a mental hospital) seems to only bolster the truthfulness of his myth. Embracing the nationalists' paranoid way of thinking, the veterans dismiss the 'untrue' component of myth:

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<sup>81</sup> Laura Destéfánis, 'El diario del mayor X, informe clasificado del Descubrimiento y la (Re)Conquista de las Islas Malvinas (en *Las Islas*, Carlos Gamerro)', *Anales de Literatura Latinoamericana*, 44 (2015), pp. 71-82 (pp. 72 and 74).

<sup>82</sup> J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd rev. edn (Penguin, 1991), p. 562.

Ninguna agencia noticiosa, ni siquiera las nuestras, admitiría jamás que un pelotón argentino se encuentra todavía combatiendo en Las Islas, diez años después. ¡Y no pueden encontrarlo! (LI, 73-74).

Favouring instead the ‘psychological truth’ of ‘supernatural’ or ‘supra-human beings’, Major X’s myth entails, for the veterans, the obligation of *still* being conscripts in the eternal present of nationalism. Giving up a fellow in combat would mean for a soldier to become a deserter, to end the war, and, consequently, to make their most craved return ‘home’ definitively impossible.

Major X serves not only to secure the military’s exclusive right to ‘Malvinas’ but also to confirm the nationalist discourse that a reachable utopia exists with its perfect *gaucho* community. The novel later reveals that Major X was a torturer in mainland Argentina, yet his being in utopia allows him to re-enact, according to his diary, the ethics of resistance once practiced by Antonio ‘el gaucho’ Rivero after being abandoned by the state. Aptly for the sacred Fatherland, those mythical pages are deemed a ‘texto sagrado’ (LI, 453) while built like the nationalists’ conception of the severed national territory: around something lost and subsequently idealised due to a lack of knowledge and concrete references. Like ‘Malvinas’ and mainland Argentina, the reunification of the diary’s scattered pages denotes the irredentist nationalist promise of materialising ‘el futuro de la patria’ indeed. When Felipe reunites the diary, signifying the completion of the irredentist act, the document reveals a crucial truth: the military’s utter ignorance about the real islands and their lack of preparation for a modern war resulted in a level of confusion akin to infancy. If for decades Argentinian nationalism has relied on the education system to create soldier-like pupils, upon reaching ‘Malvinas’ these soldiers regress back into children. While the veterans naively believe that Major X’s diary holds ‘[t]odas las respuestas’ (LI, 74), as if it were for/of a school exam, the pages ironically record that a few days before the official surrender Major X received dream messages commanding him to ‘abandonar *la escuela*’ (LI, 471). The building housing his company had always been a school, a fact confirmed when he orders the evacuation ‘segundos antes de que el bombardeo naval redujera *la escuela* a escombros’ (LI, 471). Major X’s myth thus begins with his departure from ‘la escuela’, leading to another significant, albeit illusory, ‘liberation’: that of the student

indoctrinated to reach utopia escaping the educator who conceived it. The war, then, becomes a stark metaphor for the military's failed exam.

Major X was among the commandos deployed during the Malvinas/Falklands War. Novaro and Palermo describe these officers as possessing 'gran preparación militar, una moral de combate sumamente elevada y una mística nacionalista y católica excepcionalmente dura.'<sup>83</sup> If neither Major X's professional preparation nor his combat morale can be asserted in the novel, the combination of fervent Catholicism with nationalism adds another layer of confusion to his mind. Following his escape from the bombed school, he becomes known as 'el radar de Dios' (*LI*, 472) after which, driven by a desire for 'conquistar la gloria' (*LI*, 472), he sets off on an expedition believing Sobremonte's treasure is actually located in 'la mítica tierra de El Dorado' (*LI*, 467). The fusion of these two myths within Major X's expedition has supported readings of his diary as a parodic chronicle of conquest.<sup>84</sup> While once again financial gain motivates this nationalist/territorial venture, utopia remains, in my view, the primary framework of Major X's diary. The record of his conquest expedition aligns with another feature of the utopian genre: the traveller's tale.<sup>85</sup> Analysing Argentine travel literature of the latter half of the nineteenth century (that is, after the annexation of a territory claimed as national through the 'Conquest of the Desert'), Andermann argues that these writings aimed to '*tomar posesión, mediante la letra, de tierras que hasta el momento habían estado fuera de su alcance, en nombre de los valores que esa letra representa [y] nacionaliza[r] entonces el espacio por el que viaja, mostrándolo como algo intrínsecamente propio antes aun de haber sido enfocado por el observador,*' which ultimately leads to 'una literatura que imagina —sueña o alucina— *patrias utópicas.*'<sup>86</sup> In

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<sup>83</sup> Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar*, p. 451. n48.

<sup>84</sup> Destéfani, 'El diario del mayor X', p. 72. Lardone ('*Las Islas* de Carlos Gamerro: farsa y épica en torno a la identidad nacional', p. 4) sees a parody of Columbus's diaries, reminding that in 1992—the year in which the events of *Las Islas* unfold—the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of America was commemorated. Gamerro himself describes the military's procedures in the war as 'un ejército conquistador que ocupa un territorio ajeno y somete a la población local.' See Carlos Gamerro, '14 de junio, 1982. A veinte años de la derrota de Malvinas', in Gamerro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, pp. 46-55 (p. 49) (first publ. in *Radar*, 16 June 2002).

<sup>85</sup> Ferns, *Narrating Utopia*, p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, pp. 108 and 109.

addition to these features, Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel posit that geographical discoveries of new territories, often products of conquest endeavours,

helped to make utopia plausible [...]. As strange lands were penetrated, the windows of credibility were opened wide. Authentic narratives about new nations and kingdoms with hitherto unheard-of customs were in themselves so marvelous that they lent verisimilitude to the imaginary utopia, however wild it might be. The boundary line between real and unreal, possible and impossible, faded.<sup>87</sup>

The verisimilitude of the nationalist utopia is indeed lent by the fading of the 'boundary line between real and unreal' through one of Baroque's 'formas de inmersión total: cuando soñamos tomamos la realidad onírica como *la* realidad sin más y no tenemos conciencia del otro plano, el de la vigilia; si lo hacemos, despertamos.'<sup>88</sup> If Major X never questions whether he 'vive o sueña',<sup>89</sup> once the pages of his diary are re-united it is clear that the only first-hand military testimony about 'Malvinas' reveals that the place that Argentinian nationalisms had constructed for 150 years belongs to the reality of hallucinations.

Whereas Major X's then-wife presumes he arrived in the islands on 2 April 1982, the documented portion of his diary only begins on 21 May. By this point, having spent over a month and a half in utopia, Major X appears utterly bewildered and almost indifferent to the ongoing war. Instead, he becomes increasingly fixated on classic nationalist anxieties, such as antisemitism and anti-evolutionary theories. The extent of Major X's alienation is evident in his inability, despite his fervent Catholicism, to recognise Christian symbols held by the islanders. This estrangement underscores the complete disconnect between the real place and the idealised version constructed since the late nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup> He cannot even articulate his unease because such a feeling has no place within the nationalist invention of 'Malvinas'.

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<sup>87</sup> F.E. and F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, p. 82.

<sup>88</sup> Carlos Gamerro, *Ficciones barrocas. Una lectura de Borges, Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, Cortázar, Onetti y Felisberto Hernández* (Eterna Cadencia, 2010), p. 46. Italics in the original.

<sup>89</sup> Gamerro, *Ficciones barrocas*, p. 19.

<sup>90</sup> Some testimonies in real reality agree with this description. A conscript stationed in the Darwin area, for instance, refers to 'una sensación bastante extraña: uno sabía que esta tierra era nuestra, pero veía gente que *ni siquiera* hablaba nuestro idioma.' In a letter of 22

If Major X's biography begins with a conqueror's resolve, his chief contribution to the militant nationalists and their stopping of time is his echoing 'el gaucho' Rivero's deeds. His decision of going to 'el corazón de los sombríos montes interiores, [...] hacia la muerte, o hacia el honor, la fama y la gloria' (LI, 472) replicates Rivero's escape when the British took the islands in 1833, in what is deemed a rebellion against both the foreign power and the state's desertion. Unlike Rivero, however, Major X's refusal to 'volver [...] como prisioneros en un barco enemigo [con] el amargo sabor a la derrota' (LI, 472), that is, to acknowledge a historical fact, allows him to give a testimony of the perfect *gaucho* community. Exposing again the circular immobility of the nationalist time, 'la Argentina invisible' (LI, 477) means his arrival at—the return to—the familiar place of the nationalists' dreams.<sup>91</sup> The person who opens the doors of the 'Gran Estancia Nacional' is a 'gaucho impecablemente ataviado, con las facciones de Lugones' just to offer Major X 'una fastuosa parrillada asada' joining '[c]ientos de próceres vestidos a la usanza tradicional' (LI, 478). Utopia also fulfils the most valued among nationalist premises, as Major X is told that '[l]a comunidad argentina ideal [...] fundada por los argentinos residentes en Malvinas tras la ocupación de Las Islas en 1830' has the purpose of 'mantener pura la esencia patria y desde allí *manejar con su mano invisible los destinos nacionales*' (LI, 478). In addition to identifying 'Malvinas' as the guide of the national destiny, this 'esencia patria' is constituted by masculinity; purity of race, of blood, of nationalist ideology, even of national language; rejection of any foreign influence, of immigration, and of women (LI, 479). In other words, it is an index of the most retrograde principles nationalism has sustained in a century and a half.

The invasion of 'Malvinas', Vezzetti elucidates, sought 'una legitimidad retrospectiva hacia la "guerra interior", "sucia"', since, 'primero la guerra antisubversiva habría eliminado el enemigo interior y pretendidamente sentado las

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April 1982, another conscript mentions the village as 'Puerto Rivero', the name the 'Condors' gave it in 1966. See Lorenz, *Las guerras por Malvinas*, p. 110.

<sup>91</sup> As Vitullo notes, the name of the nationalist utopia, 'la Argentina invisible', alludes to a construct of a nationalist author, Eduardo Mallea (1903-1982). See Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, p. 139. For a detailed examination of Mallea's thought, see Tulio Halperin Donghi, 'Las angustias de un observador distante: Eduardo Mallea y la "Argentina invisible"', in Halperin Donghi, *Las tormentas del mundo en el Río de la Plata. Cómo pensaron su época los intelectuales del siglo XX* (Siglo XXI, 2015), pp. 115-53.

bases para una refundación nacional, y luego se habría cumplido la guerra contra el enemigo externo, de redención y recuperación de la integridad territorial de la Patria.”<sup>92</sup>

The Lugones-like character endorses the idea of a severed body of the nation attacked by both the internal and the external enemies when he tells Major X that the voices of those great men of the ‘comunidad ideal argentina’

han guiado siempre a los grandes hombres de la patria. Ellas impulsaron a Rosas a combatir contra el Imperio, a Uriburu y Aramburu a disciplinar la chusma aluvional, a las Fuerzas Armadas a tomar el poder el 24 de marzo y Las Islas el glorioso 2 de abril (*LI*, 479).

Implicit in this discourse is the supremacy of the military of the ‘Proceso’ within the militant nationalist universe, since they alone have fought both enemies at the same time. If further evidence was required, this perfect, utopian voice invests the military with the exclusive right to accomplish the redemption of Fatherland.

‘La Argentina invisible’ produces yet another intervention within militant nationalism in their competition to identify the embodiment of the nation. While traditional Peronism looked for ‘esas manos’, and revolutionary Peronism looked for ‘esa mujer’, the illustrious *gauchos* now require the man who ‘sabrá guiarnos, el nuevo San Martín’: Major X is, of course, ‘ese hombre’ (*LI*, 480). While the ambition of his undertaking is undeniable, as it supposedly leads to ‘la conquista del mundo por parte de la Argentina’ (*LI*, 479), the schoolboy/soldier remains trapped within the lessons of his teachers, even as he attempts to surpass the imperialist goal of restoring ‘las fronteras nacionales a los límites históricos del Virreinato del Río de la Plata’ (*LI*, 52). Indeed, leaving ‘la escuela’ ultimately reveals that the situation has not changed since the nineteenth century: an educational system that produces interchangeable pupils and soldiers. Professor Citatorio *teaches* war veterans who remain, or will remain, soldiers as long as Major X resists in the islands, and Don Benito’s ‘cosmic’ writings *instruct* the military about the ‘hechos patrios’ that justify the preordained truth of ‘Las Malvinas son argentinas’.

As seen before, war (of conquest) and travelling are the main features of Major X’s diary. If these two characteristics are essential to accomplish a rite of passage, as, in

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<sup>92</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 94.

Andermann's words, '[e]l paso de los neófitos de la juventud a la madurez re-presenta [...] los sucesos fundacionales de la comunidad, narrados en los mitos de origen como relatos de guerra y de viaje,'<sup>93</sup> Major X's and nationalists' rites of passage can be deemed failed ones. Major X makes his final contribution to nationalism by *repeating* the death of 'el gaucho' Rivero. Rivero is assumed to have died fighting the Anglo-French fleet in the emblematic battle of 'Vuelta de Obligado' (20 November 1845), though Riverist historians admit to lacking

evidencia suficiente sobre el final de Rivero. Para ellos, este desenlace era plausible: "sin lugar a dudas, la presencia y muerte de Antonio Rivero en ese combate *hubiera sido* un hecho lógico en la trama de su dramático destino [...]: la defensa de la soberanía argentina".<sup>94</sup>

Aligning with Rivero's 'nationalistic' death, Felipe openly lies to his fellow veterans telling them that Major X has died 'en el cumplimiento de su deber', in a battle against 'los ingleses' (LI, 594). The veterans do not question Felipe's version of events. The immunity of nationalism to facts and chronology, i.e., to truth—as if history posed a threat to both their utopia and the glorious destiny of the nation—, guarantees to all of them that 'Las Malvinas son argentinas'.

In accord with a regime that has destroyed language, the lost parts of Major X's diary are dictated by 'la cabeza parlante de Emilio' (LI, 439), an aphasic veteran permanently convalescing in a mental hospital, to the *reappeared* officer. Truth about the utopia of the militant nationalists is uttered once the pages of the diary are re-united and Major X's identity, uncovered. No longer naming him by his utopian pseudonym, Felipe is then able to assert that,

Cuervo había entretenido sus días en el campo de prisioneros de San Carlos componiendo *una versión alternativa* del fin de la guerra, *a la exacta medida de sus fantasías adolescentes* (LI, 478).

If one of the meanings of the utopian genre is that 'the good place ought *not* to be unreal,'<sup>95</sup> the utopia constructed by Argentine nationalists for over a century and a half ultimately crumbles into mere adolescent fantasy. Nationalists, instead of pursuing

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<sup>93</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 230.

<sup>94</sup> Guber, 'El gaucho Rivero y las interpretaciones de una historia', p. 78.

<sup>95</sup> Meziems in More, *Utopia*, p. xiii. Italics in the original.

concrete political action to establish their ideal society in the real world,<sup>96</sup> opted for a utopia that functioned as ‘an escape *from* history’ and its inherent uncertainties.<sup>97</sup> Appropriately for a time that the nationalist intellectual/teacher has established must not pass, the military remain perpetually stuck in the role of schoolboys.

#### WAYS OF APPROACHING THE WAR

In the previous section, I argued that militant nationalists constructed ‘Malvinas’ as a utopia that was occupied by force with the purpose of ‘redeeming’ the severed territory of the nation and, ultimately, of establishing their own meaning of Fatherland. In line with territorial claims and irredentism as central elements of their conception of the country, the nationalists produced an utterance (the utopian ‘Argentina invisible’ that only militant nationalists could see) which proved to be an utter ‘fantasía adolescente’. Coinciding with a war that constituted, in Gamarro’s words, a ‘régimen de ficción’ as opposed to truth,<sup>98</sup> ‘la Argentina invisible’ represents what Lamarque and Olsen brand ‘fiction in the description sense, in which a fictional description is judged *not true, false,*’ outlining a negative aspect of the notion ‘in terms of falsity, non-existence, unreality, *a failure of some kind, something to be avoided.*’<sup>99</sup>

These fictions in the negative sense, comprising both the war and the nationalist utopia, give rise to two other utterances in *Las Islas* about state crimes committed by the ‘Proceso’ during the conflict. Tamerlán’s commission to find a truth about a crime only apparently circumscribed to the private, as the mogul warns Felipe that ‘nosotros no cometemos delitos comunes’ (*LI*, 29), inadvertently leads Felipe to expose a truth belatedly awakened by his war experiences. The individual in charge of ‘hacer saber la verdad que nadie quiere oír’<sup>100</sup> is, at the outset of his investigation, reluctant to involve himself in any query beyond the assigned task, to such extent that

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<sup>96</sup> F.E. and F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, pp. 2 and 3.

<sup>97</sup> Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, p. 128. Italics in the original.

<sup>98</sup> Gamarro, ‘Las ficciones de la dictadura’, pp. 95-6.

<sup>99</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, pp. 16 and 18.

<sup>100</sup> Carlos Gamarro, ‘Para una reformulación del género policial argentino’, in Gamarro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, 2nd rev. edn (Excursiones, 2015), pp. 56-65 (p. 63).

he would rank among the first desiring not to hear that truth. His bearing gradually changes upon meeting Gloria, a direct victim of state repression. Their intricate love story, analysed in detail in chapter 2, reveals a shared past as survivors of different concentration camps. This resonates with Finchelstein's assertion that 'in the concentration camps of the dictatorship, *ideology became reality itself*,' since,

[t]he Argentine concentration camps were *sites of ideological fulfillment* [...] they represented the *inner sanctum of the nation* and the ultimate outcome of the Dirty War. Perpetrators believed that *the camps would help realize the promise of a new national foundation*.<sup>101</sup>

Gloria's presence acts as a catalyst for Felipe's reconciliation with his wartime peers, specifically his fellow conscripts, by prompting him to finally verbalise his memories. This shift transforms Felipe from one of those survivors who 'eligen mayormente olvidar (y a veces lo consiguen)' into one of those who 'no quieren olvidar, y sobre todo no quieren que el mundo olvide.'<sup>102</sup> Felipe's truth will thus reveal that, rather than serving as a utopian ideal to be brought back to the community, the military made of 'Malvinas' the place where their ideology was materialised: the concentration camp.

This happens, as I see it, after Felipe becomes a Walsh-like investigator, that is, in Ana María Amar Sánchez's words, a '*narrador [que] se constituye como periodista y como detective justiciero*,' for,

el Estado es quien comete el delito o es cómplice de él [...] la pareja delincuente-víctima sufre una conversión porque los delincuentes son los representantes de la ley y las víctimas son tratadas como culpables y sospechosas.<sup>103</sup>

Similar to Walsh's investigation in *Operación Masacre* (1957), Felipe's pursuit of truth originates from an overheard conversation that sparks a pursuit of the truth concerning 'un Estado delincuente'.<sup>104</sup> As discussed earlier, the access to the state

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<sup>101</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, pp. 123 and 154.

<sup>102</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 187. The author is following Primo Levi's categories.

<sup>103</sup> Ana María Amar Sánchez, 'El sueño eterno de justicia', *Nuevo texto crítico*, 6.12-13 (1993-1994), pp. 205-16 (p. 210). Italics in the original.

<sup>104</sup> While Tamerlán makes clear to Felipe that he has to accept the investigation since '[s]i escuchó todo esto, no tiene más remedio' (LI, 30), Walsh's words are: 'Seis meses más tarde [...], un hombre *me dice*.  
—Hay un fusilado que vive.

granted by ‘Malvinas’ expands in significance to expose a central triad identified by Amar Sánchez in Walsh’s work: ‘*delito, verdad y justicia*.’<sup>105</sup> Gamarro seems to adhere to this conception, as the last rule of his ‘Decálogo del relato policial argentino’ states that ‘[e]l propósito de esta investigación puede ser el de llegar a la verdad y, en el mejor de los casos, hacerla pública; nunca el de obtener justicia.’<sup>106</sup> These three elements illuminate a critical issue regarding state crimes in *Las Islas*. As Claudia Hilb suggests, a democratic system grappling with a period of radical evil is ultimately forced to choose between prioritising justice or truth, with either path inevitably causing a loss for the other.<sup>107</sup> The most striking outcome of Felipe’s investigation is the revelation that the zone of impunity cultivated by militant nationalists eliminates even this agonising choice, by ensuring that neither truth nor justice exists.

The following two sub-sections will explore Felipe’s two distinct expressions of truth. The first consists of a videogame about the Malvinas/Falklands War, serving primarily as an external perspective on the truth. This construction, as I will show, draws upon postmodernist historical resources and exhibits connections to the utopian genre. The second truth centres on Felipe’s personal memories of the war’s final days. Here, he relives the pivotal event of his wartime experience under the dictatorship: witnessing the torture and subsequent death of his closest friend. The methods, forms, and intended audiences for these two utterances are, in my view, a product of what

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[...]

Livraga *me cuenta su historia increíble, la creo en el acto.*

Así nace aquella investigación, este libro.’ See Rodolfo Walsh, *Operación Masacre*, 16th edn (De la Flor, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>105</sup> Amar Sánchez, ‘El sueño eterno de justicia’, p. 209. Italics in the original.

<sup>106</sup> Gamarro, ‘Para una reformulación del género policial argentino’, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Claudia Hilb, ‘Justicia, reconciliación, perdón. Cómo fundar una comunidad después del crimen’, in *Lesas humanidad. Argentina y Sudáfrica: reflexiones después del Mal*, ed. by Claudia Hilb, Philippe-Joseph Salazar, and Lucas G. Martín (Katz, 2014), pp. 53-74. Hilb’s analysis focuses on reparation to victims of state terrorism by democratic regimes, thus affirming (p. 53): ‘En la Argentina, simplifico brutalmente, se optó por la justicia [...]. En Sudáfrica [...], se optó por la verdad.’ In the same collective work, Lucas G. Martín (‘Regímenes criminales, refundaciones democráticas y formas de justicia (Argentina, Sudáfrica, Uruguay)’, pp. 101-18) describes Argentina’s approach as ‘justicia [...] *retributiva*, penal. Se exigió a los criminales que respondieran por sus actos ante un tribunal y una ley común’ (p. 103), while South Africa put into practice ‘una justicia reparadora [...] orientada en primer lugar a reparar el daño, a “curar”, a restituir la dignidad de las víctimas [...] por parte del perpetrador [que debe exponer] la verdad completa y detallada [y a quien se conceden] amnistías para esos crímenes políticos confesados’ (p. 106). Italics in the original.

Burucúa and Kwiatkowski describe as ‘la insoportable tensión entre el imperativo de dar testimonio de lo ocurrido y la inadecuación de las formas de expresión para lograrlo’ that harrow ‘los sobrevivientes de la masacre.’<sup>108</sup> Through these expressions, Felipe also grapples with the limitations of justice and revenge.

#### (I) THE WAR RE-CREATED

Felipe designs the Malvinas/Falklands War videogame for his former wartime officer, Colonel Verraco. Now heading the ‘Argentinas en el 2000’ department, Verraco possesses ‘tiempo libre para dedicarse a su principal hobby: ganar la guerra de Malvinas’ (LI, 46). To cater the military’s ‘fantasías adolescentes’, Felipe must inevitably distort historical reality. This manipulation allows him to frame the war as a historical event and explore the potential ramifications of a nationalist utopia realised through an Argentine victory, as well as to execute a Hamlet-like representation of a revenge.

Colonel Verraco, Major X, and Lieutenant Hugo Carcasa represent the professional officers who fought in ‘Malvinas’. Each figure incarnates also a different illusion employed by the military to deny the passage of time. While Major X typifies the eternal qualities of the resistant *gaucho*, and Lieutenant Carcasa personifies the mutilated hero, reminiscent of the mutilated nation and Perón, whose virtues are as ageless as the territory itself, Colonel Verraco embodies the unpunished repressor’s career in democracy, who ensures the continuity of the ‘Proceso’ by showing that no ‘break with the past’ has occurred.<sup>109</sup> Driven by their perceived *right* to ‘Malvinas’, these

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<sup>108</sup> José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski, “Cómo sucedieron estas cosas”. *Representar masacres y genocidios* (Katz, 2014), p. 30.

<sup>109</sup> During the writing of *Las Islas*, Gamerro conceived the officer in a way that specifies some links of those regimes that were ‘espejos uno del otro, dos procesos que no pueden entenderse uno sin el otro’, that is, the dictatorship and Menemism: ‘Para Verraco recuperar las Islas es una ventajita. A diferencia del Mayor X, no hay trascendencia alguna. Verraco es Menem. No pierde el tiempo en boludeces.’ See Carlos Gamerro, “Técnicas, tácticas, trucos”, in *Volver a Las Islas. Lecturas sobre la novela de Carlos Gamerro*, ed. by Rolando J. Bompadre (Edhasa, 2022), pp. 145-52 (p. 149). It is highly possible, also, that the three officers benefited from the ‘Obediencia Debida’ law, which Gamerro deems ‘política y moralmente el legado más triste del primer gobierno democrático y peor en sus

military men are the only ones within the nationalist sphere who verbalise plans for retaking the islands. While all three archetypes ultimately prove fraudulent, further exposing the deceitful core of the nationalist utopia, Colonel Verraco's hopes for a videogame victory prove that the military's resources remain vain and infantile. Felipe recognises this immaturity, understanding that, for Verraco, the videogame 'sería la envidia y admiración de sus colegas y le permitiría ocupar un lugar de mayor prestigio en la exigente comunidad de los ex combatientes' (LI, 46). What rules that 'exigent' veterans' community is, as I see it, a notion of revenge. Since veterans and officers alike cling to a schoolboy mentality, their attempts only achieve fleeting satisfaction, like the transient occupation of 'Malvinas' itself. This dynamic further highlights the inherent flaws of irredentism.

In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), Sigmund Freud charted the elements present in children's play, after noting that a distressing experience was at the origin of that play. The repetition of the afflicting event as a game, unpleasurable though it was, allowed the child to turn his original passive situation into an active one, fitting it thus in the pleasure principle.<sup>110</sup> In Freud's words:

It is clear that in their play children repeat everything that has made *a great impression* on them in *real life*, and that in doing so they abreact the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves *master of the situation*. But on the other hand it is obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time—*the wish to be grown-up and to be able to do what grown-up people do*. It can also be observed that the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always unsuit it for play. [...] As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the

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implicancias que el indulto. Porque el indulto reconoce que hay un crimen y perdona la pena. Pero la Ley de Obediencia Debida dice que un crimen no fue un crimen.' In Silvina Frieria, 'En literatura, tragedia y humor no están reñidos', *Página/12*, 1 October 2012 <<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/4-26601-2012-10-01.html>> [accessed 22 July 2021]. For a thorough discussion on the 'Obediencia Debida' law, its juridical issues, and political debates, see Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, pp. 108-17.

<sup>110</sup> In his analysis of Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), Andermann outlines the correlation between 'actively' and 'virility'. See Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 239. The frustration of a proper active (virile) action would add yet another layer of frustration to the military in a field dear to their imaginary.

disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way *revenge himself* on a substitute.<sup>111</sup>

The videogame's potential for endless revenge against a distressing real-life event, coupled with the ability to project himself as a dominant figure, is precisely what will grant Verraco pre-eminence within the veterans' community, particularly amongst the officers. Apart from being the only children's activity that should achieve a 'definitive' recovery of the islands, the game transforms Verraco into the quintessential Argentine officer throughout the war. From leading the 2 April landing to single-handedly accepting the British surrender 74 days later, the narrative assigns Verraco a role in every major conflict. He saves the General Belgrano cruiser, repels a British assault like 'Rambo' (LI, 99) and even leads a successful air strike on the aircraft carrier HMS Hermes, culminating in the fictional slaying of Admiral Sandy Woodward. This omnipresence in the game is, in my view, Felipe's method of exposing the uniformity of the Argentine military during the war. Verraco, and by extension all the officers, are portrayed as equally incompetent ('le iba peor en los juegos de guerra por computadora que en los otros, y eso ya es mucho decir' [LI, 88]), bloodthirsty ('a Verraco no le habrían faltado ganas [de matar marines británicos], pero en la invasión la orden había sido "no causar bajas al enemigo"' [LI, 90]; 'a Verraco no le iba a quedar más remedio que matarlos a todos, lo que por otra parte, conociéndolo, no le iba a molestar en absoluto' [LI, 111]), felon ('Verraco estaba convencido de que la rendición habilitaba a los ingleses para entrar en Buenos Aires, y quería ofrecerse para servir a las tropas amigas en lo que pudieran necesitar' [LI, 127]), and corrupt ('qué papelón, mis subordinados van a pensar que su jefe... [...] ¿No podríamos arreglarlo de alguna manera?' [LI, 158]). By attributing these actions, morals, and ideology to Verraco, Felipe expands the critique to encompass his fellow officers. Verraco's fabricated wartime persona thus becomes a tool to expose the true nature of the crimes shielded by the militant nationalists' zone of impunity.

The concept of revenge arises when retributive justice fails to deliver on its promises.<sup>112</sup> Robert Nozick posits that revenge, usually motivated by an injury or harm,

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<sup>111</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Freud Reader*, ed by Peter Gay (Norton, 1995), pp. 594-626 (p. 601).

carries a personal dimension and ‘involves a particular emotional tone, pleasure in the suffering of another’.<sup>113</sup> Charles K. B. Barton refines the concept, defining revenge as ‘a personal retribution which is typically accompanied by feelings of indignation, anger and resentment for wrongs suffered in one’s personal domain or concern,’ which would imply two key aspects: the potential for empowerment of the victim (as opposed to the frustration of impersonal legal systems) and the emotional satisfaction, not necessarily sadistic pleasure or hatred.<sup>114</sup> Analysing *Hamlet*, Gamarro adds a Shakespearean trait that will be central to my reading, as he states that ‘[u]na venganza pública es mejor que una venganza secreta, sobre todo si llega a constituir *un buen espectáculo*’.<sup>115</sup> Considering the shortcomings of retributive justice, the centrality of personal emotions, and the need for public exposure, Felipe’s videogame emerges as both a revenge strategy echoing the Hamlet tradition and a tool for expressing his truth regarding the state crimes of the dictatorship. Although the core challenge of the videogame poses the problem of how to ‘agitar el cadáver inerte de la historia con la vida del juego’ (LI, 88), it ultimately can be classed as a fictional construct, as Felipe acknowledges the potential for manipulation through information technology. The game’s premise that ‘en esta versión de la historia [...] el 1º de mayo empezaba no la pérdida de Las Islas sino su recuperación’ (LI, 90), demands elements of postmodernist historical fiction in order to produce, as Wesseling states, that ‘the blatant transgressions of historical facts are recuperated as a device for making a

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<sup>112</sup> As examples, Nino reminds us that in the weeks after liberation in Italy there were about 30,000 acts of revenge (among disappearances and summary executions) on former fascists, while in France, ‘in 1944 alone, private citizens killed approximately 40,000 people accused of collaborating with the Nazis.’ See Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, pp. 11 and 12. For his part, Gamarro wonders ‘por qué no hubo un solo acto de venganza personal contra los responsables directos o indirectos, que a diferencia del rey Claudio publicaron, y sin arrepentimiento alguno, sus crímenes.’ After ruling out cowardice as a potential effect of ‘lo absoluto de la victoria de los militares’, he prefers to attribute that absence of revenge to a learnt lesson: ‘si la *lógica de la venganza* había pavimentado el camino de la dictadura, para desandararlo, una vez terminada esta, mal se podía recurrir nuevamente a ella’. In William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, príncipe de Dinamarca*, trans. and intro. by Carlos Gamarro (Interzona, 2015), pp. 9-66 (p. 61).

<sup>113</sup> Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 366-7.

<sup>114</sup> Charles K. B. Barton, *Getting Even. Revenge as a Form of Justice* (Open Court, 1999), pp. 70 and 31.

<sup>115</sup> Gamarro in Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p. 17.

metafictional statement.<sup>116</sup> The videogame serves as Felipe's 'metafictional statement' for uttering his truth.

Wesseling argues that postmodernist approaches to historical materials 'make fun of conventional ways for coming to terms with the past by means of hyperbole and inversion [and by] parodically invert[ing] the constitutive conventions of the classical historical novel.'<sup>117</sup> Such conventions include, according to Brian McHale, that events, characters, and objects 'can only be introduced on condition that the properties and actions attributed to them in the text do not actually contradict the "official" historical record'; that anachronisms are avoided; and that the 'logic and physics of the fictional world [are] compatible with those of reality.'<sup>118</sup> Hence, historical fictions are forced to be realistic ones. In contrast, postmodernist historical fiction deliberately make manifest the violations of those constraints, as Wesseling explains, 'by inventing where official historiography has clearly spoken, a procedure that often results in clashes with the historical record, by inserting blatant anachronisms into the text, and by freely combining the historical with the supernatural.'<sup>119</sup> The desired outcome in 'this version of history' within the videogame demands a transgression of all the aforementioned historical parameters. The narrative thus summarises major military actions in a counterfactual and darkly comedic manner, yet this approach paradoxically achieves what Georg Lukács believed crucial for historical fiction: 'an artistically faithful image of a concrete historical epoch.'<sup>120</sup> This 'image of the epoch' becomes discernible for those who can decipher the videogame's 'metafictional statement', essentially, the audience attending a 'buen espectáculo'.

Like *Hamlet's* protagonist, Felipe's videogame presents the perpetrator, Verraco, with a faithful portrayal of his deed, i.e., a war victory that, echoing the Shakespearean tragedy's structure, *inexplicably* becomes a defeat in the final stage: 'No sé, íbamos invictos y de golpe...' (*LI*, 158). This manipulation complies with a key trait of revenge, the satisfaction of the wronged party. Felipe derives pleasure from

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<sup>116</sup> Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet*, p. 5.

<sup>117</sup> Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet*, p. 178.

<sup>118</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 87-8.

<sup>119</sup> Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet*, p. 178.

<sup>120</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Merlin Press, 1989), p. 19.

Verraco's forced communication of 'this version of history': 'me dio un *sumo placer* escuchar la voz quebrada de mi ex comandante', while, moments later, watching on the computer screen the British flag raised on the Buenos Aires obelisk, he concedes: 'fue un toque de crueldad innecesaria, pero no había podido resistirme' (LI, 158). Felipe further transforms the videogame into a spectacle. The audience is constituted by the staff of 'Argentinas en el 2000', essentially Verraco's court ('mis subordinados'), of whom he is undoubtedly aware: '¿Me entendió bien lo que le pedí? —sonrió forzadamente, avivándose de que lo estaban mirando' (LI, 158). One effect of postmodern historical constructs, Wesseling adds, is that 'by juxtaposing actual history to alternate sequences of events, counterfactual fiction may *disturb the illusion that an actual course of events was inevitable*.'<sup>121</sup> The revenge enacted upon the military goes beyond making Verraco a spectator of his deed, in front of his court of subordinates; it forces him to *relive* his deed. Felipe's 'metafictional statement' lies in the game's potentially endless repetition of this outcome, with its invariable and inexplicable defeat, emphasising thus the inherent *inevitability* of the Argentine defeat and the failure of the nationalist utopia.

By calling Felipe to revise the videogame, Verraco is implicitly maintaining the military's view that technological supremacy was the reason for the British victory. This is made clear during Carcasa's celebration. While the lieutenant employs homophobic imagery to diminish their own liability—'en ese terreno y con esa tecnología, habría que ser puto o paralítico para no ganar una guerra' (LI, 352)—, Verraco uses gauchesque language:

¡Se hacen los machos porque vienen con chaleco y mira infrarroja y munición trazante, pero en bolas y chorreando agua en un elástico se le aflojan las tripas al más pintaol! ¡Así se ven los hombres, carajo! ¡Cara a cara! ¡Sin tanto apero! ¡A ver qué hacen con las miras nocturnas cuando las pelotas les chisporroteen como dos huevos fritos! (LI, 369).

During the war, Verraco advised General Menéndez: 'lo de los kelpers *arreglémoslo a la argentina, uno solo que dejemos* y va a andar pataleando que Las Islas son suyas' (LI, 124). This exemplifies the military's flawed logic. They perceive that war as a technological conflict in which, also, they mistook the 'external' enemy for the 'internal' one. If, in

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<sup>121</sup> Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet*, p. 106.

Andermann's words, it is impossible to 'imaginar un espacio sin inscribirle límites, sin *alegorizarlo*,'<sup>122</sup> in the military's view, the defeat essentially lay in the fact that the 'pelotas' of Cimatorio's image, the 'huevos estrellados' of the veterans, could not be materialised in the sizzling 'huevos fritos' of the repressors' torture sessions. The untenable *unification* of the enemies of the nation made untenable the *unification* of the national territory. A revised understanding of those notions of enemy will play a key role in Felipe's (private) revenge and truth-telling. Towards the end of the novel, having significantly left 'la chaqueta como botín de guerra para *el enemigo*' (LI, 373) after the failed revenge at Carcasa's, Felipe's plot to save the last witness of César's and state crimes allows the veterans to shout '¡ganamos!', eventually excluding the officers: those veterans have rejected a squad of former military men in the conviction that they were 'los ingleses' (LI, 593). Since the conscripts' age has been forever suspended at eighteen—when they could identify themselves with the fully materialised nation—the displacement inside the notion of 'enemy' enables them to expose, even though unknowingly, who the true enemies of the Fatherland were.

Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of parodic subversion within Renaissance popular culture, Wesseling argues that historical postmodern fiction utilises parody to achieve the 'unfolding of an alternate utopian order' by way of 'both a negative, debunking' of norms and hierarchies of official culture and 'a positive, affirmative moment' of a joyous, egalitarian, alternate world.<sup>123</sup> This does not necessarily create the anticipation of a future in a traditional utopian thought, but, rather, postmodernist novelists tend to

turn to the past in order to look for *unrealized possibilities* that inhered in historical situations, and subsequently imagine what *history would have looked like if unrealized sequences of events and courses of action had come about*.<sup>124</sup>

If Felipe's device expresses an 'alternate utopian order', as Major X did with a 'versión alternativa del fin de la guerra' that led him to the childishly nationalist 'Argentina invisible', it shows that these utopian stages are both negative. The emancipation of

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<sup>122</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 18.

<sup>123</sup> Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet*, p. 156.

<sup>124</sup> Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet*, p. 13.

schoolboys/soldiers from their teachers would have meant a further militarisation of Argentinian politics, as is clear in Felipe's initial, victorious version of the videogame. In this other 'metafictional statement', the war ended with an explicitly carnivalesque scene: 'una procesión, un triunfo romano en honor del libertador de las Malvinas y nuevo presidente de los argentinos, el general Héctor Verraco. Parado en lo alto de una carroza de carnaval con la forma de Las Islas,' the recently created president proceeds towards a monumental temple of victory where 'con el debido respeto, toma el general argentino [la corona de laureles de las manos del Papa y la] coloca él mismo sobre sus sienes' (LI, 115-6).<sup>125</sup>

This parody of Napoleonic self-coronation is accompanied by cinematographic scenes in which soldiers are received by euphoric crowds in mainland cities. If at that point of his elaboration Felipe could not avoid closing it with 'una imagen de Puerto Argentino tal como se vería hoy, a diez años de *la victoria*' (LI, 116), all this proves to be ephemeral, like children's revenge games. Immediately after the celebrations and Verraco's moment of glory, technology springs into action, *once again* to trounce the military's delusive fantasies, through a virus unmistakably named after the *defeat*: 'Malvinas140682' (LI, 117). Felipe, who has considered his revenge to be the elimination from the videogame of all Argentine victories, eventually decides to 'dejar las escasas victorias argentinas inmunes al virus [porque] la pesadilla de Verraco era que *el juego dijera la verdad*, no que mintiera' (LI, 117). Thus,

[r]epitiendo la historia sin mejorarla, el virus iba a comerse uno a uno todos sus sueños, dejar sus fantasías tan pobres como sus recuerdos, convertir la derrota en derrota (LI, 119).

Truth about the Malvinas/Falklands War and the Argentine officers is therefore uttered through a device that blatantly transgresses historical facts. Its 'metafictional statement' shows that an 'alternate utopian history' was neither possible nor desirable. The limits of the Hamletian revenge will be discussed in the following sub-section.

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<sup>125</sup> Argentinian 'real reality' provides at least two illustrious antecedents of this fascination with hyperbolic titles of pre-eminence, both conferred on military personages: in 1830, the Parliament of the Province of Buenos Aires declared Rosas 'Restaurador de las Leyes', and, in 1952, the National Parliament legally elevated Perón 'a la dignidad de Libertador de la República, y [a] su esposa a la de Jefa Espiritual de la Nación'. See Floria and García Belsunce, *Historia de los argentinos*, p. 515; and Halperin Donghi, *La democracia de masas*, p. 81.

## (II) THE WAR RE-LIVED

The return to veterans' circles imposes on Felipe a mimetic enactment with his fellow veterans, which is only apparently external. While for his joining them at Citatorio's lecture he dresses in a fake uniform (that he immediately hides under a long overcoat, producing thus a doubly deceptive look), the substantial fact remains his physically being there. If physical presence in certain places or events replaces identity—he will say, for instance, 'estuve en Malvinas' (*LI*, 248) rather than refer to himself as a war veteran—, it also compels specific values, actions, and duties that are not without consequences. The most important are, in this regard, his re-living his last days in the battlefield and the unfeasibility of an effectual revenge.

The fundamental incompatibility between paternity and war, Vitullo says, generates 'otro tipo de modelo: la invalidación de las relaciones patriarcales da lugar a relaciones fraternas; [...] la nación se vuelve un espacio de iguales abrazados en la homosociabilidad.'<sup>126</sup> For Felipe, those fraternal/homosocial relations strictly involve the conscripts with whom he shared the trench: those who *were* close to him in a physical restricted sense. He makes this clear after noticing a reproduction of himself in the scale model of Puerto Argentino where he keeps watch together with the veterans that meet at Citatorio's: 'Ese día yo estaba encerrado con la radio. Me tenían todo el día traduciendo la BBC' (*LI*, 83). Although he does not dispute the reasons for the factual adulteration—the author of the replica argues that 'al menos *acá* vamos a seguir siendo amigos *para siempre*' (*LI*, 84)—, his being in a different place marks a decisive separation from them. By the time of the conflict, Felipe calls 'amigo' just one of those conscripts who are with him in the real trench, but when ten years later an encounter with them occurs—a phantasmagorical meeting, as all are dead—, he finds no word to define their bond. The shortcomings of language that are a frequent result of massacres<sup>127</sup> are yet again filled by physical presence:

hasta que divisé el cartel con el nombre de la calle. Malvinas Argentinas, lógico. Cuando bajé la vista *estaban* al lado mío (*LI*, 587).

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<sup>126</sup> Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas*, p. 160.

<sup>127</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas", p. 15.

For Felipe, the war was not ‘una tarea de machos’ (*LI*, 503), as Tamerlán states, but of peers: of those horizontal, undefined links originated during and because of the war. If in Fogwill’s *Los pichiciegos*, according to Beatriz Sarlo, the war ‘ha destruido, para [los pichis], toda idea de nación’, creating between them transitory ties which ‘durará[n] hasta la muerte de cada uno de ellos y no perdurará[n] más allá de la muerte excepto en la voz del pichi que la cuenta,’<sup>128</sup> in *Las Islas* that unnamed relationship does survive death and war in the problematic, non-verbalised notions of revenge and survival.

*Hamlet* is again recalled, in this case by a meeting between the person who is assumed to be in charge of revenge and the dead ones in whose name that revenge must be carried out. The conflict Felipe faces is, however, sharper than Hamlet’s, for, since war has replaced paternity with fraternal relations, he was *there*, in the trench, when Verraco tortured and murdered his only friend, Carlitos, in an ‘estaqueamiento’ that yet again links the ‘Proceso’ with the campaigns to ‘conquer the desert’.<sup>129</sup> The officer made of Felipe simultaneously a witness and an accomplice (a passive one in the best case), causing also that the word ‘amigo’ is uttered for the first and last time by Felipe regarding one of his peers (*LI*, 367). In addition to placing Felipe in the ‘grey zone’ of the concentration camp, this destruction of language follows the breaking of that basic human bond as a result of ‘la lógica del exterminio’, which, in Vezzetti’s words,

nace cuando *se alcanza a romper la identificación básica con cierta categoría de personas* y se instala un *comportamiento rebajado a nivel de la sobrevivencia* (individual, aislada, amenazada por la locura); frente a ello cualquier forma de resistencia depende de crear las condiciones para *establecer algún marco de asociación y decisión colectivas*.<sup>130</sup>

The devastation of language effaces both fraternal ties and memory. It is once more physical location which allows the recuperation, even though imperfectly, of aspects erased by language. Only when Felipe *moves* from lieutenant Carcasa’s celebration to

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<sup>128</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, ‘No olvidar la guerra de Malvinas. Sobre cine, literatura e historia’, *Punto de Vista*, 49 (1994), pp. 11-15 (p. 12).

<sup>129</sup> Indeed, among the ‘escenas triunfalistas y exaltantes que habían alimentado la imaginación de la dictadura’, Vezzetti traces a line running ‘de la Campaña del Desierto a la aventura de Malvinas.’ See Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, pp. 110-1.

<sup>130</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 186.

the *place* of the deed is he able to re-live the painful scene: ‘Ya no había cumpleaños ni departamento ni ciudad a mi alrededor, nada más que ese fulgor de muerte en los cerros de la isla, la cara sonriente de Verraco’ (LI, 366). Felipe’s identification of Carlitos’s torturer—‘Es este y no otro, pensé mientras lo miraba reírse [a Verraco]’ (LI, 366)—constitutes an individualisation that, as Nozick highlights, is essential for revenge: ‘[n]ot only is the revenger not committed to avenging any similar act done to anyone; he is not committed to avenging all done to himself.’<sup>131</sup> While this individuation of both the deed and the perpetrator is needed by the survivor/victim, the torturer’s perspective is that of generalisation: ‘¡Mirá, viejo, si tuviera que acordarme de cada cristo que mandé a estaquear!’, after which the military’s sanguinary venture is recognised by his adding: ‘Si no [estuviera muerto Carlitos], te diría de entrada que no fui yo’ (LI, 371). Not only does the scene lead the perpetrator to sanction the zone of impunity—‘Muchachos, ¿no habíamos terminado con todo esto?’ (LI, 370)—but it also enables the survivor to unconsciously realise the ineffectuality of his Hamletian revenge without a proper individualisation of the criminal.

It is Verraco’s laugh, rather than language, which merges both places, allowing thus his identification. As the representation of radical evil is not fully possible through words, ten years later Felipe cannot remember,

aunque *pasaba todo ante mis ojos*, ahora, qué hice yo en ese momento, será que obedecí y también tiré de las sogas afianzando el pie en las rocas del suelo, tiré con todas mis fuerzas, por una fracción de segundo que me condena por toda la eternidad odiando a Carlitos por obligarnos a esto, odiando su brazo por resistirse a mis tironeos. O habré zafado, simplemente me hice el sota, me volví invisible contra el fondo del paisaje, perdí densidad y nitidez como tantas veces desde entonces, conseguí desaparecer —*un truco de supervivencia*— ante los ojos de todos en lugar de levantar el arma, tirar del gatillo, limpiar al mundo de *la bestia que ahora formaba parte de mi vida para siempre*. Hubiera sido fácil, no me estaba mirando, no podía verme mientras se paseaba complacido alrededor de la X tirante que era *mi amigo* sobre el barro; pero si lo hacía, si lo pensaba siquiera, iba a volverme visible de nuevo, y entonces *iban a volver por mí, iban a hacérmelo a mí* (LI, 366-7).

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<sup>131</sup> Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 368.

Felipe faces the extreme choice of the concentration camp, as Levi put it: either ‘immediate obedience or death.’<sup>132</sup> To take the perpetrator’s life would have entailed to lose one’s own, indeed like in *Hamlet*. The consequent choice between one’s own and a peer’s life—which in a war radically alters the conventional confrontation between the enemy’s and one own’s life—implies not only to cut ties with the victim, but above all to create an everlasting tie with the torturer (‘la bestia que ahora formaba parte de mi vida para siempre’) ultimately based on that sorrowful choice between truth and a kind of justice. Indeed, had Felipe’s decision been the opposite, there would have been nobody left to, even in a ravaged language, ‘speak to th’yet unknowing world / How these things came about.’<sup>133</sup> The annihilation of language (‘si lo pensaba siquiera’) becomes at the same time the means for self-preservation and the most painful legacy of the ‘Proceso’, since it spares the victim his/her life never to be able to express in full the radical evil he/she witnessed/suffered.<sup>134</sup>

If, as Ferns argues, in utopian constructs ‘the more perfect society, rather than cutting itself off from the real world, seeks instead to *replace it*,’<sup>135</sup> the military, on the contrary, succeeded in substituting the ideal community of utopia—even the infantile version of militant nationalists—with the set of values, methods, and ideology they exercised in the mainland. The torture session shows, then, that the dictatorship materialised in ‘Malvinas’ the concentration camp, their ‘inner sanctum of the nation’<sup>136</sup> that epitomises, in Vezzetti’s words,

un poder sin límites [...] ejercido con el deliberado propósito de *humillar, degradar y destruir a sus víctimas*, promueve sobre todo *la parálisis, la aceptación pasiva y embrutecida de la propia situación* [...]

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<sup>132</sup> Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, in Levi, *Opere*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, 2 vols (Einaudi, 1997), II, pp. 995-1153 (p. 1036). My translation.

<sup>133</sup> *Hamlet*, V. 2. 384-5. I quote from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkins (Arden and Routledge, 1993).

<sup>134</sup> Being properly a witness goes along with the prospect of death, as Burucúa and Kwiatkowski explain that the Greek term *martus*, ‘una persona que atestigua sobre un hecho conocido a partir de su propia experiencia,’ in early Christianity became ‘un mártir o testigo (de Cristo) [que] está tan convencido de las verdades de la religión cristiana que acepta la muerte con tal de no negarlas.’ See Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, pp. 95-6.

<sup>135</sup> Ferns, *Narrating Utopia*, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 154.

provoca desestructuraciones subjetivas y *modos de lucha egoísta por la supervivencia* que incluyen diversos grados de colaboración.<sup>137</sup>

Felipe's initial act of survival in the concentration camp, to become invisible, or as he significantly puts it, 'desaparecer', becomes his 'trick' for survival. His experiences as a war survivor and concentration camp victim complicate any attempt at moral judgement. He has been placed into the 'grey zone' of the camp, where a victim is transformed into an accomplice and for which, Levi adds, there is no human tribunal equipped to measure the guilt incurred within this zone.<sup>138</sup> Levi further emphasises this complexity, stating that,

[s]urvival without renunciation of any part of one's own moral world—apart from powerful and direct interventions by fortune—was conceded only to very few superior individuals, made of the stuff of martyrs and saints.<sup>139</sup>

While Felipe shares similarities with Hamlet in his desire for revenge, he ultimately falls short of the Shakespearean archetype. Unlike the tragic prince, Felipe withdraws from the violence, becoming a survivor of a concentration camp rather than a martyr or a saint. This act of self-preservation is reflected in his name and surname, where the repetition of the 'F' sound hints at a Shakespearean survivor, Falstaff. Christopher Coker describes Falstaff as someone who 'wants to live and so he does but at a price, for *there is always a price to be paid for survival*.'<sup>140</sup> For Felipe, survival demands abandoning the pursuit of revenge, the only act that could sever his lasting bonds with the perpetrators. The price of survival, then, is the loss of complete retribution.

Unlike *Hamlet*, the impossibility of revenge in *Las Islas* lies in its postponement. T. S. Eliot elucidates that in Shakespeare's play delay composes 'a motive which is more important than that of revenge, and which explicitly "blunts" the latter,' yet Felipe's deferral is closer, still in Eliot's reading, to Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, in which 'the action or delay is caused [...] solely by the difficulty of assassinating a

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<sup>137</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 182.

<sup>138</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1023.

<sup>139</sup> Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (The Orion Press, 1959), p. 106.

<sup>140</sup> Christopher Coker, *Men at War. What Fiction Tell Us About Conflict, from The Iliad to Catch-22* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 188.

monarch surrounded by guards.<sup>141</sup> In other words, by the question of performing the deed *without* risking one's own life. During Carcasa's party, Felipe shouts at Verraco his intentions: '¡Te iba a matar *al otro día*, hijo de puta, *te salvaron los ingleses!* ¡Si esa noche no atacan vos eras boleta!' (*LI*, 370). Whereas Felipe's first, belated revenge is ironically prevented by the external enemy, his attempt of ten years later is not only frustrated by Cimatorio's conscripts acting as 'guards' of the 'monarch' of 'Argentinas en el 2000', but substantially for the inherent impossibility of a bloodshed. After punching his former officer and upturning Carcasa in his wheelchair, Felipe repeats '¡Lo quiero matar!' (*LI*, 371), yet the scene ends in a rather pathetic quarrel among drunkards. It allows Felipe, though, to utter his truth regarding the military and the militant nationalist field, once again drawing upon physical location:

—Escuchame, Felipe —dijo Tomás, devolviéndome a la pared—. No me importa lo que pasó *allá* con Verraco. Ahora estamos todos *del mismo lado*. Él, nosotros y vos.  
—Yo no —dije, sintiendo que se me desgarraba la garganta (*LI*, 371).

Felipe's encounter with his phantasmagorical fellow conscripts significantly takes place after that declaration. His impossibility of an effective revenge ('matarlo') leaves death as Felipe's only course of action to cut ties with the perpetrators. His justification once more draws on references of geographical location to substitute the shortcomings of language: 'Me gustaría *estar* con ustedes [...]: Sigamos juntos, como *allá*, como ahora (*LI*, 591). The dead veterans' answers employ an identical code, though to give him a mission different than revenge: 'Si vos no *estás* [vivo, acá] ya no va a quedar nadie que *nos reúna*. Nuestras familias nos sueñan *por separado*', 'No *vinimos* para buscarte', 'No te queremos *con nosotros*', 'No vamos a *estar al lado tuyo* cuando [te suicides]' (*LI*, 591). Like other major and minor characters' fates, their farewell occurs once a truth has been uttered. This one is voiced by one of the dead veterans and draws upon those 'palabras suplentes,' as Andermann puts it, that allow invocation of 'las imágenes innombrables del horror'.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet', in Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3rd rev. edn (Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 141-6 (pp. 143 and 142).

<sup>142</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, pp. 148 and 149.

—Que no sientas culpa. Son ellos los que tienen la culpa. Los que nos pusieron a todos *en esta situación*. Son ellos los hijos de puta. Vos, no. Vos hiciste lo que pudiste (*LI*, 591).

In *Las Islas*, then, neither retroactive justice nor revenge is possible—there is no break with the dictatorial past. Retroactive justice appears unsatisfactory, as it cannot reach the three officers, while revenge is already ineffectual. All bodily sanctions the military suffer in the novel (including Major X/Arturo Cuervo's death) are the outcome of interventions alien to that notion, as Nozick explains that 'revenge is personal: "this is because of what you did to my ——"' (self, father, group, and so on).<sup>143</sup> After the surrender, Verraco endures a sexual humiliation from a British officer that, even though performed in front of a group of Argentine conscripts shouting and applauding as if attending 'un buen espectáculo', did not involve any personal domain. In Carcasa's self-inflicted mutilation Felipe sees 'la mano de un destino que más que castigar malos o premiar buenos se dedicaba a hacer bromas algo crueles con innegable sentido estético' (*LI*, 348). Indeed, a few days before, the commando had tortured a conscript tied to a chair, jumping 'de un lado a otro de la habitación, gritando "déjenmelo a mí que lo mato"', *tirando patadas* cada vez más elaboradas como si el chaqueño fuera una bolsa para entrenar' (*LI*, 348-9). Apart from its 'sentido estético', Carcasa's injury stresses again the fraudulent basis of the nationalist utopia, as the lieutenant's reference in his party to 'dejar nuestras huellas' and 'pisotear' refers neither to 'la tierra de Malvinas' nor to 'los ingleses' (*LI*, 349), but to a harmless conscript in a typical episode, yet again, of radical evil.

Felipe's separation from his fellows in the trench happens in a specific, unmistakably place:

La calle se interrumpía en una larga muralla de ladrillos. Los muros de la Chacarita.  
—Hasta *acá* llegamos nosotros —dijo Rubén.  
—Desde *acá* seguís solo —completó Carlitos (*LI*, 592).

Unburdened by the guilt of survival and the impossibility of true revenge, Felipe's way to sever ties with the torturers is now to re-create bonds with his peers—an attempt he would make with Gloria. Restoring a shared language becomes crucial to finally

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<sup>143</sup> Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 367.

articulate 'how these things came about'.<sup>144</sup> The failure of the nationalist utopia and the subsequent destruction of meaningful language will have significant impacts on the constitution of a post-utopian Argentina, as will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>144</sup> *Hamlet*, V. 2. 385.

## CHAPTER 2

### Argentina son Las Malvinas

#### Post-Utopian Argentina as a Heterotopia

Analyses of *Las Islas* have systematically failed to draw attention to its epigraph, a quotation from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) that arguably works as an eloquent sub-text for Gamarro's novel.<sup>1</sup> The excerpt is reproduced in its Spanish translation, and it reads:

*El infierno de los vivos no es algo que será; hay uno, es aquel que existe ya aquí, el infierno que habitamos todos los días, que formamos estando juntos. Dos maneras hay de no sufrirlo. La primera es fácil para muchos: aceptar el infierno y volverse parte de él hasta el punto de no verlo más. La segunda es peligrosa y exige atención y aprendizaje continuos: buscar y saber reconocer quién y qué, en medio del infierno, no es infierno, y hacerlo durar, y darle espacio.*

While the translator in *Las Islas* remains uncredited, as is customary in the Spanish-speaking publishing world regarding epigraphs, it is widely known to be the prestigious Aurora Bernárdez (1920-2014). Her 1974 translation of *Invisible Cities* underwent minor revisions in subsequent editions. Yet, a crucial difference persists: Bernárdez's version omits a key conditional clause, transforming a possibility expressed in the original Italian into a definitive statement. The English translation accurately reflects the Italian textbook: '*The inferno of the living is not something that will be; **if** there is one, it is what is already*

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<sup>1</sup> One exception is Destéfanis, who sees it as the epigraph of the whole of Gamarro's work and considers it to be 'una ética, una poética y una programática', enacting a strict choice: the first option 'se hace fácil a costa de vender el alma al diablo' and is mainly embodied by Fausto Tamerlán; the second one is a 'tarea de supervivientes, tarea de las generaciones de posdictadura', represented by Tamerlán's son, Fausto, and most specifically by Felipe Félix/Fefe. See María Laura Destéfanis, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamarro (1998-2011)* (doctoral tesis. University of Granada, 2019), pp. 596-8.

here [...].<sup>2</sup> Bernárdez's oversight significantly alters Calvino's message, particularly as these are the concluding lines of *Invisible Cities*. However, I argue that this alteration is fitting for my analysis of post-utopian Argentina, since it reinforces the image of a universe that indeed can only be an 'inferno of the living'.

As established in chapter 1, Felipe's perspective on the Malvinas/Falklands War reveals a stark truth. Rather than signifying a completion of the nationalist utopia, the irredentist seizure of 'Malvinas' materialised the concentration camp as an 'inner sanctum of the nation', a tool believed to facilitate 'the promise of a new national foundation.'<sup>3</sup> Language plays a central role in this process. Primo Levi elucidates that concentration camps develop a specific language based primarily on methods of animal subjugation, shouts, blows, and dehumanising treatment.<sup>4</sup> A similar situation unfolds within the concentration camps of the 'Proceso', where, as Pilar Calveiro notes, the use of language implies both 'la deshumanización de las víctimas' and 'inocentiza las acciones más penadas por el código moral de la sociedad, como matar y torturar,' given that

se evita toda mención a la humanidad del prisionero. Por lo general no se habla de personas, gente, hombres, sino de bultos, paquetes, a lo sumo subversivos, que se arrojan, se van para arriba, se quiebran.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter argues that the destruction of language in *Las Islas* as a consequence of massacres, along with the erasure of memories and affective bonds, ushers in a 'post-utopian order'. In this order, language and its possibilities are replaced by literal actions. While Fausto Tamerlán characterises it as 'esta cruzada en pos de una

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<sup>2</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. by William Weaver (Harvest, 1974), p. 165. Italics belong to Calvino; bolds characters are mine. Also, the Italian original: Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, in Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. and intro. by Claudio Melanini, 3 vols (Arnoldo Mondadori, 2005), II, pp. 357-498 (pp. 497-8). The English edition of *Las Islas* quotes the passage from Weaver's translation, thus maintaining Calvino's wording. See Carlos Gamerro, *The Islands*, trans. by Ian Barnett in collaboration with the author (And Other Stories, 2012). I thank Ian Barnett for this confirmation.

<sup>3</sup> Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War. Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, in Levi, *Opere*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, 2 vols (Einaudi, 1997), II, pp. 995-1153 (pp. 1061-9).

<sup>5</sup> Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (Colihue, 1998), p. 42.

sinceridad absoluta' (*LI*, 181), in my view it represents a 'dystopia of literality'. Such a dystopian world is governed by an economic power embodied by Tamerlán, who has effectively subjugated the state itself. Felipe's eventual revelation of the truth about post-utopian Argentina exposes the chilling connection between the 'inferno of the living', the failed nationalist utopia, and the 'inner sanctum of the nation'.

To analyse *Las Islas*' post-utopian narrative, I shall draw on two literary models: Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1920-1), exploring specifically the relationship between Felipe and Tamerlán within the dystopian tradition. This tradition features a powerful ruler paired with a seeker of knowledge and truth: the Tartar emperor Kublai Khan and the Venetian traveller Marco Polo in Calvino's work, and the Benefactor and the narrator in Zamyatin's *We*. While both Calvino and Zamyatin ultimately depict vast state structures (the Tartar Empire and OneState, respectively), my analysis will focus on the totalitarian characteristics of the state in *We*, contrasting them with the universe of contradictions, paradoxes, anachronisms, and inconsistencies presented in *Invisible Cities*. In this context, Brian McHale's reading of *Invisible Cities* proves valuable. McHale describes it as a universe that is 'radically discontinuous and inconsistent, it juxtaposes worlds of incompatible structure', leading him to wonder 'what kind of space is capable of accommodating so many incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds.'<sup>6</sup> Deriving it from Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia', he then draws upon the concept of 'zone'.<sup>7</sup> I propose that the post-utopian narrative of *Las Islas* constitutes a 'zone' in McHale's sense, one that bears a close resemblance to both Calvino's depiction of inferno and the representation of hell as a metaphor for massacres.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter thus delves into the act of truth-telling within the 'heterotopic' Argentina depicted in *Las Islas*. Drawing inspiration from the structure of *Invisible Cities*,

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<sup>6</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Routledge, 2004), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> McHale employs the term to avoid the use of 'world' in connection with heterotopia 'since it fails to observe the basic rules of world-building'. See McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 44-5. Referring to heterotopian fictions written in Spanish, Gonzalo Garcés ranks Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004) as 'la primera de esta clase, con una importante excepción: *Las [I]slas*, de Carlos Gamerro.' See Gonzalo Garcés, *Cómo ser malos. Ensayos sobre literatura* (Letras del Sur, 2016), p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas". *Representar masacres y genocidios* (Katz, 2014), in particular chapter 4 'La fórmula infernal', pp. 133-78.

Felipe engages in a dialogue with the embodiment of power, Tamerlán, ultimately revealing truths that resonate with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogic fiction'. Here, I establish a parallel between Felipe and Marco Polo, both acting as 'explorers' of knowledge. While Felipe investigates the witnesses of César's crime, uncovering a universe of contradictions and inconsistencies, Marco's exploration of imperial cities leads him to a different understanding of the Khan's empire. The analysis unfolds in three sections. First, I study the concept of the heterotopia as expounded by Michel Foucault. Second, I examine the characteristics of the two central characters, Felipe and Tamerlán. Finally, I analyse the act of truth-telling across three temporal levels: the dystopian future; the political, social, and economic landscape of the present; and the criminal past associated with the state crimes of the 'Proceso'. This chapter will demonstrate that Felipe's success in uncovering truths is partially due to the adaptive skills honed during his experience in the Malvinas/Falklands War. With regard to the past, however, achieving truth requires the reconstruction of bonds that facilitate collective action, specifically with his fellow soldiers in the trenches and with Gloria, a survivor of the mainland's concentration camps. Through these relationships, Felipe is able to piece together a more complete truth about the past.

#### THE HETEROTOPIAN ZONE

Heterotopia is one of the terms used to indicate sceptical treatments of utopianism. M. Keith Booker includes it, along with others such as 'negative utopia', 'anti-utopia', and 'cacotopia', within the concept of dystopia, which is 'a general term encompassing any imaginative view of a society that is oriented toward highlighting in a critical way negative or problematic features of that society's vision of the ideal.'<sup>9</sup> As Foucault explains, heterotopias constitute

a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; [...] the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the

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<sup>9</sup> M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature. Fiction as Social Criticism* (Greenwood, 1994), p. 22. n5.

*heteroclite*; and that word should be taken in its most literal, etymological sense: in such a state, things are ‘laid’, ‘placed’, ‘arranged’ in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all.<sup>10</sup>

In Foucault’s conception, heterotopias are explicitly opposed to utopias. While utopias have no real locality and present an organised world, ‘countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical’, heterotopias

are disturbing, probably because they secretly **undermine language**, because they make it **impossible to name** this *and* that, because they **shatter or tangle common names**, because they **destroy ‘syntax’** in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes **words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together’**.<sup>11</sup>

Heterotopias, as Foucault proposes, are spaces that disrupt or challenge dominant social orders. In this line, George Steiner explains the relevance of an ‘explicit grammar [as] an acceptance of order: it is a hierarchization [...] of the forces and valuations prevailing in the body politic.’<sup>12</sup> If heterotopias essentially ‘undermine’, ‘make impossible’, ‘shatter’, ‘tangle’, or even ‘destroy’ the various possibilities of language—echoing in this respect the devastating consequences of massacres—and thus social orders, the relationships between utopia and anti-utopian constructs are not necessarily conflicting, as Foucault sees it.<sup>13</sup> Rather, Gary Saul Morson sees a continuum between the two genres, positing that ‘anti-generic works are written in the tradition of previous works of the anti-genre’, in particular,

whereas utopias describe an escape *from* history, these anti-utopias describe an escape, or attempted escape, *to* history, which is to say, to the world of contingency, conflict, and

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge, 2005), p. xix. Italics in the original.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xix. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>12</sup> George Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle. Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* (Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Booker believes, for instance, that dystopian thought can serve as a valuable corrective to the danger of utopia degenerating into a totalitarian ideal, ‘and therefore should be thought of as working *with* rather than *against* utopian thought’. See Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, pp. 176-7. Italics in the original.

uncertainty. Refusing perfection, the anti-utopian hero tries to convince the ruler and his fellow citizens of his paradoxical truths (which are, like their opposites in utopian works, regarded by most as absurd): truths such as the unhappiness of happiness, the desirability of desire, and the advantage of disadvantage.<sup>14</sup>

In the fictional reality of *Las Islas*, I place those ‘paradoxical truths’ into what Vezzetti ponders, ‘no lo que separa y opone sino lo que comunica el *campo* [de concentración] y la sociedad.’<sup>15</sup> In other words, this would be the link between the outcomes of a pursued utopia and the actual outcome of a dystopic, post-utopian universe.

In a 1983 lecture at Columbia University, Italo Calvino described *Invisible Cities* as having ‘a double conclusion, both parts of which are equally necessary: on the utopian city (which even if we do not catch sight of it we cannot stop looking for); and on the infernal city.’<sup>16</sup> This universe containing contrasting yet interconnected elements resonates with the narrative structure of *Las Islas*. Brian McHale mentions the world of the living with the ‘other world’ of the dead; the real-world city with its representation or model or double; appearance vs reality; multiplicity of perspectives; the distortions of desire and memory.<sup>17</sup> In *Invisible Cities*, Calvino crafts a narrative through Marco Polo’s descriptions of fantastical and realistic cities presented in significant pairings like ‘cities and memory’, ‘cities and desire’, and ‘cities and the dead’. These descriptions become the foundation for an intricate game of Knowledge and Power between Polo, the ‘explorer’, and the Khan, the ruler. A crucial aspect of this game lies in the gradual mastery of language by Polo. As Polo refines his ability to depict these complex urban

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre. Dostoevsky’s Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Northwestern University Press, 1981), pp. 115-6 and 128. Italics in the original. The author is referring to Zamyatin’s *We*, whose connections with *Las Islas* are analysed in pp. 93-9 of this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente. Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2002), p. 185. Italics in the original.

<sup>16</sup> Italo Calvino, ‘On *Invisible Cities*’, *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 8 (1983), pp. 37-42 (p. 41). However, critics seem to have preferred to place Calvino’s book into the tradition of utopian fictions. See, for instance, Melanini in Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*, II, p. xxxi; and Peter G. Christensen, ‘Utopia and Alienation in Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*’, in *Italo Calvino*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Chelsea House, 2002), pp. 26-28. Other genres noticed in Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* are listed in Letizia Modena, *Italo Calvino’s Architecture of Lightness. The Utopian Imagination in an Age of Urban Crisis* (Routledge, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 43.

landscapes, he begins to destabilise the established roles and expected behaviours of both explorer and ruler. The growing possibilities of representation embodied in Polo's narratives subtly undermine the Khan's initial position of absolute certainty, while, at the beginning of their relationship,

*Marco Polo could express himself only with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder and of horror, animal barkings or bootings, or with objects he took from his knapsacks [...] improvised pantomimes that the sovereign had to interpret.*<sup>18</sup>

Not only does the paragraph highlight a central problem of communication at the level of language, but also a determination to speak and be understood. This confirms Levi's conviction that 'it is always possible to communicate [since], all human races speak, only non-human species do not know how to speak.'<sup>19</sup> However, as sometimes happens to survivors, certain matters seem not to be easily addressed in a direct way. The following interchange between Marco and the Khan suggests it:

*"Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know."  
"There is still one of which you never speak."  
[...]  
"Venice," the Khan said.  
Marco smiled. "What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?"  
[...] "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice."*<sup>20</sup>

The issue reflects the innermost conflict of representation, as Marco has previously stated that 'the city must never be confused with the words that describe it [...]. Falsehood is never in words; it is in things.'<sup>21</sup> The task would be for the survivor to find the appropriate terms to utter his/her truth. This is insinuated by the city of Eutropia which, rather than 'the good place' of utopian thought, would command the 'good rhetorical expression' to convey a critical experience, as is indeed Felipe's case with regard to 'Malvinas' and, by extension, to that concentration event.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, pp. 21-2. Italics in the original.

<sup>19</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1060. My translation.

<sup>20</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 86. Italics in the original.

<sup>21</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, pp. 61 and 62.

<sup>22</sup> I thank Dr José Saval for drawing my attention to this specific city and its potential implications for my reading.

As previously established, the relationship between Tamerlán and Felipe in *Las Islas* mirrors the dynamic between the Khan and Marco Polo in *Invisible Cities*. In this regard, Tamerlán's fate is foreshadowed in the opening lines of Calvino's work, where the Khan expresses melancholic disquiet about '*the boundless extension of the territories we have conquered [...] this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin*' since '*the triumph over enemy sovereigns has made us the heirs of their long undoing*.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the powerful ruler eventually becomes aware, after the descriptions by his messenger of knowledge, that the cities 'that menace in nightmares and in maledictions' the realisation of those ones 'of the promised lands visited in thought but not yet discovered or founded' are leading the world to 'the infernal city'.<sup>24</sup> It is then that Marco Polo pronounces the words quoted in the epigraph, those that in Spanish indubitably sanction the earthly inferno.

Calvino's passage joins, and thus introduces the reader of *Las Islas* to, a literary tradition that places hell on *this* earth. Such a tradition goes back to the sixteenth century, when Christopher Marlowe's Mephistopheles affirms:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
In one self place, for where we are is hell,  
And where hell is must we ever be.<sup>25</sup>

With these lines, Jan Kott affirms, '[f]or the first time, hell is existential and there is "no exit" from its inner darkness.'<sup>26</sup> Marlowe's conception of an earthly inferno was later completed by that of an internal one (also acknowledged in Calvino's quotation), that was further explored by authors like William Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, and Oscar Wilde.<sup>27</sup> Contemporary to Marlowe's verses, Burucúa and Kwiatkowski note, the notion of inferno began to be employed as a formula to represent massacres, yet it developed an ambivalent meaning:

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<sup>23</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 5. Italics in the original.

<sup>24</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>25</sup> *Doctor Faustus*, II. 1. 123-5. I quote from Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett (Everyman, 1999), pp. 340-457. The quoted lines are taken from the 1604 text; the 1616 version suffers only minor variations of punctuation.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Kott, 'The Two Hells of Doctor Faustus: A Polytheatrical Vision', in Kott, *The Bottom Translation. Marlowe and Shakespeare and the Carnival Tradition*, trans. by Daniela Miedzyrzecka and Lillian Vallee (Northwestern University Press, 1987), pp. 1-27 (p. 6).

<sup>27</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, "*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*", pp. 149-50.

Ocasionalmente, los perpetradores utilizaron el tema infernal en un intento de justificar la matanza, por cuanto *los muertos aparecerían como legítimamente condenados*. [...] Pero el infierno también fue usado para *describir matanzas en un intento de redimir a las víctimas, consideradas inocentes*.<sup>28</sup>

The notion of inferno thus reflects both its religious origins and its application to modern atrocities. Originally, perpetrators viewed themselves as battling the enemies of God, those who deviated from the ‘true religion’ and faced eternal damnation in hell. Victims, consequently, were demonised and stripped of their humanity, paving the way for their annihilation.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the second meaning developed gradually. It refers to the unimaginable suffering inflicted upon victims and underscores the horrific nature of the act. This interpretation has been widely used, particularly by survivors and artistic representations, to describe the horrors of Nazi concentration camps. These drew upon the circles of Dante’s *Inferno* ‘con sus multitudes agobiadas, desnudas, retorcidas de asfixia y vociferantes, con sus atmósferas de encierro, con los símiles de sirvientes autómatas del demonio,’ though

[t]ambién los perpetradores se refirieron a sus acciones mediante alusiones semejantes: “El infierno de Dante se hizo realidad aquí”, sostuvo el comandante Irmfried Eberl sobre Treblinka; “Comparativamente el infierno de Dante es una comedia. Estamos en el *anus mundi*”, afirmó Johann Paul Kremer, médico de Auschwitz.<sup>30</sup>

While both the supposed legitimacy of the punishment and the inhumanity of the victims’ sufferings converge in Dante, a significant outcome of the poet’s presence in hell is remarked by Burucúa and Kwiatkowski:

En el canto XXXIV del *Inferno*, Dante enmudece, sus facultades humanas le fallan tanto como en presencia de Dios, ni siquiera puede describir lo que siente: “no estoy muerto ni vivo; piensa por ti mismo, si algún ingenio tienes, en qué me convertí”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, p. 133.

<sup>29</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, pp. 152, 157, and 166.

<sup>30</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, p. 175. Italics in the original.

<sup>31</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, p. 133.

Dante's struggles to express the horrors he witnesses in *Inferno* foreshadow the profound inadequacies of language experienced by real-life witnesses and survivors of atrocities. Some, like Levi describes, returned from concentration camps rendered 'mute' by the trauma.<sup>32</sup> Even though speechless, however, Dante managed to leave the infernal realm. This is not the case of Felipe, who, as seen in chapter 1, finds himself within the 'grey zone' of the concentration camp elucidated by Levi. The limitations of both retroactive justice and revenge leave him perpetually entangled with the horrors he has endured. He thus remains confined within a boundless hell: for him, there is truly 'no exit' from the 'inner darkness' of his earthly, internalised *inferno*.

The situation is acknowledged in the meeting with his phantasmagorical mates:

—Escuchame, porteño, ¿vos sabés lo que es el infierno?  
 —Sí —asentí vehementemente—. No te quepa duda. Puedo escribirte un libro.  
 —El nuestro es distinto. De lo que sufrimos en vida nos desnudamos para cruzar nadando al otro lado. Lo que recordamos lo recordamos sin dolor. Pero *hay uno que cruza con nosotros. El de ustedes. El de los que siguen vivos* (LI, 590).

In Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, the boundless empire of the Khan is ultimately threatened by the 'infernal city'. *Las Islas* presents a bleaker vision, as the dialogue between Felipe and his dead mates underscores the idea that both the world of the living and the 'other world' of the dead are 'infernos'. Memory and pain act as bridges between these two hells. The suffering in the 'inferno of the living' stems not only from the atrocities themselves but also from the lack of words to express those outrages. This lack of expression is further amplified by the formula of 'inferno', that, by its ambivalent use, establishes clear-cut roles for those enacting each meaning: whilst the perpetrator becomes an 'ángel militar', the survivor must carry the 'mandato de la transmisión de la verdad', forced to bear the weight of his/her 'experiencia concentracionaria'.<sup>33</sup> Only the voice of a victim that never returned, the 'complete witness' of Giorgio Agamben's formulation,<sup>34</sup> can set free the survivor: 'Estamos contentos de que vos te hayas

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<sup>32</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1056.

<sup>33</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas", pp. 158 and 30.

<sup>34</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 1999), p. 34.

salvado. [...] No nos debés nada más' (*LI*, 591). The new mission consists in dreaming all the 'complete witnesses' together, as nobody else, but the survivor, can do.

Marco Polo ends his descriptions uttering another mandate: to '*seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.*'<sup>35</sup> This mandate is consistent with Kott's analysis of Marlowe's earthly inferno, as '[t]he devil always appears in disguise, because otherwise he could frighten but not tempt.'<sup>36</sup> It is through economic temptation—rather than physical fear, though not always excluding it—that the inferno manifests itself in post-utopian Argentina. Felipe's accepting Tamerlán's money will not eventually prevent him from uttering truth in a heterotopian place, i.e., in a space that has 'undermined', 'made impossible', 'shattered', 'tangled', or 'destroyed' the possibilities of language and social order.<sup>37</sup> If heterotopias produce spaces 'less constructed than *deconstructed* by the text, or rather constructed and deconstructed at the same time', not any longer organised around a perceiving subject,<sup>38</sup> in *Las Islas* such a space can *only* be constructed/deconstructed by a narrator who has suffered history. Felipe's post-utopian life consists in a journey *towards* history as he himself acknowledges that, despite all his efforts, 'sabía que tarde o temprano iba a terminar alcanzándome' (*LI*, 62). It is indeed the journey from utopia to dystopia.<sup>39</sup> Like Calvino's Marco Polo, then, Felipe is someone who has *seen, undergone, and returned* from, a supposed utopian place. It is thanks to that experience (the strategy learnt during the torture and death of his friend Carlitos) that he is able to reconstruct the destroyed syntax of truth in a scattered post-utopian world, by becoming,

invisible contra el fondo del paisaje, perdí densidad y nitidez  
como tantas veces desde entonces, conseguí desaparecer —un truco  
de *supervivencia*— ante los ojos de todos (*LI*, 366).

Felipe's ability to navigate the 'inferno of the living' hinges on his adaptability in a Darwinist approach. This skill is even recognised by his counterpart, Fausto Tamerlán, who remarks, 'Darwin estaría orgulloso de nosotros' (*LI*, 506). His 'becoming invisible

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<sup>35</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 165. Italics in the original.

<sup>36</sup> Kott, 'The Two Hells of Doctor Faustus', p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xix.

<sup>38</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 45. Italics in the original.

<sup>39</sup> Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, p. 128.

against the backdrop of the landscape' grants Felipe access to the diverse, incongruous, contradictory spaces within the 'inferno of the living'. It acts as a crucial step in his process of recreating/reconstructing, in a post-utopian world, the syntax to ultimately produce the predicative structure to utter truth.

#### THE ADAPTIVE EXPLORER OF KNOWLEDGE

Despite being a survivor of both the Malvinas/Falklands War and a concentration camp, Felipe's primary objective in post-utopian Argentina is not to dwell on or relive these traumatic experiences—that is, to continue being subjected to that historical experience, as most of his fellow veterans keep doing. Notably, when conscripts meet to commemorate the tenth anniversary of 2 April in the Lagos de Palermo, Felipe remembers having achieved 'mi mayor maratón de permanencia en la red [...]. Ni atendí la puerta ni contesté el teléfono ni prendí el televisor ni salí a la calle en todo el día' (*LI*, 62). One of his dead mates at the trench later corroborates this utter isolation: 'con vos no había caso. Golpeábamos y golpeábamos pero no nos abríais' (*LI*, 590). It is not the case for the person who rules the political and economic order of the post-utopian nation. Tamerlán summons Felipe in a manner eerily reminiscent of the state's actions during the war. Both occasions involve written notices, personally delivered in evening hours by security forces, and similar threats to coerce Felipe's compliance. In 1982, the wording is 'venimos a buscarte y ahí sí que no la vas a sacar tan barata' (*LI*, 327), while, in 1992, it is '[n]o faltes [...]. Si no, voy a tener que venir a buscarte' (*LI*, 12). This mirroring of the methods of a totalitarian state thrusts Felipe back into a position of vulnerability, since he recognises that the man bringing Tamerlán's notification is

[u]n servicio, claro; pero demasiado bien mantenido para ser de la SIDE o del ejército; parecía más bien uno de los tantos que en el último tiempo se habían privatizado (*LI*, 12).

These key agents of the dictatorship remain active in the new democratic milieu thanks to adaptation. Since Darwin it is accepted that 'animals possess some power of

reasoning [as they] may constantly be seen to pause, deliberate, and resolve.<sup>40</sup> Yet, what separates human beings from the other mammals, allowing them heterogeneous, sophisticated ways of life, is language. In this regard, John Dupré points out that ‘the complexity and subtlety of human language [...] is surely a necessary condition of the complexity of culture that human societies enjoy and the diversity of roles that they exhibit’, further to which,

the interplay between individual goals and social structures embedded in language provides a space in which can be found something that genuinely deserves to be called *human freedom*.<sup>41</sup>

As previously discussed, the destruction of language hinders the possibilities of describing past massacres. In post-utopian Argentina, this destruction produces two additional crucial consequences. Firstly, the severe restrictions on human freedom, which will be addressed in the following section. Secondly, the supremacy of natural selection, which places individuals in a world where core activities like finding mates, protecting offspring, evading threats, and securing resources become a matter of survival of the fittest.<sup>42</sup> If Felipe has neither mates to find nor offspring to protect, he will, however, follow that agency-detector system which allows ‘humans to adaptively navigate ancestral environments by responding rapidly and economically to important, statistically repetitive task demands, such as distinguishing predator from prey and friend from foe.’<sup>43</sup>

Felipe’s memories of the final stages of the war reveal a transformation in this sense. In fact, from noticing ‘la nuca erizándose al unísono como el lomo de un gato acorralado’ (*LI*, 556) during the decisive battle of Longdon, to the witnessing of a British soldier carrying a dead Argentinian ‘como una hormiga tratando de arrastrar un insecto demasiado grande para ella sola’ (*LI*, 563), all conscripts around him—and he himself—end up by becoming either animals or insects. This self-perception remains unchanged ten years later, when the meeting with Tamerlán takes place. If his first

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Ruse, *Charles Darwin* (Blackwell, 2008), p. 159.

<sup>41</sup> John Dupré, *Darwin’s Legacy. What Evolution Means Today* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 74 and 75.

<sup>42</sup> Scott Atran, *In Gods We Trust. The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. vii.

<sup>43</sup> Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, p. 57.



words, stimulates us ‘to make inferences about situations relevant to the course of life’, and it is often a paralysing reaction that aids survival, given that ‘ceasing all movement offers predators fewer cues to guide attack.’<sup>44</sup> Fear therefore helps the potential prey to continue alive, and it incites deductions about that process of survival. Hence, ten years after the war Felipe reflects that the fly trapped in the cobweb ‘puede pasarla bastante bien si se relaja mientras espera’ (LI, 11). Some lessons from immobility have been taken:

Y si *no me muevo demasiado* estos hilos ni se sienten, son tan tenues, es como si flotara de espaldas en el aire. Sí, *sólo se hacen reales cuando trato de zafarme*. (LI, 11).

Atran further delineates anxiety as ‘usually distinguished from fear by lack of an immediate external eliciting stimulus.’<sup>45</sup> While Felipe experiences fear in response to an external impetus (the imperative to attend the meeting), his anxiety likely originates from the authoritarian way Tamerlán issues the summons. The ‘language’ likening the captives to animals within the concentration camp may indeed evoke the terror requisite for subjugating victims within such confines.<sup>46</sup>

At first, Felipe transcends these emotional states by harnessing humour. Parody and irony are frequently utilised within dystopian narratives to discredit, satirise, or caution against either the utopian genre itself or specific societal dilemmas.<sup>47</sup> Felipe’s comedic sensibility not only adheres to the conventions of dystopian literature but also functions as a fitting conduit to access the dystopian zone. This intrinsic disposition, reminiscent of the clown archetype scrutinised by Mikhail Bakhtin in his study of laughter during medieval epochs, further solidifies the intimate connection between humour and truth. Laughter, Bakhtin argues, is:

essentially not an external but *an interior form of truth* [that] liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that

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<sup>44</sup> Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, pp. 66 and 67.

<sup>45</sup> Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, p. 67.

<sup>46</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1023.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Ferns, *Narrating Utopia. Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature* (Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 15; and Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, p. 116.

developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to facilitating acceptance of the peculiar characters and occurrences that he encounters, humour serves to shield Felipe from indulging in self-pity and from entertaining notions of self-importance. The fly ensnared within the cobweb serves as a non-descript prey: the spider, already sated, likely by another victim, exhibits no urgency in consuming the newly captured insect. Both predator and prey can afford to bide their time, recognising the inevitability of their respective destinies or roles. The use of the indefinite article, '*una mosca*', reinforces the idea of being only one among other prey (as, in Verraco's view, were the victims of the military); while for the predator, on the contrary, the article employed is the definite one, '*la araña*', which, in M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan's words, 'indicates that the item in question *is* specific and identifiable; that somewhere the information necessary for identifying it is recoverable'.<sup>49</sup> A few lines below it will be explicit that the fly of the image is Felipe himself. The revelation comes with neither moral considerations nor questionings about his circumstances. Hence, he is in a position to accept without major qualms any sort of extravagancies Tamerlán's post-utopian order can place before his eyes. It is in this vein that he witnesses the most radical materialisation of the 'fuerzas poderosas del inconsciente' (*LI*, 41) that Dr Canal fosters: the raping of César by his own father.

The intricacies of Felipe's trajectory are expounded through interactions involving adaptation across three distinct categories of identity: personal, collective, and relational. Central to his self-conception and interpersonal dynamics, *personal identity*, encapsulating the 'sense of self', pertains to individuals' perceptions of the unique qualities and attributes distinguishing them from others, a composite of physical, psychological, and interpersonal traits exclusive to the individual. In contrast, *collective identities* encompass a spectrum of social delineations such as occupation, religion, ethnicity, or cultural heritage, emphasising affiliations with cohorts sharing

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<sup>48</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (Longman, 1976), p. 71. Italics in the original.

similar attributes.<sup>50</sup> *Relational identities* extend to those individuals constituting an integral part of one's extended self-concept, such as children or a spouse, as well as the attributes exhibited during interpersonal interactions.<sup>51</sup> Felipe's personal identity, diminished to that of an insect, consequentially constrains his relational identity within the confines of the predator-protector-prey paradigm. The tentative utilisation of his collective identity, defined by his status as a war veteran and an IT specialist, concurrently reflects both a crisis and an acknowledgment of the imperative for adaptation within the post-utopian milieu he inhabits.

Ten years after the war, his returning to veterans' spheres requires of him not only, as seen in chapter 1, an explicit declaration of being a soldier, but also the appropriate clothing and the observing of specific dates, celebrations, and rituals. In his meeting with Tamerlán, he has introduced himself first as '[e]specialista en seguridad de sistemas' and immediately afterwards, pressed to secure his position, as a 'hacker' (*LI*, 18). In need of re-joining Citatorio's group, Felipe replaces 'la ropa elegante de la entrevista [por] el uniforme de veterano de guerra de la campaña de Malvinas, que había comprado [...] en el pasaje subterráneo que cruza la 9 de Julio a la altura de Corrientes' but over which '[m]e puse un sobretodo bien largo encima, para taparme hasta llegar al local' (*LI*, 52). The line that separates true from false is thus confusing, simultaneously showing and hiding what may ascertain his identity. The opposite procedure is acted before entering Carcasa's party. He pulls out 'los escuditos de Los Ramones y Metallica que junto con el pelo largo me permitían *pasar por rockero*—la gente todavía no se acostumbra a esto de los veteranos de guerra— y los reemplacé por los de Malvinas' (*LI*, 332). Although Felipe blames 'la gente', this employment of layers that hide, or at least confuse, his identity depicts the conflictive relationship he holds with the identity that has been imposed on him by history and society. A sharp rejection of this identity is verified when the driver of a taxi he takes turns out to be a veteran. Felipe's reaction is physical:

“Esto sí que no”, pensé, sintiendo el conocido bolo de angustia  
empezar a revolcarse en mi estómago. “Parar a tomar un café,

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<sup>50</sup> *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. by Gary R. VandenBos (American Psychological Association, 2015), p. 517.

<sup>51</sup> *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. by David Matsumoto (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 244-5.

recitarnos las mutuas anécdotas, intercambiar teléfonos. Hoy no” (LI, 252).

It is only in special circumstances—most notably when he needs to establish a congenial bond with ‘la gente’—that he invokes his condition of war veteran. On those few occasions he does not say he has been in ‘Malvinas’ nor ‘me mandaron a Malvinas’ (LI, 308) nor even ‘me llevaron’ (LI, 396), but ‘soy ex combatiente de Malvinas’ (LI, 444). The effect of this declaration is either ‘no me creyó una palabra’ (LI, 444) or the reproach ‘[l]aburaron dos meses y después pretenden que los mantengamos el resto de sus vidas’ (LI, 445). Such answers ironically endorse his perception about his collective identity in relation to society’s difficult coming to terms with its recent past and the reality that past has generated.

The fluidity of collective identities is governed by the imperative to evade *predictability* to others, as any externally imposed identity entails prescribed modes of conduct that jeopardise one’s position and, potentially, one’s life. The status of being a war veteran, for instance, implies an adhering to irredentism, thereby subjecting individuals to the dictates of military authority and the looming spectre of mortality akin to their fallen comrades at the *pozo de zorro*. An illustration of the perils inherent in social identification surfaces when Felipe gains access to the SIDE premises and its information infrastructure. After procuring a list of witnesses’ names, he discovers the following day that the original list has been altered overnight, courtesy of a computer virus, substituting them for an equivalent number of names unrelated to the crime plot. Felipe immediately reckons that the change has been ‘[l]a venganza del nerd [...], es algo personal. Mi reemplazante en la SIDE, mi discípulo’ (LI, 162). The identification of his presence at the ‘Argentinas en el 2000’ office in his true capacity frustrates his *predictable* task, turning him thus into prey. After the event, as happens to all those characters whose identity is established by others, Felipe’s relevant activity as a hacker ceases. He is forced to adopt a new identity (that of a ‘classic’ investigator) to survive in the predator-protector-prey scheme.

While Felipe is thus compelled to the aforementioned adaptations to survive in post-utopian Argentina, until his meeting Gloria, Tamerlán adopts Felipe’s opposite adaptive scheme. This will be analysed next.

## THE RULER, OR THE PERFECT SPECIMEN

Utilising Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, the fusion of temporal and spatial dimensions into a singular category, Jan Kott speculates, with 'a certain freedom of chronology', about the possibility of an encounter between Hamlet and Faustus in Wittenberg, where the latter 'could have told Hamlet [...] how he summoned the ghosts of the dead.'<sup>52</sup> In *Las Islas*, a similar meeting between someone who lectures about events that the other puts into practice is impossible not only because, as discussed in chapter 1, Felipe is a failed Hamlet, but particularly because Tamerlán is not compelled to apply his own Darwinian lessons. He has already achieved a dominant position in post-utopian Argentina. Tamerlán is the only main character who does not attempt to change, or hide, his identity throughout the novel. As he considers that he has reached perfection, his way of survival is not adaptation, but rather 'clonarme' (*LI*, 393)—i.e., not to evolve but to duplicate himself.

As his name and surname allude both to *Doctor Faustus* and to *Tamburlaine the Great*, Fausto Tamerlán evokes Christopher Marlowe, a dramatist with 'particular interest in a central character always eager to extend his own horizons, break conventions, employing dangerous, even cruel methods if necessary to fulfil his ambitions.'<sup>53</sup> Tamerlán's 'Argentinian' lineage harks back to Sarmiento, who saw in Facundo Quiroga 'el hombre grande, el hombre de genio, a su pesar, sin saberlo él, el César, el Tamerlán, el Mahoma' born 'para mandar, para dominar, para combatir el poder de la ciudad, la partida de la policía.'<sup>54</sup> Noting that in *Facundo* (1845) 'el temor y el terror son reiteradamente señalados como los medios principales del poder, sea personal, sea político, que ejercía Facundo,' Carlos Altamirano remarks that those constitute the main traits of a despotic power.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, like Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Calvino's Khan, Fausto Tamerlán appears essentially a conqueror. It is what Felipe observes in their first meeting. He sees the great man 'midiendo sus dominios' (*LI*, 26),

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<sup>52</sup> Kott, 'The Two Hells of Doctor Faustus', p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> David A. Male, *Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe* (Macmillan, 1985), p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo* (Biblioteca Ayacucho and Hyspamérica, 1986), p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> Carlos Altamirano, 'El orientalismo y la idea del despotismo en el *Facundo*', in Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, *Ensayos argentinos. De Sarmiento a la vanguardia* (Ariel, 1997), pp. 83-102 (p. 96).

‘hierático como un emperador bizantino’ (LI, 28), sitting in ‘su trono giratorio’ (LI, 29), or pondering the ‘límites de su reino’ (LI, 32), while he thinks of him as ‘el señor de la comarca’, notices the scale reproductions of the towers as ‘estandartes de un conquistador arribado a estas costas a fundar otra vez la ciudad’ (LI, 28), and listens to the businessman talking of ‘extender mis dominios y prolongarlos en el tiempo’ (LI, 32) or dubbing himself ‘el señor de los espejos’ (LI, 34).

If Marlowe presented ‘the Scythian Tamburlaine: / Threat’ning the world with high outstanding terms / And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword,’<sup>56</sup> the mogul is also described as a conqueror by an anonymous poem left on his desk a few days after the crime: ‘Dadme un mapa, así podré ver / qué parte del mundo me resta conquistar, / y mis muchachos lo harán por mí’ (LI, 35), which is a literal translation of Tamburlaine’s words a few moments before his death.<sup>57</sup> In the first edition of *Las Islas*, the lyrical voice of the ‘poemita’ was the victim’s, hinting at Eva Perón’s falsely attributed phrase ‘Volveré y seré millones’:

Me fui tan rápido que ni saludé,  
Caí aunque todos me tendían sus manos,  
Canten mi nombre a coro y volveré,  
Volveré y seré millones de gusanos.<sup>58</sup>

While the verses in the initial edition hint at the demise of an unnamed victim of César, also foreshadowing the eventual fate of Tamerlán himself, the alteration serves to emphasise the conqueror-like attributes of Tamerlán. It further intertwines Tamerlán with Marlowe’s character, who, according to Mark Thornton Burnett,

<sup>56</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*, The Prologue. 3-4, in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, pp. 2-73.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Give me a map, then let me see how much / Is left for me to conquer all the world, / That these, my boys, may finish all my wants’. See *Tamburlaine the Great, Part Two*, V. 3. 124-6, in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, pp. 74-146. The part of the world left for Tamburlaine (and significantly for Tamerlán) to conquer is ‘presumably South America’. See Burnett in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, p. 555.

<sup>58</sup> Carlos Gamerro, *Las Islas* (Simurg, 1998), p. 34. Analysing this version of the poem, Destéfani persuasively links the disappearance of the victim’s corpse with those of Eva Perón and the *desaparecidos*. See Destéfani, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamerro*, pp. 476-7. The situation also enacts rule 6 of Gamerro’s ‘Decálogo del relato policial argentino’: ‘Frecuentemente, se sabe de entrada la identidad del asesino y hay que averiguar la de la víctima. A diferencia de la policial inglesa, la argentina suele comenzar con la desaparición del cadáver’. See Carlos Gamerro, ‘Para una reformulación del género policial argentino’, in Gamerro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, 2nd rev. edn (Excursiones, 2015), p. 65. Italics in the original.

[i]n wearing crowns, [...] adopts and fashions for himself new, respectable identities, concealing the fact of his low origins and attempting to obscure his status as a social upstart. He is, after all, a 'base usurping vagabond' (I: IV. 3. 21), at least according to official perspective.<sup>59</sup>

Tamerlán's origins are not 'low', though they are certainly 'base'. He is the son of a Nazi officer with whom he arrived in Buenos Aires the very 17 October 1945, carrying a suitcase full of 'las alhajas y las menudas piezas de oro que había logrado acumular' (LI, 514), and for which he had a 'pedido de captura [de] la policía de seis países europeos' (LI, 151). That gold, he tells Felipe, 'ha sido el origen de la fortuna familiar, que se remonta a mi padre apenas' (LI, 23), hinting thus at a wealth originated in the plunder of his victims. Successive ideological adaptations to Peronist governments (1946-1955 and 1973-1976), as well as to military regimes (the 'Revolución Libertadora', 1955-1958, and the 'Proceso', 1976-1983), secured Tamerlán his dominant position. However, it is only with the destruction of language as a result of the event of radical evil that, in my reading, his 'dystopia of literality' can be materialised. Dr Canal then assures Felipe that 'el señor Tamerlán es el superhombre' (LI, 42), i.e., that the mogul has reached Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of 'higher humanity' embodied by the *Übermensch*. Apart from the Nazi appropriation of this idea of a superior being,<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche's notion foresees a change from a weak animalised condition of man to that of a superior creature. In Nietzsche's view, man is not only 'the most endangered animal' but also 'the sickliest' and 'most bungled of all the animals', yet he could achieve higher development since, Richard Schacht explains, '[i]t is the *Übermensch*, after all, rather than the "beast of prey," which he has Zarathustra proclaim to be "the meaning of the earth".'<sup>61</sup> Having achieved that 'higher humanity', Tamerlán is now aware that 'el tiempo es mi peor enemigo [...]. Por eso mi hijo es tan importante' (LI, 178). Similar to the nationalists and 'Malvinas', Tamerlán's project depends on defeating time, not on adaptation. He has therefore to draw upon his Faustian facet.

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<sup>59</sup> Burnett in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, p. xix.

<sup>60</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1074.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 273-4.

After Tamerlán's assertion that his kingdom 'no es de este mundo solamente' (*LI*, 32), Vitullo convincingly argues that 'es más abarcador que el reino de Jesús y el del Tamerlán de Borges quien abría su poema homónimo diciendo "Mi reino es de este mundo"'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, if Tamburlaine pursues 'the sweet fruition of an *earthly* crown',<sup>63</sup> Tamerlán verbalises a drive of otherworldly reaches that can only be achieved in the wake of that man who is supposed 'to have sold his soul to the devil and to perform magic'.<sup>64</sup> This inclination is alluded to by Tamerlán's corporeal traits. Instead of the physical perfection of Marlowe's Tamburlaine,<sup>65</sup> Tamerlán seems to follow Faustus's 'inordinate appetite [and] desire to consume to excess'.<sup>66</sup> Besides his 'vientre abultado' (*LI*, 22), 'la panza blanca y peluda sacada hacia adelante' (*LI*, 34), or 'la lengua carnosa de tortuga [asomando] entre los labios córneos' (*LI*, 36), Tamerlán consumes tobacco, alcohol, and cocaine with no restraint. In Faustus, Burnett points out, gluttony and pride are coupled with 'a will to dominate all material things and all knowledge', usually articulated through 'turns of phrase [that] are inflected towards proclaiming a *totalitarian authority*'.<sup>67</sup> This language that 'at one and the same time declares his need to eat and his urge to tyrannise', also expresses 'his urge to play out his sexual predilections'.<sup>68</sup> Once again, Tamerlán eclipses the Asian emperor, as within the realm he presides over, there exists no intermediation between actions and their representation: the sordid genesis of his wealth is laid bare amidst excrement mingled with remnants of his father's ill-gotten gold; the subjugation of his surviving progeny is concretised through a literal act of violation; his complicity in the 'Proceso' is evidenced by his regular attendance at, and likely participation in, torture sessions;<sup>69</sup> the

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<sup>62</sup> Julieta Vitullo, *Islas imaginadas. La Guerra de Malvinas en la literatura y el cine argentinos* (Corregidor, 2012), p. 127. The obsession of Faustus with power is also highlighted by Kott, who states: 'Not until Romanticism does Faust demand the gift of eternal youth from the devil. The Renaissance Faust did not prize youth very highly—with power one can have any man and any woman.' See Kott, 'The Two Hells of Doctor Faustus', p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*, II. 7. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance Dramatist*, p. 27. Also Male, *Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe*, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance Dramatist*, p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Burnett in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, p. xxviii.

<sup>67</sup> Burnett in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, p. xxviii.

<sup>68</sup> Burnett in Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, p. xxviii.

<sup>69</sup> Not only, as Vezzetti notes, 'por primera vez en la historia hubo campos de concentración en la Argentina', but also there were testimonies of 'un juez federal que interrogaba

dominance of political authority finds embodiment in a politician who, behaving akin to a dog, urinates on the bust of his revered leader, Eva Perón; and the ultimate control over knowledge is wielded through the utilisation of firearms by a psychoanalyst or the fabrication of a male pregnancy by medical practitioners.

The birth of Fausto II gives Tamerlán both an heir in his image and likeness, and the opportunity of placing himself above ordinary men. He alone, among all fathers, is able to ensure the legitimacy of his own paternity. Since the ideal reproductive method, cloning, is still under development, Tamerlán devises a means that allows him to ‘pasar la divina substancia del padre al hijo sin corromperse’ (*LI*, 391). Through blood transfusions and other medical procedures on his wife’s—as well as on his own—body, a Faustian deed is eventually produced: the image of a parturient male in which science and representation conjoin, allowing Tamerlán to pose a proud rhetorical question: ‘¿Quién, alguna vez, tuvo más derecho a llamarse padre que yo?’ (*LI*, 393). Since Tamerlán’s baby delivery is a pretended one, this scene radically alters the pact with Mephistopheles: ‘The devil is not allowed to lie. Nor is science.’<sup>70</sup> Given its false premises, it is of no surprise that Tamerlán’s project undergoes a collapse parallel to that of the nationalistic utopia. Whereas his ‘dystopia of literality’ is only possible after the failure of ‘Malvinas’, it is the latter that frustrates his project, as it takes the life of the heir in his image and likeness. Fausto II volunteered to go to ‘Malvinas’, whence he never returned. A paradoxical detail is revealed by Major X’s diary: Fausto II served as ‘lenguaraz’ (*LI*, 456) of his expedition, that is, he facilitated communication during the foray into the hallucinated nationalistic utopia of a regime that destroyed language.

In Claudia Hammerschmidt’s analysis, ‘los temas de la paternidad, del capital y de la nación explícitamente se juntan en el intento de Fausto de refundar y volver a concebir a su hijo hasta que salga a su imagen y semejanza.’<sup>71</sup> This project that ultimately assimilates nation with capital via paternity certainly requires that Tamerlán

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secuestrados en Campo de Mayo, con participación del titular de la Bolsa de Valores y de peritos de la Bolsa y del Banco Central.’ See Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, pp. 18 and 135.

<sup>70</sup> Kott, ‘The Two Hells of Doctor Faustus’, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Claudia Hammerschmidt, ‘Huellas de entre los muertos. *Las Islas* o la “ficción barroca” de Carlos Gamerro’, in *Relatos de Malvinas. Paradojas en la representación e imaginario nacional*, ed. by María A. Semilla Durán (Eduvim, 2016), pp. 121-40 (p. 129).

secures his descendance. By openly threatening his surviving child to give him ‘un nieto sano [en] un año de plazo’ (LI, 38), he is unconsciously signing the true Faustian pact. Such a pact is agreed with a devil ‘in disguise’ whom he has not cared to ‘seek and learn to recognize’, and that eventually makes of the powerful predator a mere prey. The disguised devil of the pact, Dr Canal, had foreseen the event: ‘En el derrotero de la evolución *el inconsciente está destinado a hacerse real*, a salir al mundo y recorrerlo a su antojo, midiéndolo solo por *el paso de sus botas*’ (LI, 41). The superfluity of language in the dystopian order goes along with this martial realisation of ‘the region of the psyche containing memories, emotional conflicts, wishes, and repressed impulses that are not directly accessible to awareness but that have dynamic effects on thought and behavior.’<sup>72</sup> In yet another twist of a plot full of endless disguises and betrayals, César succeeds in killing his father—that is, in producing a literal parricide both confirming and putting an end to the dystopia of literality—, as a result of what César explains is

[e]l error de la araña [...]. Desde el centro de la tela puede mover todos los hilos. Controlar todas sus presas. Pero ahí también la van a encontrar muy fácil sus enemigos (LI, 543-4).

In their first meeting, Tamerlán spotted a connection with Felipe—the two belonged to the same *species*. Later in the novel Felipe ascertains that bond, though not exactly as Tamerlán described it:

En ambos, ese mismo hambre que ningún alimento de este mundo puede aplacar: *sobrevivir a cualquier precio*. Los dos habíamos respondido de maneras análogas y opuestas; *el mismo miedo a la hostilidad del mundo* allá afuera nos había llevado, a mí, a *retirarme de él y tratar de subsistir en sus márgenes*; a él, a *tragárselo hasta el último bocado para que no quedara nada afuera que lo pudiera amedrentar* (LI, 506).

Felipe’s truth about the man whose economic empire ruled post-utopian Argentina is clear. The two were survivors, yet to understand their different trajectories César’s uttering adds a further voice to this truth: the most perfectly totalitarian regime cannot guarantee the total safety of an absolute predator.

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<sup>72</sup> VandenBos (ed.), *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, p. 1119.

## RECONSTRUCTING THE SYNTAX OF HETEROTOPIA

Felipe's adept narrative abilities enable him to navigate the 'zone' emerging in the aftermath of the collapse of the nationalistic utopia. Literary genres assume a pivotal role in elucidating these spheres, along with the temporal dimensions (past, present, and future) each genre encapsulates. Consequently, this study will delve into dystopian developments vis-à-vis Tamerlán's corporate dominion, notably within his Golden Tower, a realm emblematic of societal decay and oppression. Then, the investigation will engage with the realm of realistic crime fiction, as Felipe probes the intricacies of the *Surprise from Spain* pyramid scheme and its constituents, offering insights into contemporary societal dynamics. Finally, attention will be directed towards the reconstruction of historical bonds and memories pertaining to the atrocities perpetrated during the 'Proceso', situated within the Parque Chas district of Buenos Aires, a locale replete with historical vestiges corresponding to the period under scrutiny. Similar to Felipe's encounter with his dead fellows, discussed in chapter 1, the genre of this sub-section will be memory.

### (I) A FORAY INTO A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE: A TOTALITARIAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM

The failure of the nationalist utopia has paved the way for a dystopian alternative, characterised by private governance personified in a wealthy individual and his corporate entity. Tamerlán Towers, where nearly all encounters between Tamerlán and Felipe occur, emerge as the symbolic locus of this new epoch.

Tall, clean, and crystalline, the twin towers bear features that evoke both a mythic origin and a sci-fi future. They appear to Felipe as 'una *montaña acabada de nacer*, inmaculada de erosión, empujada a través de la piel verde y tierna de la pampa por los retortijones subterráneos de algún cataclismo colosal,' though 'en un montaje tan incongruente que parecía *generado por computadora*' (LI, 13). The new buildings constitute 'un nuevo símbolo de [la] ciudad, rivalizando incluso con el obelisco, insípido y primitivo en comparación' (LI, 13). The opposition modern/ancient that contrasts the towers with the traditional symbol of Buenos Aires expands the notion of replacement.

In addition to replacing the obelisk as the emblem of the city, the Tamerlán Towers host yet another scale model reproducing an idealised moment: instead of the perfect past of the veteran's Puerto Argentino model, that of the future envisaged by Tamerlán: '[l]a Tercera Fundación de Buenos Aires. La ciudad del Tercer Milenio' (*LI*, 28).

While stressing the dystopian penchant of Tamerlán's place, Felipe draws upon the 'principal technique of dystopian fiction', that is, for Booker,

defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable.<sup>73</sup>

Just as utopia required a distant place, dystopian narratives rely on a spatial or temporal disconnect from the present to depict the imagined consequences of current social and political trends. *Las Islas* achieves this effect through the Tamerlán Towers, a seemingly contemporary landmark that embodies those quintessential dystopian features. On the one hand, futuristic details, such as automated doors, elevators, and mirrored glass panels responding to human presence, showcase an environment controlled by advanced, even perplexing (for an IT specialist like Felipe), computational systems. On the other hand, though the buildings are not 'remote', they exist in a state of detachment from the surrounding city. The towers are situated in Puerto Madero, which was at the time a projected neighbourhood reminiscent of London's South Bank, segregated from the city by a wall running along Ingeniero Huergo Avenue and the docks. Felipe's observations further solidify this sense of separation from ordinary city life, remarking that he is 'uno de los contados mortales que en sus vidas disfrutarían del privilegio de conocerlas por dentro' (*LI*, 13).

The specific dystopian elements employed in Tamerlán's corporation bear a striking resemblance to the world, or 'zone' in McHale's terms, depicted in the already-mentioned dystopic-totalitarian regime of the twenty-sixth century A.D. in Zamyatin's *We*, OneState. In both fictions, the pervasive use of a particular material serves as a key element in establishing a Panoptic order that mirrors the rigid hierarchical structures of

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<sup>73</sup> Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, p. 19.

both the concentration camp and the totalitarian state.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, both societies promote the pursuit of happiness as a central tenet, while simultaneously being dominated by a powerful, deified central ruler. The narratives in both works employ a narrator who initially adopts a mildly ironic or humorous tone in their portrayal of these zones and their inhabitants. Finally, both narratives posit the existence of an ‘other world’ beyond the confines of the dystopian societies, a world that represents a potential threat to the stability of the totalitarian project.

The Tamerlán Towers are made of acrylic and glass, as the title of chapter 1 of the novel announces, while in *OneState* glass is the exclusive material. In both, the Panoptic conception makes visible any activity by the employees of the corporation/the inhabitants of the state, to each other, but most importantly to the managers/the state security agents. The narrator in *We* suggests this circumstance in a passage that resembles one of Felipe’s initial discoveries inside the towers: ‘We mounted the glass steps of the stairway. You could see everything below like the palm of your hand.’<sup>75</sup> Although glass panes in the Tamerlán Towers allow people in the higher levels to see what is going on in the lower ones, the Panoptic conception of the building has different purposes to those of permanent control operating in *OneState*. Indeed, what for the employees appear as mirrors are ‘vidrios transparentes para los jefes’, as Tamerlán explains: ‘En cualquier punto que esté, todo lo que puede ver, hacia abajo o a los lados, está bajo su mando, y este es más directo cuanto más clara sea la imagen’ (*LI*, 33). Tamerlán’s is thus not an organisation based on control, but on hierarchy. The mogul therefore prefers mirrors to CCTV cameras, given that mirrors

[h]an tenido milenios para infiltrarse en nuestras almas. Tienen un poder propio. Son primitivos y elementales. Una cámara puede generar incomodidad, quizás miedo; pero no terror. Los espejos sí. Más si uno sabe que detrás del espejo, de lo que ve en él —a uno mismo— siempre hay alguien. El amo mirándonos a través de nuestros ojos (*LI*, 34).

Hence, strict hierarchy and pervading terror associate the Tamerlán Towers with the conceptual scheme of the concentration camp, as described by Levi.

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<sup>74</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1025.

<sup>75</sup> Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. by Clarence Brown (Penguin, 1993), p. 80.

The social order within the Tamerlán Towers hinges on an extreme form of fear, a primal emotion shared by humans and other species. The converse of fear, happiness, is not overtly emphasised within the corporation's structure, as the pursuit of happiness is an inherent element of all utopian projects. In contrast, happiness appears a central tenet of OneState. This ideology is embodied by the INTEGRAL, a spaceship that serves as a powerful symbol conflating the concepts of the future and happiness. This 'elegant, elongated ellipsoid made of our glass—as everlasting as gold, as resilient as steel [...] off it will fly, *the fiery Tamerlane of happiness*. ...'<sup>76</sup> The thematic parallels between the INTEGRAL and the Tamerlán Towers extend beyond their shared construction material. The towers themselves, designated as 'Golden' and 'Silver', establish a clear hierarchical structure, mirroring the INTEGRAL's design as a 'gigantic glass beehive.'<sup>77</sup> Significantly, both environments are depicted as populated by a laborious and industrious populace. If Felipe characterises the towers as 'la colmena de vidrio' (*LI*, 16), their happiness is silently guaranteed by another Tamerlane—a leader who shares some supernatural features with the Benefactor, the totalitarian ruler of OneState.

The prospect of an audience with Tamerlán is imbued with such significance that it evokes a spectrum of emotions amongst the employees, ranging from abject fear to fervent hope. It is the case of one of the witnesses, whose presence within the Silver Tower at the time of the crime is due to this unwavering devotion to Tamerlán. It represents for him the singular opportunity to be near the 'great man'. His dreams of the moment in which Tamerlán sends for him to save the corporation and he, 'atravesando los espejos, uno tras otro, [llega] a Su despacho' (*LI*, 233), are only materialised in order to be murdered. This does not signify, however, an obstacle to his ultimate happiness, as he confesses to Felipe while expiring: 'Yo tenía razón. Mi sueño se hizo realidad. Me llamó personalmente' (*LI*, 496). The fact that the call is fake, and the actual Tamerlán empire is at that moment really collapsing, enacts the false premises of Tamerlán's dystopia, in the same way as Major X's hallucinations after the war—and his eventual death—exposed the impossibilities of the nationalistic utopia.

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<sup>76</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>77</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 188.

However, within the confines of Tamerlán's dystopia, a systematic erosion of language akin to that observed in concentration camps is demonstrably enacted. Historically, language has facilitated the development of complex societies through collaborative learning processes amongst individuals assuming diverse roles. This enables not only complex societies encompassing labour specialisation and status distinctions, but also fosters communication between complementary functions within a diversified social structure.<sup>78</sup> By restricting the use of human language, with the ensuing restriction of that space 'that genuinely deserves to be called *human freedom*,'<sup>79</sup> Tamerlán's dystopia becomes of necessity an authoritarian one. While in Tamerlán's dystopia such a process assumes the predator-protector-prey scheme, that also restricts emotional spectrum to basic states and limits cognitive abilities to non-complex levels, OneState seeks to forcibly reshape humans in the image of machines humans. This dystopian order views imagination, the wellspring of creative language use, as a subversive element relegated to a 'wretched little brain node' and whose extirpation is at a certain point imposed by the state.<sup>80</sup> Once the operation is done, that is, when 'the last barrier on the path to happiness [...] has already been *demolished*', the state propaganda assures, 'you are cured of imagination [...]. You are perfect, you are the equal of the machine, the path to 100 percent happiness is free.'<sup>81</sup> Happiness as the ideal condition of humankind is possible, both in OneState's and Tamerlán's dystopias, by means of subtraction. It will happen, as one of the inhabitants of OneState puts it, 'when there are no longer any desires, not even one', a situation that the Benefactor deems '[t]he ancient dream of paradise...'<sup>82</sup> Paradise certainly excludes the intricate social structures arising from historical and cultural contexts. This pursuit aligns with Darwinian principles of the 'Struggle for Existence' as outlined in *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>83</sup> By eroding the significance of language and its cultural products, Tamerlán's dystopia seeks to pave the way for the unconscious mind, perceived as the key to unlocking human perfection.

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<sup>78</sup> Dupré, *Darwin's Legacy*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>79</sup> Dupré, *Darwin's Legacy*, p. 75.

<sup>80</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, p. 172.

<sup>81</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, p. 172.

<sup>82</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 176 and 203.

<sup>83</sup> Ruse, *Charles Darwin*, pp. 24-6.

This ideal status, Tamerlán considers, has already been attained by the working classes, which enjoy the liberty to perform all activities demanded by the body—from eating to copulating—with no discerning of places and no need of uttering words. Words, once again, are only needed by those not yet liberated from the impositions of language through culture, education, and civilisation: ‘*nosotros, que somos ricos*’, Tamerlán affirms, ‘*necesitamos nuestra utopía más que los pobres*’ (LI, 169, italics in the original, and 172). The forceful weight of language upon the upper classes is condensed in a typical formal dinner. After deliberately describing it with adverbs such as ‘*educadamente*’ and ‘*cortésmente*’, Tamerlán states that the whole ceremony seeks merely to conceal the fact that those ‘*comensales distinguidos [son] una piara de putas y maricones creyendo disimular que sólo son cerdos hozando en un chiquero*’ (LI, 170, italics in the original). Language appears thus an internal self-restriction that prevents the upper classes from unreservedly becoming predators.

The final shared element solidifying the dystopian nature of both narratives is the presence of a deified central figure around whom the social order revolves. In both OneState and the Tamerlán empire, these figures are constructed as idealised beings that their most devoted subjects strive to emulate. The Benefactor’s public appearance during the Day of Unanimity evoke a specifically celestial image, drawing explicit parallels to the God of Judaism and Christianity. This association is further emphasised through the use of capitalised pronouns and possessive adjectives when referring to him. Similarly, some characters exhibit a tendency to capitalise pronouns and adjectives related to Tamerlán (as demonstrated above), suggesting an analogous level of reverence and deification:

It was He. He was descending from the heavens in His aero to be among us, the new Jehovah, as wise and as cruel in his love as the Jehovah of the ancients [...]. In my thoughts I am up there with Him looking down.<sup>84</sup>

Distant to the heavenly image of the Benefactor, Tamerlán introduces himself at the centre of his empire in a bodily fashion:

En el centro de este organismo hecho de espejos y cañerías y cables telefónicos y fibras ópticas y redes de computadoras late

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<sup>84</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 135-6.

un solo corazón: el mío. Todo el edificio es una mera prolongación multiplicada de mi propio cuerpo. Cada pulsación envía órdenes que hacen estremecerse cada rincón; cada órgano alejado sigue funcionando aun cuando duermo, porque aun dormido soy ese corazón que no deja de latir (*LI*, 32-3).

Tamerlán's presentation has been labelled as a 'posthuman identity [...] identifying the building with its mechanical components as technological prostheses of his own body.'<sup>85</sup> The futuristic traits associated with 'technology that facilitates torture and the technology that facilitates neoliberalism'<sup>86</sup> reinforce the reference to the totalitarian dystopian order ruled by Tamerlán. This description goes along with Ferns's reading of *We*, a novel that, in his view, pushes 'the premises of the centralist utopia to the point where dream is transformed into [...] a nightmare in which technological progress, hitherto glorified by writers from Bacon to Wells as central to the realization of the utopian vision, becomes the means to a totalitarian end.'<sup>87</sup> Both in *We* and in *Las Islas*, the idea of that centralist utopia is conveyed by the image of a cobweb with the spider in the centre. In the two novels, the cobwebs stand as the images of that totalitarian power that produces the individual's immobilisation, either by placing it in a rigid predatorial scheme, as in Felipe's case, or as the outcome of respecting the state prescribed routine, as in Zamyatin's narrator.<sup>88</sup> In both novels, this allows the deified ruler utter power over those people who, like the narrator of *We*, one morning feel 'all wrapped up in a spiderweb, with spiderwebs in my eyes, [without] the strength to get up', and during the Day of Unanimity see masses arranged

like the circles of a spiderweb [...], a spiderweb in whose center the wise white Spider will now alight, the Benefactor, in white raiment, binding us hand and foot in His wisdom with the beneficial snares of contentment.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> J. Andrew Brown, *Cyborgs in Latin America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 117.

<sup>86</sup> Brown, *Cyborgs in Latin America*, p. 118.

<sup>87</sup> Ferns, *Narrating Utopia*, p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> Immobility was indeed, along with darkness and silence, one of the permanent conditions of prisoners in Argentine concentration camps. See Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 97 and 135-6.

Morson describes *We* as ‘an exemplar of the modern “dystopia,” a type of anti-utopia that discredits utopias by portraying the *likely effects of their realization*.’<sup>90</sup> Tamerlán’s ‘dystopia of literality’ is also made real, though by a spider who, unlike the devil in the ‘inferno of the living’, was not sought and therefore not recognised.

The individual who thrives within the predator-protector-prey scheme is Dr Canal. Felipe initially observes the psychoanalyst-bodyguard’s unsettlingly insectoid movements (‘no movía los ojos, sino que giraba la cabeza entera, *como los insectos*’ [LI, 18]), hinting at a prey nature. Moments later, though, Canal walks away ‘bamboleándose inseguro en sus dos piernas —la costumbre de *usar las ocho*—, [y] deslizándose sin temor por *los hilos de su tela* tendida sobre el vacío’ (LI, 19-20). Felipe has thus misconstrued Canal’s true predatory capabilities. Significantly, their meeting takes place in a room adorned with hunting scenes, imagery directly linked to the concept of massacres.<sup>91</sup> The act of avoiding clear identification emerges as a defining characteristic for survival in post-utopian Argentina, since identification within the predator-protector-prey scheme dictates an individual’s position in the social hierarchy. In an order in which language has been erased, making it impossible to utter truth, those characters who can effectively hide, change, or lie about their identities are the ones most likely to survive. Conversely, those whose identities are readily apparent or easily determined by others face elimination. While this section showed the unfeasibility of truth in a totalitarian scheme in which language has been abolished, the following section will analyse how this dynamic plays out amongst the witnesses to César’s crime.

## (II) A FORAY INTO THE PRESENT: A WORLD OF PREDATORS, PROTECTORS, AND PREYS

Thus far in this chapter, I have posited that the collapse of the nationalistic utopia precipitated the disintegration of a social structure underwritten by the state, thereby ushering in an era wherein the private sector reigns supreme. Analogous to the

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<sup>90</sup> Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, pp. 115-6.

<sup>91</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, in particular chapter 2 ‘La fórmula cinégetica’, pp. 49-94.

isolation of OneState, which is shielded from the outside world by a Green Wall, the Tamerlán Towers are ensconced within an equivalent enclave denoting an ‘other world’. Within this context, the investigation commissioned by Tamerlán to Felipe can be construed as an exploration of this ‘other world’, comprising the populace entangled with the pyramid scheme enterprise *Surprise from Spain*; a cluster of residual state institutions and officials plotting a recovery of ‘Malvinas’, with the ultimate aim of reinstating the nationalistic utopia; and the cohort of war veterans, both living and deceased. While all three groups operate on the periphery of Tamerlán’s empire, reaffirming the centrality of his authority, it is only the first two factions (*Surprise from Spain* and the military) that pose direct challenges to Tamerlán, as both harbour utopian aspirations whose realisation would inevitably precipitate Tamerlán’s downfall. Following his thwarted attempt to breach the defences of the SIDE as a hacker, Felipe undertakes his inquiry into the present as a conventional criminal investigation, a literary genre that, in the words of Mempo Giardinelli, ‘impregna hoy en día la vida cotidiana; tiene las mejores posibilidades de reseñar los conflictos político-sociales de nuestro tiempo.’<sup>92</sup> Felipe’s exploration within this pyramid organisation will thus lead him to the uttering of a truth regarding the present of the narration.

All individuals witnessing César’s crime have participated in the meetings held by *Surprise from Spain*. As Felipe embarks on his investigation, it becomes evident that these witnesses predominantly hail from the middle classes, a demographic Tamerlán holds in disdain, branding its members as ‘perdedores’ (*LI*, 29) since they ‘conjugan lo peor de ambos mundos. Están sujetos a nuestra autoridad como los pobres, y al mismo tiempo tienen normas de autocontrol casi tan rígidas, y seguramente mucho más aburridas, que las nuestras’ (*LI*, 169). Engineers, doctors, veterinarians, paediatricians, university lecturers, small-scale merchants, real estate agents, and employees ensnared in the pyramid scheme lay bare the systemic decline of a social stratum that had once epitomised progress in a nation predominantly comprised of immigrants seeking opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.<sup>93</sup> This erosion of

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<sup>92</sup> Mempo Giardinelli, *El género negro. Orígenes y evolución de la literatura policial y su influencia en Latinoamérica*, 2nd edn (Capital Intelectual, 2013), p. 15.

<sup>93</sup> Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina. Apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003* (Planeta, 2009), p. 9.

the middle classes is starkly underscored by the solitary representative from a disparate social milieu, an aristocratic elderly woman fixated, akin to Tamerlán, on a sexually objectified portrayal of the impoverished, who frequents these gatherings, as she intimates to Felipe, ‘por los pobres’ (LI, 245), in the hope of discovering therein a

pobre ideal [por quien] estaría dispuesta a entregarme [...], a arrojar lejos de mí dos mil años de civilización como se arroja una chalina de seda y sentir por una vez lo que sienten *las bestias del campo y las aves del cielo* (LI, 247).

This perspective regarding the plight of the impoverished middle classes finds explicit validation from one of the influential figures presiding over the meeting attended by Felipe, a Cuban individual who, contrary to the utopian ethos, has fled an island milieu in search of the ideal community on the continental shores of Florida. The guru offers a diagnostic assessment of the sufferings afflicting his audience, likely mirroring his own experiences, with medical terminology as a metaphorical framework: ‘la pobreza es una adicción, y sólo se cura con dinero’ (LI, 224). Although inconsistently employed, these medical images stress the seriousness of the illness and introduce a therapy: ‘[e]s adentro donde se encuentra atrincherado el pobre que debes *extirpar de tu cuerpo*’ (LI, 225). As happened in OneState with imagination, the cure to the source of unhappiness comes from subtraction.

Poverty identified with ants, mice, cockroaches, and even likened to cysts, is the presumed rationale underpinning their collective acquiescence to the pyramid scheme. By becoming ensnared within the predator-protector-prey paradigm, *Surprise from Spain* does not offer them a pathway back to a middle-class status; instead, it presents yet another utopian endeavour, one fashioned in the likeness of Tamerlán’s dystopia. The envisioned idyllic place, situated directly opposite the meeting chamber, is unveiled to them during these gatherings, accompanied by an admonition to attentively observe what ‘vuestro futuro’ will entail should they dare to ‘dar el gran salto’ (LI, 213 and 211). Approaching the window to have a closer look at Tamerlán’s office makes also the ideal community visible to them: it is their own images, Felipe finds while watching the videorecording of the evening of the crime, ‘reflejadas más perfectas y más hermosas en la torre de oro del señor Tamerlán’ (LI, 213). If places hold a key role in the construction of a utopia, in the case of *Surprise from Spain*’s they

reach a highly symbolic degree. The company is not only renting an office in the twin tower branded since its origin with poverty, as Tamerlán himself tells Felipe during their first meeting ('a mí por supuesto me tocaba aquella, *la más pobre*' [LI, 27]), but also with a status of inferiority involving crime and baseness. Indeed, while only the murder of his partner, to which he contributes actively, allows Tamerlán to occupy the Golden building, the Silver one is now destined to the son who he calls 'abyecto' (LI, 27).

By explicitly aligning its enterprise with the name and exploits of Christopher Columbus, *Surprise from Spain* accentuates the previously observed aspect of utopian plausibility.<sup>94</sup> In fact, the Genovese navigator is presented as 'un hombre como cualquiera de vosotros salvo por su inconmensurable determinación de creer *a pies juntillas* solamente *en sí mismo*' (LI, 210). This juxtaposition of the commonplace with the extraordinary, as well as the figurative with the literal, appears pivotal for *Surprise from Spain* in its quest to ascend to Tamerlán's echelon. The implicit transition from one realm to the next is exemplified when the concept of the 'great leap', typically a cliché denoting a significant transformation, materialises into a literal, and criminal, act: a wealthy heir callously ejecting an anonymous homeless individual from a window to secure his own standing within his father's domain. The literal dimension within *Surprise from Spain* is accentuated by the issuance of badges to its members representing various animals—deer, foxes, lions—commensurate with their hierarchical (predatory) status within the organisation, thereby delineating the predator-protector-prey paradigm of Tamerlán's dystopia. As one participant of the pyramid scheme succinctly states, '*Surprise* no es más que un modelo a escala de *la selva en que vivimos*' (LI, 269).

In Zamyatin's *We*, the 'other world' beyond the Green Wall poses a potential threat to the stability of OneState. It symbolises the unruly and the unknown. *Surprise from Spain*, on the contrary, seeks to supplant Tamerlán's dystopia by developing a replica 'in his image and likeness'. This aspiration is elucidated by a Spanish marquis brought in to bolster the company's endeavours. He underscores this objective while demonstrating to the attendees their enhanced reflections on Tamerlán's windows:

"Vedlos", decía el marqués. "Contemplaos. Sois parte de *la misma sustancia*, si la sentís correr por vuestras venas. Un *futuro como ese que veis* puede estar aguardando a cada uno de vosotros,

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<sup>94</sup> Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, p. 16.

si creéis en vuestro potencial. ¿Quién os dice que no *sois vosotros allí dentro*, siendo mirados por los que aún esperan?” (LI, 213).

The marquis’s allusion to ‘la misma sustancia’ echoes Tamerlán’s words regarding the conception of his son in his image and likeness, as the millionaire has talked of ‘la divina sustancia’. The contiguity ordinary/exceptional, which had previously suggested the feasibility of utopia, now proves its impossibility despite the attendants’ belief ‘a pies juntillas’ in the proposal of *Surprise from Spain*. Indeed, they react as if they really had a ‘pobre de adentro’ (LI, 225) that must be expelled, purged, and even exterminated, trying literally to take him out of their bodies by all sorts of physical movements. As the situation does not change—they all continue to be prey—, the pathetic comedy of the scene reinforces the impossibility of the intended replacement. Tamerlán’s heir in his image and likeness—that ‘fiel reflejo mío, más allá de todas las imperfecciones que cualquier copia supone’ (LI, 32)—can only be a predator. It is literally shown to them by the fate of the person who may be ‘vosotros allí dentro’ being murdered through the performing of the ‘gran salto’.

Yet, one of the ‘losers’ of *Surprise from Spain* appears the closest archetype to Tamerlán’s predator. It is one of the witnesses, Dr Tarino, a medical doctor who introduces himself as ‘el resultado final de una larga cadena evolutiva’ (LI, 271) in the subjugation of the wretched and poor.<sup>95</sup> Through assistants disguised as jobless people, Dr Tarino recruits volunteers among the most desperate in the queues of unemployment to induce them to sell their organs and blood. Once the extractions are done, the doctor/witness advises them to invest in the pyramid scheme the money thus obtained, ‘donde se cierra el círculo de un negocio perfecto’ (LI, 272). In an open reference to real reality, Felipe identifies the doctor with the dominant current in Peronism at the time—‘no soporto a los menemistas’ (LI, 272)—, making explicit the association between the economic program of the government with the pyramid scheme’s business design, while implicitly questioning the representation of the working classes (now ‘desempleados’, LI, 270) traditionally assumed by Peronism.

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<sup>95</sup> Gamarro’s characters constantly invite the reader to find significant allusions in their names and surnames. To the already mentioned Felipe and Tamerlán, can be added Tarino, who is an anagram of ‘tirano.’ For her part, Hammerschmidt talks of ‘la parodia de Lacan en su anagramático Dr. Canal.’ See Hammerschmidt, ‘Huellas de entre los muertos’, p. 133.

However, Menemist Dr Tarino epitomises yet another instance of Peronist involvement in *Las Islas*, underlining the compromised stature of this political faction as subservient to alternative political or economic agendas during the 1990s. As seen in chapter 1, traditional Peronism, personified by Don Benito, serves merely as a façade to obscure the military’s covert undertakings. The leftist iteration of Peronism from the 1970s finds representation through Hernán Stoffa, a member of *Surprise from Spain* who, after bankrupting twice his family textile company (‘Fabricadas íntegramente por sus dueños. Sin explotación de la plusvalía’ [LI, 201]), defrauds the insurance company by setting fire to his warehouses. He then becomes an importer of goods, once again in accordance with the economic times, as, in the moment of his business failures, ‘no habíamos descubierto la importación de bolivianos y peruanos’ (LI, 201) for slave labour. He adheres now to the creed of the ‘actual gobierno’ acknowledging that ‘la competencia extranjera [nos barrió], depositándonos sobre el duro pero saludable suelo de la competencia local’ (LI, 202). Finally, the most politically relevant Peronist character that Felipe meets is an unnamed MP whose presence in Tamerlán’s sancta sanctorum highlights the subordination of Peronist ‘renovadores’ to triumphant Menemism.<sup>96</sup> Physical resemblances—‘un gordo medio pelado y de barbita semicrecida’ with esthetical addition of silicon in ‘las nalgas’ (LI, 163-4)—are reminiscent of one of the foremost *renovadores* politicians, José Luis Manzano (b. 1956), under Menem’s governments. Manzano’s phrase ‘I steal for the crown’ became ‘infamous and demonstrated at the same time the extent of the corruption and the impunity enjoyed by those involved.’<sup>97</sup>

If the MP is part of Tamerlán’s dystopia of literality—he has been *literally* bought by Tamerlán: ‘Es mío. Lo compré, y bastante caro me salió’ (LI, 175) to lobby for passing the laws the millionaire’s corporation needs—, he is, like Don Benito, useless for the purposes required. However, rather than the indifference the old

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<sup>96</sup> In the mid-1980s, Romero explains, ‘the *renovadores* had refashioned Peronism in the same image as that of *alfonsinismo*: a scrupulous respect for republican institutions, modern and democratic initiatives elaborated by intellectuals independent of the great interest groups, and establishment of minimum guarantees with the government to ensure the orderly transition from one administration to another.’ See Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. by James P. Brennan (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 281.

<sup>97</sup> Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, p. 290.

Peronist receives, outlining the marginality of traditional Peronism, the MP is the object of Tamerlán's fury. He then *literally* behaves akin to a dog, certainly contrasting with Don Benito's dignity, yet he fails to obtain a reward from the great man's dystopic order. Dr Tarino follows the same fate. By deceiving jobless people and dispossessing them of their blood, organs, and money, Tarino factually puts *Surprise from Spain's* extractive diagnosis into practice, becoming a literal *chupasangre*. Similar to Dr Canal, Dr Tarino is a predator disguised as a protector. Yet, despite his success in embodying Tamerlán's 'cruzada en pos de una sinceridad absoluta' (LI, 181) by which words are suppressed and, with them, the possibility of uttering truth, Tarino continues to belong to the ranks of the losers: he is another proof that Tamerlán's, *Surprise from Spain's*, and neo-con Peronist ambitions are all fraudulent.

The expansion of the pyramid scheme exceeds the places and characters that Felipe meets in his capacity as Tamerlán's investigator. His return to the veterans' circles compels him to attend Lieutenant Carcasa's celebration, in whose bedroom he discovers 'dos camas gemelas, separadas por un estrecho corredor [...], en cada colcha, el bordado de una de Las Islas' (LI, 333) and immediately afterwards 'debajo de la cama [...]: Productos Christopher' (LI, 334). Although Carcasa's involvement with the pyramid scheme will be revealed later, the idea of extirpation, fundamental to the nationalist's and to *Surprise from Spain's* utopias, are plain from that moment. A subtle—yet ironic—association is still made. The fraudulent quality of the pyramid scheme has led Felipe to conclude that one of the possibilities for its prey was 'meterte las pulseritas y colgantes en el culo' (LI, 223). Hugo Carcasa has put that deceitful stuff under the covers that represent the islands, producing thus the unbearable, for his nationalistic ideology, association between 'Malvinas' and 'culo'. *Surprise from Spain's* utopia makes of Carcasa a double prey: like Tarino's victims, he has suffered the extirpation of his money as well as of parts of his body, with the fundamental difference that the latter's is due to the failure of his most cherished nationalistic utopia. Believing that a return to 'Malvinas' will literally imply 'devolverle sus piernas [...] suaves y rosadas como las de un recién nacido' (LI, 349) makes of him too a victim of Tamerlán's dystopia—once more underscoring the impossibility, as well as the falseness, of these three projects.

Given the deceitful handling of friends, relatives, and acquaintances in *Surprise from Spain*, the involvement of the military in this pyramid scheme is not surprising, as it reproduces the pattern by which individuals were given up under the dictatorship.<sup>98</sup> In a structure that requires an ever-increasing number of participants, it turns out to be that the real commodity, as Felipe discovers, ‘el secreto de las enormes ganancias [era que] lo que se compraba y vendía en *Surprise* no eran fantasías y cosméticos baratos: eran personas’ (LI, 223). Producing an unlikely income from such a scheme becomes the equivalent to one’s own salvation, which in practice is only possible by ‘reclutar más amigos, es decir, cagarlos como te cagaron a vos’ up to the moment in which ‘todos los adultos del país tendrían que entrar en *Surprise* para salvarte’ (LI, 223). The zone of heterotopian Argentina represented by the pyramid scheme shows that the project modelled after Tamerlán’s dystopia of literality bears indispensable connections with the dictatorship’s methods. In the universe of *Surprise from Spain*, the predator-protector-prey pattern is modified by the elimination of the protector figure, as those who are expected to play the role in question become bare predators.

### (III) A FORAY INTO THE PAST: THE MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS RECOVERED

As seen in the previous two sub-sections, Felipe’s enquiry leads him from a dystopic future to a realistic present, through the most apt genres to access those heterotopian places. If these two levels respectively show the projections and outcomes of what Marcos Novaro calls ‘esta peculiar versión del proyecto peronista que proponía Menem’ upheld in ‘la tradición hiperpragmática del peronismo y la *visión darwinista y unanímista del mundo social* que promovía lo más duro de la derecha empresaria y política’,<sup>99</sup> Felipe’s final stages of his investigation destine him to a past that, confirming Luis Alberto Romero’s words, ‘todavía está vivo.’<sup>100</sup> Felipe’s discovery that

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<sup>98</sup> This is Gamarro’s personal interpretation of the pyramid scheme in relation to the ‘Proceso’. Personal interview with Carlos Gamarro (Buenos Aires, December 2015).

<sup>99</sup> Marcos Novaro, *Argentina en el fin de siglo. Democracia, mercado y nación (1983-2001)* (Paidós, 2009), p. 403.

<sup>100</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *La Argentina que duele. Historia, política, sociedad. Conversaciones con Alejandro Katz* (Katz, 2013), p. 19.

all the witnesses he helps to identify are being eliminated makes him face, in my view, the ambivalence of that inferno that prolongs the ‘grey zone’ of the concentration camp in which a victim can be turned into an accomplice. Henceforth his task becomes to preserve the life of the person who is literally the last witness of a crime that unites the dictatorship, ‘Malvinas’, and Tamerlán’s dystopic world. This is Gloria, a victim of the concentration camp who later married her torturer and gave birth to his two twin daughters.<sup>101</sup> Felipe’s encounter with a victim of the dictatorship will incite, albeit problematically, personal narratives of memory that will gradually re-create those bonds with peers destroyed by the ‘Proceso’.

Concealing once again his true identity, Felipe reaches Gloria in his role of a ‘classic’ investigator. The fraud is reminiscent of the pyramid scheme. It does not consist only in his pretending to be a *Surprise from Spain* agent—when actually working for Tamerlán—, but also in his affirmation that he has come to *give* her a pecuniary compensation from the company while his real purpose is to *extract* key information from her. If the cheque he produces is false, in line with his assumed identity, the notion of a permanent, undefined danger is emphasised by the particular design of Parque Chas district, where Gloria lives. The oval outline of its streets suggests to Felipe the image of a ‘*tela de araña de calles tenues como hilos de seda*’ (LI, 287). More importantly, Parque Chas involves a particular location in time, since Felipe feels that ‘[c]ada anillo había ido dejando atrás un par de décadas, y en el centro cada esquina, salvo una, sostenía un negocio sustraído por este remolino del tiempo a la corriente incesante de la ciudad’ (LI, 288). Among other buildings, Felipe spots ‘una farmacia con remedios en *botellones de vidrio*, un quiosco con golosinas de *mi infancia*, una verdulería con *precios de antes* escritos en tiza sobre una pizarra negra *gastada*’ (LI, 288). It is not surprising therefore that the definitive connection between Felipe and Gloria takes place in the past: the pair discover that they had actually met in Malihuel, a small

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<sup>101</sup> Yet again, real reality provides a situation similar to the debased relationship between Major Arturo Cuervo and Gloria: the marriage of the head of the clandestine centre Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), Admiral Chamorro, to a Montonero woman. See Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (Yale University Press, 1996), p. 198. n44.

village in the Province of Santa Fe where she comes from, and he used to spend his childhood summer holidays.<sup>102</sup>

Unlike Tamerlán's dystopian project of 'una sinceridad absoluta' (*LI*, 181), the past they reconstruct needs words. After a few minutes of conversation, Felipe reflects:

Era bueno, también, esto de conversar sin objetivo, sin estrategia, sin necesidad de apurar al otro, humillarlo, sacarle la información que no quiere dar, darle a entender la cosa equivocada. Las palabras, de repente, no servían sólo para quitarle cosas a alguien, o para imponérselas. Se prestaban, se regalaban, se acariciaban como un gato, se devolvían, se saboreaban en la boca, bajaban a veces hasta el pecho (*LI*, 292).

As Levi contends, the infliction of violence upon individuals is inherently intertwined with violence against language, suggesting that language serves as an initial avenue of mutual acknowledgment crucial for the restoration of their humanity among victims of radical evil.<sup>103</sup> In addition to putting an end to outcomes of the dictatorship by dismantling the predator-protector-prey paradigm, language undoubtedly facilitates the reconstruction of the interpersonal connections that the 'Proceso' had shattered.

The recovered significance of words is acknowledged after sexual intercourse, as the pair is still able to

jugar con las palabras como dos nenes chiquitos en la caja de arena, ensimismados y muy serios de tan concentrados, compartiendo los juguetes, prestándoselos sin saber cuál es de cuál: las palabras después de coger, otro diccionario, las que mantienen la pureza de las primeras de la vida (*LI*, 305).

Along with the idyllic purity of childhood, words also make History present in the victims' lives. Amnesia about the camp's memories, Levi stresses, is a shared experience by the victim and the perpetrator.<sup>104</sup> This maybe explains why, after retelling her story as a state prisoner, Gloria demands from Felipe a similar disclosure by drawing upon an implicit comparison to their experiences: '[s]e sobrevive' (*LI*, 596).

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<sup>102</sup> Gloria recognises Felipe as 'Félix el gato' (*LI*, 305) just like, during the Malvinas/Falklands War, his mates will welcome him back to the *pozo de zorro* by shouting '¡Felipe! ¡Gato! ¡Sos vos!' (*LI*, 341). The use of the nickname suggests a more profound liaison between the victims of the dictatorship and those conscripts than the shared reference to the popular cartoon.

<sup>103</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1066.

<sup>104</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, in particular chapter 1 'La memoria dell'offesa', pp. 1006-16.

Felipe's reluctance during their first meeting is not exclusively due to the war memories themselves, but because he is on the verge of identifying himself as a *veteran*. His collective identity, though, is attenuated by his use of the first-person plural. As he explains to her, 'la mayoría de los veteranos de Malvinas *somos* expertos' (LI, 311) in specific methods of storytelling, while a few moments later he adds 'hasta hace poco *éramos* los chicos de la guerra' (LI, 329). A transitory physical location risks becoming the definitive one through an identity imposed by history and society. His fleeing from Gloria's is, therefore, an(other) attempt in his determination to survive by shunning identification.

Outlining the connections between the 'Proceso' and Menemism, Gloria is not only a political victim of History, but also an economic one. She joins *Surprise from Spain* once the compensation she received for her voluntary severance after the privatisation of the national telephone company has run out. If her experience as a state prisoner condenses the horrors suffered by many, her shift from a minor position in a state-run company to a jobless status is also a characteristic one. Carlos Menem's presidency inaugurated, in Romero's words, an 'economic opening up (*apertura*)' which, among other measures, included laws that 'authorized laying off public employees [as well as the] necessity of privatizing a long list of state-owned companies.'<sup>105</sup> Being both a political and economic victim of History, Gloria decides not to reproduce the order that ruined her life. She therefore refuses to invite anybody in her close circle to be part of *Surprise from Spain*: 'Nunca me dio [...] para *cagar* a algún amigo o conocido como *me cagaron a mí*' (LI, 290). Felipe's moral conflict is hinted at when Gloria likens him to the two henchmen that, producing 'carnets de policía', had come to ask 'por el día de *Surprise*, por mis invitados, *como vos*' (LI, 321). Since *Surprise from Spain* works on trafficking friends, relatives, and acquaintances, Felipe's employment as Tamerlán's investigator involves giving up for a second time (now to the mogul's 'muchachos') those people already betrayed.

Gloria embodies an ethic of *rejection* which openly opposes that of *resistance*, enacted by Major X, but also that of *prolongation*, represented by Tamerlán. While the millionaire has used his blood to transfer uncorrupted 'la divina substancia' to his son

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<sup>105</sup> Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 286, 289 and 288.

in his image and likeness, so that he can consider Fausto II ‘el hijo de mis entrañas’ (LI, 521), Gloria employs her body to purify her twin daughters, Malvina and Soledad, from the past she had suffered. They have been born with Down’s Syndrome, significantly on 2 April 1982, to Arturo Cuervo—the later Major X. When Gloria states that ‘un hijo de puta es un hijo de puta siempre, y *ensucia todo lo que toca*’, she sets apart her daughters:

Las nenas, no. *Mi cuerpo hizo de filtro*, y absorbió todo el daño. Las nenas nacieron puras [...] *no hay un átomo de maldad en sus cuerpos*. Ese es mi triunfo, ahí es donde le gané. Y era mi única salida. Si me hubieran salido *varones, o normales*, y tuvieran *esto de inteligencia*, las habría convertido en lo que él quería. Así, no tuvo oportunidad (LI, 317-8).

Pilar Calveiro links the possibility allowed to victims to give birth in the concentration camps ‘con la contraparte del poder de muerte, que lo completa y cierra el círculo haciéndolo total: el ejercicio de un supuesto “*poder de vida*”.’<sup>106</sup> Hence, perpetrators felt they were God. Gloria’s purification from evil enacts the cancellation of those god-like features of the perpetrator, represented in her life by Arturo Cuervo. Indeed, the precise day of the Argentine surrender in the war, Major X jots down in his diary his ultimate communion with God: ‘No existo. Nadie existe. Sólo Dios. ¿Dios? Soy más feliz de lo que las palabras pueden expresar’ (LI, 477). His perceived merging into God is possible in ‘Malvinas’ as the military had made of their utopia another concentration camp.

As delineated in chapter 1, the trajectory paternity-masculinity culminates in the tragic demise of sons in warfare, while the trajectory maternity-femininity signifies, if not necessarily a novel epoch, certainly a pathway towards a definitive rupture with a criminal past. This holds particular significance within the milieu of *Las Islas*, where neither economic nor political authorities acknowledge ‘*lo que debía quedar atrás*’.<sup>107</sup> In *Las Islas*, therefore, the imperative to leave behind what should be relegated to the past is symbolically ratified within the private sphere through the existence of two daughters, offspring conceived within a concentration camp by a perpetrator and his victim, and born on the very day the dictatorship commenced the military campaign

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<sup>106</sup> Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, p. 56. Italics in the original.

<sup>107</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 115. Italics in the original.

that ultimately terminated its reign. These two girls, raised in an exclusively female family—as Gloria implies by saying that ‘[m]i vieja las crió más que yo’ (LI, 599)—, may also stand as the image of both the difficult origins and the development of the new-born democratic times. Although it would be problematic to establish a straightforward connection between Malvina and Soledad’s condition and Argentine democracy, it is certainly possible to imply that the purification from evil is achieved through a mother who had personally endured radical evil. In its echoes of those mothers who determinedly demanded to the perpetrators the return of their children, the ‘Madres de Plaza de Mayo’, it can clearly be ascertained, then, ‘*who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno.*’<sup>108</sup>

It is of note that a novel narrated by a man, that substantially explores two events that were ‘*tarea de machos*’, as Tamerlán had affirmed, closes with the words of a woman. After their attempt to commit suicide together, Gloria tells Felipe ‘un cuento de hadas para que te duermas y descanses en él’, a fairy-tale, she explains, ‘al revés’ (LI, 609). It is the story of a princess who, during the absence of her father in a war, breaks the promise she had made not to enter a forbidden room of the palace. The daughter’s disobedience has certainly biblical reminiscences, though her breaking of the paternal mandate, instead of reaffirming the authority of a father/god, carries the defeat in the war and the downfall of his kingdom. The final king’s act of power is one of a father, though only to expose his powerless situation: he gives his daughter in marriage to the victor, a toad that becomes the new monarch. If she obeys her spouse, the deposed king assures her daughter, one day the toad will become a handsome prince. Hereafter the princess lives in the hope of a change that never occurs. Her eventual pregnancy makes her understand that ‘el cambio que me habían anunciado [...] no bastaba con soñarlo, el sueño debía hacerse carne en mi cuerpo’ (LI, 613). While disobeying her father has brought her to her current position, and obeying her husband has not produced the assumed, promised fairy-tale change, her only way out is to place her hope in the future and in the generations-to-come. The princess thus concludes:

Puede ser que ahora sean renacuajos, pero cuando nazcan se habrán tornado en niños o niñas como cualquier otro, no, más hermosos que ninguno, hermosos como soles. *Esta vez sí, todo*

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<sup>108</sup> Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 165. Italics in the original.

*va a ser diferente*, pensó la princesa esa noche, antes de quedarse dormida (LI, 614).

Since Esteban Echeverría's *La Cautiva* (1837), the body of a woman has been seen as expressing the ideal features of the nation.<sup>109</sup> Subsequently, this association incited images of erotic contents. For instance, David Viñas describes the territory of the nation as '*virgen y contaminado a la vez [...] rústico, amenazador y desnudo, [...] llama para poseerlo, parcelarlo y transformarlo [...] a la vez que urgencia por "llenarlo" [...] con avideces e imperativos de acción.*'<sup>110</sup> Further to this, Andermann remarks a tradition of foundational Latin American fictions that sought in sentimental frustration the symbol of political crisis questioning the entire development of a nation.<sup>111</sup> Having been herself a 'captive', Gloria can then be perceived as embodying the real, rather than the idealised, traits of the nation a century after its formation: that sexualised body ends up by being a woman tortured and raped by the state, giving birth to a new generation in a purifying act, after sustaining a debasing relationship with her torturer.<sup>112</sup>

Apart from the princess marrying someone with the attributes of a monster and the hopes she holds about her children, Gloria's autobiographical allusions are outlined by her being given up by a powerless father trying to keep the appearance of a certain authority. Gloria was captured quite belatedly, once it was clear that 'no íbamos a ganarles [...] casi cuando se estaba terminando la temporada de caza y la urgencia se les había vuelto hábito' (LI, 310), while she was in her father's home:

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<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, 'Esteban Echeverría, el poeta pensador', in Altamirano and Sarlo, *Ensayos argentinos*, pp. 17-81. For a detailed examination of the diverse readings of Echeverría's work, see Soledad Quereilhac, 'Echeverría bajo la lupa del siglo XX', in *Las brújulas del extraviado. Para una lectura integral de Esteban Echeverría*, ed. by Alejandra Laera and Martín Kohan (Beatriz Viterbo, 2006), pp. 113-46.

<sup>110</sup> David Viñas, *Literatura argentina y política. De los jacobinos porteños a la bohemia anarquista* (Sudamericana, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>111</sup> Jens Andermann, *Mapas de poder. Una arqueología literaria del espacio argentino* (Beatriz Viterbo, 2000), p. 42.

<sup>112</sup> Felipe's description of the veterans' situation transpires a similar love relationship expressing a frustrating state of the nation: '¿Sabés por qué todavía, diez años después, seguimos disfrazándonos de esta manera, reuniéndonos para organizar expediciones imposibles, reconstruyendo hasta el segundo cada uno de aquellos días que *lo mejor sería olvidar?* [...] *Estamos enamorados* hasta la médula, y las odiamos. [...] ¿Sabés cuántos de nosotros nos suicidamos por *ese amor?*' (LI, 413-4).

Los tipos con las Itakas y mi viejo erguido sacando pecho. “Si *mi hija hizo algo indebido* no seré yo quien me interponga en su camino. Proceda, oficial. Cumpla con su deber” (LI, 314).

Gloria’s fate is deemed because, like the princess, ‘hizo algo indebido’: she had entered a room that, if not explicitly forbidden, had been alien to her middle-class family. Joining ‘la juventud guevarista’ (LI, 308)—or politics at all—had led to a defeat, but a genuine way out from the concentration camp has not been achieved by the obedience to her torturer/husband, as she is aware that ‘[é]l me hacía indigna de [mis amigos], y sin ellos no tenía otra opción que acercarme más a él’ (LI, 314). Gloria is thus a victim of what Vezzetti brands ‘la lógica del exterminio’, that is, a crucial dictatorship method that consists in annulling specific collective identities to replace them with ‘un comportamiento rebajado al nivel de la sobrevivencia (individual, aislada, amenazada por la locura).’<sup>113</sup> Gloria’s words endorse this situation of the survivor:

Los amigos que tengo ahora son *todos nuevos*. A ellos *no tengo que contarles nada*, y si les cuento no tienen nada con qué comparar, *la única Gloria* que conocen es ésta (LI, 314).

The princess’s belief that ‘esta vez sí, todo va a ser diferente’ may appear exaggerated for Gloria’s story, yet it implies to finally leave behind what should be relegated to the past through the uttering of her testimony to someone who is, like her, a victim. The fairy-tale ‘al revés’ can end thus in a peaceful mood of resignation and hope, similar to Marco Polo’s final statement in *Invisible Cities*, because in the ‘inferno of the living’ that in *Las Islas* definitely exists, a mother has given birth to children that are not inferno and found a peer with whom to re-establish bonds that leave behind the dictatorial ‘lógica del exterminio’.

#### TRUTH FINALLY UTTERED

The pursuit of truth, at a fictional level, set the narrative of *Las Islas* in motion. However, neither Tamerlán nor the proponents of the nationalistic utopia were

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<sup>113</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 186.

capable of uncovering or ultimately expressing this truth. This impossibility becomes evident when the mogul learns of the potential return of his son, Fausto II, from the islands. Previously presumed dead during the war, Fausto II's return throws the established narratives and the quest for truth into disarray. Tamerlán's claim is then unambiguous: 'ayúdeme a averiguar *la verdad*' (LI, 398). The certitude that Major X, the man whose mythic deeds keep the nationalistic utopian project alive, is involved in Fausto II's fate, only emphasises the conflictive relationship nationalists hold with truth. Mainly, Major X honours the identity he has assumed since the war. Sent to 'Malvinas' as Major Arturo Cuervo, he meets there his fate in a Borgesian fashion:

Cualquier destino, por largo y complicado que sea, consta en realidad *de un solo momento*: el momento en que el hombre sabe para siempre quién es.<sup>114</sup>

If Arturo Cuervo knew definitively there and then who he was it is to draw blatantly upon Rodolfo Walsh's character in 'Esa mujer': an officer obscurely involved in the kidnapping and disappearance of a corpse, whose mutism impedes the finding of that corpse. Although the identity of the dead in *Las Islas* is never ascertained, unlike the one in Walsh's story, both cadavers are highly significant to Argentinian history: Eva Perón's and a Malvinas/Falklands War veteran. No conclusive evidence is given in the novel, yet there are hints suggesting that the anonymous dead man might have actually been Tamerlán's son, Fausto II. Since the war, the dead man had lived as a homeless person in a container near the towers, with a fellow veteran who later depicts the dead man's nostalgic, if not obsessive, attitude towards Tamerlán's premises: 'cuando hacía buen tiempo se lo pasaba en la terraza mirando la torre' (LI, 582). Like Ignacio with (utopian) Puerto Argentino, he spent a great deal of time making the scale reproduction of the (dystopian) towers. The confirmation of his identity as Tamerlán's son would add another ironic trait to the novel, since referring to the towers the mogul had told Felipe that 'mi hijo mayor murió antes de *poder verlas terminadas*' (LI, 27). If the dead man had indeed been Tamerlán's eldest son, the fake version of Major X's diary stating that Fausto II had returned from 'Malvinas' would therefore be true. Forged to blackmail Tamerlán in search of financial support for yet another invasion

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<sup>114</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)', in Borges, *Obras completas*, 3 vols (Emecé, 1990), I, pp. 561-3 (p. 562). Italics in the original.

of ‘Malvinas’, this version would definitively blur the boundaries of truth and falsehood in the universe of the militant nationalists.

The surviving homeless veteran tells Felipe that the dead man ‘[d]ecía siempre que *se hizo linyera allá* [en Malvinas]. Después le pareció natural seguir’ (LI, 583). Becoming a homeless person is thus the literal fate that awaits the surviving conscripts, confirming yet again the dystopia of literality after the collapse of ‘Malvinas’. Felipe himself has learnt it during the war. After a short period in town, translating BBC broadcasts for Argentine officers, he is sent back to the front as a punishment ‘por traducir correctamente’ (LI, 340), that is, for *saying the truth*, the news that the British forces had disembarked in Saint Charles Bay. The return to the *pozo de zorro* makes him notice

en lo que nos había convertido —no la guerra, sino apenas la espera interminable de la guerra—: en una tribu de salvajes, de hombres de las cavernas; en monos, en (*esta era la más difícil de aceptar*) linyeras (LI, 342-3).

It is not the war, but the bare fact of being there, in the nationalistic utopia, that places the soldiers at the bottom of the particular scale of evolution created by the Argentine military. As one conscript made it clear in Carcasa’s celebration, they are doomed to never have any other home than ‘Malvinas’.

Tamerlán’s demand for help to ‘averiguar la verdad’ (LI, 398) implicitly acknowledges that truth can only be uttered by someone who is in a close position to those victims who, in Levi’s formulation, did not return from the concentration camp—the ‘complete witness’.<sup>115</sup> The group of veterans whose comradeship Felipe initially denies (those who have survived, the same ones who rescued him from the mental hospital) play a vital yet unintentional role in the resolution of the ‘Malvinas’ plot of the novel. Believing that ‘los ingleses descubrieron a la esposa del mayor X [y] quieren raptarla para obligarlo a rendirse’ (LI, 493), they actually protect the last witness of the dystopian crime. The conscripts reject the squad of Tamerlán’s henchmen ‘de los tantos que en el último tiempo se habían privatizado’ (LI, 12) in the belief they are fighting ‘los ingleses’ (LI, 594). The event certainly does not produce the

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<sup>115</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1002; also, Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 34.

recovery of their 'home', yet it allows the uttering of truth. This development is crowned, not only symbolically, when Felipe gives them Major X's diary,

el mítico e inhallable texto sagrado que contenía el secreto de la guerra, todas las respuestas a las innumerables preguntas que en diez años diez mil mentes dañadas supieron concebir; el plan infalible para arrancar Las Islas de las usurpadoras garras del inglés y unir las definitivamente al suelo patrio (LI, 453).

Felipe reassures the conscripts: '*Es verdad todo lo que siempre se dijo. Contiene el secreto de la guerra*' (LI, 595). Since that 'secret of the war', as already seen in chapter 1, is no more than the 'fantasías adolescentes' (LI, 478) of a perpetrator during his days as a war prisoner, Felipe's truth also exposes the grounds upon which the nationalistic utopia is built.

If Major X has a Borgesian feature, the ending of the 'Malvinas' plot also shows an uttering of truth that can be related to another Borges short story: 'Emma Zunz' (1948). The narrative of a plotted revenge for an event that, for the protagonist, 'era lo único que había sucedido en el mundo, y seguiría sucediendo sin fin', ends with words that may help those veterans to understand their own story:

La historia era increíble, en efecto, pero se impuso a todos, porque sustancialmente era cierta. Verdadero era el tono de Emma Zunz, verdadero el pudor, verdadero el odio. Verdadero también era el ultraje que había padecido; sólo eran falsas las circunstancias, la hora y uno o dos nombres propios.<sup>116</sup>

While all Argentine officers had similar characteristics, as seen in chapter 1, within the field of the conscripts there appear two categories. The first is constituted by those who really fought in the islands and are now dead (either in a war event or, like veteran Chanino, because they committed suicide); the second, those who have not been in the front and consequently have survived (the group that had 'su primer enfrentamiento con los ingleses' [LI, 594] at Gloria's). This distinction would place Felipe in the 'grey zone' of the war: he has fought, yet he is alive. He ultimately faces the iron choice of either accepting that he too is a 'linyera', condemned to dream forever with a return to 'Malvinas', or that he has to join in death his mates of the trench. If, as Levi put it, suicide inherently belongs to humans, rather than to animals,

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<sup>116</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Emma Zunz', in Borges, *Obras completas*, I, pp. 564-8 (pp. 564 and 568).

since it is a meditated, not intuitive, non-natural act that frequently results from an overwhelming sense of guilt,<sup>117</sup> Felipe's failed suicide attempt along with Gloria implies recognising his recovered humanity. It also carries a third option: uttering a truth that definitively leaves behind the dictatorship by re-creating language and collective identities, while putting an end to the ambivalence of the 'inferno of the living'.

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<sup>117</sup> Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, pp. 1049-50.

### CHAPTER 3

## Hobbes in the Pampas

The Creation and Consolidation of an Argentinian Leviathan in

*El sueño del señor juez* and *El secreto y las voces*

So far, I argued that the failure of the nationalist utopia allowed the emergence of a post-utopian order regulated by a private corporation, that I called ‘dystopia of literality’. The mere possibility of articulating a truth about the dictatorship and its continuation was cancelled with the dismantlement of language as an outcome of those state crimes. Truth ultimately found expression through the gradual process of recovering language, memories, and collective identities, a process initiated by a victim of the ‘Proceso’. In my analysis, truth continues to be the articulating element in Gamerro’s next two novels, *El sueño del señor juez* (henceforth, *El sueño*) and *El secreto y las voces* (henceforth, *El secreto*). Both narratives unfold in the fictitious village of Malihuel, serving as microcosms for two pivotal moments in Argentina’s history regarding the formation and consolidation of the state: the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the nation is securing, through the ‘Campaigns to the Desert’ (1878 and 1879) and the federalisation of Buenos Aires (1880), the dominion and unity of the territory claimed as belonging to the nation; and, a century later, a period in which the dictatorship of 1976-1983 relentlessly amplifies the authoritarian tendencies inherent in the state since its inception.

I will study these two novels, searching to demonstrate that, in *El sueño*, the national state emerges as the result of an agreement between authority and the population under its rule, both embodied by archetypical figures of the gauchesque: the *juez de paz* and the *gaucho*, with the materialisation of an urban centre that, since Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, is the epitome of civilisation and republic.<sup>1</sup> *El sueño* narrates the story of Don Urbano Pedernera, Malihuel’s first *juez de paz*, who in 1877 begins

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<sup>1</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, un escritor en las orillas* (Ariel, 1995), pp. 20-1.

dreaming about (and punishing) crimes committed by neighbours of the hamlet, eventually forcing one of them, the *gaucho* Rosendo Villalba, to cross the border to the ‘desert’ in search of an escape from the oppressive state. Although Gamerro depicts society in the gauchesque as ‘una arcadia pastoril hasta que aparecen el juez de paz y la policía,’ while its heroes find themselves ‘[m]ás cerca (mucho más cerca) de Rousseau que de Hobbes’,<sup>2</sup> I argue that the return of the *gaucho* to ‘civilisation’, after realising the impossibility of a life in the space of ‘barbarism’, leads the two of them to a pact that rather reflects elements of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651). Following Hobbesian thought, I see a ‘condición política mínima, apenas diferente de la condición de naturaleza, [en la que existe] una voluntad con vocación constituyente, que maneja una espada vencedora [y] marca la salida de la guerra universal.’<sup>3</sup> The always conflictive bond that the gauchesque exposes between the *juez de paz*/state authority and the *gaucho*/population is settled, then, by an agreement in which the state is allowed to pronounce the law while society retains a space for uttering unofficial truths. Its effects will be displayed a century later, when in *El secreto* one of the ‘voices’ that inform the novel complains about ‘este país donde *los vencedores hacen la historia y los perdedores la escriben*’ (SV, 63).

Hobbes articulates his political thought to overcome a state of nature that is potentially warlike. In his theory, individuals agree to surrender their natural freedom and become unconditionally subject to a power who guarantees them peace and their right to life, while himself remaining outside the agreement.<sup>4</sup> This agreement is certainly not exempted from violence, as José Luis Galimidi remarks ‘la *función constitutiva* que adquiere la violencia en la república de Hobbes.’<sup>5</sup> Hobbes envisages power embodied by ‘the sovereign’ which is, in M. M. Goldsmith’s words, ‘not only

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<sup>2</sup> Carlos Gamerro, ‘Para una reformulación del género policial argentino’, in Gamerro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, 2nd rev. edn (Excursiones, 2015), pp. 56-65 (p. 58).

<sup>3</sup> José Luis Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador. Reverencia y legitimidad en la filosofía política de Thomas Hobbes* (Homo Sapiens, 2004), p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Nicola Matteucci, ‘Contractualismo’, in *Diccionario de política*, ed. by Norberto Bobbio, Nicola Matteucci, and Gianfranco Pasquino; trans. by Raúl Crisafio and others, 2 vols (Siglo XXI, 1991), I, pp. 351-65 (pp. 361-2).

<sup>5</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 130.

supreme but also unlimited.<sup>6</sup> This conception will be altered by the Argentine state to unroll its utmost authoritarian features during the 1976-1983 dictatorship, as is shown in *El secreto*. In this novel, an investigation about the murder in 1977 of a notable son of Malihuel reveals that, although assumed to be a Montonero, the dead man was a journalist, kidnapped and disappeared for his uttering a truth about the joint criminal origins of the state and the vast fortunes of the region. Besides being one of the persons who, in Gamerro's view, is in charge of 'hacer saber la verdad que nadie quiere oír,'<sup>7</sup> Darío Ezcurra is slain for exercising the right granted by nineteenth century agreement.

The dichotomy between authority and truth holds significant importance within Hobbes's philosophical discourse. As Andrés Rosler explains, Hobbes 'capturó el credo del positivismo jurídico en un eslogan: "*Authoritas non veritas facit legem* [La autoridad, no la verdad, hace la ley]':<sup>8</sup> While Hobbes addresses thus a classic contractualist concern, which sees in law the rational tool for regulating social and political relationships,<sup>9</sup> for him the violation of law would inexorably lead, in Eduardo Rinesi's description, 'a la penosa situación de guerra de todos contra todos.'<sup>10</sup> Law is thus pivotal for dealing with human conflict in civil state, yet I see in both novels a clash about the model of political organisation to be instituted. In *El sueño*, the paradigm agreed is the Roman *civitas*, which Arnolando Siperman defines as based on the tenet that 'los conflictos pueden ser siempre resueltos [por el derecho en tanto] *una instancia de la verdad que no admite réplica ulterior*'; whereas in *El secreto* this model is questioned after the Greek *polis*, which proposes politics as the 'ámbito permanente de debate y negociación, tentativa inagotable de tramitar los conflictos *sin resolverlos autoritariamente*.'<sup>11</sup> These two paradigms will call into crisis the pact by which the state

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<sup>6</sup> M. M. Goldsmith, 'Hobbes on Law', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. by Tom Sorell (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 274-304 (p. 278).

<sup>7</sup> Gamerro, 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino', pp. 65 and 63.

<sup>8</sup> Andrés Rosler, *La ley es la ley. Autoridad e interpretación en la filosofía del derecho* (Katz, 2019), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> See Goldsmith, 'Hobbes on Law', p. 274; and Matteucci, 'Contractualismo', p. 359.

<sup>10</sup> Eduardo Rinesi, *Política y tragedia. Hamlet, entre Maquiavelo y Hobbes*, 2nd rev. edn (Colihue, 2011), p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> Arnolando Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad. Isaiah Berlin y el pensamiento trágico* (De la Flor, 2000), p. 80. In agreement, Rosler argues that the modern concept of law 'parte [...] del

*legitimately* utters law, and civil society *legitimately* utters truth(s) potentially undermining the state's authority. However, in the Hobbesian notion the sovereign is above, and not beneath, the law, thus not restricted from changing laws previously enacted.<sup>12</sup> In my reading, this implies the capacity to *arbitrarily* pronounce/devise crimes and criminals, as the dreams of the *jueces de paz* show and the 'Proceso' will push to its farthest extremes.

*El secreto* consequently becomes the enactment of the agreement reached in the foundational moment of the nation, now in the Greek approach to human conflict: the tragic genre. As Siperman affirms, tragedy conceives human conflict 'como *situación irresoluble* de la vida social', that could only be settled 'en el orden de la *liquidación de las diferencias* y del *aniquilamiento del diferente*.'<sup>13</sup> As far as I see it, *El secreto* exposes that the Leviathan agreed upon a century before has been corrupted: from the original absolutist quality required by Hobbes into an authoritarian/totalitarian one, whose main traits were analysed earlier in the concentration camp and in Tamerlán's dystopic order. The Hobbesian notion of 'that great LEVIATHAN [...] which is but an artificial man,'<sup>14</sup> tacitly suggesting the idea of a 'body politic', appears to sustain a biased interpretation in the vein of political organicist theories upon which the 'Proceso' ideologically draws. These entail, in Nino's words, 'a holistic [conception] which *sacrifices individuals for the collective nation or state* when it is deemed in danger.'<sup>15</sup> Aligning the ambiguity of Leviathan's nature with that of its creators, Galimidi notes that,

este **Leviatán aterrador**, al que se obedece por el poder que tiene **para proteger y para destruir** [asume] la inquietante dualidad de la condición humana: el hombre, a la vez que **puede compararse con Dios**, ya que su participación voluntaria en el pacto lo pone como *creador* del animal artificial, también **se sabe absolutamente frágil** y dependiente de la voluntad de su representante soberano.<sup>16</sup>

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desacuerdo, de la insuficiencia de los valores y principios compartidos, y es por eso que el derecho pretende tener *autoridad para resolver el conflicto*.' See Rosler, *La ley es la ley*, p. 184.

<sup>12</sup> Goldsmith, 'Hobbes on Law', p. 282.

<sup>13</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, pp. 19 and 42.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, The Introduction, 1. I quote from: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. and intro. by J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford World's Classics, 2008). Unless stated otherwise, small caps are Hobbes's.

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (Yale University Press, 1996), p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, pp. 187-8. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

In agreement, Montserrat Herrero states that ‘el *Leviatán*, a pesar de toda su potencia y ferocidad, es mortal, está sujeto a la decadencia, igual que las demás criaturas de la Tierra.’<sup>17</sup> That life-threatening danger of Hobbes’s design is embodied, as Rinesi explains, by ‘[*la palabra*, desmedida y descontrolada, seductora y sediciosa (sediciosa *porque* seductora)’ of those groups who, in their aspiration to political power, show a ‘sistemática voluntad subversiva.’<sup>18</sup> Those members of civil society who exercise their right to uttering the truth of the foundational agreement are now in a position to be arbitrarily declared a ‘subversivo irrecuperable’<sup>19</sup> by the dictatorship, because of that same agreement. The ‘solución definitiva’ (SV, 55) that the state authority looks for at the end of the twentieth century to close the conflict is indeed the annihilation of difference. For this, the dictatorship proposes a new agreement, in this case, one of impunity, in the wake of Nazi strategies to perpetually engage those collaborators of the ‘grey zone’ by implicating them in their criminal blood-spattered actions.<sup>20</sup> It is what one of the ‘voices’ of *El secreto* says:

Una especie de *pacto de sangre*, con la sangre de otros se entiende [...] cuando la limpieza estuviera terminada y democracia mediante empezaran los reclamos *los quisquillosos no pudieran darse el lujo de apuntar a los demás con las manos limpias y decir yo no fui* (SV, 67).

#### TRANSFORMING THE ‘DESERT’: STATE, NATION, AND TERRITORY

In 1877, the year the *juez de paz* begins dreaming about crimes committed by the inhabitants of Malihuel, the country is undergoing a decisive moment as regards its constitutional and territorial consolidation. The period of institutional stability lasts from 1860 to 1930, when a coup d’état breaks constitutional rule for the first time. The territorial expansion, achieved by the campaigns of 1878 and 1879, effectively put

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<sup>17</sup> Montserrat Herrero, *Ficciones políticas. El eco de Thomas Hobbes en el ocaso de la modernidad* (Katz, 2012), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 188. Italics in the original.

<sup>19</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente. Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2002), p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, in Levi, *Opere*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, 2 vols (Einaudi, 1997), II, pp. 995-1153 (p. 1022).

under the nation's control the whole of a territory claimed as Argentine since the collapse of Spanish rule. If, as seen in chapter 1, this territory was considered to be 'argentino desde siempre,'<sup>21</sup> its annexation gave origin, in Nino's words, to a 'skewed land distribution, which to this day deeply affects social structures, [...] as the wealthy took advantage of legislative loopholes and the corruption of public officials.'<sup>22</sup> All these are central issues in the story of *El sueño*.

The 'Conquest of the Desert' signified doubling the space actually dominated by the Argentine Republic.<sup>23</sup> The securing of such a territory demanded then three consequent transformations: of a state assumed to be guardian of territorial integrity, as well as expression of a homogeneous society;<sup>24</sup> of its population, which in my reading is not only essential for economic purposes but specifically for the signing of the Hobbesian agreement; and the state authority, whose institutional legitimation derives from a covenant that, as Hobbes acknowledges, in terms of historical experience has exclusively been that of 'acquisition by conquest'.<sup>25</sup>

Following the economic crisis of 1874, territorial expansion became imperative to integrate new regions into the framework of agricultural production.<sup>26</sup> This was particularly noticeable in the Province of Santa Fe, where the fictional Malihuel is located. Thanks to its agricultural colonisation, railway development, and arrival of European immigrants, Santa Fe was, Ezequiel Gallo points out, 'la provincia argentina de mayor crecimiento en el periodo intercensal 1869-1895 [...] sólo es comparable en la época con algunas regiones de Canadá y Australia.'<sup>27</sup> This growth mainly involved its south-west area. In *Las Islas*, Malihuel was introduced as 'ese pueblito perdido en la punta de la bota de Santa Fe' (LI, 296)—that is, in the zone near the borders with the Provinces of Córdoba and Buenos Aires. Its location is confirmed in *El sueño* when Don Urbano, in moments of distress and discouragement, climbed 'al mangrullo, solo,

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<sup>21</sup> *La Argentina en la escuela. La idea de nación en los textos escolares*, ed. by Luis Alberto Romero and others (Siglo XXI, 2004), p. 199.

<sup>22</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Hilda Sabato, *Historia de la Argentina. 1852-1890* (Siglo XXI, 2012), pp. 259-60.

<sup>24</sup> Romero (ed.), *La Argentina en la escuela*, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Sabato, *Historia de la Argentina*, p. 262.

<sup>27</sup> Ezequiel Gallo, 'Notas sobre el surgimiento de villas y centros urbanos en la campaña de Santa Fe (Argentina 1870-1895)', in *De historia e historiadores. Homenaje a José Luis Romero*, ed. by Sergio Bagú and others (Siglo XXI, 1982), pp. 387-400 (p. 389).

y se quedaba horas *mirando hacia el noreste* [...] la ciudad de Rosario, donde su mujer y sus hijos disfrutaban de la vida regalada que a costa de enormes sacrificios él arrancaba de estas tierras bárbaras' (*SSJ*, 31). Malihuel is thus at the core of the area that chiefly benefitted from agricultural development, a fact that will be corroborated a century afterwards in a hyperbolic fashion as 'el [departamento] más rico de la región agrícola-ganadera más rica del planeta' (*SV*, 33).

In my view, Argentina's territorial expansion compels the archetypal characters of the gauchesque to undergo a significant transformation or face eradication. This has been the option left to the aboriginal population once the state carried out the final 'Campaigns to the Desert'. Indeed, if 'barbarism' and 'desert' were the two features attributed to those vast spaces since Echeverría's *La cautiva*, this implied, as Beatriz Sarlo explains, that from the perspective of civilisation there was a 'desierto' paradoxically populated by 'una barbarie indígena con la que el nuevo mundo de las naciones surgidas de la independencia *no debía mezclarse*'.<sup>28</sup> Such a verbal construct may have found theological and juridical support in the thought of Italian jurist Alberico Gentili (1552-1608), who, as Rosler reminds us, argues:

"Dios no creó la Tierra para que estuviese vacía", ya que "la ocupación de tierras vacantes es por derecho natural". Y "nuestros [juristas] enseñan acerca de las tierras incultas, que pueden ser reclamadas como si fuesen tierra de nadie" [...] "¿acaso no existen hoy esas tierras incultas en el mundo? [...]. ¿Y bajo el imperio español, *no está casi vacío todo el nuevo mundo?*"<sup>29</sup>

As will happen with other nationalist endeavours, the 'redeeming' conquest of this desert follows an untruth fiction of theological reaches. What actually existed was a conflictive co-existence, whose end David Viñas summarises with a reformulation of the well-known Sarmientian dyad: in *Facundo*, 'lo de civilización y barbarie aparece inicialmente unido por una "y" copulativa, hacia el momento de Roca el sentido se desplaza hacia una "o" disyuntiva'.<sup>30</sup> The 'bárbaro' had then to accept a transformation that one way or other entails his/her disappearance: either to become a rural worker,

<sup>28</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, 'Oralidad y lenguas extranjeras: el conflicto de la literatura argentina durante el primer tercio del siglo XX', in Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, *Ensayos argentinos. De Sarmiento a la vanguardia* (Ariel, 1997), pp. 269-87 (p. 270).

<sup>29</sup> Andrés Rosler, *Razones públicas. Seis conceptos básicos sobre la república* (Katz, 2016), p. 245.

<sup>30</sup> David Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, 2nd edn (Santiago Arcos, 2003), p. 81.

to quit the lands conquered by the Argentine state, or be eliminated. In *El sueño*, this disappearance has already taken place, as the *gaucho* learns when, following the pattern of José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* (1872 and 1879), he crosses the border and a 'cautivo' makes clear to him that '[l]os caciques que no están muertos se conchabaron de peones en alguna estancia. Las pocas tribus que los milicos dejaron escapan todas hacia el sur, buscando cruzar la cordillera antes de que venga el invierno' (*SSJ*, 92). The territory conceptualised as a 'desert' for much of the nineteenth century is ultimately rendered empty, prompting the critical question about the population that, for the Argentine elite, should have the right to live in it. Whilst before 1880, government policies actively encouraged the arrival of Europeans aiming to populate the 'desert', after that year the primary goal of government policies towards those vast regions transitioned from population growth to securing a readily available rural workforce.<sup>31</sup> This is the transformation forced on the *gaucho*.

Territorial expansion required also administrative functions apt to the ongoing transformations. The *juez de paz* is one of the public servants under pressure. The budget stress of provincial administrations as a result of that expansion led, Gallo explains, to 'la baja calidad de una parte no desdeñable del personal elegido y en los *innumerables conflictos* que se generaron entre las autoridades locales y los habitantes de las colonias.'<sup>32</sup> An official attached to minor rural units, the *juez de paz* exercises, in Marta Bonaudo's words, a 'lábil control' over the settlements in a scheme that increasingly appears less effective for 'una provincia con baja densidad poblacional, sin fronteras firmes frente al indígena, que *se va tornando más compleja y necesita nuevas fórmulas políticas*.'<sup>33</sup> These new political formulas decentralised authority, previously concentrated in the *juez de paz*. Administrative, military, judicial, educational, and police functions were now dispersed among a triad of officials, diluting the *juez de paz*'s nearly absolute power.<sup>34</sup> While the economic, social, and territorial transformations accompanying

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<sup>31</sup> Carlos Alberto Floria and César A. García Belsunce, *Historia de los argentinos* (Larousse, 2001), p. 682.

<sup>32</sup> Gallo, 'Notas', p. 398.

<sup>33</sup> Marta Bonaudo, 'Las elites santafesinas entre el control y las garantías: el espacio de la jefatura política', in *La vida política en la Argentina del siglo XIX. Armas, votos y voces*, ed. by Hilda Sabato and Alberto Lettieri (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), pp. 259-76 (p. 260).

<sup>34</sup> Bonaudo, 'Las elites santafesinas entre el control y las garantías', p. 261.

national consolidation are rendering the traditional role of the *gaucho* obsolete, the *juez de paz*, for his part, finds himself increasingly threatened by the advancement of the republican ideal with its emphasis on separation of powers.

If the *juez de paz* brings immediately to mind the archetypical antagonist of the *gaucho*, portrayed in *Martín Fierro* as the incarnation of an omnipotent state in rural areas, the authority of *El sueño* reflects more accurately the instability characteristic of that moment of intense transformations. Below what seems like unrestrained power, Don Urbano Pedernera's position is precarious, showing what Hilda Sabato describes as 'la fragilidad de las bases sobre las que se sostiene la autoridad en nuestra sociedad.'<sup>35</sup> In fictional reality, the territorial conquest has already forced him to undergo a fundamental transformation: that of a military career into a civil one. It is after a short foray into the desert 'tras el rastro de los indios' that the then Colonel Pedernera

pidió el retiro y regresó, solo, para ocuparse de los campos ganados al salvaje que en recompensa a sus servicios el gobierno le había vendido a precio nominal. Venía también con una misión personal: hacer del rancharío contenido por las cinco paredes del fuerte y del chinerío rejuntado que lo habitaba un pueblo, un pueblo que un día llevaría su nombre (*SSJ*, 25).

Don Urbano perceives 'la mutación' (*SSJ*, 25) that the triumph of civilisation implies. Hence his urge to found a village becomes 'mi sueño máspreciado' (*SSJ*, 59), as he publicly declares—that is, to transform a 'rancharío destartado' (*SSJ*, 10) into the social and political organisation that will secure him (and his properties) a lawful position in the new times. It has been suggested that the *juez de paz*'s Christian name is at the origin of his obsession with the founding of a village as a mandate to 'hacer honor a su apelativo.'<sup>36</sup> In my view, 'Urbano' echoes the Latin term *Urbs* that, as Siperman reminds us, is fundamentally linked with the expansion of Roman Law that the Edict of the Emperor Caracalla began in A.D. 212 when,

declaró ciudadanos romanos, por tanto sujetos a su derecho, a todas las personas que habitaran dentro de los confines del Imperio, lo cual, atendiendo a *la equivalencia de éste con el mundo no*

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<sup>35</sup> Hilda Sabato, *Pueblo y política. La construcción de la república* (Capital Intelectual, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> María Laura Destéfanis, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamerro (1998-2011)* (doctoral tesis. University of Granada, 2019), p. 85.

*bárbaro*, permite captar en toda su intensidad la consecuencia universalista de *someter a todos sus habitantes*, sean cuales fuesen sus características personales o de los grupos de origen o pertenencia *a la aplicación de este medio de tramitar la conflictividad que es el Derecho*.<sup>37</sup>

Don Urbano seems aware of this historical and legal tradition. In addition to one morning awakening ‘poseído de furor neroniano’ (*SSJ*, 34), a few days later he addresses the population of Malihuel to equate the Indigenous people to those ‘bárbaros [que] amenazan nuestras fronteras, como las de la Antigua Roma’ (*SSJ*, 58). The mention of Ancient Rome also hints at Sallust, who, in Rosler’s words, suggests that ‘*el origen de toda comunidad política es criminal*: “aquel día se habría perpetrado el peor crimen desde la fundación de la ciudad de Roma”.’<sup>38</sup> If Rome is brought to the fore by the *juez de paz*, the shape of Malihuel suggests a shared analogy in Ancient Greece of the *polis* with a ship. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for instance, a play relevant for my reading as it addresses, among other topics, the question of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ enemies of the city, Creon refers to Thebes thus:

The State, the Fatherland, is everything  
To us, *the ship we all sail in*.  
If she sinks, we all drown,  
And friendship drowns with us.<sup>39</sup>

Maybe foreshadowing the tragic events it will host during the 1970s, Malihuel was founded upon a ‘*fortín en forma de barco*’ (*SSV*, 48, italics in the original). The nineteenth-century village confirms this form, as indeed ‘tenía forma de barco, un barco de proa al desierto para quebrar el embate de los malones [...] un vago horizonte de indios que avanzaba y retrocedía como una marea’ (*SSJ*, 24).

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<sup>37</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 77.

<sup>38</sup> That is, fratricide. Rosler also notes that Niccolò Machiavelli ‘defiende los orígenes de Roma en términos de performatividad: “jamás una mente sabia reprenderá a constituyente alguno por acción extraordinaria alguna que usase para *ordenar un reino o una república*. Es bien conveniente que, *acusándolo el hecho, lo excusan los efectos*; y cuando sean buenos como los de Rómulo, siempre lo excusará; porque *se debe reprender al que es violento para estropear, no al que lo es para componer*”.’ See Rosler, *Razones públicas*, p. 259. n4.

<sup>39</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. by Don Taylor (National Theatre and Methuen, 2012), p. 11. Other reference to the *polis* as a ship is found in Plato, *Republic*, VI, 488a. I thank Dr Martín D’Ascenzo for all these indications.

The foundation of the urban centre, then, enhances an expansion that is both territorial and juridical. What Law comes to establish in the conquered lands is the Greek-Roman formula *Vitam instituere*. As Enrique Kozicki elucidates, it means ‘fabricar el dispositivo jurídico destinado a tomar a su cargo al humano que, precisamente, *marcado por la Ley*, nace así a su condición de *sujeto*,’ a notion by which ‘[n]o existe otro sujeto que el instituido, fuera de la institución no hay sujeto.’<sup>40</sup> Not only does this formula conversely provide a status of ‘no-humanity’, that would eventually facilitate the elimination of the ‘bárbaros’, and establish Law as the Roman way of dealing with human conflict, but it also institutes the individuals who will sign the agreement to legitimate state power.

*El sueño* incorporates several distinctive elements of the gauchesque. Beyond the central figures of the *juez de paz* and the *gaucho*, the novel employs the notion of a border separating the spaces of civilisation and barbarism; a narrative structure that, for the *gaucho*, follows the pattern of *Martín Fierro* (an ‘ida’ to the ‘desert’ and a ‘vuelta’ after a transformation with regard to civilisation); and the conceptual idea of the author of the genre, described by Josefina Ludmer as those who ‘transcriben y no como los que “inventan”’.<sup>41</sup> However, I argue that the gauchesque in *El sueño* is no longer the literary genre able to account for the situation of the country. In this regard, Ludmer explains that ‘*La vuelta [de Martín Fierro]* cierra el género’ allowing thus ‘pasar a otro género literario.’<sup>42</sup> In my view, *El sueño* will undergo a sophisticated transformation (apt to the moment of changes for the nation): while the novel begins within the well-known construct of the gauchesque, it will end up by being a ‘leyenda’ (*SSJ*, 159), i.e., a narrative which, according to the relevant meaning in Cuddon’s definition, ‘lies somewhere between myth and historical fact and which, as a rule, is about a particular figure or person [...]; stories which often grow taller and longer with time and which may eventually be written down or recited in song, verse and ballad, through which means the oral tradition is sustained.’<sup>43</sup> This transformation of the gauchesque in *El*

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<sup>40</sup> Enrique Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley* (Gorla, 2004), pp. 74-5. Italics in the original.

<sup>41</sup> Josefina Ludmer, *El género gauchesco. Un tratado sobre la patria*, 2nd edn (Eterna Cadencia, 2019), p. 89. n8.

<sup>42</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, p. 61.

<sup>43</sup> J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd rev. edn (Penguin, 1991), p. 484.

*sueño* is central to my argument regarding the agreement between the *juez de paz* and the *gaucho*. While the urban centre is ultimately established after the state's will (the Law), the truth about its origins is revealed by an anonymous narrator who 'transcribes' a version of history passed down through generations. This figure, acting in the vein of the author of both the gauchesque and the legend, allows the people's truth emerge, to challenge the state's official narrative. The following section will analyse these genre elements in *El sueño*, paying particular attention to the alteration of the gauchesque to explore the complex relationship between power, truth, and the construction of the nation-state.

#### GENRES, SPACE, AND TIME IN *EL SUEÑO DEL SEÑOR JUEZ*

*El sueño* is divided into three parts, each of them bearing different geographical and temporal settings, in which a highly symbolic concept in the politics and culture of the time ('la frontera') plays a substantial role. Rather than a fixed line, Sabato explains, the border between Argentina and the aboriginal nations was 'una franja de contacto y de disputa [...], un escenario de intercambios pero a la vez de violencias.'<sup>44</sup> The centrality of this notion was summarised by President Nicolás Avellaneda (1874-1880) in a letter of August 1875:

*La cuestión de fronteras es la primera cuestión de todas, y hablamos incesantemente de ella aunque no la nombramos. Es el principio y el fin, el alfa y el omega. [...] Suprimir a los indios y las fronteras no implica en otros términos sino poblar el desierto.*<sup>45</sup>

Echeverría's *La Cautiva* establishes 'la frontera' as a literary space entailing, in Sarlo and Altamirano's words, 'un dualismo social (indios/criollos) y filosófico (naturaleza/civilización urbana)' that sets apart 'la campaña' from 'el desierto (es decir, por oxímoron, el territorio indio).'<sup>46</sup> Referring to a similar situation in early nineteenth century North America, Brian McHale explains that 'the closing of the frontier, and

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<sup>44</sup> Sabato, *Historia de la Argentina*, p. 260.

<sup>45</sup> In Sabato, *Historia de la Argentina*, p. 259.

<sup>46</sup> Sarlo and Altamirano, 'Esteban Echeverría, el poeta pensador', pp. 38 and 36.

the effective absorption of the wilderness space by civilization' forced North American writers 'to reconceptualize and imaginatively restructure their country.'<sup>47</sup> In *El sueño*, the impending absorption of 'barbarie' by the space of 'civilización' signifies a distinct transformation for both the state and its population. In the ensuing sub-sections, I will scrutinise the novel, focusing specifically on the geographical and temporal contexts of each segment. I will posit that for the state, this transformation primarily pertains to the future, requiring an agreement to ensure its legality. Conversely, for the inhabitants, it encompasses both the present and the past, involving the right to utter a truth that will serve as the counterpart in the aforesaid agreement.

#### (I) MALIHUEL: THE FUTURE ENVISAGED

The first section of *El sueño* is located in Malihuel which, towards the end of 1877, is just a 'rancherío destartalado' (*SSJ*, 11) grouped around the old fortification, out of which the dream of the 'señor juez' is to found a village to be baptised after his Christian name, San Urbano. In the ideological imaginary of nineteenth century Argentina, the concept of civilisation bears a distinctive Sarmientian stamp, in particular because of its close ties to the notions of city and republic. In Sarlo's words, Sarmiento '[c]ree que en la ciudad está la virtud y que *la ciudad es el motor expansivo de la civilización*. La extensión rural es despótica, *el agrupamiento urbano incuba a la república*.'<sup>48</sup>

Civilisation is indeed advancing, as the *juez de paz* remarks that 'la frontera se corrió unas leguas' (*SSJ*, 14). However, the institutional and political future does not materialise. The arrival of the 'agrimensor', required for official sanctioning of the village, is always uncertain: 'Con las del mes pasado eran tres las cartas que mandaba al gobierno reclamando por el agrimensor, y nada' (*SSJ*, 10). This frustration will soon turn up in his dreams: 'decidió inmotivadamente que llegaría por fin el agrimensor. Había estado toda la semana soñando con él, y en el sueño le daba indicaciones

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<sup>47</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Routledge, 2004), p. 49. In his *Democracy in America* (1835), Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) significantly called 'desert' the territories over which the North American army was fighting the aboriginal nations. See Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 94.

<sup>48</sup> Sarlo, *Borges, un escritor en las orillas*, pp. 20-1.

precisas de cómo quería los bulevares, las plazas, las fuentes; todo el trazado, en fin, del pueblo que tendría su estatua por centro' (*SSJ*, 31). The immobility of the *juez de paz*'s position is persuasively associated with the immobility of the 'reloj del juzgado' (*SSJ*, 12) by Verónica Inés Garibotto, for whom '[l]as agujas del reloj no marcan aún la hora; el pueblo no se ha incorporado todavía al espacio de la nación; permanece fuera del calendario.'<sup>49</sup> If in *De Cive*, as Norberto Bobbio reminds us, 'Hobbes compares the state to the archetypal machine, the clock,'<sup>50</sup> the state's immobility appears more upsetting by contrast with the changes around: the old fortification has become an impromptu settlement; its 'mangrullo' is being used as the bell tower of the church; the *gaucho* is no longer required as a soldier but as a rural worker, and the *juez de paz* himself has replaced his military rank with a civil one. It is in this context of frustration as regard the materialising of his 'sueño máspreciado' that dreams about criminal deeds committed by the inhabitants of the hamlet begin to pervade his nights. The essential unity between the founding of a village and the actions of its inhabitants is not only shown by the fact that all occur in the future, but also by the crucial presence of Law as the privileged tool for the construction of that future.

In the *juez de paz*'s very first dream, 'un vecino [...] le meaba las paredes recién terminadas del edificio del juzgado' (*SSJ*, 9). Not long afterwards it is made clear that at present only one wall has been built, while to his eyes 'el juzgado parece una toldería y el calabozo un rancho' (*SSJ*, 10). In other words, the seat of authority appears as two distinctive structures associated with the external and internal enemies of the nation who, either by elimination or transformation, must belong to the past. What is more, the person who is dreamed as 'un vecino' is diurnally addressed as a 'gaucho bruto' (*SSJ*, 11), emphasising the change that the new times require from the inhabitant of the *pampas*. After the 'Revolución de Mayo,' Sabato remarks, '[s]er vecino de una localidad implicaba ser jefe de familia, residir en ella y tener "arraigo o giro conocido", calidades todas que debían ser evidentes tanto a las autoridades como a los demás vecinos.'<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>49</sup> Verónica Inés Garibotto, *Contornos en negativo: reescrituras posdictatoriales del siglo XIX (Argentina, Chile y Uruguay)* (doctoral thesis. University of Pittsburgh, 2008), p. 199.

<sup>50</sup> Norberto Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, trans. by Daniela Gobetti (The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Sabato, *Pueblo y política*, p. 25.

*gaucho*, on the contrary, is by definition a rootless man, as Rosendo Villalba confirms after deserting civilisation:

él no estaba hecho para la vida pueblera [...]. De única pared el horizonte, y de único techo el cielo estrellado; nada amaba más que tener el pingo de catre y despertarse en un lugar distinto del que se había dormido (*SSJ*, 76-7).

Ludmer calls these new times ‘la *coyuntura de paz* [en la que] surge la voz del trabajo y la ley.’<sup>52</sup> The transformation that the new times require is not only chronological, but fundamentally a legal one with economic and social effects: the *gaucho* has to settle in a community through work and family.

Law becomes then the essential feature regarding the future, as all crimes in the *jueces de paz*’s dreams concern the violation of a legal structure that is not yet effective. This is evidenced once dreaming overpowers Don Urbano to the point that he perceives himself losing ‘el control sobre sus propios sueños, que se volvían cada vez más intrincados y bizarros, desafiando la interpretación o el desmadejamiento, cayendo sus remedios *cada vez más fuera de la letra de la ley, obligándolo a lecturas minuciosas del Código Rural* que lo dejaban más perplejo que antes’ (*SSJ*, 30). The ‘coyuntura de paz’ forecasts thus more intricated issues for that man who has changed ‘el grado militar por el civil’ (*SSJ*, 10). Since the deed that asserts civilisation, the foundation of the state in the ‘desert’, is not yet materialised, he rejects the only dream by Malihuel inhabitants that accords with the ongoing project of nation:

—Patrón, soñé que cabalgábamos *hacia el sur*, usté a la cabeza en su alazán refusilando de plata, su poncho rojo flameando al viento tan largo que *nos envolvía a todos* [...] y envueltos en su poncho como gurises sabíamos que nada malo nos podía pasar, porque usté nos guiaba, las patas de su pingo alisaban los yuyos como un peine y todo *el desierto se abría para dejarlo pasar*, y cuando mirábamos pa atrás *la pampa se había vuelto campo*, de la huella salían el maíz y el trigo y las nubes del cielo bajaban a la tierra convertidas en ovejas... (*SSJ*, 49).

The dream closely echoes that of Professor Citatorio in *Las Islas*, a similarity that would show that the idea of territory as guarantee of a privileged destiny for the country is deeply rooted in the discourse of the nation. Don Urbano’s rejection,

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<sup>52</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, pp. 171-2. n12. Italics in the original.

however, centres on the *right* to dream, in line with a period that was a ‘restrained democracy’ in which ‘some authoritarian tendencies’ consolidated:<sup>53</sup>

—¡Vos soñaste! ¡El señor soñó! ¿Pero a quién le importan los sueños roñosos de un roto como vos? ¿Su señoría soñó, y yo *tengo que hacerle caso?* (*SSJ*, 49).

While the *juez de paz* denies the inhabitants the right to dream, thereby impeding their ability to envision a future, he concurrently grapples with discomfort stemming from the role of the military in advancing civilisation. Civilisation and material progress, the very future he is actively contributing to, are paradoxically lagging behind him. Hence, for the state authority, the imperative lies in securing an agreement that legitimates its position. This pursuit aligns with the objectives of contractualist thinkers, as their proposed agreement serves as a tool for political liberation while preserving the existing social structure rooted in family and private property.<sup>54</sup>

The effects of the legal corpus of civilisation can be foreseen in Rosendo’s decision to desert. If the *indios* have been excluded by means of divesting them of their humanity, the *gaucho* is tolerated on condition that he becomes an accomplice of state criminal actions. Like Felipe in *Las Islas*, the *gaucho* becomes the helpless witness of the murder of the person he considers to be ‘su amigo’ (*SSJ*, 68) by a state official abusing his authority. Being placed in the ‘grey zone’ produces a sense of alienation that forces Felipe to be a survivor and Rosendo a deserter of civilisation. A similar situation will take place in *El secreto*, though the resulting alienation will reach the whole population of Malihuel, as one of the voices reckons when the state authority consults them about murdering Ezcurra: ‘si el recorrido del comisario Neri nos unía, era *para separarnos*’ (*SV*, 59). Unlike Felipe, Rosendo is able to desert the ‘grey zone’ by crossing the border. His foray into the ‘desert’ is an escape from the future forecast by the rule of civilisation and essentially consists of an exploration of the present.

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<sup>53</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>54</sup> Matteucci, ‘Contractualismo’, p. 354.

## (II) DESERT: THE PRESENT EXPERIENCED

Rosendo complies thus with the fate of the *gaucho*, or, at least, with that of the most emblematic one, Martín Fierro. His way of facing authority is deserting civilisation with the purpose of offering his knowledge to the ‘external enemy’, who is assumed to be preparing a ‘malón grande’ (*SSJ*, 76). His is also a last attempt to live the life of a *gaucho*, as he becomes aware that ‘[h]abía terminado echando raíces a pesar suyo, como el tronco de sauce cuando lo ponen de lado; ya había llegado el momento de sacudirse la tierra y andar’ (*SSJ*, 76). Desertion implies crossing ‘la frontera’, a concept that organises Sarmiento’s dyad ‘civilización/barbarie’, and that certainly does not go unnoticed in *El sueño*. A soldier stationed in ‘la frontera’ makes it clear to Rosendo in an excited mood that reflects the possibilities of the conquest:

Del lado de acá, está la civilización, o sea nosotros; del lado de allá, la barbarie, o sea ellos. ¿Lo ve? ¿Lo ve? Civilización/barbarie, civilización/barbarie. ¿Entiende? ¿Entiende? (*SSJ*, 82).

To a certain extent, ‘la frontera’ that Rosendo crosses does not exist any longer: it is that traced by the then Secretary of War, Adolfo Alsina, whose death in those very days (on 29 December 1877) will signify the end of his rather measured policy of conquest of Indigenous lands.<sup>55</sup> Criticised for being slow and onerous, Alsina’s policy will be replaced by the aggressive campaigns of his substitute, General Roca.<sup>56</sup> For President Avellaneda, it is now a matter of ‘ir directamente a buscar al indio a su guarida, para someterlo o expulsarlo’ beyond the River Negro.<sup>57</sup> If the ‘zanja’ was an absurdity, as is manifested by the soldiers in charge of digging it, the sheer delusion that its crossing implies is confirmed when the *gaucho* arrives at that ‘guarida’ only to find Christian ‘cautivos’ in the place of the native inhabitants, exposing at the same time the effects of the conquest of the ‘desert’, and the impossibility of the life of the *gaucho* as it had been before.

In *El sueño*, the reconceptualization and restructuring of the nation following the disappearance of the frontier are facilitated through *misattribution*, a post-modernist

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<sup>55</sup> Sabato, *Historia de la Argentina*, p. 262.

<sup>56</sup> Juan Carlos Walther, *La conquista del desierto*, 2nd edn (Eudeba, 1976), p. 422.

<sup>57</sup> Sabato, *Historia de la Argentina*, p. 264.

technique that involves altering traditional catalogues of places and their attributes. This process disrupts and fractures the automatic associations typically attached to them.<sup>58</sup> This also shows the border, in Andermann's words, as a 'zona de contacto y mezcla, más que de otredad.'<sup>59</sup> While the crossing of the 'border' leads Rosendo to realise that 'nada había de distinto en los campos *del otro lado*' (SSJ, 84), on 'this' side of the border Don Urbano has already had a dream in which he visits the most conventional Parisian places just to find them occupied by typical characters and expressions of Latin American culture. This slippery nature of attributes and characters shows the ineffectiveness of the concept of 'frontera' and the state policies of eradication, deepening thus the frustration of the *juez de paz* as regards his endeavour of civilisation. Misattribution offers the *gaucho*, on the contrary, the possibility to question civilisation, placing him in a better position to reach the foundational agreement of the nation. If Rosendo thus enacts the 'fantasma del "volvedor del desierto" que se lanza a *ejercer su venganza y derrumbar el orden*,'<sup>60</sup> he achieves that once he hears and understands in the space of 'wilderness' sophisticated expressions of civilised culture, i.e., Góngora's verses that present 'el sueño' as 'teatro sobre el viento armado' (SSJ, 108, italics in the original), and the plots of some revenge plays such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1601) and *Othello* (c. 1603), Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* (1635), and Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* (1619). While before those discoveries Rosendo 'dormido soñaba con *la vuelta*' (SSJ, 73), certainly hinting at a Hernández-esque 'ida', his 'vuelta' is only possible after knowing those Baroque possibilities and finding a Borgesian manner to perform it:

Supo en ese momento para qué estaba destinado, ahora que su destino personal era lo menos importante en juego; *supo quién era, ahora que era todos y a la vez nadie*; supo que iba a volver, ahora que sabía para qué se había ido (SSJ, 111).

Like Tadeo Isidoro Cruz in Borges's reformulation of Hernández's character, as well as Major X in *Las Islas*, Rosendo Villalba has his moment in which 'sabe para siempre

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<sup>58</sup> McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>59</sup> Jens Andermann, *Mapas de poder. Una arqueología literaria del espacio argentino* (Beatriz Viterbo, 2000), p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 194.

quién es.<sup>61</sup> Rosendo's return is more or less contemporary to that of Martín Fierro, yet his purpose is radically different. His return is not to claim 'casa, / escuela, iglesia y derechos,' that is, to submit to the ongoing project of nation or, as Andermann puts it, to look for 'un principio legítimo, una ley, capaz de restablecer el orden.'<sup>62</sup> On the contrary, he returns to utter a truth in the guise of a revenge that, a century afterwards, will allow the reader to revisit the official 'history' of the foundation of the village. This return constitutes the third part of the novel.

### (III) MALIHUEL AGAIN: THE PAST REVISITED

The return of the *gaucho* presents the most complex temporal level of *El sueño*. It is in this part that the narrator reveals that he/she belongs to the 'generaciones siguientes' (SSJ, 157) after that which founded the village. The oneiric/carnavalesque/narcotised scene in which Malihuel's population takes revenge on the *juez de paz*, following Rosendo's scheme, is considered nowadays by the inhabitants as 'confusas versiones de leyendas locales que nunca coincidirían si alguien se tomara el trabajo de cotejarlas' (SSJ, 159). Those 'confusas versiones' become in *El secreto* the history of the foundation, as one of its 'voices' makes explicit: 'Si le interesa la literatura me imagino que ya habrá leído *El sueño del señor juez*, que transcurre acá, justamente, le cuenta *toda la historia de la fundación*' (SV, 12). This version is confirmed by another 'voice', who states that 'la leyenda y la historia consagran [a Malihuel] como la Fuenteovejuna santafesina' (SV, 28). The version that presents Malihuel as 'la Fuenteovejuna santafesina' will suffer a fundamental transformation, since the narrator of *El secreto* begins his research with the hypothesis of a crime in a small town that is 'una conspiración, en la que todo el pueblo esté de acuerdo' (SV, 15). This conspiracy of an entire population plotting against a fellow neighbour/victim, instead of the state authority/perpetrator, will

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<sup>61</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)', in Borges, *Obras completas*, 3 vols (Emecé, 1990), I, pp. 561-3 (p. 562). A discussion of this Borges's passage unfolds in *Un yuppíe en la columna del Che Guevara*, as will be studied in chapter 4 (p. 226).

<sup>62</sup> José Hernández, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro*, 4828-9. I quote from *Antología de la poesía gauchesca*, ed. by Horacio Jorge Becco (Aguilar, 1972), pp. 1437-570; and Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 257. n30.

eventually prove true. Malihuel's population will thus become *active* accomplices of the state crimes.

The episode that inspires Malihuel's reputation casts the *juez de paz* in a situation in which 'el soñador obedece al soñado, la verdad del mundo cede ante la del teatro', making of him somebody who 'no sabe en qué plano está (si vive o sueña, si lo que hace es acción o actuación, si ve o imagina, si es persona o personaje).'<sup>63</sup> Although the whole episode is narrated from Don Urbano's befuddled point of view, the source of the story/history (a version orally conveyed through generations) only allows the 'author' to imagine the *juez de paz*'s reactions. Rather than a direct testimony, the episode should be considered the Baroque re-creation of a revenge facilitated by the secret administration of drugs stolen from the opiomaniac Dr Glitz. Through a seemingly theatrical portrayal of various characters and events in the life of the *juez de paz*, the foundational institutions supporting the social fabric of the nation—namely, family and Christian religion—are subjected to ridicule in a nightmarish scenario. The climax of this evening unfolds when Don Urbano Pedernera notices his own mother as a prostitute, awaiting him as her next client. If this vision constitutes the uttering of a truth—he is effectively told he is *un hijo de puta*—, the hypothetical consummation of this act would symbolise, albeit in a Baroque manner, an instance of incest, which, according to Kozicki, signifies the transgression of the 'prohibición estructurante' of Law, without which '*no serían pensables ni posibles las estructuras familiares y sociales [...] el orden del mundo.*'<sup>64</sup> Don Urbano confronts an intractable dilemma: either violate the Law, thereby precipitating the collapse of the order that upholds his position, or acquiesce to the Taboo, which imposes constraints not only on the realm of sexuality but also on his absolute authority over individuals, their rights, freedoms, and properties, a dominion he had hitherto enjoyed. As foretold by the inhabitant's dream, he discovers no foothold in civilisation, leaving him with no recourse but to depart from the village.

The return of the *gaucho* signifies a triumph over state authority, not necessarily because the events unfolded precisely as recorded, but rather because the *gaucho*,

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<sup>63</sup> Carlos Gamerro, *Ficciones barrocas. Una lectura de Borges, Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, Cortázar, Onetti y Felisberto Hernández* (Eterna Cadencia, 2010), p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, pp. 93 and 95. Italics in the original.

deemed the official emblem of the country, ‘la máxima expresión de la argentinidad’ by official standards,<sup>65</sup> has asserted this rendition as the authentic narrative. Apart from the truth that is uttered, both an insult and a repudiation, the episode allows the state authority to be named the culprit of events. In fact, Dr Glitz openly accuses the *juez de paz* with words that expand from the stealing of his drugs towards the entire situation in Malihuel: ‘¡Usted es el culpable!’ (SSJ, 155). The episode later gives rise to an annual carnivalesque celebration (SSJ, 159) that prolongs until the ‘Proceso’ (SV, 205). In those occasions, the statue of Don Urbano is mocked by the population of Malihuel by taking it to the places that the legend/story/history dictates he attended that foundational night. The ritual confirms Bakhtin’s notions about carnival as ‘the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life.’<sup>66</sup> This certainly implies, in Wesseling’s reading, ‘the parodic subversion of the established order [...] linked with the unfolding of an alternate Utopian order.’<sup>67</sup> The ‘subversive word’ feared by Hobbes and actually uttered by the *gaucho* is thus maintained for a century, when, after the elimination of the person who has spoken a truth, the population tacitly agrees to ‘archivar la ceremonia hasta nuevo aviso’ (SV, 206).<sup>68</sup> This conclusion carries additional political ramifications, which will be explored in the sections focusing on *El secreto*. Malihuel’s carnivalesque tradition, however, illustrates that the right bestowed upon individuals validates Hobbes’s concerns regarding the destabilising impact of unofficial truths on political order. The examination of this agreement will be undertaken in the ensuing section.

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<sup>65</sup> Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El gaucho indómito. De Martín Fierro a Perón, el emblema imposible de una nación desgarrada* (Siglo XXI, 2019), pp. 67 and 161.

<sup>66</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 123. Italics in the original.

<sup>67</sup> Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet. Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel* (John Benjamins, 1991), p. 156.

<sup>68</sup> The ‘Proceso’ actually banned Carnival festivities. I thank Dr Marcelo Leiras for this information.

## THE FORMATION OF A LEVIATHAN

With the publication of *Martín Fierro*, Ludmer contends that ‘la voz del gaucho y su nombre se transformaron en signos de la patria,’ yet the political dimension has been a consistent presence within the gauchesque since its inception by Bartolomé Hidalgo, who incorporates literal words from Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1762).<sup>69</sup> These illustrate a longstanding political tradition in Hispanic America, where the concept of agreement as the institutional legitimisation of power has persisted since the formation of the Spanish viceroalties.<sup>70</sup> The eventual constitutional organisation attained between 1853 and 1860 resulted from a congress convened, as stated in the preamble of the Magna Carta, ‘por voluntad y elección de las provincias que la componen, en cumplimiento de pactos preexistentes.’<sup>71</sup> It thus embodies the realisation of contractualist frameworks.

Nevertheless, by 1877, the agreement enshrined within constitutional law had not yet reached the entirety of the territory effectively governed by the state. In *El sueño*, this reality is exemplified by the portrayal of the *jueces de paz*’s authority as *de facto*, or at the very least, as a by-product of the ‘restrained democracy’ emblematic of the era.<sup>72</sup> Don Urbano’s title seems based on his military degree and participation in the military interventions that are forging the country (the wars of independence, civil wars, campaigns against Indigenous nations), though it is crucially due to the support of big landowners who are benefitting from the advance of ‘civilisation’. His institutional status is thus precarious, as Sabato remarks that ‘[e]l poder no puede sostenerse mucho tiempo sólo apoyado en la fuerza; requiere ser reconocido como autoridad legítima.’<sup>73</sup> For Hobbes, this results from a pact in which, Herrero states, ‘Estado y pueblo se reconocen mutuamente.’<sup>74</sup> The agreement will therefore simultaneously

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<sup>69</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, pp. 147 and 106.

<sup>70</sup> Sabato, *Pueblo y política*, pp. 11-5.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Préambulo,’ in Constitución de la Nación Argentina.

<sup>72</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, p. 41.

<sup>73</sup> Sabato, *Pueblo y política*, p. 13. For a comprehensive analysis of political legitimacy, see Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, in particular chapter 2 ‘Fundamento y legitimidad de la República’, pp. 67-128.

<sup>74</sup> Herrero, *Ficciones políticas*, p. 33.

assign the position of the state authority and the social place of the *gaucho* in the ‘*coyuntura de paz*’ that the conquest is imposing.<sup>75</sup>

Peace stands as the cornerstone of Hobbes’s theoretical framework of the state, since the covenant he envisions represents not merely a sequential or rational transition from the state of nature to civilisation, but rather serves as the mechanism to ensure the acknowledgment and submission of individuals to the Leviathan, thereby constituting the sole guarantee of order and indispensable peace for social life.<sup>76</sup> Appropriately, the Argentinian agreement appears to endorse the historical fact of ‘la generación por conquista de las repúblicas’. This implies, following Galimidi’s analysis, that the ‘violencia, explícita o latente, y [la] actitud de profunda reverencia ante las formas supremas de poder, real o imaginario’ showed by men in Hobbes’s state of nature, are translated to ‘los aspectos violentos y reverenciales que reviste la institución soberana’ after the ‘consentimiento que los derrotados han prestado a su vencedor, a condición de que este *suspenda el golpe de gracia, y los convierta en súbditos*.<sup>77</sup> The intrinsic contradiction of striving for peace while retaining the violent characteristics inherent in the state of nature, coupled with the prerogative of being outside the contract and the notion of forming a body politic, leads, in my interpretation, the Argentine state to perpetrate what Hobbes explicitly forbids: the breach of the agreement.

Some characteristics of Hobbes’s Leviathan induce the misinterpretation that will lead to that breaking of the contract. Hobbes defines his sovereign as ‘that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, (in Latin CIVITAS) which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended.’<sup>78</sup> The name is taken from the book of Job, Ch. 41, especially its last two verses,

where God having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, calleth him King of the Proud. *There is nothing*, saith he, *on earth, to be compared with him. He is made so as not to be afraid. He seeth every high thing below him; and is king of all the children of pride.*<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, p. 172. n12. Italics in the original.

<sup>76</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, pp. 91, 187, and 195.

<sup>77</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>78</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, The Introduction, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXVIII. 27. Italics in the original.

Hobbes clarifies that his ‘artificial man’ is ‘a *Mortal God*, to which we owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence.’<sup>80</sup> Despite this, there continues to be present in its name a Biblical tradition ‘of associating Leviathan with the Devil.’<sup>81</sup> In addition, Hobbes’s sovereign is appointed with the purpose of keeping peace and order, for which he must enjoy impunity whatever his actions are.<sup>82</sup> Legitimacy of power is thus crucially associated with its effectiveness. In this regard, after noting that in *Leviathan* XVII, 2 Hobbes asserts that ‘covenants, without the sword, are but words’, Rinesi emphasises that ‘la política se sostiene sobre relaciones de poder, de fuerza, de guerra, de muerte.’<sup>83</sup> This intricate relationship between legitimacy and effectiveness of a power echoing evil (even though distantly) will be sanctioned apropos the ultimate Argentine regime based on power, force, war, and death—the ‘Proceso’—when, in a 1990 decision, the Supreme Court of Justice,

upheld the validity of these [*de facto*] laws because military regimes were in possession of the coercive apparatus in society and could *assure peace and order*. In *Godoy*, the court asserted that the contrary conclusion would result in *a state of serious uncertainty and insecurity*.<sup>84</sup>

Following the judiciary’s reasoning, then, that uncertainty and insecurity would have led to the state of nature, paradoxically making of the effective capacity to assure ‘peace’ and ‘order’ a philosophical justification for dictatorships.

The diverse contractualist schemes converge in three shared requirements: 1) a state of nature; 2) an agreement to put an end to that state in order to create a social and political order; 3) the individuals needed to give their consent to establish the new order. In the following sub-sections, I will study these three common elements in *El sueño* which are respectively equated to the concept of ‘la frontera’; in the content of the contract; and the population who will sign it, verifying Hobbes’s separation between *authoritas* and *veritas*.

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<sup>80</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVII. 13. Italics in the original.

<sup>81</sup> Gaskin in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 477. n7.

<sup>82</sup> Matteucci, ‘Contractualismo’, pp. 361-2.

<sup>83</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 102.

<sup>84</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, pp. 156-7.

(I) THE STATE OF NATURE

Bobbio describes the state of nature as a state devoid of politics and inherently resistant to political structures, contrasting it with the framework of civil society. This condition primarily consists of individuals, although natural groupings like families may exist, who dwell outside formal societal structures yet exhibit sociability, freedom, and equality, and decide the transition from the state of nature to civil society through one or more conventions.<sup>85</sup> Hobbes characterises it thus:

during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man [...] so the nature of war, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE.<sup>86</sup>

In this condition in which ‘every man is enemy to every man’, Hobbes concludes that the main characteristic of the state of nature is ‘continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’<sup>87</sup> As Rinesi observes, the passage from the state of nature to that of civil society implies ‘*la obligación de cumplir todas las leyes y contratos*’.<sup>88</sup> This event—a contract among individuals establishing a law that regulates social life—was actually verified in the border. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, Matteucci explains, the agreement became in New England ‘el instrumento concreto’ for the formation of new societies that,

deben afrontar los duros y dramáticos problemas de la frontera y del *wilderness* (los espacios desiertos) [...], fuera de cualquier jurisdicción política [donde surgen] nuevas ciudades pequeñas que establecen como fundamento de su existencia un *covenant o agreement*, suscrito por todos los propietarios libres, con el fin de constituir un “body politic incorporated” o un “civil body politicke”.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII. 9.

<sup>88</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 186. Italics in the original.

<sup>89</sup> Matteucci, ‘Contractualismo’, p. 363. Italics and English expressions in the original. The voyage of the *Mayflower* in 1620 was, Gaskin affirms, ‘probably known to Hobbes [...] the need for mutual co-operation and order, in a situation where no authority existed to enforce the King’s writ, resulted in a written compact or constitution in which the Pilgrim

The state of nature/war is, thus, an always present threat to civil societies.<sup>90</sup> In *El sueño*, this possibility is known to the *juez de paz*, who verbalises the risks of civil disintegration that the advance of civilisation is not entirely able to prevent. On the contrary:

El corrimiento de la frontera [...] no había determinado el fin del peligro indio, apenas que los malones arrancaran más al sur, y que Malihuel fuera ahora, en lugar de uno de los fortines a esquivar, uno más de los asentamientos a saquear; lo cual, explicaba el flamante juez de paz, nos hace no *menos* sino *más* vulnerables que antes (*SSJ*, 26, italics in the original).

If the state of nature is poised to materialise through the actions of an external enemy, the primary threat to state authority arises from internal sources. A regression to this pre-political state would essentially entail reinstating the egalitarian status characteristic of that stage. As Rinesi clarifies, there exists no inherent ‘principio natural de dominación de un hombre sobre otro,’ which, conversely, is ‘la condición *sine qua non* para el funcionamiento de *toda sociedad moderna*.’<sup>91</sup> Consequently, the state of nature would position the *juez de paz* on the same political footing as the *gaucho*, thereby implying the possibility of a new and distinct contract to govern civil society’s affairs.

## (II) THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The consensus among contractualist thinkers is that the social contract constitutes a tool of political emancipation only, that affixes the social structure based on family and private property.<sup>92</sup> Hobbes’s purpose was, in Rinesi’s words, ‘*inducir a sus lectores a reconocer al Estado, al Leviatán, como creación suya, a reconocerse como autores de ese Leviatán, y consecuentemente como ciudadanos, a obedecerle*’, aiming thus not to institute a new political order, but to safeguard or reproduce the existing one, that must be obeyed to keep

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Fathers bound themselves into “a civil body politic” for the sake of order and the enforcement of law.’ See Gaskin in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. xxxv.

<sup>90</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 177.

<sup>91</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, pp. 24 and 141. Italics in the original.

<sup>92</sup> Matteucci, ‘Contractualismo’, p. 354.

peace and order.<sup>93</sup> Among other specificities, Galimidi stresses this narrowly entwined relationship by saying that, for the signatory, the social contract implies to ‘asumir *como propios* todos los actos y juicios’ of Leviathan.<sup>94</sup>

The agreement proposed in the novel follows that contractualist pattern: the *gaucho* is given a legal status that freezes his subjected social position. He legally ceases to be, in Ludmer’s analysis,

el gaucho “vago”, no propietario y sin trabajo ni domicilio fijos,  
[que forma] la conocida ecuación desposeídos = delincuentes  
[para convertirse en] mano de obra para los hacendados y de  
soldados para el ejército.<sup>95</sup>

Yet again, Rosendo Villalba epitomises these circumstances. Having previously served as a soldier in the war of the ‘Triple Alianza’ (1864-1870) and on the frontier, he now toils as a rural labourer in the fields of his former commander. A century later, amidst the regime that moulds the totalitarian corruption of the nineteenth-century Leviathan, another Villalba reaffirms the enduring subjugation of the *gaucho*: ‘los Villalba siempre fuimos gentes de orden y respetuosas de la autoridad’ (SV, 154). Although by then the *gaucho* was somehow able to acquire a modest portion of those lands his ancestors had helped to gain from the Indigenous populations (the twentieth-century Villalba owns a ‘chacra’ [SV, 152]), the situation does not alter what Viñas considers to be ‘*civilización latifundista*’ at whose centre he finds ‘esa unidad productiva representada por la estancia desde fines del siglo XVIII.’<sup>96</sup> In a passage of the novel, the *juez de paz* denies the *gaucho* the lands that had been promised to him with words that verbalise the state policy regarding those lands while actually referring to *his* own:

—¡Qué tierras ni tierras! ¡Desde cuándo un gaucho roñoso va a tener tierras acá! ¡Quién te ha metido esa idea en la cabeza a vos, para qué vas a querer un título de propiedad si ni siquiera sabés leer! ¡A ver si te creés que yo me juego el pellejo arrancándosela al indio para después regalársela a un pelagatos!

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<sup>93</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 195. Roca’s first presidential period—that is to begin in 1880, as the political result of his ‘Campaigns to the Desert’—will significantly deploy the slogan ‘Paz y Administración,’ which ‘respondía bien a una *aspiración colectiva* y a una *necesidad operativa*’. See Floria and García Belsunce, *Historia de los argentinos*, p. 694.

<sup>94</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 153.

<sup>95</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, pp. 37 and 38.

<sup>96</sup> Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, pp. 109 and 19. Italics in the original.

¡La tierra es para el que la trabaja, no para vagos como ustedes!  
(*SSJ*, 67).

Don Urbano's discourse amalgamates the dual authority wielded by both the state and a private landowner, thereby delineating a different boundary—a social one—for the *gaucho*. In addition to idleness, an attribute traditionally associated with denizens of the *pampas*, illiteracy is now appended, further marginalising him from the rights bestowed by civilisation. A century later, his progeny may possess a modest *chacra*, yet their subordinate status remains unaltered, as they continue to serve the dictates of authority. In *El secreto*, the land ultimately acquired is utilised for the clandestine interment of a victim of state terrorism, compelling the *gaucho* to unwittingly become an accomplice of a state crime.

Land ownership emerges as a pivotal facet in the trajectory of civilisation, intertwined with the coercive measures employed by the state to assert control over it. The *juez de paz* is depicted as owning 'campos ganados al salvaje que en recompensa a sus servicios el gobierno le había vendido a un precio nominal' (*SSJ*, 25), subsequently protecting them with a 'zanja' (*SSJ*, 66). Initially ineffective as a state strategy for safeguarding civilisation, this measure evolves into an efficacious tool for consolidating private property, at the expense of those endeavouring to establish a socio-economic standing in the emerging era. This is exemplified by Musurana, a newcomer with political affiliations, who is deemed an(other) 'gaucho roñoso' (*SSJ*, 67) by the authority, thereby depriving him of the land promised to him and consequently relegating him to the opposite side of the aforementioned 'social frontier'.

While Musurana's claim is solved by the state authority via a treacherous massacre, another dispute about lands initially destined to *gauchos*/soldiers had also been ended by the state through the means of treason, torture, and death. It was instilled by 'la promesa cierta de una ley de tierras para recompensar a los regresados de la guerra' and then unexpectedly given to a European immigrant, 'un tal Patricio Mulligan' (*SSJ*, 16). The state's preference for European immigrants to the detriment of the *gaucho* with regard to 'populating the desert' is outlined by Don Urbano's plans to settle 'una colonia agrícola como las del Norte de la provincia, sólo para gringos' (*SSJ*, 60). However, the essential alliance remains that between state and big landowners, as

will be confirmed in *El secreto*. A century afterwards, a truth regarding that foundational coalition will be the cause of the state crime: while the *terrateniente* commands the death of the person who utters truth ‘de un balazo, a la vista de todos, así sin vueltas’ (SV, 41), in the fashion of Musurana’s murder, the political authority gives his explicit approval, and the security forces carry out the deed. Those ends bring into mind both *Martín Fierro* and Hobbes. In *La vuelta*, ‘el moreno’ compares law with a cobweb that only traps small insects yet is broken by the big ones (‘el hombre rico’, ‘el que mande’), also echoing/anticipating Felipe’s self-perception in *Las Islas*, to later establish:

la ley es como el cuchillo:  
no ofende a quien la maneja.<sup>97</sup>

These three murders—Musurana’s, the veterans of the ‘Triple Alianza’ War’s, and Ezcurra’s—also confirm Hobbes’s dictum: as soon as the covenant of words appears ineffective for keeping the social status quo, the sword is called into action.

### (III) THE SIGNATORY

In the previous section it was seen that the Hobbesian pact substantially establishes the legitimation of an existent power—the state—that is achieved by force. In Galimidi’s words, this is enacted by a person who ‘dispone de un ya objetivamente comprobado poder visible de destrucción —y, por tanto, de protección— [que] no depende de la voluntad y capacidad de cohesión de sus futuros dominados.’<sup>98</sup> These become the signatory required to legitimise the *de facto* power. If the dreams of the *señor juez* expose a new reality of the country that the gauchesque cannot account for any longer, they also create that counterpart of the agreement. The character who embodies experience and wisdom, ‘el viejo Santoro’, puts it to Rosendo with these words:

¿Qué éramos nosotros antes? Amuchaos a la orilla de la laguna  
ni siquiera como hacienda que anda junta sino como fieras que  
en la seca por acaso se acercaron a abrevar. ¿Quién le dijo que

<sup>97</sup> Hernández, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro*, 4237-8 and 4245-6.

<sup>98</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 163. In agreement, Herrero states that ‘el Estado [...] no supone un nuevo pacto, sino una relación de *protección y obediencia*’ that can precede the original agreement. See Herrero, *Ficciones políticas*, p. 37.

todo esto, los campos, las casas y la laguna, *nosotros mismos* acá sentaos, *no somos más que un sueño suyo?* Levantar un rancho no es echar raíces, joven amigo. Estamos unidos al lugar apenas tenuemente, como los panaderos al tallo de un cardo, y el primer viento que pase nos desparrama volando por toda la llanura (*SSJ*, 40-1).

Implicitly concurring with Hobbes, Old Santoro suggests that society is not an inherent reality but rather the result of a deliberate decision by a ‘body politic’ already endowed with authority—the ‘Conqueror Leviathan’, as it were. In the following century, the narrator of *El sueño* endorses Santoro’s vision:

Hasta que los sueños del señor juez empezaron a mezclarlos y combinarlos como a los naipes de una baraja, los habitantes del paraje denominado Malihuel desde los tiempos anteriores al recuerdo *no habían tenido mucho que los uniera* (*SSJ*, 23).

Malihuel appears, like the country itself in the version of national history taught in school, a creation of the military.<sup>99</sup> While the village was originally a fortress, all its inhabitants (men and women alike: as soldiers and as prostitutes) are linked to the army. If, in Sebrelí’s words, ‘después de casi un siglo de guerras civiles, anarquía y dictadura [...] se logró por fin *organizar un Estado nacional*’, that immediately made it necessary to ‘*crear a los argentinos*,’<sup>100</sup> it is thus the army that creates the population, with the unifying feature (outlined by the authority’s dreams) of being essentially criminal. In Ludmer’s analysis, ‘el gaucho que va al ejército no es delincuente, sino que *sale delincuente*,’ a fact later sanctioned by civilisation since ‘[l]a ley crea delincuentes.’<sup>101</sup>

The *juez de paz* openly acknowledges the necessity for the populace to endorse the agreement that legitimises state authority, particularly evident when the penalties imposed for crimes within his dreams drive residents to desert Malihuel. This episode stresses the vital reliance of authority on the counterpart of the covenant, serving as a cautionary tale, ‘al juez sobre el peligro de que el paraje se le despoblara antes de que se lo declararan pueblo,’ leading him to proclaim ‘en un bando que nadie podía abandonar el distrito sin el pasaporte correspondiente, que por supuesto él no les

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<sup>99</sup> Romero (ed.), *La Argentina en la escuela*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>100</sup> Juan José Sebrelí, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas. Los orígenes de la crisis* (Sudamericana, 2002), p. 63.

<sup>101</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, pp. 227 and 245.

otorgaría' (*SSJ*, 57). That necessity places the state authority in a paradoxical situation: underscoring the state's dependence on the population's acquiescence for its legitimacy, the counterpart required to conclude the pact must have the right to utter a word. The state must therefore recognise as political subjects those individuals or groups not previously recognised as such, and who, through the word, become 'seres susceptibles de hacer promesas y *firmar contratos*.'<sup>102</sup> Illiteracy is brandished to exclude the *gaucho* from the right of property, yet that fault is circumvented—as actually happens in the novel—by somebody else signing a public document on the *gaucho*'s behalf when the state needs it. That is, by a 'fictional political' act devised by Thomas Hobbes: representation.<sup>103</sup>

A last, substantial Hobbesian interpretation is to be found in the *juez de paz*'s dreams about Malihuel's population. Explaining to Rosendo the ultimate meaning of that oneiric activity (that neither the *gaucho* nor the gauchesque have the means to understand), Santoro wonders:

¿Desde cuándo en los sueños las cosas y las personas hacen lo que nosotros queremos? Si justamente ahí es donde se portan más locas que nunca. [...] *Si el juez nos sueña es para que podamos ser libres* (*SSJ*, 41).

Santoro's words verbalise what Leiser Madanes has called the 'paradox of tolerance', by which the mightier the absolutist Leviathan is, the less at risk by the exercise of his subjects' rights he feels.<sup>104</sup> When the *gaucho* complains that '[n]i en el fuerte teníamos tan poco albedrío' (*SSJ*, 41), the voice of wisdom of experience refutes his view by again drawing upon the aforementioned Hobbes's construct. The ending of the novel will confirm this interpretation, as the uttering of truth (the right to the word) will be guaranteed by the covenant.

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<sup>102</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 232.

<sup>103</sup> Herrero, *Ficciones políticas*, p. 34.

<sup>104</sup> For Madanes, the Hobbesian sovereign should be conceived as 'un árbitro cuyo arbitraje no aspira a determinar la verdad sino a lograr la paz.' In Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 174. n17.

The crimes committed by Malihuel's inhabitants in Don Urbano's dreams are symbolic of the nascent state's efforts to establish a legal system through the materialisation of an urban centre. These crimes, by their very nature, rely on the existence of future laws. While the repetition of the dreams reflects the uncertainty and arbitrariness of the period of transformations the nation is undergoing, significantly, no one questions the truth of the dreamed events. The territorial expansion that the 'Conquest of the Desert' is securing for the country, in my view, accounts for the expansion of reality towards other uncharted fields, in the novel represented by those oneiric regions. The notion of dreams as an undiscovered territory appears confirmed by Old Santoro, who explains the matter thus:

—Por *las tierras del sueño*. *Las tierras del sueño son tan ilimitadas* que si un hombre al trote se largara por ella no le alcanzarían todas las noches de una vida para cruzarlas. Y *recorrería lugares que no son de este mundo tampoco* (SSJ, 37).

The limitlessness of the lands of dreams appears to confer boundless authority upon the state, granting it access to realms beyond reality and the ability to attribute imaginary criminal acts to its populace. This phenomenon notably reinforces the authoritarian inclinations of the era, as highlighted by Nino, who observes that 'authoritarianism thrives by misleading and confusing the public not only about values but also *about empirical facts*.'<sup>105</sup> Such a confusion will be central in the twentieth century for the notion of concentration camp, a place where facts become indistinguishable from law. In Giorgio Agamben's words, 'the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law *on the basis of a factual state of danger*, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement [in the camp], which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order.'<sup>106</sup> In the concentration camps, then, the sovereign no longer limits himself 'to deciding on the exception on the basis of recognizing a given factual situation (danger to public safety),' but, on the contrary, 'he now *de facto* produces the

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<sup>105</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 169.

situation as a consequence of his decision on the exception.<sup>107</sup> The camp will thus be the space where the sovereign materialises that limitless power bestowed upon him by territorial expansion. In the 340 concentration camps that the ‘Proceso’ ran between 1976 and 1982 along the whole of the national territory, the military had absolute power over the life, death, and even maternity of the victims, as discussed in chapter 2, making the perpetrators believe that ‘[a]quí adentro somos Dios.’<sup>108</sup> They arrived indeed, as Old Santoro had foreseen, at one of those ‘lugares que no son de este mundo.’

The *juez de paz*’s dreams soon affect the lives of the inhabitants of Malihuel, as the narrator notes:

poco a poco los dispersos habitantes del paraje comenzaron a otorgar un valor oracular o profético a los sueños del juez de paz, y sus vidas empezaron, al principio imperceptiblemente, a transitar la senda que ellos les marcaban (*SSJ*, 20).

The attribution of prophetic qualities to the dreamlike manifestations of the *juez* may appear surprising, yet they are not entirely incongruous. The ‘Conquest of the Desert’ was often depicted using imagery and rhetoric that ideologically associated these military campaigns with the actions and figures, both historical and mythological, of ancient civilisations. In his classic study on the topic, for instance, Viñas deems ‘la campaña al desierto como etapa superior de la conquista española,’ while he also describes the military participating in the endeavour as ‘esa *intertextualidad de continuos* con la serie de los generales de Alejandro Magno.’<sup>109</sup> Among other instances, Viñas cites Sarmiento describing that ‘a trueque de hacer un *poema épico*, Ercilla *hizo del cacique Caupolicán un Agamemnon, de Lautaro un Ajax, de Rengo un Aquiles*’; Eduardo Wilde parodying Napoleon’s words at the feet of the Egyptian pyramids, ‘[d]esde el río Negro, cuatrocientos años de historia nos contemplan’; and General Roca affirming in a letter of 1880 that Argentine nationality ‘tiene que formarse, como *las pirámides de Egipto y el poder de los imperios*, a costa de la sangre y el sudor de muchas generaciones.’<sup>110</sup> Don Urbano Pedernera appears then fully in context when, as seen before, he had

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<sup>107</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 170.

<sup>108</sup> Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (Colihue, 1998), pp. 29 and 54. Italics in the original.

<sup>109</sup> Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, pp. 279 and 264. Italics in the original.

<sup>110</sup> Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, pp. 279, 54, and 107.

equated the Indigenous people to the barbarian threatening the border like that of Ancient Rome.

The ascription of prophetic capabilities to the dreams of the *juez de paz* appears to resonate with the political and cultural symbolism prevalent during the historical epoch. Oracles in Ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and in the Semitic world were a primary source of legitimation of power, where a tradition of great politicians, priests and legislators held special relations with oracles and thus became, David Hernández de la Fuente explains, ‘profetas y padres de la patria predestinados por la divinidad a dotar a la ciudad de sus leyes.’<sup>111</sup> These

figuras semidivinas, hombres sagrados o [...] *maestros de verdad*, tienen especial relación con la esfera mántica, en la vertiente de la consulta personal, el coloquio o comunión con la divinidad [...], a fin de obtener las mejores leyes para los hombres.<sup>112</sup>

Freud elucidates that, in ‘pre-scientific’ times, dreams were regarded ‘as either a favourable or a hostile manifestation by *higher powers, daemonic and divine*.’<sup>113</sup> From a psychoanalytic reading of law, Kozicki observes that ‘la Ley, con mayúsculas, el más enigmático y formidable recurso que se dio el hombre para vivir y convivir [...] se basa en un enigma; *es un saber, casi secreto, al que solo tienen acceso los iniciados* [...], *a la manera oracular*.’<sup>114</sup> For his part, Siperman notes that juridical discourse

es también oracular; jueces y juristas hablan entonces en el nombre sagrado de la Ley, que se confunde con la Razón misma. Es a través de las diversas facetas de lo jurídico como se va delineando el modo de construirse la verdad en Occidente.<sup>115</sup>

Oracles occupy a central position in both the ‘enigmatic’ and ‘sacred’ origins of and the accessibility to the law, for which the notion of truth is integral, thereby conferring a privileged social and political status upon those believed to possess divinatory abilities.

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<sup>111</sup> David Hernández de la Fuente, ‘Oráculo y ley. Una aproximación a la influencia política de la adivinación en la Antigüedad’, *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 2.22 (2009), pp. 299-309 (p. 301).

<sup>112</sup> Hernández de la Fuente, ‘Oráculo y ley’, p. 301. Italics in the original.

<sup>113</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘On Dreams’, in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (Norton, 1995), pp. 142-72 (p. 143).

<sup>114</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 30. Rosler also outlines ‘la opacidad del razonamiento normativo’ in particular opposition to the transparency of the reasoning about values. See Rosler, *Razones públicas*, p. 182.

<sup>115</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 83.

In addition to its specific importance in moments of foundation, Hernández de la Fuente outlines that ‘la adivinación se perfila no sólo como fuente de derecho, sino también como instancia de resolución de conflictos e *instrumento de control social y legitimación política*.’<sup>116</sup> Oracular powers condense in the figure of the *juez de paz*, then, access to the law, to the sacred, and to truth, while conferring him tools for both social control and political legitimation.

In *El sueño*, the official religion of the nation contributes to the consolidation of that tradition at the service of political power by adding a relevant feature to dreaming: impunity. When a priest arrives in Malihuel to regularise the spiritual affairs of the population regarding God, the knowledge that all sins confessed have been committed in dreams prompts him to exasperatedly clarify:

¡Podés soñar que te surtís a todas las chinas de la provincia por lo que a mí me importa! ¡Podés soñar que le tocás el culo a la Virgen, por lo que le importa a *Dios*! ¡En los sueños uno hace lo que quiere, para qué mierda están si no! (*SSJ*, 63, italics in the original).

If in dreams even blasphemy is allowed, it is only communicated to the state authority. Don Urbano receives the priest’s words as ‘una experiencia mística, una revelación’ with the effect that ‘todo el día se sintió feliz, *lavado de todas sus culpas*’, before concluding that ‘bastaba que algo fuera soñado para *volverse inocente*’ (*SSJ*, 63). This trait of impunity guaranteed by religion to oneiric activity will substantially affect the Hobbesian agreement. Since ‘dreamed’ events are protected by impunity, the Argentine ‘Mortal God’ will later recognise no restrictions in its pursuit of peace and order so long as his actions come from the ‘boundless lands’ where everything is possible—where he feels like the ‘Immortal God’. Hobbes was indeed present during the times leading up to, and following, the 1976 coup d’état, as Sebastián Carassai points out:

“Tiempos hobbesianos”, escribió Carlos Floria hacia el final de 1974, en una expresión que resultó a la vez *actual y profética*. Ningún año de la historia del siglo XX argentino se acercó más al *estado de naturaleza* que 1975, ninguno como los dos primeros

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<sup>116</sup> Hernández de la Fuente, ‘Oráculo y ley’, p. 306.

años del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional se pareció más al *Leviatán*.<sup>117</sup>

Originating from a pre-civil society era,<sup>118</sup> oracles encapsulate the sole instance wherein truth serves as the foundation of law—namely, that *veritas* supports *authoritas*. Consequently, when the inhabitants of Malihuel endeavour to resist the novel reality engendered by the dreams of the *juez de paz* through an intricate scheme of collective dreaming, their efforts culminate in utter futility. At that stage, when *veritas* has not yet been taken on by the population, a scheme the women of Malihuel put into practice appears slightly more effective. They try to uncover, and whenever possible to prevent, the obscure activities of political and social control of the state authority. These actions embody an ethics of rejection, as Gloria did in *Las Islas*, adding thus to the links between the two historical periods. Such links include, apart from repressing members of civil society for supposed deeds that power deems illegal, the fact that both Don Urbano Pedernera and the dictatorial authorities of the 1976-1983 regime hold civil titles obtained/usurped as a result of their military careers and activities. In the assumed quality of ‘maestros de verdad’ of the oracular powers, they are therefore reuniting *veritas* with *authoritas* to better subjugate those under their rule. It is in this context that one of Malihuel’s inhabitants can say: ‘El juez no era justo pero tampoco mentiroso’ (*SSJ*, 16). Only the agreement verifies, in Rinesi’s words, ‘la distancia que existe en Hobbes entre el ámbito del poder y el de la verdad’ since the sovereign, by the means of his authority, ‘[t]rae la paz, pero no la verdad.’<sup>119</sup> Truth is thus to be assumed by individuals.

In line with *Martín Fierro*, the figure who opposes, subsequent to enduring the injustices inflicted by, the *juez de paz* is a *gaucho*. In *El sueño*, this role is embodied by

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<sup>117</sup> Sebastián Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común: la naturalización de la violencia* (Siglo XXI, 2013), p. 179. The context of the 1976 coup confirms the actuality of Hobbes’s concerns. In Novaro and Palermo’s words, ‘el fantasma de la “disolución nacional” que recorrió durante esos meses [previos al golpe] la sociedad argentina terminó otorgando a los militares la condición que siempre se habían atribuido a sí mismos: *la de garantía última de la unidad y el orden de la nación*.’ See Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983. Del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Paidós, 2002), pp. 30-1.

<sup>118</sup> As, according to Hobbes, the prophet was the supreme authority during the realm of natural law. See Herrero, *Ficciones políticas*, p. 112.

<sup>119</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, pp. 122-3. n16.

Rosendo Villalba, the criminal/victim of Don Urbano's initial dream. Analogous to Hernández's character, Rosendo has served as a soldier on 'la frontera' and later forsakes civilisation to pursue an ultimately futile life in the 'desert', only to eventually re-join civilised society. Rosendo also shares with Fierro a transformation that, in Viñas's description vis-à-vis the latter, 'se lleva a cabo *en el espacio de los indios* [...], comprueba *las posibilidades reales que hay más allá de la frontera*.'<sup>120</sup> Unlike that of Martín Fierro, however, Rosendo's return is not to submit to the new political order, but to confront it. It is in the wilderness that he is able to give a meaning to his dialogue with Old Santoro, when Rosendo's uneasiness with the situation, and with the explanations received, leads to the following exchange:

—¿Qué es esto? ¿Una *payada*?  
 —Algo así. Pero *no con usted* —le contestó Rosendo sonriendo  
 (*SSJ*, 40).

If, as Ludmer states, '[e]l gaucho puede "cantar" o "hablar" para todos, en verso, porque lucha por los ejércitos de la patria: su derecho a la voz se asienta en las armas,'<sup>121</sup> that voice is expressed through the *payada*. *Payada* is, in my reading, the 'right to the word' that the *gaucho*/populace acquires in the agreement.

*Payada* is a form of art in which the singing of poetic verses is frequently organised as a *contrapunto*, a sort of symbolic duel between two *payadores*. On a political level, Sylvain B. Poosson explains, *payada* is the discourse of the marginalised social sectors, mainly blacks and *gauchos*, who express a demand for 'political status within the elite-controlled government of Buenos Aires [...] a political weapon to regain possession of blacks' basic rights.'<sup>122</sup> Inherent to *payada* is the notion of 'desafío' that,

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<sup>120</sup> Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, p. 169.

<sup>121</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, p. 39.

<sup>122</sup> Sylvain B. Poosson, 'Entre tango y payada: The Expression of Blacks in Nineteenth-Century Argentina', *CLA Journal*, 47.3 (2004), pp. 343-65 (pp. 354, 345, and 360). Poosson remarks that, while the *gaucho* belonged to rural areas, 'the bulk of the Africans were concentrated in Buenos Aires', where they had been brought as slaves, and disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century (pp. 356 and 347). Their traces seem to have been so minutely effaced from Argentinian society that, for instance, when a critic of such social awareness as David Viñas refers to the victims of the 'república oligárquica argentina,' branding them 'los primeros "desaparecidos" de esa matriz inicial generadora,' he includes the 'gaucho', the 'indio', and the European immigrant, 'el *gringo* rioplatense,' but makes no mention of the African population. See Viñas, *Indios, ejército y frontera*, p. 160. Italics in the original.

in Ludmer's words, enacts a kind of 'guerra simbólica [en la que] la agresión sirve para señalar e identificar al rival, al enemigo.'<sup>123</sup> It is the pattern of the most prominent *payador* of the Buenos Aires area, Gabino Ezeiza (1858-1916), a black man whose poems mostly entail 'a duel between him (as a symbol of the oppressed) and the rulers (as the oppressors).'<sup>124</sup> Significantly, the *payada* that takes place towards the end of *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* stages that 'duel' between the two archetypal marginalised characters of the time, i.e., the *gaucho* and the black man. However, the *payada* of *La vuelta* does not escape, in my view, the antagonism oppressor/oppressed. On the one hand, the *payada* is not without conflict based on racial conditions, as is emphasised by the fact that Fierro's opponent, 'el moreno', has no identification apart from that of his racial traits. On the other hand, Fierro has returned to civilisation to embody the *gaucho* that looks for 'un principio legítimo, una ley, capaz de restablecer el orden.'<sup>125</sup> It is in his submission to the values of the ongoing project of nation that he characterises black people drawing upon an animalisation that will be later employed to facilitate massacres.<sup>126</sup> This maybe explains why, as Paulina L. Alberto observes, 'Afro-Argentines were *ambiguous figures* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [...] excluded from elite definitions of national culture' who 'became symbols of Argentina's *expanding popular sectors and emerging working classes*.'<sup>127</sup> As a forecast of the fate of those who in the 1970s defied power in the name of 'oppressed' sectors (the 'cabecitas negras'), Afro-Argentines suffered a similar 'ambiguous' destiny to that the dictator Jorge Rafael Videla described about 'las miles de personas secuestradas y torturadas por el régimen terrible que encabezaba [...]': "Los desaparecidos no están *ni vivos ni muertos*: están desaparecidos".<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, p. 159.

<sup>124</sup> Poosson, 'Entre tango y payada', p. 359.

<sup>125</sup> Andermann, *Mapas de poder*, p. 257. n30.

<sup>126</sup> For instance, Fierro compares the blacks first with the 'mulita' regarding the quantity of their children, and then with spiders, to which he attributes bad nature: 'suele ser de mala entraña: / se vuelve como *la araña*, / siempre dispuesta a picar.' See Hernández, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro*, 4503-5.

<sup>127</sup> Paulina L. Alberto, 'El Negro Raúl: Lives and Afterlives of an Afro-Argentine Celebrity, 1886 to the Present', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 96.4 (2016), pp. 669-710 (p. 687).

<sup>128</sup> José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski, "Cómo sucedieron estas cosas". *Representar masacres y genocidios* (Katz, 2014), p. 133.

The political connotations of the *payada* between Rosendo and the *juez de paz* are to be read in the context in which the *gaucho* is the only oppressed figure. Rosendo's return does not aspire to dispute the institutional power of the *juez de paz*/the state, as this would be beyond the *payada*'s aim.<sup>129</sup> More appropriately, he is about to articulate the version of history that 'las generaciones siguientes' will accept as truthful. By signing the agreement that sanctions civil society and legitimates the power of the 'conqueror Leviathan', the period of oracles is ended—*authoritas* is divested from *veritas* for the making of law. This is seen in the final pages of *El sueño*. Even though Rosendo's plot forces don Urbano to leave the place over which the nation is consolidating its dominion, this end cannot be interpreted as a defeat of the state. On the contrary, the state's 'sueño máspreciado' is being materialised—the *agrimensor* eventually arrives to give official approval to the village, which is named, after the *juez de paz*'s wish, San Urbano—and it will develop during the following century as projected by the ruling 'generación del 80.'<sup>130</sup> The narrator confirms all this when Malihuel enjoys a period of 'prosperidad' as an established lake-resort, where,

con el tiempo llegó el ferrocarril y se multiplicaron los comercios, y se llenaron las calles de familias de vestimenta exótica, hablando en lenguas que ya nadie podía entender (*SSJ*, 157).

The state has therefore succeeded in establishing a civilised, modern nation, populated by the descendants of immigrants who have forgotten their languages (their roots) in their incorporation to that nation. Complying with their part in the agreement, people have decided the truth of historical facts, as is evidenced when they pay homage 'al ya fallecido fundador con estatua ecuestre en la plaza del pueblo' (*SSJ*, 158) holding a thistle in his hand, as the story/history/legend of the foundation establishes that he

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<sup>129</sup> This reading is given by Garibotto, who regards the entire novel as 'la textualización de una *payada* en la que los contrincantes —el letrado y los gauchos; el representante del poder oficial y sus subalternos— *luchan por la hegemonía*. Y quien gane la batalla va a ser en la novela quien consiga la hegemonía sobre ese saber aún no codificado (aún no normalizado ni utilizado como eje de regulación) que es el campo de lo onírico; *quien domine los sueños dominará la ley y tendrá el control sobre el Estado*.' See Garibotto, *Contornos en negativo*, p. 201.

<sup>130</sup> As Oscar Terán puts it, the construction of a modern nation-state required 'procesos de modernización que suponían cambios profundos (como la inmigración, el ferrocarril, el progreso y el crecimiento económico).' See Oscar Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina. Diez lecciones iniciales, 1810-1980* (Siglo XXI, 2008), p. 109.

had at his awakening after the nightmarish revenge. In my interpretation, the significance of this thistle lies not in providing Coleridgean proof of the events' reality, but rather as evidence affirming the *accepted* truth regarding the village's establishment. Emphasising the process of truth attribution, the narrator also clarifies that by this juncture 'el pueblo había revertido su *denominación oficial* a la original de Malihuel' (*SSJ*, 158). If, as Ludmer elucidates, 'los autores [de la gauchesca] aparecen como los que transcriben y no como los que "inventan",'<sup>131</sup> the narrator of *El sueño* assumes the voice of the *gaucho*—that is, he/she utters truth as a product of that agreement reached in the *payada* between the *gaucho* and the *juez de paz*.

For Hobbes, the pact by which the state is dispossessed of truth undermines the strength of the sovereign, facilitating thus the conditions for a return to the state of nature/war. As Rosler expresses, Hobbes 'cree que la retórica, si no *el lenguaje general*, es una "trompeta de sedición".'<sup>132</sup> It is thus essential for the sovereign to impose, in Rinesi's words, 'un relato único del pasado, para evitar las habladurías y las murmuraciones y para lograr que las palabras quieran decir una cosa y sólo una.'<sup>133</sup> Since, as argued, the state holds the power of arbitrarily designating the Argentinians as criminals (the internal enemy) yet conceding the 'right to the word' (to utter truths) to the *gaucho*/population, this agreement will face a momentous crisis in the 1970s, as will be analysed in the following sections.

#### EL SECRETO Y LAS VOCES: IN SEARCH OF A NEW AGREEMENT

Truth, in *El secreto*, is the articulating element in two different ways: it involves an investigation, during the winter months of 1996, of a crime committed almost twenty years before, in February 1977; and it is a state crime caused by the utterance of a truth ultimately regarding the foundation of the state itself. Hobbes's fears about unofficial truths challenging '*un relato oficial de los hechos, monolítico y universalmente aceptado*' appear confirmed through a reading of *Hamlet*:

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<sup>131</sup> Ludmer, *El género gauchesco*, p. 89. n8.

<sup>132</sup> Rosler, *Razones públicas*, p. 130.

<sup>133</sup> Rinesi in Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 17.

Como en Elsinor, donde la sedición, el desorden y las luchas surgen como consecuencia de las múltiples interpretaciones “privadas” de los hechos y de las narraciones, aquí —en la Inglaterra de Hobbes— *es también la pluralidad de interpretaciones, versiones y lecturas [...] la causa de las conmociones y de la anarquía [...]* en Hobbes, como en *Hamlet*, la infección del cuerpo político comienza por los oídos, y la corrupción se propaga “*de oído en oído*”.<sup>134</sup>

If *Hamlet* can be read as an anticipation of Hobbes’s concerns about the safety of the Leviathan, the ‘unofficial truth’ uttered some time before the 1976 coup bears an unambiguous Hamletian title: ‘Algo huele mal en Malihuel’ (*SV*, 27), which, in its very name (‘Mal i huel’) carries a Hamletian allusion from its origins.<sup>135</sup> In my reading, this situation in the mid-1970s makes it necessary for the Argentine state to search for a new agreement—a ‘pacto de sangre, con la sangre de otros’ (*SV*, 67)—, which will be now based on complicity with its population. By expanding thus the ‘grey zone’ of the concentration camp, it will consist in the annihilation of that dissident who, through his/her right of uttering truth granted by the foundational pact of the nation, has placed the state (the ‘Mortal God’) at risk of disintegration.

In addition to its explicit reference to *Hamlet*, *El secreto* contains numerous direct allusions to Greek tragedy, forming the primary focus of my analysis of this novel. While the murder of Darío Ezcurra is almost unanimously considered by Malihuel’s inhabitants as a sacrifice, that of his mother, Delia Alvarado, will be explained through tragedy regarding the role of women (and specifically of mothers of state victims) in the public scene of Argentina’s last dictatorship. Tragedy is also relevant as the origin of a peculiar type of thought—the ‘tragic thought’—, defined by Siperman as ‘el que acepta reflexionar sobre el mundo reconociendo en él *ámbitos de conflicto irreductible*.’<sup>136</sup> This irresolvable conflict—based on the rights granted to both signatories of the foundational social contract—implies a radical incompatibility with totalitarian regimes, like the one Argentina is enduring in 1977. To deal with that ‘danger to public safety,’ the sovereign’s response is the instituting of the ‘state of

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<sup>134</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, pp. 84 and 85. Italics in the original.

<sup>135</sup> I thank Dr Fiona J. Mackintosh for pointing out this interpretation, which is not included in the etymological analysis carried out by the intellectual ‘voice’ of the novel (*SV*, 213-6).

<sup>136</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 36.

exception,' in which the 'normality of the exceptional' becomes the rule and leads, as previously seen, to the concentration camp.<sup>137</sup> The initial 'crimen en un pueblo chico' (*SV*, 11) ends up by being a state crime that complies with the four stages elucidated by Zygmunt Bauman regarding the mechanisms of disappearance that not only defeat the enemy but annihilate him/her: identification and classification of the victim; re-localisation; the concentration moment; the final solution.<sup>138</sup>

The novel unfolds within a dual tragic framework. The initial frame pertains to the present narrative timeline, wherein Fefe (Felipe Félix's 'Malihuel' nickname) returns to the lakeside resort village, his maternal grandparents' former residence, after a twenty-year absence. Recalling his childhood summers spent there, he professes his intent to conduct research for a fictional work centred on a crime, specifically the murder of Darío Ezcurra, by engaging in discussions with various residents over the course of several weeks. It is highlighting this collective investigative that *El secreto* has been considered a 'policial coral'.<sup>139</sup> The interchanges of the narrator with the 'voices' of Malihuel are indeed reminiscent of dithyramb, the dialogue of a character with the chorus that is at the root of Greek tragedy.<sup>140</sup> As Jacqueline De Romilly reminds us, chorus was not an element alien to action, since it represented concrete social groups (women, confidantes, witnesses) strongly interested in the development of events, though powerless as regards those events.<sup>141</sup> It was indeed Aristotle's recommendation that, rather than performing a merely ornamental role, the chorus involves itself in the action, like the actors.<sup>142</sup> With specific attention to Sophocles' *Antigone*, a tragedy whose echoes are to be found throughout *El secreto*, George Steiner notes an interpretation of

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<sup>137</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>138</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>139</sup> Destéfani, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamerro*, p. 372. Despite this mention, the author does not analyse *El secreto* as a tragedy, but exclusively a crime fiction. A complete summary of the different readings the novel has aroused can be found in Mauro Greco, *Responsabilidades y resistencias: Memorias de vecinos de la dictadura* (Eduvim, 2019), pp. 207-8.

<sup>140</sup> Jacqueline De Romilly, *La tragédie grecque* (PUF, 2012), p. 23.

<sup>141</sup> The importance of the chorus was stressed in some Greek tragedies from their very titles. Among other examples, Romilly mentions Aeschylus's *Choephoroe* and *Eumenides*; Sophocles's *Women of Trachis*; and Euripides's *The Bacchae* and *The Phoenician Women*. See Romilly, *La tragédie grecque*, pp. 27-9.

<sup>142</sup> Carmen Trueba, *Ética y tragedia en Aristóteles* (Anthropos and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2004), p. 47.

the chorus as the ‘suffering, passive organ of a body (the body politic) which is caught up in suicidal conflict.’<sup>143</sup> Apart from this analysis entailing the suicide of a body politic after an act of its own volition, Steiner finds in this tragedy all ‘the principal constants of conflict in the condition of man’, which are

fivefold: the confrontation of men and of women; of age and of youth; of society and of the individual; of the living and [of] the dead; of the men and of the god(s). The conflicts which come of these five orders are not negotiable.<sup>144</sup>

Considering its exploration of those ‘not negotiable’ conflicts, *Antigone* serves as the primary reference concerning the initial tragic framework within my analysis of this novel by Gamerro.

*El secreto* too conveys its dithyrambic scheme from its title, in which the narrator—eventually revealed to be Ezcurra’s biological son: ‘el secreto mejor guardado de Malihuel’ (*SV*, 231)—holds numerous dialogues with characters whose voices only exist in relation to that crime. The importance of this chorus function is supported, in my view, when Malihuel’s voices succeed in invading Fefe’s nights,

vuelven a hacerse oír, discutiendo descorteses entre ellas, interrumpiéndose, contradiciéndose, tratando de taparse unas a otras, tratando de ganar mi aprobación, mi atención, o apenas mi oído (*SV*, 78).

The conduct of Malihuel’s ‘voices’ exhibits two prominent characteristics reminiscent of the chorus in classical Greek tragedy. While they play a decisive role in the primary action, as their consent is essential for the commission of the crime, their subsequent portrayal of self-perceived helplessness is wielded, two decades later, by one of the community’s most prominent members, Don León Benoit, as a rationale for their actions:

la suerte de Ezcurra ya estaba echada, *nada que uno hiciera o dijera podía cambiarla*, lo único que uno podía lograr con defenderlo *era quedar pegado* (*SV*, 57).

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<sup>143</sup> George Steiner, *Antigones. The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought* (Clarendon, 1986), p. 91.

<sup>144</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 231.

Dithyramb comes to Fefe's mind after a vexing interview with (significantly) a butcher, that the narrator closes seeing a 'pila de *lenguas de vaca* que, como un *elocuente coro*, desde la bandeja de acero han acompañado con su *mudo ditrambo* a la voz del amo' (SV, 66). Further in this tragic frame, another 'voice' interprets that 'tanto Ezcurra como el jefe de la policía cometieron un error: ese error que los antiguos griegos denominan *húbris*, y que puede traducirse como exceso de confianza' (SV, 62, italics in the original).

The second tragic frame concerns the period examined, and it mainly echoes Shakespearean tragedy. Structural correspondences underscore the links between the two tragic frames and *El secreto*, as the novel is organised in five chapters, with an 'intermedio' at the end of each one, and an epilogue. If five were indeed the acts of Shakespearean tragedy, the Greek genre had between two and five 'episodes' separated by lyric pieces by the chorus, called *stasima*.<sup>145</sup> The characteristic of immobility of the 'intermedios' hints at the etymological origin of the Greek term *stasimon*, 'stationary song', and its function of alternating with the dialogues in the play.<sup>146</sup> In this second frame, Ezcurra's murder is remembered by the population of Malihuel with words of Hamletian reverberation: 'Ese viernes, el día del perro que le dicen' (SV, 238), a label that follows Rosas Paz's claim when commanding the crime: 'Él tuvo su día de ladrar, ahora yo quiero el mío de morder' (SV, 31). Similar to *Hamlet*, in *El secreto* the 'dog will have his day'.<sup>147</sup> As Harold Jenkins explains, this was 'a familiar proverb [that] usually implied that the dog would have its turn of prosperity or success,' though Hamlet's words admit more than one interpretation, of which the most significant is that '[y]ou cannot stop a creature from acting according to its nature'.<sup>148</sup> Malihuel's inhabitants vaguely know that there was 'un dicho [...], algo del día del perro...', that Fefe confirms ('[e]s un dicho inglés'), after translating it as: "'Todo perro tiene su día'" (SV, 30). The implication in the novel is thus double: on the one hand, that a murderer can only act as such; on the other, that Ezcurra's crime consisted in having uttered a truth, since he is remembered as the 'cuzquito que le ladra al perrazo a través de la reja [...]. Y ahora que la reja está abierta el cuzquito se calla, y se cree que con eso alcanza' (SV,

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<sup>145</sup> Romilly, *La tragédie grecque*, p. 25.

<sup>146</sup> Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, p. 916.

<sup>147</sup> *Hamlet*, V. 1. 287.

<sup>148</sup> In Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p. 393. n287.

30). The ‘Proceso’ ‘opened the door’ to launch what Gloria, another Malihuel inhabitant, yet again employing one of the traditional formulas to represent massacres, called in *Las Islas* ‘la temporada de caza’ (LI, 310).<sup>149</sup>

Law has central importance for both Greek and Shakespearean tragedies as, in Kozicki’s words, ‘*inexorablemente [...] ella es evocada, cuestionada, transgredida*’.<sup>150</sup> Rinesi recaps that Greek tragedy was ‘la aleccionadora puesta en escena de una situación excepcional de desajuste de las cosas’ in contrast to the situation of normality (understood as the ruling of *nomos*, the Law) that its audience experienced in the *polis*, while Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy artistically expressed

una situación de descalabro de los órdenes simbólicos, de desajustes de los sistemas morales y de desquicio de las seguridades filosóficas, políticas y religiosas que era la que se vivía también *fuera* del teatro.<sup>151</sup>

The explicit references to the ‘day of the dog’ are thus aptly suited to the ‘descalabro’, ‘desajustes’, and ‘desquicios’ Argentina was experiencing, as reconstructed two decades later, when life in the *polis* seemingly returned to the tranquil governance of *nomos*. If in *El secreto* the sequential arrangement of the two forms of tragedy is reversed, the Greek framework, in my analysis, serves as an exploration of the consequences of the erosion of the language of the state, namely Law, brought about by dictatorship. Whereas in ‘Malvinas’, the destroyed bonds were horizontal (pertaining to friendships and romantic relationships), in Malihuel, the compromised and ultimately thwarted bonds are vertical (involving relationships of parenthood, maternity, and filiation). The sought-after complicity between the populace and the state, embodied in the new agreement, stands as the sole connection a totalitarian regime permits.

As indicated, Ezcurra’s murder conforms to the mechanisms of disappearance expounded upon by Bauman, necessitating a degree of complicity from various quarters. Such collaboration may emanate from the community through acts of silence or via a psychological process of negation, as well as consciously or unconsciously

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<sup>149</sup> See Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, in particular chapter 2 ‘La fórmula cinegética’, pp. 49-94.

<sup>150</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 163. Italics in the original.

<sup>151</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, pp. 26-7. Italics in the original.

from the victims themselves or individuals associated with them.<sup>152</sup> In Ezcurra's case, once his identification and classification is done—by the economic power with the approval of the political authority—, the security forces carry out the enquiry that obtains the agreement of the Malihuel population, which allows *Comisario Neri* to kidnap Ezcurra and clandestinely re-localise him in the police headquarters. The concentration moment unfolds when Ezcurra is locked up in an abandoned train wagon, from where he escapes to be eventually given up by a Malihuel inhabitant, prior to the reaching of the final solution, which occurs in a highly symbolic place for Argentinian literature: the 'matadero municipal' (*SV*, 147). If the disappearance, as Siperman elucidates, is relatively independent from the fact, 'no por cierto anodino, de cuál haya sido el alcance de la recuperación de un cuerpo,'<sup>153</sup> tragedy will also shed light on the clash between the state and the individual over the dead body. In Steiner's reading of *Antigone*, this should imply that the rites of burial make the body pass 'from the dominion of the [*polis*] back into that of the family [...] a return into the primal custody of woman (wife, mother, sister).'<sup>154</sup> Ezcurra's body can never be recovered, though it is known where it has been buried, or, in Fefe's ironically bitter words, 'sumergido' (*SV*, 232).<sup>155</sup> The denied rites of burial prevent his corpse from its return to the dominion of the private, making thus of the *desaparecido* a lasting presence in Argentina's public scene. Antigone's destiny is finally fulfilled by Ezcurra's mother. She demands to know the fate of her son and, once Ezcurra's death is obliquely admitted by the state authority, refused the possibility of 'bring[ing] him home to the guardian earth [which is] the highest degree of holiness.'<sup>156</sup>

In the following sub-sections, I shall undertake an analysis of the four principal characters/functions depicted in *El secreto*: the state authority, the victim, the dynamics of paternity and filial bonds, and the maternal figure. This scrutiny will be guided by

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<sup>152</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 228. These conditions, Siperman adds, appear easily reachable in totalitarian regimes.

<sup>153</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 227.

<sup>154</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 34.

<sup>155</sup> Relating the implications of burials for Greek and Western culture, Steiner observes that the 'disappearance of a dead body in the weltering sea—Palinurus, Lycidas—impresses western sensibility as peculiarly desolate.' See Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 115.

<sup>156</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 34.

the overarching themes of the tragic genre, with particular attention to its implications for the revelation of truth concerning the Argentine real reality.

(I) THE TRAGIC AGENT: *COMISARIO NERI*

Aristotle defines tragedy as ‘a representation of an action of a superior kind—grand, and complete in itself— [...] effecting, through pity and fear, the purification of such emotions.’<sup>157</sup> Stressing its centrality for his conception, action ‘involves agents who will necessarily have certain qualities of both character and intellect. It is because of the qualities of the agents that we classify their actions, and it is because of their actions that they succeed or fail in life,’ before expressing that, ‘the deed may be perpetrated in full knowledge and awareness.’<sup>158</sup> These key elements of the Aristotelian notion are present in the main event of *El secreto*: the crime that the state commits in order to guarantee its own survival constitutes the ‘action of a superior kind’; the qualities of the tragic agent, *Comisario Neri*, as well as his fate, are determined by that action, which seems to have been performed ‘in full knowledge and awareness’. In Don León Benoit’s words:

desde hace años existen presiones para trasladar la jefatura y todos los juzgados a Toro Mocho. Imagínese dónde estaríamos ahora: sin las oficinas públicas y sin el balneario de la isla. [...] Así que de alguna manera *Neri pensaba en el bien común*. [...] El comisario mismo me lo dijo, es justo la excusa que están buscando, decir que no es como entregarle la jefatura en bandeja a los de Toro Mocho, y *si se va la jefatura se va todo lo demás*. Malihuel puede darse el lujo de perder a uno de sus habitantes, pero no a las fuentes de trabajo de todo el pueblo (*SV*, 42).

*Comisario Neri* appears perfectly aware of the external circumstances that constrain his personal freedom. He complies with the Aristotelian features, since he is, in Carmen Trueba’s words, ‘*un agente que participa en su desgracia, que actúa y que se equivoca*’, no una

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<sup>157</sup> *Poetics*, 1449b. I quote from Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and intro. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford World’s Classics, 2013).

<sup>158</sup> *Poetics*, 1450a and 1453a.

mera víctima pasiva de unas circunstancias o de unas fuerzas destructivas externas y extremas.<sup>159</sup> In this regard, as Siperman elucidates, the tragic agent performs ‘actos reprobables, bajo la coerción indirecta de fuerzas, míticamente asociadas con las pasiones de los dioses, cuya oposición enuncia la imposibilidad de la satisfacción simultánea de dos exigencias éticas válidas.’<sup>160</sup> If in the tragic conflict, as Hölderlin sees it, there is a collision between ‘God and man’ where the ‘divine plane is inevitably superior’,<sup>161</sup> and since Medieval times ‘el Estado *reemplaza a Dios* en el texto jurídico’,<sup>162</sup> *Comisario Neri* thus faces a moral conflict for an act that a divine-like institution commands him to do.

The assumption of the tragic conflict as always irresolvable is disputable.<sup>163</sup> Yet, in *El secreto* the conflict takes place precisely because both parties obey the Law as the voice of a state with godly features: to utter a truth, in the case of the individual; to safeguard its own survival, in the case of the state, which at the same implies the subsistence of humanity itself. In fact, Kozicki explains, ‘[s]in esta dimensión jurídico-institucional no tiene sentido hablar, precisamente, de vida humana; su eventual carencia llevaría al concepto, ni siquiera pensable, del no-hombre’; the conflict between the indissoluble notions of Law and humanity would enact a transgression with devastating effects that, however,

no aniquila la Ley, su antropológica función instituyente. Lo contrario llevaría a la hipótesis del no-sujeto generalizado, a caer “fuera de la humanidad”.<sup>164</sup>

*Comisario Neri*’s response will be thus the search for a new foundational agreement which—like the one in the nineteenth century—will consist of identifying the enemy of the city and eliminating him/her after dispossessing him/her of their humanity.

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<sup>159</sup> Trueba, *Ética y tragedia en Aristóteles*, p. 116. Italics in the original.

<sup>160</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 28.

<sup>161</sup> Steiner, *Antígonas*, p. 76.

<sup>162</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 75.

<sup>163</sup> Trueba indeed rejects the idea that by necessity ‘los conflictos trágicos son insolubles y que la tragedia excluye toda justicia o compensación’; for her, ‘[l]o único cierto es que lo trágico está atravesado por conflictos, pasiones y sufrimiento.’ See Trueba, *Ética y tragedia en Aristóteles*, p. 101.

<sup>164</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, pp. 74-5 and 94. Paradoxically, the ultimate resource of the totalitarian state—the concentration camp—is based upon the dehumanisation of its victims. See Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, p. 1032; and Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, p. 42.

Memories of *Comisario* Neri are contradictory: he was ‘el mejor jefe de policía en la historia de Malihuel,’ a ‘Robin Hood de la zona [que r]obaba en los pueblos ricos para dar a los pobres’ (SV, 37), ‘[u]n hombre íntegro, un hombre derecho,’ as well as somebody who ‘[l]e gustaba pegar’ (SV, 40). The essential requirements of the Leviathan are clearly listed by the butcher, who assures Fefe that

no hubo en Malihuel otro jefe de policía como él [...] se ocupó de *mantener el orden* y poner a todos los chorros y alborotadores en vereda [...] en lugar de agarrar la coima *hacía cumplir la ley* (SV, 64).

Although another voice dismisses Neri’s honesty saying that it was a ‘cuento’ (SV, 125), the general consensus seems to be that he was ‘diferente’ (SV, 36), ‘distinto. No parecía policía’ (SV, 37). What made him atypical was that he looked ‘más comprometido con el pueblo’ than other police officers, as he ‘había decidido quedarse cuando se jubilara’ (SV, 37) even with the intention of ‘postularse para intendente’ (SV, 42). The engagement of the agent with the community constitutes another feature of the tragic character, as Trueba reminds us that his/her relevant feature is ‘su *pertenencia simbólica a alguna variante de las categorías sociales* vigentes en la antigua *polis*: rey o reina, hijo o hija, hermano o hermana, hombre o mujer, libre o esclavo, extranjero o ciudadano.’<sup>165</sup> The tragic character exists so long as he/she can be categorised in his/her relationships with the *polis*. The essential relationship between the hero and the group that depends on him is thus made apparent.<sup>166</sup>

Neri’s moral qualms—or, at least, reluctance—to perform the deed appeared confirmed by the intellectual of the village, Professor Gagliardi, who used to play chess with the *comisario*. It would be a friendship that Gagliardi ‘nunca pudo perdonarse’ (SV, 238), as another voice states, but that allowed him a close knowledge of an event that he thinks of in dramatic terms. For Gagliardi, ‘Malihuel se convirtió por un tiempo *en el teatro* de un curioso experimento con seres humanos, conducido algo chambonamente por su jefe de policía’ (SV, 229). The *profesor* is later concerned to understand ‘en qué medida y de qué manera, cada uno de los habitantes de Malihuel participó de *esta tragedia, qué hizo o dejó de hacer, que dijo, cómo actuó antes, durante y después de los*

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<sup>165</sup> Trueba, *Ética y tragedia en Aristóteles*, p. 79.

<sup>166</sup> Romilly, *La tragédie grecque*, pp. 27-9.

hechos' (*SV*, 233). As neither Neri consulted him nor he called on the *comisario* thinking that it would have constituted 'una señal de debilidad' (*SV*, 230), Gagliardi ranks among those who did not act to prevent *Comisario* Neri from doing the deed. The *profesor* appears, however, the only one who knows that the episode was decided by 'una apuesta' (*SV*, 228) between a military man based in Rosario and Neri: the latter would have been released from carrying out the murder if 'los vecinos del pueblo le negaban *su colaboración*' (*SV*, 228). Although the image Gagliardi conveys of Neri is of one desperately searching to be released from the tragic mandate, his conclusion is that,

el comisario hizo trampa. Contra sí mismo. No preguntó al azar, fue selectivo en su sondeo. No le preguntó a la madre. No me preguntó a mí. No le preguntó a quienes podían... frenarlo (*SV*, 229).

In his dithyrambic interaction with Malihuel's chorus, Neri selectively engaged with individuals who either presented themselves as vulnerable or affected a guise of helplessness, while sidestepping those whose proximity to the principal event could have hindered his perpetration of the crime. This episode reveals that the murder orchestrated by economic influence, sanctioned by political authority, and ultimately propelled by military intervention materialised through a trivial undertaking that, in accordance with Hobbesian principles, can be attributed to 'the secret working of God, which men call *good luck*.'<sup>167</sup>

The outcome has further implications for the tragic agent. Professor Gagliardi's inference is that Neri

había tenido fe en este pueblo, con sus historias de lucha, de resistencia; y lo habíamos decepcionado. No habíamos sabido estar a la altura de nuestra leyenda (*SV*, 228).

If in 'Intermedio 1', while describing the twentieth-century village, the narrator has deemed that 'Malihuel nunca llegó a estar a la altura de su mapa' (*SV*, 47), hinting at a historical failure vis-à-vis territorial promises, the population's moral shortcomings show now the contrast between reality and the image forged by legend: they were not able to stand up to the state authority, as the *gaucho* allegedly did, or perhaps only

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<sup>167</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, X. 2.

outlining an event that became characteristically exaggerated with the passing of time. In any case, it is *Comisario* Neri who believed in the legend, thus reinforcing his tragic bonds with the community, while at the same time causing him dissatisfaction that leads him to ‘marcharse [...] Como si hubiera perdido su fe no sólo en Malihuel, sino en la humanidad’ (*SV*, 228). *Comisario* Neri thus follows the fate of his nineteenth century predecessor, Don Urbano Pedernera, both regarding how the inhabitants despise him and the awkward send-off they offer him as long as ‘se fuera de una vez’ (*SV*, 200). Similar to *Antigone*, since the two state authorities failed to ‘assign their due portion to the law of his native land and to the justice of the gods’, the two end up ‘dishonoured’ and ‘citiless’, rejected by the chorus for being ‘polluted and contagious.’<sup>168</sup> It is not surprising, then, to the inhabitants of Malihuel to hear that, after settling back in the north of the province and modestly opening a convenience store, Neri and his wife die in a car crash: ‘era sólo *cuestión de tiempo*. Digo, si siguió chupando como acá’ (*SV*, 201). The tragic protagonist’s destiny emerges as Aristotle prescribed, directly stemming from his actions. Reference to Sophocles’ *Antigone* further elucidates the agent’s attributes through the characterisation of his deeds. While Creon could be construed as someone who ‘incarnates “the tragic might” of the [*polis*], since he exercises the morality of public duty and virtue’, as hinted by recollections of certain inhabitants, the state authority can be contemplated through the lens of Goethe’s perspective, which discerns that,

Creon’s motive is *hatred of the dead man*. Polyneices’ attack on Thebes has been sufficiently chastised by death. *His corpse is innocent*. [...] Creon’s decree, in that it causes the pollution of the whole city, is [...] “a political crime”.<sup>169</sup>

The ‘political crime’ that pollutes the city is the disappearance of the innocent corpse, an action on which the population of Malihuel was not consulted—and therefore has not given its consent. Once the chorus’s guilty (in)action has been ascertained, the narrator refuses to be a ‘catalizador a la catarsis colectiva’ (*SV*, 231), yet the dithyrambic dialogue he has incited shows that, like in *El sueño*, again evoking the

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<sup>168</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>169</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 50.

‘Madres de Plaza de Mayo’, only women opposed the state authority. Their failure is inherent to the traits of the victim, as will be analysed in the next section.

## (II) THE VICTIM: BETWEEN A FAILED ROMEO AND A SUCCESSFUL DON JUAN

On the occasion of *Comisario Neri*’s enquiry, Don León Benoit recollects having said that he knew of Ezcurra ‘todo lo que el pueblo sabe, comisario, ni más ni menos [...]: su actuación en la comuna, su labor periodística, sus negocios, sus líos de polleras’ (*SV*, 57). Each of these aspects of Ezcurra’s life appears to play a role in his fate. However, the most persistent is, in Malihuel’s memory, that of a womanizer. In my view, the combination of the private doings and interests of a powerful family with the public need of preserving order places Darío Ezcurra in the traditions of both Romeo and Don Juan, figures that merge transgression of Law, political disruption, and courtship of death. Those figures determine Ezcurra’s fate after he utters a truth about the violent origins of the state in relation to the rich families in the country.

Of the two, the figure of Don Juan is the most evident in Darío Ezcurra. Edgardo Dobry refers to this character born during the Spanish Baroque as the only myth of modernity that—unlike Hamlet, Don Quixote, Faustus, or Robinson Crusoe—‘carece de una forma definitiva’, requiring a permanent staging that makes of him ‘una *silueta vacía* [que] exige (y fagocita) siempre nuevo contenido.’<sup>170</sup> The image of a ‘figura vacía’ to depict Don Juan coincides with the one employed in Argentina to publicly remember the *desaparecido*, whom, in Vezzetti’s words, ‘[e]n la memoria pública y en las honras [...] se lo representaba como *un vacío* (plasmado eficazmente por el recorte de *esas siluetas todas iguales*)’.<sup>171</sup> Since September 1983, Burucúa and Kwiatkowski observe, artistic and public interventions drew upon the ‘siluetas’ as the means to

representar la magnitud del terror de estado a partir del recuerdo de su crimen más horrendo, que implicaba a un tiempo la destrucción personal y física de los prisioneros y la

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<sup>170</sup> Edgardo Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan. Creación y vigencia de un mito moderno* (Arpa, 2017), p. 14. Elsewhere, Dobry stresses this characteristic of Don Juan as a figure ‘vacía o incompleta’ (p. 18).

<sup>171</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 116.

ausencia de los cuerpos, concretada por medio de un aparato clandestino destinado enteramente a ese fin.<sup>172</sup>

Unsurprisingly, two decades following his demise, Darío Ezcurra is remembered as the ‘silueta vacía’, reminiscent of both Don Juan and the *desaparecido*, a term particularly apt during the ‘Proceso’ to depict individuals who, in Videla’s words, ‘no estaban, no se sabía qué había pasado con ellos; [eran] “una entelequia”’.<sup>173</sup> Based on that conception, then, the dictatorship established

un sistema de creencias que fue eficaz en la construcción ideológica de un *enemigo irrecuperable*, un ser humano sin derecho a la vida y contra el cual todo estaba permitido [para] asegurar el cumplimiento de *una empresa de muerte que no era fácil de soportar*.<sup>174</sup>

Darío Ezcurra’s fate is accounted for in that ‘construcción ideológica’ that the state is allowed to produce as the result of the foundational agreement, whose arbitrariness was never contested by the counter-signatory of that agreement. Hence, he is one of those who, by uttering ‘unofficial truths’, undermine Leviathan’s power. Significantly, Rinesi refers to them as ‘esos “Don Juanes de la *res pública*” que, como el engañador de Sevilla’, devote themselves to seduce ‘ciudadanos frágiles como mujeres’ in order to lead them to sedition.<sup>175</sup>

In the words one of his old classmates, Ezcurra was ‘[e]l playboy del pueblo [...], el Isidoro Cañones de Malihuel’ (*SV*, 21), an association later corroborated by another friend: ‘él era nuestro Isidoro Cañones’ (*SV*, 123), that is, a popular cartoon character that Oscar Steimberg defines as ‘ejemplo de porteño juerguista, aprovechado y mujeriego.’<sup>176</sup> Throughout the novel, Ezcurra is evoked as a womanizer, both by men and women alike. One of the male members of the Tuttolomondo family refers that

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<sup>172</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, pp. 183-4. Agamben notes that, in the Nazi concentration camps, ‘under no circumstance [the thousands of naked, tortured corpses] were to be called “corpses” or “cadavers,” but rather simply *Figuren*, figures, dolls.’ See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 1999), pp. 50-1.

<sup>173</sup> Burucúa and Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”, p. 182.

<sup>174</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 155.

<sup>175</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 85.

<sup>176</sup> Oscar Steimberg, *Leyendo historietas: estilos y sentidos en un “arte menor”* (Nueva Visión, 1977), p. 110. n2.

‘[l]as mujeres del pueblo son las que más se acuerdan de él. La mitad porque no las dejó llegar virgen al altar y la otra mitad porque sí’ (SV, 22), while Clara Benoit, a former lover of Ezcurra and the character most devoted to his memory, says: ‘Eran las otras las que lo celaban, las que él nunca había querido tocar. Eso fue lo que terminó con él: una conspiración de ilusas despechadas azuzando a un rebaño de cornudos imaginarios’ (SV, 75). The female universe of Malihuel is therefore organised according to a conquest/deceit criterium between those who were seduced and *then* abandoned, and those who were abandoned *before* being seduced, with the consequent result, in either case, of expectations inexorably ending up in deceit. The patriarchal universe is not alien to the conquest/deceit structure that Don Juan enacts. In 1973, Ezcurra promotes ‘una sociedad, seguro estaban don León y Casarico, y dicen que también el jefe de policía’ with the purpose of organising an agricultural fair, that will later be remembered in terms of the classic Argentinian fraudulent device: ‘Ezcurra *les vendió el buzón* de la Expotencia y *cayeron como chorlitos*’ (SV, 32).

If his ‘líos de polleras’ and ‘negocios’ depict Ezcurra as a deceiver, evidence of his political creed is found in the flyer publicising the fair. In that leaflet, Peronist rhetoric apt to the mood of General Perón’s return (‘la Argentina Potencia’ [SV, 32], ‘el año 2000 nos encontrará unidos o dominados’ [SV, 34]) is mixed with allusions to the Sarmientian dyad ‘civilización/barbarie’ (‘los desmanes del salvaje incontrolado [...] hoy luce el ropaje de la más alta civilización’ [SV, 33-4]), as well as praise for the disappeared inhabitants of the *pampas*: the *indio* (‘un cacique bravo, señor de nuestras dilatadas pampas’ [SV, 33]) and the *gaucho* (‘los heroicos gauchos que lo sucedieron, adalides de la lucha por la independencia que hoy [...] está a punto de concluir en victoria’ [SV, 33]). Finally, the (failed) exhibition is linked to the nationalist promise of a glorious future: ‘un evento que algún día sus nietos celebrarán como el albor de una nueva era’ (SV, 34). As if foreshadowing all the promises of that epoch, the outcome of the project was that ‘la Expotencia se vino abajo’ (SV, 35): the ‘*Expo* [exposición] -tencia’ became indeed an ‘*Ex* [ya no] potencia.’<sup>177</sup> Subsequent to this blend of different and clashing discourses, what remains in the memory of Malihuel is the political association to fill that ‘silueta vacía’: ‘Ezcurra terminó pegado como el monto del

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<sup>177</sup> I thank Dr Fiona J. Mackintosh for pointing out this pun.

pueblo' (SV, 35), that is, as a member of the leftist Peronist armed organisation that became synonymous with 'subversión' in the 1970s.<sup>178</sup>

Setting themselves apart from popular opinion, those who understand the Don Juan-esque dimension of Darío Ezcurra are Don Manuel Rosas Paz and Don Julián Echezarreta, the characters respectively embodying the economic and political powers of the community. The agreement between them is later confirmed by another 'voice': '[s]e cebaron, Rosas Paz y Echezarreta, se aprovecharon que *la cosa daba para todo*' (SV, 95). While the former ordered the deed, the latter gave his approval, even though in a circuitous way, leading a delegation of notable neighbours to *Comisario* Neri's office. The people's memory is that '[l]o que [Rosas Paz] le pedía era sencillito: que de los pelos lo sacara a Ezcurra de la casa y lo dejara seco de un balazo, a la vista de todos, así sin vueltas' (SV, 41), while 'nuestro querido intendente fue uno de los más entusiastas defensores del sí' (SV, 95), urging Neri to '*tomar decisiones penosas [...] la idea no es irle a la gente con problemas, que ya bastante tienen, sino solucionárselos [...] que le ponga un punto final al asunto*' (SV, 100). Confusing once again the two domains for their own benefit, the elites' *public* reasons hide the *private* ones: as will be later analysed, Ezcurra has damaged the mayor's personal honour by seducing (and abandoning) his daughter, and the landowner's name by denouncing the violent (and corrupt) origins of his family's fortune.

If seduction and deceit are persistent characteristics in the evocation of Darío Ezcurra, his fitting in the tradition of Don Juan is accentuated by other traits. These are: being a conqueror; dominating the public space; publicly enjoying his conquests; and belonging to a distinguished family of the community. Fefe's first recollection of Ezcurra occurs indeed in the public space, when the Don Juan-esque figure achieves a conquest, whose joy is overtly displayed in front of his victim. In the episode, Fefe remembers himself as a child walking hand in hand with his maternal grandmother while suddenly having to cross to the opposite, undesired pavement in order not to meet that

hombre joven, elegante que evidentemente *divertido por la situación* dirige a mi abuela *una sonrisa burlona*, y a mí *un guiño*

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<sup>178</sup> Ezcurra's affiliation to Montoneros will be confirmed in *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* (YCCG, 62-90).

*cómplice* [...] esa persona cuya espalda vestida de blanco se aleja ahora, campechana, por *la sombra que acaba de conquistar* (SV, 23).

Ezcurra's action in the public space stages an alteration that will be fully manifest when Fefe realises that his grandparents 'se atragantaron con la bronca de no poder odiar a Ezcurra *en público* (y el otro, sabiéndolo, *los gozaba el doble*)' (SV, 227). The idea of Don Juan's joy plays a substantial role in Rosas Paz's decision to order the crime, as a 'voice' explains that, for the landowner, it was 'la idea intolerable de irse primero él y dejarlo al otro para *bailar sobre su tumba*' (SV, 26).

Don Juan's adventures, Dobry elucidates, unfold 'siempre al aire libre, en su perpetuo deambular, en calles, caminos, plazas, playas o en los balcones y las puertas de los palacios.'<sup>179</sup> The public space and its political order are thus altered by Don Juan's rule, a situation secured by Ezcurra's belonging to a notable family. This has two effects as regards his social position. The first is that his family's notability places a critical obstacle to his elimination: 'no estábamos hablando así como quien dice de un pirincho cualquiera. Un Ezcurra nada menos, de los Ezcurra de Rosario, y Alvarado por parte de madre' (SV, 41). Ezcurra's lineage indubitably gives him the courage to face the *comisario* a few days before his capture:

Yo soy una de las figuras más influyentes del pueblo, no uno de sus pirinchos que se dejan arriar con la vaina. Si se mete conmigo va a terminar con todo el pueblo en contra, palabra de Ezcurra [...] yo nací acá [...], mi madre nació acá y mi abuelo también. Nosotros levantamos este pueblo de la nada ¿y ahora usted que vino con un viento y se va con otro nos va a echar y quedarse con todo? ¡Siga metiéndose conmigo y el que se va a terminar yendo es usted! (SV, 92).

Ezcurra's prophetically tragic words will certainly materialise regarding his antagonist, yet *Comisario* Neri soon afterwards starts the mechanism of disappearance elucidated by Bauman as he identifies, classifies, and arrests the victim. Neri's words are also revealing of the ideology of the military: 'el señorito tenía que hacerse el guapito, demostrar que acá en el pueblo es gente importante, un *intocable*' (SV, 146, italics in the original). Following Émile Durkheim's developments, Vezzetti has noted the

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<sup>179</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 110.

synonymy of 'lo intocable' with 'lo Sagrado'.<sup>180</sup> By disappearing an 'intocable', those lords of life and death that in their concentration camps perceived themselves as God<sup>181</sup> were thus making clear that, for them, not even human life was sacred.

The second effect of Don Juan's aristocratic position is the presence of a servant/assistant, named either Leporello or Sganarelle, whose fundamental aim is to spread his *maître's* reputation. This is based on the number of his conquests. As Dobry explains, '[e]l verdadero Don Juan carece de interés por cada mujer individualizada: lo que le importa es el asalto y la huida; y, en todo caso, la vanidosa cuantificación de sus aventuras, asentada por su secretario'.<sup>182</sup> In Ezcurra's case, it is his own mother who keeps count. Delia is remembered as being proud that her son 'fuera tan requerido y yo creo que *llevaba la cuenta de sus conquistas*, hasta mejor que él si te descuidás' (SV, 173). While Delia is introduced in relation to this essential Don Juan-esque characteristic, quantity also plays a crucial role in Ezcurra's end. Once it is established that no one (not even the most morally prominent character in the novel, Professor Gagliardi) tried to save Ezcurra, it turns out that only Clara Benoit sent anonymously a letter to her former lover, an attempt that she recollects convinced that,

no la abrió, estaba acostumbrado a recibir cartas de sus... Incluso traté de cambiarle la letra, para que *no me reconociera*, traté de hacer *letra de hombre*. [...] *Si sabía que era mía no iba a creer lo que decía*. Iba a pensar que era otro de mis trucos desesperados (SV, 128).

The fundamental impossibility, inherent in the myth of Don Juan, of transforming a mere numeral into a recognisable identity, even through the guise of masculinity, results in Clara's stratagem faltering. Her letter represents the sole action that could have potentially saved Ezcurra, thereby absolving the village of its complicity or tacit consent in the crime. This implication is subtly conveyed through her father's sceptical and jocular remarks: 'fueron tantos [los que dicen haberla escrito] que tendrían que haber hecho cola frente a la puerta de los Ezcurra, cada uno con su cartita en la mano, para echársela por debajo' (SV, 127).

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<sup>180</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria. Memorias y olvidos* (Siglo XXI, 2009), p. 131.

<sup>181</sup> Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, p. 54.

<sup>182</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 34.

The only piece of journalism by Darío Ezcurrea known in the novel is the one which denounces the genocide perpetrated by the state and its accomplices/beneficiaries against the aboriginal population, as well as the cruel methods employed in the endeavour. Ezcurrea thus denounces ‘aquel Rosas Paz que pagaba una libra la pieza las orejas de indio que su devoto bisnieto conserva aún como reliquia familiar en una vitrina de su escritorio’ (SV, 28). The article also exposes a notion of family kept by male line, that might appear at risk for somebody who was the grandfather of ‘dos nietas en edad de merecer, una la Elvira, que se terminó casando con un agrónomo francés que tenía olor a chivo, y la otra la María Luisa, que le decían Pipina y que quedó para vestir santos’ (SV, 35). Another ‘voice’ rejects this interpretation by making the case of physical beauty: ‘las dos eran tan feas que con sólo verlas se te volvía novillo el toro, y eso al menos debemos reconocérselo al finado: tenía buen gusto’ (SV, 35). However, Dobry explains, for Don Juan ‘no se trata de una cuestión de tipo [de belleza] (flaca o gorda, joven o vieja, noble o plebeya), sino de condición: *debe estar sujeta a algún tipo de interdicción*.’<sup>183</sup> This interdiction is already in place: for Rosas Paz, Ezcurrea not only appears a potential Don Juan, since Molière’s version (1665) adds to the myth a wife named Elvira, but also a potential Romeo. Like Montague and Capulet, the publicly known enmity between the Rosas Paz and the Alvarado families ‘venía de mucho antes, de antes de que Ezcurrea naciera’ (SV, 24), as the result of a fraudulent manoeuvre by Ezcurrea’s grandfather that accidentally damaged a cereal cargo belonging to Rosas Paz. If Darío Ezcurrea was already a Don Juan with regard to political power, having seduced the mayor’s daughter, he could now be a Romeo for economic power. Either Don Juan or Romeo leads to the breaking of Law, with the consequent disruption of the established order, as both defy,

el poder patriarcal que impone la adecuación entre pasión e institución, entre amor y alianza matrimonial. Por unirse a Julieta, Romeo transgrede las interdicciones derivadas de las enemistades familiares; pone la pasión por encima de la política [...]. Don Juan, en cambio, se burla a la vez de padres y de maridos [...]. El renacentista Romeo desacata el orden establecido con la voluntad de formar uno nuevo, en armonía con sus sentimientos y valores. El barroco Don Juan se re[b]ela, en cambio, para instaurar un perpetuo desorden,

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<sup>183</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 44.

porque no hay para él sosiego posible en un nuevo estado de cosas: cualquier orden que se presentase seguiría moviéndolo a transgresión y burla.<sup>184</sup>

Economic power is thus able to prevent Darío Ezcurra from becoming a Romeo, yet the political disruptions of Don Juan have already taken place. As Francisco Rico explains, ‘los amores de Don Juan son múltiples, breves, cambiantes, y lo obligan a *mudarse constantemente de paisaje*’.<sup>185</sup> Although Ezcurra is remembered as always leaving ‘este pueblo de perdedores para siempre’ (SV, 18), before his constant returns, in the novel the essential Don-Juan-esque displacement is inverted: rather than the ‘burlador’, it is the ‘burlada’ who has to leave Malihuel after the seduction, verifying

no solo la fantasía —que él convierte en acto— de arrebatarse a otro lo que le pertenece sino, además de *causar su destrucción, para impedir que el otro vuelva a poseerlo*. En las versiones clásicas, la pérdida de la doncellez dificulta el matrimonio convenido, alterando, además, *las delicadas alianzas políticas de la corte*. El apetito carnal del Burlador inicia una cadena de incidentes que *lleva al borde del colapso la geometría del poder y la arquitectura política*.<sup>186</sup>

It is the political power that suffers this destruction. Through the act of dispatching his seduced daughter, who bears a concealed pregnancy, to Buenos Aires, an action reminiscent of Greek ostracism, the mayor endeavours not only to conceal his family’s shame but also to deprive his daughter of *her* agency and humanity. Her voice will be never heard again in Malihuel, not even by letter, as those she writes up until her death never reach her addressee.

If Darío Ezcurra’s crime is to utter a truth regarding the obscure origins of the state and landowners’ possessions, the intricate system of economic and political allegiances between the state and the individuals who benefited from the ‘Conquest of the Desert’ is not new to the inhabitants of Malihuel. The story/history of the village’s origins makes it plain it when, for instance, the disappearance of a mare makes the villagers remember ‘la deuda de don Manuel [Rosas Paz] con Juan Crescencio por su tropilla de potros de un pelo, y *la de don Urbano con don Manuel por el apoyo a su nominación*

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<sup>184</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>185</sup> In Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 17.

<sup>186</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 33.

*ante el gobierno de la provincia* (SSJ, 21). What Ezcurra's texts denounce is the unaltered continuity of those relationships, emphasised by the fact that, while the name and function of the state authority in *El secreto* are different from those in *El sueño*, the name and function of the landowner who embodies economic power are the same in both novels/periods. Homonymity not only denotes that the political, economic, and social position of those who profited from the consolidation of the state remains unaffected, but fundamentally that this continuity has been achieved through the patriarchal line of family bonds.<sup>187</sup>

Hobbes's concerns about narratives that defy the state's official truth are thus confirmed. In *Leviathan*, he argued that 'the actions of men proceed from their opinions; and in the well-governing of opinions, consisteth the well-governing of the men's actions, in order to their peace, and concord,' conveying 'the sovereignty, to be judge of what opinions and doctrines are averse, and what conducing to peace.'<sup>188</sup> Aligning with Hobbes's fears, Ezcurra's utterances of truth belong not to a singular individual, but rather to the community. After reading one of the most inflammatory texts by Ezcurra twenty years later, one of the 'voices' reflects:

—Ahí se reconoce la mano del profesor Gagliardi [...]. Le daba una manito a Ezcurra con los textos. *Todos, en realidad*. Nos juntábamos acá, ponele, y le dábamos letra (SV, 29).

These utterances of 'unofficial' truths, yet again in Hobbes's thought, lead the 'Mortal God' to perceive the formation of Behemoth, that is, in Galimidi's words, the 'bestia del desorden.'<sup>189</sup>

Some of the 'voices' raise doubts about the importance of Ezcurra's articles as the real reason for his murder. They draw upon a saying that also hints at the animalisation of the victim: 'Don Manuel no era de *gastar pólvora en chimangos*' (SV, 35). Still, the 'voices' who were closer to, if not part of, the political regime of the time regard the matter differently. One of these eventually concedes that 'Ezcurra puede no haber empuñado el fusil, [...] pero *fue su prédica, y la de otros como él*, que orientó la mira

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<sup>187</sup> It is also of note that, while Malihuel has recovered its original denomination—replacing the Christian name of the state authority—, other villages of the department have significantly kept their landowners' surnames: Bullock and Rosas Paz, for instance (SV, 50).

<sup>188</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVIII. 9.

<sup>189</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 192.

hacia los que *teníamos en nuestras manos los destinos de la comunidad* (SV, 60-1). Like the baroque/carnavalesque/opiomaniac scene at the end of *El sueño*, the uttering of truth in *El secreto* becomes a collective action, making of that action a precedent that the twentieth-century state authority needs to prevent.

The figure of Don Juan is also appropriate for both Darío Ezcurrea's end and for the tragic genre. On the one hand, Don Juan's death has an 'inmediato efecto político [...] el reino vuelve a estar *en orden*';<sup>190</sup> on the other, *Comisario Neri*'s 'self-destruction' as the result of the 'process of transcendental collision' between God and man will produce a 'restoration of equilibrium.'<sup>191</sup> In the Don Juan tradition, Dobry explains, his death is presented 'como castigo de Dios.'<sup>192</sup> Apart from being perpetrated by those who were God, yet again the official religion comes out in support of a state policy of extermination. The day after the murder of Ezcurrea, when many attend mass with the purpose of knowing a pronouncement of the Catholic Church, Father Abeledo is remembered to have articulated his sermon in relation to

[a]lgo *del cuerpo como modelo de la comunidad ideal*. En una comunidad de hombres los gobernantes son como la cabeza, la policía el ojo vigilante, la iglesia el alma, los trabajadores las manos, las mujeres el corazón [...] y si alguna parte del cuerpo está dañada o sufre un mal incurable que *amenaza la salud del cuerpo todo, mejor extirparla que permitir...* Quedó clarísimo que hablaba de Ezcurrea, que de alguna manera *estaba justificando lo que le hicieron* (SV, 165).

The analogy between the human body and the body politic had been previously drawn by Hobbes.<sup>193</sup> In Galimidi's words, Hobbes likens 'las acciones de los súbditos que desafían los atributos del poder soberano absoluto con enfermedades del cuerpo humano, las que, si no se remedian a tiempo, concluyen con la guerra civil, que equivale a la muerte del *body politic*.'<sup>194</sup> Underpinning this image, Calveiro notes that the 'Proceso' conceived its action as 'una operación de "cirugía mayor"' in which '[l]os campos de concentración fueron el quirófano donde se llevó a cabo dicha cirugía —no

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<sup>190</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 152.

<sup>191</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>192</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 150.

<sup>193</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIX.

<sup>194</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 188.

es casualidad que se llaman quirófanos a las salas de tortura.<sup>195</sup> Father Abeledo's homily is openly approved by the Church hierarchy, as a 'voice' recalls that 'sus superiores quedaron encantados' (*SV*, 166). If, in Kierkegaard's reading, that 'figura vacía' of Don Juan brings to mind the 'conquistador por excelencia: [...] Satanás, el que miente y engaña para conducir a sus víctimas a la condenación eterna,'<sup>196</sup> the internal enemy of the nation becomes also the archetypal enemy of religion. A proverb with Biblical roots is here called to mind, '*vox populi, vox Dei*,' uniting the religious and the political in a long-established tradition that grants *oracular* powers to the people: 'la palabra del pueblo es el intermediario de la palabra de Dios.'<sup>197</sup> The assent of Malihuel's population would thus enact the assent of God.

The organicist doctrines, duly justified by the Catholic Church, imply a notion of a society that '*sacrifices* individuals for the collective nation or state when it is deemed in danger.'<sup>198</sup> Therefore, Father Abeledo's homily may be at the origin of a widely-accepted belief in Malihuel: that of Ezcurra's death as a sacrifice. This conviction is first enunciated by don León Benoit: 'Ezcurrita terminó sacrificándose por bien de todos' (*SV*, 42). The most significant endorsement is, however, Professor Gagliardi's. Rather solemnly, the intellectual of the community asserts during Fefe's last hours in Malihuel that

su padre fue un hombre valiente [...]. Luchó por lo que creía justo, por una sociedad mejor, por los derechos de los menos favorecidos, a costa de sus propios intereses y *a riesgo de su vida, que terminó ofrendando* (*SV*, 242).

While Don León interprets Ezcurra's actions as a sacrifice of 'uno' to save 'todo el pueblo' (*SV*, 42), and Professor Gagliardi views it as the valorous act of a man devoted to his ideals, the fundamental concept of voluntary sacrifice remains unaltered. These interpretations once more evoke the ancient practice of sacrifices mandated by or offered to the Greek gods, often in response to commands divulged by oracles intertwining civil and political affairs with the sacred realm. This conceptual

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<sup>195</sup> Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición*, p. 11.

<sup>196</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 30.

<sup>197</sup> Sandro Landi, *La mirada de Maquiavelo. Un ensayo desde la historia intelectual* (Eudeba, 2022), pp. 251 and 252.

<sup>198</sup> Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial*, p. 132.

framework, when viewed through the lens of tragedy, yields illuminating insights within the novel. As Nicole Loraux points out, in real reality, human sacrifice was an act ‘corrupt from every point of view,’ that when it was ‘only imagined by a tragedian, could not fail to conform this rule’ of displaying, to be effective, ‘the willingness of the victim.’<sup>199</sup> The initial consequence is that the eradication of the ‘internal enemy’ through a sacrificial ritual would inherently entail the victim’s acquiescence to their own demise. Hence, this dynamic would inevitably absolve the populace of culpability for their involvement in the act of killing.

The second consequence is derived from Agamben’s analysis of the emblematic massacre of the twentieth century (that of Jews by Hitler’s regime), of which the mass murders carried out by the ‘Proceso’ had reminiscences.<sup>200</sup> Agamben deems that ‘[t]he Jew living under Nazism is

a flagrant case of a *homo sacer* in the sense of a life that may be killed but not sacrificed. His killing therefore constitutes [...] neither capital punishment nor a sacrifice, but simply the actualization of a mere “capacity to be killed” inherent in the condition of the Jew as such. The truth—which is difficult for the victims to face, but which we must have the courage not to cover with sacrificial veils—is that the Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, “as lice,” which is to say, as bare life.<sup>201</sup>

Following both Agamben’s analysis and the prohibition of human sacrifices in the Greek *polis*, it could be said that Ezcurra’s was not a sacrifice, but a plain extermination: like a ‘dog’, in his case, as ‘bare life’. When Professor Gagliardi utters his words about Ezcurra, Fefe is grateful, but he feels ‘incapaz de decir lo que verdaderamente pienso: que *nada de eso es verdad*,’ as, for him, the intellectual has made ‘un héroe de un mártir *involuntario*’ (SV, 243).

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<sup>199</sup> Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. by Anthony Forster (Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 12 and 42. Loraux (p. 81. n37) explains this ‘willingness’ after the animal ‘has bowed its head under a libation of pure water and has by this sign consented to the fate planned for it.’

<sup>200</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 18. Vezzetti places the Argentinian one during the 1976-1983 dictatorship into Hannah Arendt’s notion of ‘saga de las “masacres administradas” del siglo XX.’

<sup>201</sup> Agamben, *Homo sacer*, p. 114.

### (III) IMPOSSIBLE FATHERS AND SONS

As argued in the previous sections, the way the regime of 1976-1983 found to secure the survival of the state was that of becoming the 'No-Ley', i.e., a regime that, instead of instituting humanity, denied it to the dissident so he/she must be eliminated.<sup>202</sup> As one 'voice' puts it, a system in which 'la cosa daba para todo' (*JV*, 95). In the special relations he holds with Law and Fatherhood, Don Juan also fits the dictatorship's purpose of guaranteeing peace and order by the means of becoming the 'No-Ley'.

The Don Juan-esque essence, Dobry elucidates, is that of transgression of law, since

sin ley, sin consciencia del pecado, no hay burla; sin burla, no hay goce. Sólo en la dialéctica entre ley y violación de la ley [...] existe la transgresión donjuanesca [...]. La transgresión, entonces, no es el resultado de la abolición de la ley: es *su afirmación más radical*.<sup>203</sup>

Don Juan needs the law, yet he cannot embody that law as 'quien solo existe en el acto de violar la ley no puede, él mismo, ser la Ley'.<sup>204</sup> Don Juan's quintessential action, carnal union, 'es furtiva, se adelanta al matrimonio, al derecho; reemplaza el momento y el lugar del rito por el del arrebató, rompiendo el orden religioso y político'.<sup>205</sup> If, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Law is embodied by the Father, Don Juan attacks that essential personification of Law. Following the distinction between 'sujeto concreto-sujeto abstracto', Kozicki states that '[u]n padre es una persona, el Padre es un concepto' that makes of paternity not 'una cuestión biogenética [sino] una instancia jurídica, una instancia identificable como instancia de la Ley. El principio de paternidad es un principio jurídico estructurante'.<sup>206</sup> Kozicki continues: 'la presencia del Padre [...] remite al *lugar* del padre como portador, vocero y garante de la Ley' which produces that '[l]a filiación, el parentesco, la paternidad, la relación entre los sexos, en el sistema

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<sup>202</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, p. 38

<sup>203</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 43.

<sup>204</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 37.

<sup>205</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 62.

<sup>206</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 102.

jurídico, no son “naturales” [sino] una *construcción*, precisamente, de la Ley.<sup>207</sup> Adding to the fundamental links between Paternity and Law, Kozicki explains that in Rome,

la función de padre estaba necesariamente ligada al poder en la ciudad, al principio político. Para poder acceder a los *honores de la ciudad* —los cargos públicos— era condición *sine qua non* tener estatus de *pater familias*.<sup>208</sup>

Through the exposure and interrogation of the criminal foundations underlying the wealth amassed by Don Manuel Rosas Paz, Ezcurra effectively implicates the essential complicity of the state itself. The preservation of this symbiotic relationship transcends mere acquiescence of political authority to economic power; rather, it constitutes a fundamental act of self-preservation for the state. If it is probable that Don Juan ‘tenga hijos, dado que la posesión de mujeres es su razón de ser’,<sup>209</sup> this fatherhood can only happen in the biological domain. The threat that his figure poses to the state involves the transgression of the (current) law, as well as his potential becoming a Father, with the consequent embodying of a (new, different) Law that would paradoxically consist in its permanent transgression. By eliminating him, the dictatorship therefore suppresses the prospect of that transformation into a revolutionary order based on chaos and anarchy.

Don Juan’s impossible position is endured by the narrator once *anagnorisis* is produced, i.e., when he has unveiled his identity as the (biological) son of Ezcurra. Then he wonders whether he has come to Malihuel in search of ‘el premio mayor’: ‘[l]as últimas palabras de Ezcurra antes de morir: “mi hijo, mi hijo” (sí, ¿pero cuál?)’ (*SV*, 223). Those words that would institute him legally as a son, in an echo of the royal ‘dying voice’ instituting an heir,<sup>210</sup> are impossible for Don Juan. Paternity is substantially a legal relationship that, Kozicki states,

consiste en significar la Ley, en hablar en nombre de ella, en portar y garantizar esta Ley, hasta producir en otro un efecto mayor: infligirle un límite, *instituyéndolo como sujeto*. Si no se alcanza ese objetivo, estamos ante el no-Padre, ante el Padre inexistente.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, pp. 105 and 106. Italics in the original.

<sup>208</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 104. Italics in the original.

<sup>209</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 37.

<sup>210</sup> Rinesi, *Política y tragedia*, p. 113. n9.

<sup>211</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 102.

Don Juan's elimination fixes him as 'el no-Padre', 'el Padre inexistente': Ezcurra cannot be other than that 'silueta vacía' of the *desaparecido*. His fate evokes that of Polyneices, who 'unburied' is,

literally "without destiny" [...]: unless he can return to earth within a fabric of familial custody and remembrance, a man has not lived "his authentic essence". He is stripped of fulfilment.<sup>212</sup>

The dictatorship has thus destroyed human bonds in a vertical direction. As happened in *Las Islas* and *El sueño*, where the state created a 'grey zone' by perversely making accomplices out of the witnesses/victims of its crimes, in *El secreto* the regime demands again a person close to the victim, his (biological) son, to become witness of the criminal deed. When a former policeman tells him about the kidnapping, during a popular event, the narrator realises:

No era imaginación. Era recuerdo. Como todos ellos, *yo había estado ahí*. Yo también era *testigo de lo que pasó* (*SV*, 133).

Not only does the son witness the disappearance of his father, but he also sees, a few days later, the desperate ('como una loca' [*SV*, 179]) search of a mother, when Delia turns up in the middle of the night in Echezarreta's house. To add repugnance to horror and tragedy, the final question for Fefe is to remember whether he bathed in the lagoon, as was his habit, after Ezcurra's body was sunk the very last day of that summer holiday:

El domingo 27 lo tiraron. Yo volvía a Buenos Aires siempre a principios de marzo. Pero quedaba ese lunes 28. ¿Estuve en Malihuel ese lunes, me di el baño de despedida en la laguna? Quizás, si ese lunes fue lluvioso, puedo quedarme tranquilo. Cualquier diario puede decírmelo. Qué alivio si fue un día de lluvia (*SV*, 158-9).

To reinforce Don Juan's impossible situation, Ezcurra's murder happens when he wants to 'sentar cabeza', pondering the possibility of 'casarme, formar una familia, ser alguien acá' (*SV*, 67), that is, when he is about to stop being Don Juan. For a character that 'siempre se estaba por ir' (*SV*, 67), a Don Juan-esque escape would have implied salvation, as one of the policemen involved in his slaying acknowledges: 'Si se

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<sup>212</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 100.

tomaba el buque a la capital, a Rosario, a Alcorta más no fuera, nos quedaba fuera de jurisdicción y *no lo podíamos tocar*' (SV, 93). The end of the 'intocable' is thus interpreted, in a Don Juan-esque line, as a victory:

Él sabía lo que iba a pasar, estaba perfectamente al tanto. [...] Vivo o muerto, él iba a quedarse en Malihuel, y así fue. Como no pudieron echarlo tuvieron que matarlo. *No fue una víctima* [...]. De alguna manera la partida la ganó él (SV, 68).

Ezcurra's end complies with the 'silueta vacía' of both Don Juan and the *desaparecido*. On the one hand, because Don Juan's end is always Death, as Dobry elucidates that 'solo se puede terminar la larga cadena viciosa pasando directamente al Infierno.'<sup>213</sup> On the other hand, because his destiny is, as appropriate for a victim of a massacre, hell. The conclusion of the episode is also reminiscent of the banquet in Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla* (1616):

Una caja de champán, mandó a comprar nuestro intendente. ¿Qué estaban celebrando? No era Navidad, ni Año Nuevo, ni el cumpleaños de nadie. Averiguá quiénes se tomaron esas seis botellas de champán, y vas a saber quiénes mataron a Ezcurra, o por lo menos quiénes lo querían muerto (SV, 95).

One of Ezcurra's last images in the novel is 'disfrazado de preservativo para la ceremonia de la estatua del Juez' (SV, 244). The image of the male contraceptive device certainly reinforces Don Juan's incompatibility with fatherhood, while hinting at his carnivalesque essence: Don Juan's need of becoming Nobody/Other for his seductions is usually a performance associated with carnival.<sup>214</sup> In addition to Ezcurra's murder occurring in the last week-end of Carnival, that is, in a celebration associated with the subversion of socio-hierarchical relationships of the established order,<sup>215</sup> he is slain in 'el matadero municipal' (SV, 147). The place draws certainly upon the emblematic place of tyranny and elimination of the dissident pictured by Echeverría in *El matadero*. In *El secreto*, the *matadero* was, as one 'voice' tells Fefe, 'una idea de tu abuelo para abaratar el precio de la carne' dreamt up to avoid 'el pobretaje de segunda fila [...] muchas familias hubieran pasado hambre si no' (SV, 147). If the descriptions

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<sup>213</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 145.

<sup>214</sup> Dobry, *Historia universal de Don Juan*, p. 110.

<sup>215</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 123.

of despondent people desperately searching for a piece of meat also lead to *El matadero*, Sarlo and Altamirano note carnivalesque connotations in Echeverría's fiction:

La sociedad del matadero es, casi, un carnaval y una parodia: las modalidades del juicio al que se somete al joven, con su Juez, sus captores, carceleros y verdugos, evoca las representaciones carnavalizadas de la justicia que aparecen en la cultura popular desde la Edad Media.<sup>216</sup>

Ezcurra's murder not only ends the carnival of that year, but also the ceremony of the *juez de paz*'s statue which was, as one of the 'voices' puts it, 'como una purificación' (SV, 205). Furthermore, in his visit to the abandoned slaughterhouse, Fefe sees 'fragmentos, como un mosaico romano' (SV, 147), which can be a hint at the ruins of the Roman conception of law as the way to resolve conflict through an ideal notion of justice.<sup>217</sup>

The death of Don Juan restores order, a fact symbolically acknowledged by the end of the ceremony. Malihuel's inhabitants thus submit to political order, denying both that the event 'era una falta de respeto o un faltarle a la autoridad' (SV, 205), or any political connotation, '*nada político* como algunos decían. Éste ha sido siempre *un pueblo de gente pacífica y respetuosa de la autoridad*' (SV, 203). This is poetically expressed by the narrator while contemplating the farm of the descendant of the *gaucho*, where 'los últimos Villalba devuelven en el lento goteo de las generaciones su pasado legendario al anónimo linaje de los pobres' (SV, 240): those *gauchos* who never contested the arbitrariness of the state authority's dreams while signing the agreement that allowed the state the right of instituting *arbitrarily* its subjects as criminals.

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<sup>216</sup> Sarlo and Altamirano, 'Esteban Echeverría, el poeta pensador', p. 45. Kohan adds that the judge 'ejerce la suma del poder en aquella pequeña república por delegación del Restaurador [...] por lo que el "juicio" del unitario es carnavalesco, sí, pero a la vez es oficial.' See Martín Kohan, 'Las fronteras de la muerte', in *Las brújulas del extraviado*, pp. 171-203 (p. 193).

<sup>217</sup> Siperman, *Una apuesta por la libertad*, pp. 84-5.

#### (IV) MOTHERHOOD IN THE PUBLIC SCENE

The final picture of Ezcurra brings to Fefe's mind a last memory of

un hombre que una tarde me llama en la calle, se agacha apenas para escudriñarme el rostro, pregunta con una sonrisa: ¿Sos el nieto de don Julián, no? *El hijo de la Poli*. Mandale saludos a tu mamá de parte mía. ¿Sabés quién soy, no? (*SV*, 244).

If Don Juan cannot acknowledge his own paternity—denying thus the narrator 'el premio mayor', his being instituted as a son from a 'No-Padre'—, the scene is certainly anticipating the pre-eminence of the maternal line in the public space of those years. The murder of that 'silueta vacía' brings to the *polis* Delia Alvarado, Darío Ezcurra's mother, who will search for her absent son in a fashion that was characteristic of the 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo'. Indeed, as Vezzetti expresses,

en la mayoría de los casos las Madres han admitido que fue *la afrenta personal, el dolor privado por la pérdida sufrida* lo que las llevó a iniciar una acción colectiva que, en sus comienzos al menos, explícitamente quería distanciarse de toda relación con la política.<sup>218</sup>

That action is performed, unlike Antigone's, with no knowledge of the deadly destiny of her kin. Delia is thus instinctively fulfilling one of the primal duties of woman in Greece: that of claiming the dead body from the dominion of the *polis* back into that of the family.<sup>219</sup> The state's rejection produces what Steiner describes as the belief, in classical antiquity, 'that non-burial prevents access to the realm of the dead. The spirit of the unburied man or woman *will haunt the near shores of Lethe in a passion of remembrance and reminder.*'<sup>220</sup> This is clear to the sorcerer of the village and the person now possessing oracular powers, who asserts that '[u]n muerto insepulto no tiene paz y por eso no da tregua' (*SV*, 195). Malihuel will suffer a flood which, among other suggestive outcomes, destroys judiciary and police archives, even though 'no había nada de lo que les pasó a los Ezcurra. Nada de eso quedaba asentado en los libros de guardia, ni se abrían expedientes, nada' (*SV*, 87). If the place where Ezcurra rests produces the

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<sup>218</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 174.

<sup>219</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 34.

<sup>220</sup> Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 115.

destruction of what should be the emblem of state memory, the year in which this happens, 1983, is also highly symbolic: the year democracy returns sees that event of collective amnesia, very much in line with the general sensation in *Las Islas*, regarding the crimes of the dictatorship.

In addition to adhering to Antigone's imperative, Delia meets a violent demise, echoing the fates of female characters in Greek tragedy. Thus, tragedy also serves as an explanatory framework for her ultimate fate. This genre, Loraux elucidates, 'as a civic institution, delighted in blurring the formal frontier between masculine and feminine and freed women's death from the banalities to which they were restricted by private mourning.'<sup>221</sup> If women leave the private it is to 'become involved in men's world of action and [suffer] for it.'<sup>222</sup> This suffering necessarily ends in death. What the tragic genre tells us about the death of women is that,

some of them were murdered, such as Clytemnestra and Megara, but many more had recourse to suicide, as the only escape in desperate misfortune [...], in the case of young girls, the sacrificial knife was the favoured instrument, and, to the host of wives who killed themselves, one must add the group of virgins who were sacrificial victims.<sup>223</sup>

By the logical exclusion of suicide and sacrifice—as Delia neither killed herself nor was a 'young virgin'—, the only possible death for her was that of Clytemnestra and Megara. She, who has intuitively played the role of Antigone in facing up to the state authority over the dead body of her kinship, is murdered outside the *polis*.

Like all women in *El secreto*, with the only exception of 'la jueza Carmona', Delia has belonged to the domain of the private up to Darío's disappearance. Her public behaviour will be judged accordingly by her former friends, as if for women there were no sphere and values other than those of the private. One of her former female friends, for instance, deems that 'ella tampoco supo hacerse ayudar [...], primero se pone a todo el pueblo en contra y después lo critica porque la abandonó' (SV, 208). From the moment she starts her inquiry about her son (similar to that

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<sup>221</sup> Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, p. 3.

<sup>222</sup> Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, p. 21.

<sup>223</sup> Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, p. 4. In p. 24, Loraux adds that '[e]ven when a woman kills herself like a man, she nevertheless dies in her bed, like a woman.' The exception is, certainly, Antigone.

carried out by *Comisario Neri*), Delia becomes, to the eyes of Malihuel, the ‘vieja loca’ (*SV*, 193), in apparent reference to the ‘Madres de Plaza de Mayo’.<sup>224</sup> She dies in the conviction that her son is still alive, or at least refusing to believe in his death. What for Don Juan was unviable (the individualisation of women) is central to Delia’s rejection of the news Clara tries to give her:

Delia se me quedó mirando yo lloraba ella no y me dijo mentís.  
Vos a Darío desde que te dejó lo querés ver muerto pero Dios  
te va a castigar por este daño que me hacés (*SV*, 185).

That rejection will sadly anticipate those voices who twenty years later still affirm that ‘no es seguro que lo hayan matado’ (*SV*, 17), or even that Ezcurra is enjoying a prosperous family life a few kilometres away from Malihuel (*SV*, 68-9).

Fefe’s research about a crime ‘en un pueblo chico’ ends up, then, by exposing the truth about the dictatorship’s methods of disappearance, as well as the complicity of the local population in its realisation. Drawing upon tragedy brings to the fore the ban on human sacrifices in the *polis*, stating thus that the deaths of Ezcurra and Delia were murders. It is yet again a private individual—an ‘hijo de desaparecidos’, in this novel—who must utter the truth about a ‘padre’ not allowed to become a ‘Padre’. The Hobbesian Leviathan, a Mortal God ‘not Subject to the Civill Lawes’<sup>225</sup> in charge of keeping order and peace to avoid ‘the unique evil of anarchy or civil war,’<sup>226</sup> has been corrupted by the Argentine regime of 1976-1983, leading thus Fefe, after recognising that ‘no es fácil, a mi edad, enterarte que sos hijo de desaparecidos’ (*SV*, 250), to get in touch with HIJOS, an organisation of children of *desaparecidos*, to deal with the paternal/filial bonds that the state has destroyed.

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<sup>224</sup> Nélica Bonaccorsi and Margarita Garrido, ‘Antígona en Plaza de Mayo. Un diálogo entre Literatura e Historia social’, *Revista de Lengua y Literatura*, 9-11.17-22 (1997), pp. 143-50. The authors express, for instance: ‘Las Madres [de Plaza de Mayo], como Antígona clásica, fueron llamadas “locas” por los *otros*’ (p. 149). Italics in the original.

<sup>225</sup> Goldsmith, ‘Hobbes on Law’, pp. 277-8.

<sup>226</sup> Noel Malcolm, ‘A Summary Biography of Hobbes’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, pp. 13-44 (p. 19).

## CHAPTER 4

### Cervantes Meets Machiavelli

Baroque, Violence, and the Sacred in *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara*

This thesis has thus far contended that the truths uttered in Gamarro's fictional reality regarding the nation pertain, either explicitly or implicitly, to the period of radical evil endured by the nation, the 'Proceso', while simultaneously questioning the state's legitimacy as the primary institution governing communal life. Those truths, particularly regarding the state's own unlawful actions, were silenced by a zone of impunity. In *Las Islas*, this impunity shielded the military and their crimes through an agreement of amnesia within the militant nationalist field. *El secreto*, on the other hand, utilises a 'pacto de sangre' (SV, 67) between the military and civilian population to ensure the omission of these events remains unchallenged. In my analysis of Gamarro's next two novels—*La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (henceforth, *La aventura*) and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* (henceforth, *Un yuppie*)—, truth about the public sphere now expands to encompass the actions of the insurgent armed movements of the 1970s. These actions were initially protected by a sacred sphere demarcated by violence and death. However, as argued by Hugo Vezzetti, this domain eventually transmutes into a sacred memory that is materialised through 'un mandato de olvido [destinado] a la implantación de una visión ideológica que sacraliza una memoria de los combatientes e impone que sus acciones queden sustraídas del juicio de la opinión pública.'<sup>1</sup> This analysis argues that the profanation of that sacred zone is perpetrated by Ernesto Marróné, a figure of the middle classes who exhibits certain parallels to Cervantes's Don Quixote but who is able to survive times of extreme violence, and to consequently utter his truth, thanks to Machiavellian aptitudes inherent to his social class.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria. Memorias y olvidos* (Siglo XXI, 2009), p. 56.

*La aventura* and *Un yuppie* constitute a pair of novels conceived in a Quixotesque framework as the first and second parts of a story structured around the main character's sallies into worlds that are alien to his day-to-day life. Like all Gamerro's other novels, these fictions present two temporal levels of narration: one in which the recollection is produced (the moment in which truth is uttered) and that of the events recreated. In May 1992, sixteen years after the episodes he is about to evoke, Ernesto Marroné, a managerial employee of the Tamerlán corporation and a secondary character in *Las Islas*, feels that '[h]abía llegado la hora de que su hijo *supiera la verdad*' (ABE, 12) about his past as a guerrilla fighter when he discovers a poster of Che Guevara in his son's room. The decision is reconfirmed at the outset of the second part of the story, when he faces 'el ineludible (tantas veces demorado, y a la vez ineluctablemente esperado) momento de *decir toda la verdad* sobre su pasado guerrillero y su pertenencia a la mítica columna "Comandante Che Guevara"' (YCCG, 14). If once more truth is the motivational force for Gamerro's fictions, the uttering of the middle classes' truth about their endeavours in Peronist and Guevarist spaces assumes the shape of a religious act, that Marroné confirms when he finally delivers it: 'Hijo, tengo algo que *confesarte*' (YCCG, 405). Furthermore, he wants his confession to have 'el valor de una *parábola* y una *enseñanza*' (YCCG, 406), endorsing thus the religious pattern of the politics of the time of his recollection.

Marroné's confession/truth comprises events surrounding the weeks immediately leading up to and following the coup d'état of 24 March 1976, which ousted María Estela 'Isabel' Martínez, third spouse and at the time widow of General Juan Domingo Perón, thereby terminating the third constitutional period of Peronism in government. In fictional reality, by December 1975 the revolutionary Peronist organisation Montoneros have kept Tamerlán in captivity for several months, demanding a significant ransom for his release along with the placement of 92 busts of Eva Perón in the company's premises. Entrusted with the acquisition of these busts, Marroné finds himself present at 'Ysería Sansimón' when the factory is seized by its workers protesting substandard working conditions. Despite the arrival of a contingent of Montoneros to support the workers during the occupation, the strike is forcefully suppressed by security and paramilitary groups. Consequently, Marroné, having risen to a leadership role within the protest, is compelled to seek refuge in a shanty town.

Following a Baroque, enlightening experience at the ‘Fundación de Ayuda Sexual Eva Perón’ (*ABE*, 329), Marroné hastens to ‘Ciudad Evita’, where he ultimately secures the busts. *La aventura* finishes with Marroné’s success being frustrated by the news that Tamerlán has died during the rescue attempted by the police.

*Un yuppie* opens, then, with the funeral of Tamerlán, which soon proves to be a simulation: Marroné is discretely informed by the widow that the businessman is not only alive, but also leading negotiations with his captors. Marroné is assigned the delivery of the ransom, hence having to gain access to the Montoneros. Once in the armed organisation, his group operates in the Delta area, mirroring Che Guevara’s *foco* strategy, while becoming increasingly disconnected from broader political events in the country. Following the military coup and Tamerlán’s liberation, Marroné finds himself unexpectedly reinstated within the company. He is even promoted to the position he had always desired: ‘gerente de Marketing’ (*YCCG*, 383). Not surprisingly in a regime that, as discussed in previous chapters, fostered a pervasive ‘grey zone’ throughout society where moral boundaries were blurred, Marroné’s new role implies his active collaboration with the dictatorship’s methods of repression. With the return to democracy, two substantial state interventions for building a paradigm based on the rule of law with the investigation and disclosure of crimes committed by the dictatorship (the ‘Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas’ [CONADEP] and the ‘Juicio a las Juntas’ [1985])<sup>2</sup> seem to threaten Marroné’s position. The end of *Un yuppie* shows that, despite the extensive evidence available about both his participation in insurgent activities, on the one hand, and his collaboration with state terror methods, on the other, his ‘middle-class’ crimes are the only ones that remain unpunished.

#### MIDDLE CLASSES, CONFESSION, AND POLITICAL ORDER

Marroné’s uttering of a truth about his ‘middle-class’ crimes is, as stated, materialised through confession. In accordance with Bakhtin’s framework of speech genres, this

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<sup>2</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente. Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2002), pp. 164-5.

constitutes an utterance emerging within a domain that affords the transgressor both a degree of confidentiality and autonomy in determining the extent and sincerity of the disclosed events. Additionally, confession proves apt for the articulation of such truths due to the religious undertones permeating the political landscape of the era. In this regard, the Argentinian historical course that ended up in the violence of the 1970s can be placed into what historian Emilio Gentile, analysing Fascist Italy, deems ‘the broader phenomenon of the sacralization of politics in modern society.’<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the ‘decline in the supremacy of traditional religions and the secularization of society and the state’, that process produced most acutely in the twentieth century,

the frequent transfusion of the “sacred” from traditional religions into political mass movements of both right and left [giving] rise to new millennial religions [...] now *it is politics that has assumed its own autonomous religious dimension*, and become *one of the main areas in which the sacred has been metamorphosed in the contemporary world*.<sup>4</sup>

The process of secularisation within political spheres has been observed since the early modern period. Its archetypical thinker, Thomas Hobbes, saw ‘no signs, nor fruit of *religion*, but in man only; [...] the seed of *religion*, is also only in man.’<sup>5</sup> Hence, in José Luis Galimidi’s analysis, Hobbes admits that ‘entre los fundamentos de su modelo político debe considerarse *la pervivencia de una energía de veneración y de sacralización* que inviste y contribuye a *legitimar la esfera de las relaciones políticas*.’<sup>6</sup> Central to Hobbes’s thought, then, this persistent trait of religiosity in civil society must be placed under the rule of the sovereign: the unity of ‘priestly power’ and ‘civil power’ must be achieved through the subjection of the former to the sovereign.<sup>7</sup> This is explained by Hobbes’s organicist vision of life, for whom, in Montserrat Herrero’s words, ‘las fuerzas vitales que contribuyen a su constitución son las mismas que conducirán a su decadencia. El germen de la religión que permite la generación del Estado ha de ser dominado por el

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<sup>3</sup> Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. by Keith Botsford (Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII. 1. Italics in the original.

<sup>6</sup> José Luis Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador. Reverencia y legitimidad en la filosofía política de Thomas Hobbes* (Homo Sapiens, 2004), p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> Norberto Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, trans. by Daniela Gobetti (The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 65.

soberano para no convertirse en la causa de su destrucción.<sup>8</sup> In the political landscape of Argentina (and Latin America), during the 1960s and 1970s, the opposite paradigm emerges, wherein terrestrial authority is conceived subjecting to celestial dictates.

This phenomenon can best be explained through the theoretical frameworks proposed by Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and his school. Certainly endorsing Hobbes's vision, for Durkheim this religious feature is not only at the core of society, but also constitutes, as Fernando Giobellina Brumana puts it, 'su resorte más profundo.'<sup>9</sup> Such deep-rooted religious traits would organise society into two poles that are at the origin of a series of 'dualidades jerárquicas' structured around the same semantic axis 'pero que tienen valores opuestos, *uno positivo y el otro negativo*, o, mejor, *uno preeminente y el otro subalterno*.'<sup>10</sup> Since the late 1960s, Latin American politics has exhibited a growing inclination towards religious influences, wherein the sacred is upheld as the positive/prevalent pole invading—not merely opposing—the profane as the negative/subjected one. Yet again, Hobbes's thought would be confirmed, since for him, 'la institución más nociva para la salud pública, es la iglesia, entendida como institución pública, como *intérprete de la verdad divina*.'<sup>11</sup>

This process became discernible in 1968, when a sector of the South American Catholic Church, the Priests for the Third World, began expressing their concern about the material, not just spiritual, problems of impoverished populations. This faction, as elucidated by Luis Alberto Romero, also manifested,

the necessity of *becoming actively involved in social reform and of assuming the consequences of that commitment* [...]. A "liberation theology" adapted the Church's traditional message to the conflicts of the hour, affirming that *the "violence from below" was a consequence of the "violence from above" and condoning crossing the boundary, increasingly narrow, between denunciation and action*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Montserrat Herrero, *Ficciones políticas. El eco de Thomas Hobbes en el ocaso de la modernidad* (Katz, 2012), p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> Fernando Giobellina Brumana, *El lado oscuro. La polaridad "sagrado/profano" y sus avatares* (Katz, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Giobellina Brumana, *El lado oscuro*, pp. 10 and 171.

<sup>11</sup> Herrero, *Ficciones políticas*, p. 108. As seen in chapter 3, this 'verdad divina' would lead to the times of the prophets, i.e., the state of nature; thus, for Hobbes, 'la iglesia no debe subsistir al margen del *intérprete de la verdad civil*.'

<sup>12</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. by James P. Brennan (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 185.

Apart from sustaining a notion of sacred violence (the ‘violence from below’), these pronouncements of progressive sectors of the Catholic church entailed a call to materialise, in Carlos Altamirano’s words, ‘la transformación del orden temporal’ in accordance with the dogmas of the spiritual world, setting a pattern by which the ‘mesías colectivo (el “pueblo”, el “pobre” o el “proletariado”)’ was held to be redeemed (‘liberado’) through the imminent revolution that would thus bring about ‘el reino en la tierra.’<sup>13</sup> If for Marx, the proletariat ‘is the *chosen people* of historical materialism,’<sup>14</sup> in Argentina Peronism appears the only way to reach those masses. It is in this scheme of redemption that the rapprochement between the middle classes and Peronism is produced. Usually regarded in highly negative terms by Marxist *intelligentsia*, the middle classes would escape, Altamirano explains, ‘una *condena* definitiva’ instead to being offered ‘un horizonte de *salvación*: unir “su destino al del proletariado” [...] una *conversión* que podía llevar al encuentro *salvador* si la clase obrera demostraba, por su lado, *vocación* de clase universal.’<sup>15</sup> With the potential ‘salvation’ of the bourgeoisie, the sacred zone formed by Peronist masses, Marxist ideology, and Catholic determination to materialise the kingdom of God on Earth is thus ready to conquer the profane.

However, Marroné’s endeavours will show that the middle classes ultimately remain an alien element in that framework. Their emergence as a social class is intertwined with the cultivation of a mindset defined by an approach to knowledge rooted in first-hand experiences of reality. As José Luis Romero outlines in relation to the end of the Middle Ages,

la realidad tendió a identificarse cada vez más, y exclusivamente, con la *realidad sensible*. Más allá de ella, pero desplazada cada vez más lejos, quedaba la otra realidad, la realidad inteligible, transformándose cada vez más en *realidad sagrada*. La mentalidad burguesa imaginó al hombre instalado eminentemente en la realidad sensible [...] como *un ser radicalmente profano*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Carlos Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, 2nd rev. edn (Siglo XXI, 2011), pp. 153 and 152.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (The University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 37. The author develops the religious connotations of Marx’s political thought, with specific emphasis on the redemptive characteristics Marx bestows upon the proletariat, in pp. 33-51.

<sup>15</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> José Luis Romero, *Maquiavelo historiador*, 3rd rev. edn (Siglo XXI, 1986), p. 13.

It is as a reaction to that detachment from the religious account of the world that the Baroque appears. In Jorge Luis Marzo's words, the Baroque constitutes 'el intento de unir lo que el Renacimiento había roto —*la trascendencia cristiana presente en la Edad Media*— mediante una reconquista general contra la ciudad renacentista, reconquista que adopta *la ideología religiosa como única forma posible de cultura*.'<sup>17</sup> Besides, in countries of Catholic tradition, the Baroque 'se asocia a todas las artes, a la arquitectura, la pintura, la escultura, la literatura, el teatro, pero también a *un estado general de la sociedad*,' that, in the hands of Spanish political power during the conquest of America, becomes a state policy aiming to produce,

un emborronamiento del discurso histórico, determinado por la voluntad de *administrar la memoria*, de *gestionar la historia* y de *encubrir la creciente tradición política del engaño y de la manipulación*.<sup>18</sup>

The essential notion, for Baroque, is the fold.<sup>19</sup> I posit that the pivotal juncture in 1970s Argentina is articulated by the pairing sacred/profane. Federico Finchelstein expounds upon the significance of this articulation in Argentine politics, particularly in the context of fascism, an extremist form of nationalism which in Argentina 'represented an extreme amalgamation between the secular and the sacred [...] was presented as a God-given theory and its practice a reflection of what God wanted for the country,' as well as for Peronism, under which the 'constant blurring of the profane and the sacred was pushed to its limits.'<sup>20</sup> Further to this blurring, one of Durkheim's disciples, Georges Bataille (1897-1962), argued that Christianity 'rejected impurity' from the sacred, adding that 'only in Christianity did the *existence of the impure world become a profanation in itself*.'<sup>21</sup> It is thus in this context that Marroné's forays into revolutionary Peronist and Guevarist schemes will constitute a profanation of both the sacred zone (i.e., that constituted by revolutionary actions in the 1970s) and the sacred

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<sup>17</sup> Jorge Luis Marzo, *La memoria administrada. El barroco y lo hispano* (Katz, 2010), p. 170.

<sup>18</sup> Marzo, *La memoria administrada*, pp. 30 and 13.

<sup>19</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. and intro. by Tom Conley (The Athlone Press, 1993). Gamberro acknowledges the importance of that idea for his own concept. See Carlos Gamberro, *Ficciones barrocas. Una lectura de Borges, Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, Cortázar, Onetti y Felisberto Hernández* (Eterna Cadencia, 2010), p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War. Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 6 and 79-80.

<sup>21</sup> Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality. A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (Walker, 1962), pp. 121 and 122.

memory (i.e., the construct accepted in the early 1990s about those armed organisations).

Even though Marroné envisions his act of memory to be strictly performed in the private sphere, it involves a past that, as the narrator notes, he shares with his peers:

Porque la historia de Marroné, lejos de ser excepcional, era más bien emblemática de toda una generación, una generación abocada hoy a borrar las huellas de un vergonzante pasado con el mismo ahínco que antes había dedicado a la construcción de un utópico futuro (*ABE*, 12).

That generational experience, simultaneously ordinary and shameful, fails to elicit discernible curiosity among Marroné's close family or his professional colleagues in knowing Marroné's version of events, even though none of them 'podía ignorar el paso de Marroné por la célebre organización extremista' (*ABE*, 11). The situation appears an almost exact paraphrase of Gámez's previous work of fiction, 'un secreto a voces' (*ABE*, 11), i.e., an open secret that is common to a community in the tacit conviction that it has to be effaced or silenced for a collective benefit. In Marroné's case, it is for his children who, 'para bien o para mal, habían sido —hasta hoy— *preservados*' (*ABE*, 11). The notion of a generational guilt expands to his fellow neighbours in the country club, who may 'con la misma mano que hasta hace un rato balanceaba con soltura la raqueta Slazenger, [haber] empuñado en el pasado las armas para luchar contra privilegios mucho menos injustos que los que ahora detentaban' (*ABE*, 12). This sense of collective innocence/impunity agrees with Carlos Nino's view, for whom '[m]assive human rights violations could not be committed without the acquiescence of many people' ultimately leading to a general belief that 'if almost everybody is guilty, there is a feeling that *nobody really is*.'<sup>22</sup> In this context, Marroné's reflection looks justified: '¿Quién, entonces, se atrevería a tirar la primera piedra, a señalarlo con el dedo?' (*ABE*, 12). The transparent Biblical allusion—'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' (John 8. 7)—<sup>23</sup> confirms his determination to utter a truth in a field that is not that of memory, understood as a

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<sup>22</sup> Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (Yale University Press, 1996), pp. ix-x.

<sup>23</sup> I quote from *The Bible. Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. and intro. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford World's Classics, 1998).

collective activity in connection with the social pursuit of truth and justice,<sup>24</sup> but in that of religion.

Confession is crucially part of a legal system, as Giobellina Brumana expounds following the development of Durkheim's disciple Robert Hertz (1881-1915), since for the Catholic Church confession,

es ya parte de la reparación, puesto que implica *someterse a la norma, someterse a una agencia que la encarna* [...].

La expiación, pues, hace que *el transgresor retorne a la ley, a la unidad de la que, voluntariamente o no, ha sido separado* [...]. La comunidad se fortalece en ese acto de reparación; *la transgresión se hace necesaria para ese fortalecimiento periódico*. Separación y unidad son un ciclo de perpetua retroalimentación.<sup>25</sup>

By performing an act that ultimately reconfirms the submission of the sinner/outlaw to the rule he/she has transgressed, Marroné is fulfilling the restoration of that Law and Order that he broke sixteen years before. The act completes his re-insertion into 'los ordenados circuitos de la sociedad' (*ABE*, 13) that were sanctioned by economic and family instances once Marroné's middle-class endeavours in revolutionary places had finished. Indeed, Tamerlán re-admits Marroné to the company by saying: 'Usted, ahora, es un *burgués probado*' (*YCCG*, 380). Marroné's wife, for her part, proposes to him: 'no quiero que me cuentes *olvidémoslo* hagamos como que *no pasó nada* estuviste en Europa ¿dale? Quiero que *dejemos todo atrás* yo sé que juntos podemos' (*YCCG*, 398). The restoration of Law and Order is thus appropriately achieved within the Christian law, consecrating, simultaneously, that 'mandato de olvido' of the sacred memory.<sup>26</sup>

#### BETWEEN CERVANTES AND MACHIAVELLI: THE AGENT OF PROFANATION

Similar to Alonso Quijano, Marroné is an individual who, fixated on a particular literary genre (management manuals rather than chivalry novels), derives essential concepts for envisioning an ideal world. Like Cervantes's character, Marroné is

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<sup>24</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Giobellina Brumana, *El lado oscuro*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>26</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 56.

fundamentally a reader who comes to believe that a materialisation of that reality, in his own times and place, is *possible*. While this idealised vision of the world may, akin to Don Quixote, ultimately prove to be naively unrealistic, Marroné will draw upon management notions to navigate unfamiliar circumstances and to reveal the truths he uncovers in his endeavours. Apart from explicitly perceiving himself as an ‘ejecutivo andante’ emulating a book entitled *Don Quijote, el ejecutivo andante* (ABE, 71; YCCG, 45-6), Marroné follows in the footsteps of the old *hidalgo*, becoming somebody else for the duration of his forays into those foreign places.<sup>27</sup> Their inadequacies force the two into different means of dealing with the ruthless realities they encounter, even if Don Quixote’s well-known failures are mirrored by some of Marroné’s. However, the ultimate difference between them remains that Don Quixote decides to sally forth, while Marroné’s endeavours as an ‘executive errant’ unfold due to circumstances beyond his control. It is in his capacity as ‘Jefe de Compras’ that Marroné is in charge of purchasing the busts demanded by the Montoneros, as he himself realises: ‘*Para eso soy jefe de compras, ¿no?*’ (ABE, 36). During the subsequent visit to the factory aimed at negotiating the production of the busts, Marroné finds himself ensnared in circumstances reflective of the prevailing instability and violence the country is undergoing during that period. It is within this context that, in my interpretation, a clear demarcation between Gamero’s and Cervantes’s characters transpires: rather than on Don Quixote’s tenets, Marroné’s survival will depend on the application of two fundamental concepts elucidated by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527).

The first of Machiavelli’s concepts is ‘*fortuna*’. Alluding to the Roman goddess, the notion denotes the circumstances external to the agent. Machiavelli equates ‘*fortuna*’ to ‘fate’ and ‘events beyond human conjecture’ in order to question the long-established consensus at his time about her absolute power over human will, since ‘Fortune is the arbiter of *one half of our actions*, but that she still *leaves the control of the other*

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<sup>27</sup> Intertextual links between Cervantes’s and Gamero’s novels in relation to the story, the narrative of adventure, and the similarities of the two main characters are studied in María Elena Fonsalido and Martina López Casanova, ‘*La aventura de los bustos de Eva, de Carlos Gamero, y la intervención del Quijote en la representación del pasado reciente*’, *Siglos XX y XXI. Memoria del I Congreso Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Españolas Contemporáneas* (2008).

*half*, or almost that, to us.<sup>28</sup> The second is ‘*virtù*’, a notion again belonging to Latin and Renaissance traditions, of which Machiavelli gives various definitions that slightly alter the association with qualities classically attributed to men, such as strength, agility, foresight, and endurance.<sup>29</sup> *Virtù* can be conceptualised as the internal qualities of the agent, i.e., his/her ‘energía o disposición para actuar en la esfera de lo público, de los hombres en general y de los ciudadanos en particular.’<sup>30</sup> This concept necessarily leads to a clash with *fortuna* as, J.L. Romero points out, the ultimate purpose of virtue is to test ‘las posibilidades de transformación de la realidad.’<sup>31</sup> This conflictive relationship directs Machiavelli to state that the exercise of *virtù* sometimes ‘puede exigir el empleo tanto de la fuerza bruta como del engaño.’<sup>32</sup> In his terms, it implies choosing, among the ‘beasts’, the qualities of the fox and the lion—that is, animals respectively characterised by their astuteness, slyness, and untrustworthiness, and courage.<sup>33</sup> The Florentine recommends the combination of the two, given that,

the lion cannot defend itself from traps, while the fox cannot protect itself from the wolves. It is therefore necessary to be a fox, in order to recognize the traps, and a lion, in order to frighten the wolves: those who base their behaviour only on the lion do not understand things.<sup>34</sup>

The aftermath of *Un yuppie* underscores indeed that those individuals who ‘base their behaviour only on the lion’ without considering the evolving political landscape, end up in torture, murder, or disappearance. Primarily, this pertains to guerrilla fighters who act without careful analysis of the deteriorating political conditions, placing undue emphasis on mere displays of courage. In contrast, Marroné survives the era of extreme violence by embracing the adaptability advised by Machiavelli. A pivotal moment occurs during one of his final missions as a guerrilla fighter, wherein he becomes ensnared by repressive forces in the Buenos Aires metro. The images that

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<sup>28</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. and ed. by Peter Bondanella (Oxford World’s Classics, 2005), p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> The Latin term *virtus* etymologically derives from *vir* (man) and it is associated with *vires* (strength). See John Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (Brewer, 2002), p. 76 and n19.

<sup>30</sup> Rafael del Águila and Sandra Chaparro, *La república de Maquiavelo* (Tecnos, 2006), pp. 187-8.

<sup>31</sup> J.L. Romero, *Maquiavelo historiador*, p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> Del Águila and Chaparro, *La república de Maquiavelo*, p. 193.

<sup>33</sup> Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 60.

prevail in his mind while being chased belong to the animal realm, as he notices in himself ‘el acre olor a animal perseguido’ (YCCG, 289), successively identifying himself with ‘un animal que de la protección del bosque ha salido a descubierto’ (YCCG, 290-1), a hare (YCCG, 294), a fish in a tank (YCCG, 297), and a dog (YCCG, 298), while people around him show a ‘paciencia bovina’ (YCCG, 303). All those images expose his mutability in front of a life-threatening danger, yet once he realises that dropping his gun has made impossible it for him to ‘dejar el mundo debatiéndose *como un león*, entre zarpazos y rugidos’ (YCCG, 290), he is forced to choose ‘among the beasts’. After discarding the cyanide pill option of dying ‘revolcándose sobre sí mismo *como una rata que comió arsénico*’ (YCCG, 290), Marroné finally deceives the ‘malignos ojos de dogo’ (YCCG, 304) of the military officer with a trick that is astute, sly, and untrustworthy. In other words, he has become the fox that recognises and escapes the trap, thereby endorsing Machiavelli’s words: ‘he who has known best how to use the ways of the fox has come out best.’<sup>35</sup>

Adaptation is thus, as seen in my Darwinian analysis of *Las Islas*, essential for succeeding in one’s specific goals, even though sometimes these goals consist of simply surviving. Marroné’s prospects of survival—and consequent elaboration and uttering of a truth—throughout Peronist and Guevarist spaces chiefly rely on his ability to adapt to times that, as John Roe describes, for Machiavelli ‘in general admit of no security’ and ‘too often betray intention.’<sup>36</sup> Marroné’s use of his ‘chivalrous’ virtues adheres to a precise sense of the real, following yet again Machiavelli’s advice in *The Prince*: ‘the man who adapts his method of procedure to *the nature of the times* will prosper, and likewise, [...] the man who establishes his procedures out of tune with the times will come to grief.’<sup>37</sup> Don Quixote’s nature contradicts Machiavelli’s counsel. Martín de Riquer describes the old *hidalgo* as a ‘*hombre bueno, inteligente, [que] sólo denuncia su locura al creerse caballero y al amoldar cuanto le rodea al ficticio y literario mundo de los libros de caballerías.*’<sup>38</sup> To a certain extent, Marroné can also be said to suffer, as de Riquer does about Cervantes’s character, ‘una auténtica intoxicación literaria.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, pp. 188 and 142.

<sup>37</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 85.

<sup>38</sup> Martín de Riquer, *Para leer a Cervantes* (Acantilado, 2003), p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> De Riquer, *Para leer a Cervantes*, p. 125.

Managerial literature endorses Don Quixote's approach to the world: 'Conocer la realidad, nos está diciendo Cervantes, no pasa por *aceptarla* tal cual es, sino por *transformarla*' (YCCG, 44-5, italics in the original). However, Marroné puts into practice rules from his 'intoxicación literaria' only when the turbulent, treacherous reality allows him to do so (as is clear in chapter V of *La aventura*, 'Siete cascos para debatir' [ABE, 195-232], where a role play devised by Marroné among workers and leaders of the protest ends up in the active production of the busts required for the release of Tamerlán, i.e., in the *transformation* of reality). When the possibilities of reality do not allow him to proceed otherwise, as seen in his escape from the metro, he certainly 'adapts his method of procedure to the nature of the times'. Unlike Don Quixote, then, it is only in specific, favourable, circumstances that Marroné tries to modify reality.

The interaction between *fortuna* and *virtù* also carries a clear differentiation of gender roles, suitable for Marroné's confession. As is appropriate, it is performed in a rigorously secluded domain, addressed to somebody unconnected to the sin(s) he is about to acknowledge (somebody belonging to the new, 'safeguarded' generation), and purportedly directed to a male member of this younger generation, since the sphere of the official religion of the country, Catholicism, is predominantly masculine. What Marroné is about to confess is a middle-class *virtù* (that is, the appropriate disposition to circumvent unstable, treacherous fortune), that is reached, as the tradition of the notion indicates, through experience.<sup>40</sup> Since Machiavelli advises employing *virtù* as a 'young', 'impetuous', 'less cautious, more ferocious' man in his dealings with *fortuna*, who 'is a woman',<sup>41</sup> Marroné's communication has necessarily to be masculine.

Marroné's daughter, Cynthia, 'la todavía mimada princesa de papá' (ABE, 13), is ruled out from his confession or, at least, indefinitely put on hold. In a traditional patriarchal view, he places his daughter in a position of utter innocence, occupied 'hasta ayer [en] los juegos con muñecas Barbie, y hoy [en] los peinados, los bailes de fin de semana, los regímenes para adelgazar y los coqueteos inocentes con jóvenes de su misma edad y condición' (ABE, 13). Politics is consequently excluded, in this male/paternalistic view, from the ordinary life of a female teenager, as Marroné himself

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<sup>40</sup> Del Águila and Chaparro, *La república de Maquiavelo*, p. 188.

<sup>41</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 87.

knows: ‘Si bien era verdad que en aquella época la guerrilla en su impetuoso avance había llegado a sumar miles de mujeres a sus filas, era igualmente cierto que, hoy por hoy, dicha posibilidad había quedado definitivamente sepultada’ (ABE, 13). Marroné’s reflection endorses the pressures of frivolous concerns that in the 1990s affected women in particular.<sup>42</sup> However, gender played a crucial role in the politics of the period he revisits, as Sebastián Carassai reminds us that,

[e]n 1970, la policía utilizaba el género de los implicados como método para inferir si un delito había sido realizado por delincuentes comunes o por “subversivos”. Si se constataban participación femenina y uso de armas o explosivos, deducían que se trataba de estos últimos. En la realidad, *el binomio “armas-mujeres” era indicio de política.*<sup>43</sup>

Marroné acknowledges this correlation. As revealed by Tamerlán in *Las Islas*, one of those ‘miles de mujeres’ facilitated his abduction by persuading Fausto II to initially join the Montoneros and subsequently betray his father. Marroné thus knows that ‘el entregador del señor Tamerlán había sido su propio hijo, *instigado o engañado por una Mata Hari de secundario*’ (YCCG, 120). Women’s actions, then, are not only synonymous with politics but also with duplicity and betrayal, mirroring the concept of *fortuna* as posited by Machiavelli. Once the abduction is successfully concluded, the ‘Mata Hari de secundario’ complies with her nickname’s fate and disappears from Fausto II’s life, also exposing that he merely is a ‘joven perejil’ (YCCG, 119) inside the Montoneros structure. This generational betrayal appears thus a confirmation of both the police’s suspicions about women and Machiavelli’s identification of the treacherous female *fortuna*.

It also introduces a gendered twist in relation to one of these Gamarro novels’ subtexts, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare’s play presents an exclusively male conspiracy unfolding within the public sphere of the time period.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the targeted individual is depicted as a ‘Roman Tamburlaine of illimitable ambition and

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<sup>42</sup> María Laura Destéfani, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamarro (1998-2011)* (doctoral thesis. University of Granada, 2019), p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> Sebastián Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común: la naturalización de la violencia* (Siglo XXI, 2013), p. 269.

<sup>44</sup> Eduardo Rinesi, *¡Qué cosa, la cosa pública! Apuntes shakespearianos para una república popular* (Ubu, 2021), in particular chapter IV ‘De fondo, Troya’, pp. 77-106.

ruthless irresistible genius; a monstrous tyrant.<sup>45</sup> While the wives of Brutus and Caesar are confined to the domestic realm within the play, these novels subvert this dynamic: the ‘treacherous’ interventions of women exploit men’s vulnerabilities to orchestrate the downfall of powerful figures in the 1970s. Once again Marroné seems aware of this, as his son, Tomás, appears to his eyes as,

un joven brillante, condenado al éxito, un líder nato y a la vez excelente compañero, y sobre todo de gran nobleza de corazón. Pero eran justamente estas cualidades, lo mejor que en él había, lo que lo volvían más proclive a escuchar el canto de sirena de los impacientes y los violentos (*ABE*, 13).

Confession, then, serves to convey a truth within a masculine order. Similarly, Marroné is about to transmit the memory of a historical experience that belongs to the middle classes in their interactions with Peronism and the insurgent movements of the 1970s—the ‘canto de sirena de los impacientes y los violentos’ that once he himself, and the Argentinian bourgeoisie, listened to and were attracted by.

Marroné’s mention to that appealing ‘canto de sirena’ is indeed appropriate for its Peronist echoes, as ‘violentos’ and ‘apresurados’ were Perón’s characterisations of those young people who demanded of him immediate revolutionary actions.<sup>46</sup> Further to this image, the person who opposes the sirens is Odysseus/Ulysses, the most ambiguous of Homer’s heroes. As José Emilio Burucúa reminds us, Ulysses has been noted for either ‘su carencia de escrúpulos, sus artes del engaño y la mentira, su astucia puesta al servicio de la traición’ or for being a ‘varón de las muchas formas, de los grandes recursos, [dotado de] destreza y flexibilidad de pensamiento,’ even to the point of being considered, in the twentieth century, the ‘mito burgués e ilustrado por excelencia.’<sup>47</sup> Ulysses also incited meaningful readings (among others, the ‘prudencia-engaño’ dyad and the dictum ‘engañar o perecer’), yet, most significantly, in Ancient Rome Julius Caesar was equated to the Greek hero as the ‘monarca restaurador de *un*

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<sup>45</sup> T.S. Dorsch in William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. by Dorsch (Arden and Routledge, 1988), p. xxvii. As will be discussed later, a different depiction is given by Rinesi (*¿Qué cosa, la cosa pública!*), who sees Caesar as ‘amado por el pueblo’ (p. 44), ‘líder del pueblo’ (p. 109), ‘líder popular’ (p. 110), ‘viejo líder’ (p. 152), ‘caudillo’ (p. 156), and ‘viejo dirigente popular’ (p. 228).

<sup>46</sup> Silvia Sigal and Eliseo Verón, *Perón o muerte. Los fundamentos discursivos del fenómeno peronista*, 2nd edn (Eudeba, 2003), p. 190.

<sup>47</sup> José Emilio Burucúa, *El mito de Ulises en el mundo moderno* (Eudeba, 2013), pp. 15 and 197.

*orden perdido*, and, later, some Fathers of the Church likened Christ to Ulysses, as the Christian should confront ‘los vicios del mundo como Ulises lo había hecho con *aquellos monstruos femeninos*.’<sup>48</sup> If, then, there exists the risk of a seductive, feminine, monstrous violence, the way to confront it is through the restoration of a lost order and a masculine resistance of those vices.

In front of Che Guevara’s poster, Marroné ratifies the generational, patriarchal feature of his confession:

“Pudo haber funcionado conmigo”, le dijo mentalmente, “pero con *mi hijo* no te va a resultar tan fácil. Porque *él no está solo*, me tiene a mí. Y yo... te conozco demasiado”. Marroné sintió una puntada en el pecho al pensar en cuántas vidas se podrían haber salvado si tan sólo *los padres hubieran sabido hablar a tiempo con sus hijos* [...]. *Una generación entera se había inmolidado en el altar de dudosos ídolos*, una generación de la cual él, Marroné, era un sobreviviente. ¿Y para qué había sobrevivido, si no *para contar la historia* y, contándola, conjurar su repetición, y devolver al descanso de la tumba a los inquietos fantasmas del pasado? (ABE, 14).

Marroné endorses thus the dictatorship’s official discourse that, in Carassai’s words, ‘argumentará que si las madres de los desaparecidos se hubieran preocupado antes por sus hijos no estarían lamentando esas desapariciones.’<sup>49</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that, along with the ratification of order, Marroné’s/the middle classes’ confession also shores up paternal authority, as it was the dictatorship’s explicit aim that families could ‘*retomar el mando*’ over their children when advising: ‘padres, madres e hijos *sanos* de nuestro país [...] cuiden el hogar. *Preserven su seguridad* [...] *La seguridad y la paz* del pueblo se construyen *dentro del hogar* y las escuelas.’<sup>50</sup> While Marroné’s/the middle classes’ experience begins with their rapprochement to Peronism, it is within the ideological frame of the ‘Proceso’ that his confession/truth is produced.

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<sup>48</sup> Burucúa, *El mito de Ulises en el mundo moderno*, pp. 121, 142, 56, and 59-60.

<sup>49</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, p. 139.

<sup>50</sup> Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La dictadura militar 1976/1983. Del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Paidós, 2002), pp. 126 and 125. Finchelstein states that ‘[o]utside the [concentration] camps the family was a center stage of this fight [against ‘subversion’], while through popular magazines ‘Argentine parents were warned that their children might have become “subversives,” that is, enemies of God and the homeland.’ See Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 147.

Marroné's survival draws upon Machiavelli's methods in order to materialise a truth ('contar la historia') which is Machiavellian in the sense that it is the result of direct experience. If Marroné initially shows Quixotesque traits, during the occupation of 'Yesería Sansimón' he verifies Machiavelli's intellectual presence, as he deems a character's behaviour to be 'sutil, por no decir maquiavélico' (*ABE*, 138). His use of the adjective joins a tradition begun in Europe in the sixteenth century, by which Machiavelli's name was directly associated with evil.<sup>51</sup> This reception was replicated in Buenos Aires under the second rule of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1835-1852), who was likened to a 'tirano maquiavélico' by members of the 'Generación del 37'.<sup>52</sup> This marks another separation from Don Quixote, who is substantially an 'hombre bueno', though the linking of Machiavelli to evil will be reformulated, granting him a 'doble personalidad'<sup>53</sup> that pervades his conception of the bourgeois man. For Machiavelli, indeed,

el hombre-masa no es, en rigor, ni [absolutamente malo ni absolutamente bueno], sino que *hace el bien cuando se siente coaccionado a ello y el mal cada vez que tiene ocasión*. Como presa de su naturaleza, el hombre-masa es, pues, *inestable y voluble, y pasa rápidamente de una ambición a otra, de un sentimiento a otro, de una resolución a otra*.<sup>54</sup>

To this Machiavellian co-existence of good and evil must be added a key attribute for the uttering of truth(s). On the one hand, in J.L. Romero's words, Machiavelli 'desvaneció la tupida red de convenciones y extremó la *actitud burguesa fundamental* que había sido *el entendimiento directo con la realidad*.'<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Sandro Landi notes that the Florentine favoured 'una jerarquía de sentidos basada en *la primacía del tacto, del conocimiento directo*, como atestigua la metáfora "ojos que tocan".'<sup>56</sup> In Machiavelli's own

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<sup>51</sup> Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, pp. 4 and 7.

<sup>52</sup> Leandro Losada, *Maquiavelo en la Argentina. Usos y lecturas, 1830-1940* (Katz, 2019), p. 25. In *Facundo*, Sarmiento famously characterised Rosas as 'falso, corazón helado, espíritu calculador que *hace el mal sin pasión* y organiza lentamente el despotismo, *con toda la inteligencia de un Maquiavelo*.' See Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo* (Biblioteca Ayacucho and Hyspamérica, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Losada, *Maquiavelo en la Argentina*, p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> J.L. Romero, *Maquiavelo historiador*, pp. 60-1.

<sup>55</sup> J.L. Romero, *Maquiavelo historiador*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Sandro Landi, *La mirada de Maquiavelo. Un ensayo desde la historia intelectual* (Eudeba, 2022), p. 241.

words to the prince: ‘Men in general judge more by their eyes than their hands: everyone can see, but few can feel. Everyone sees what you seem to be, few touch upon what you are.’<sup>57</sup> Comprising the prospects opened by Machiavelli’s thought, Leandro Losada summarises:

Se lo ha asociado con la validación de las conductas más abyectas, con los fenómenos más repudiables, del crimen a la tiranía, de la hipocresía a la violencia. Maquiavelo fue quien *dijo lo indecible* y, a la vez, quien *enseñó la necesidad de la mentira y del engaño*. Un autor de la *franqueza sin eufemismos* y un *maestro de la simulación*.<sup>58</sup>

Machiavelli’s framework unites the two key aspects of Marroné’s profanation of the sacred zone: the ability to ‘speak the unspeakable’ informed by direct experience, coupled with the capacity for lie and deception. As will be analysed in the following section, Marroné’s, or more broadly, the experiences of the middle classes, will serve to complete the nationalist notion of the sacred Fatherland.

#### THE NATIONALIST NOTION OF THE SACRED

Marroné’s endeavours in Peronist and Guevarist spheres embody the struggles waged by revolutionary movements against the oppressive forces of the third Peronist government and the subsequent of the ‘Proceso’. Repression under Peronism is staged, in *La aventura*, during the ‘liberation’ of ‘Yesería Sansimón’. In this regard, Carassai notes ‘la temprana aparición [desde 1974], y en un contexto institucional democrático, de un *estado terrorista* guiado por propósitos e instrumentando metodologías similares a los que las autoridades militares implementarán a partir de marzo de 1976.’<sup>59</sup> For Vezzetti, these constitute ‘*prácticas terroristas, no sistemáticas*’ of the state, in order to emphasise the ‘carácter sistemático [...], institucional de las Fuerzas Armadas a cargo

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<sup>57</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> Losada, *Maquiavelo en la Argentina*, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, p. 174.

del Estado' that those activities acquire after the coup.<sup>60</sup> It is the repression shown in *Un yuppie*.

Both conflicts enact, always following Vezzetti's analysis, 'una disputa sobre el significado mismo de la idea de *Nación*.'<sup>61</sup> This dispute within the nationalist field necessarily involved religious content, since the nationalists presented their creed as a 'God-given theory.'<sup>62</sup> All those parties in conflict share an attitude 'integrista', that in Altamirano's words is 'la afirmación de *la integridad de la doctrina cristiana en todas las esferas de la vida*, en oposición a la discontinuidad de los lenguajes y la diferenciación de los dominios que acompañan a la secularización de la sociedad moderna,' a bearing that in the 1970s 'sigue siendo antiliberal, pero *ya no es antimarxista*.'<sup>63</sup> It is through this attitude 'integrista', either in the traditional position of the Catholic church or in its Third-World faction, that the sacred invades the profane. Both versions appear in fictional reality.

The first unfolds during Tamerlán's false funeral, when a priest of traditional nationalism conducts the religious service making Biblical allusions (particularly to Ecclesiastes and Revelation) that openly read the political situation of the country through the pattern of those sacred sources. Yet again, as seen in *El secreto*, a priest's sermon lends theological support to the policies of extermination that the state was to apply:

Durante ese plazo *la bestia* saldrá a la luz y triunfará del justo, y recibirá la adoración de las gentes. Mas vencido ese plazo *llegará a su término el reinado de la bestia*, y *ese tiempo ya está cerca* [...]. ¿Creéis acaso que mientras se entregan los corruptos a su festín y los impíos diariamente nos matan y ofenden, permanecen *los ejércitos del Señor* indiferentes? No, ellos observan, y toman nota, y afilan sus hoces en silencio, mientras esperan que sea llegado el tiempo de la cosecha. Entonces vendimiarán la viña de la tierra, y echarán la uva en el gran lagar de la ira de Dios, y *del lagar saldrá sangre* en lugar de vino. Porque dice el Señor de

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<sup>60</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, 'Verdad jurídica y verdad histórica. Condiciones, usos y límites de la figura del "genocidio"', in *Lesas humanidad. Argentina y Sudáfrica: reflexiones después del Mal*, ed. by Claudia Hilb, Philippe-Joseph Salazar, and Lucas G. Martín (Katz, 2014), pp. 17-37 (pp. 25-6). Italics in the original.

<sup>61</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 73. Italics in the original.

<sup>62</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, p. 153.

vuestros enemigos: *en el cáliz que os dieran de beber, dadles a beber doblado* (YCCG, 24).

The two moral categories ('the righteous and the wicked') into which humanity is placed before divine scrutiny<sup>64</sup> serves as the basis for the interpretations selected by the priest from Revelation. As Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett explain, this text 'has been interpreted in *extremely literal fashion by many millenarian and fundamentalist groups throughout Christian history*' with a propensity to see in it 'particular historical situations—most notably, perhaps, at the time of the French Revolution,'<sup>65</sup> i.e., one of the secular events that envisioned to separate politics from religion. Not only do the 'grotesque images of the Apocalypse express a simple eschatological belief that, after the fall of empires and the destruction of the Beast, *Christians [...] will reign with Christ over a new and transformed world*,' leading back 'to where it all began in Genesis, and the story of the garden of Eden,'<sup>66</sup> but they also sanction the method of achieving it, literally employed by the 'Proceso' for disappearing its opponents: 'a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast *it* into the sea' in order that 'with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.'<sup>67</sup> This implied outcome of the sacred conquering the profane accords with interventions, in real reality, of high members of the Catholic Church. These prelates conceived the dictatorship's criminal actions as 'a "holy war" [...] tightly bound to the idea of *purifying sacrifice*,' thus justifying 'the repression, calling it "a blood bath" and maintaining that the function of the Army was to "atone for our country's *impurity*."' <sup>68</sup> The 'army of the Lord' undertaking acts of atonement for a nation's impurity underscores the inherent incompatibility between impurity and the Christian sacred exposed by Bataille. This narrative further emphasises that purification, in this context, demands the elimination of the impure or profane through bloodshed.

Marróné comes across the version of the Catholic discourse supporting the opposite nationalist faction while serving as liaison between the Tamerlán family and the Montoneros. For this purpose, he has to follow instructions that are left to him in

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<sup>64</sup> Ecclesiastes 3. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Carroll and Prickett in *The Bible*, p. 438.

<sup>66</sup> Carroll and Prickett in *The Bible*, pp. 440 and 441.

<sup>67</sup> Revelation 18. 21. Italics in the original.

<sup>68</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 128.

the guise of Biblical riddles. These religious signs will literally direct him to his becoming a guerrilla fighter through a significant encounter in a church. It is there that, in a Bible belonging to a ‘curita obrero’, he finds annotations conveying materialist readings of the Gospels as well as the political moment of the country, among which,

[L]a que más lo impresionó [...] fue la cita que decía: “¿Pensáis que he venido a la tierra a dar paz? No, os digo, más disensión. Porque estarán de aquí adelante cinco en una casa divididos; tres contra dos, y dos contra tres. *El padre estará dividido contra el hijo, y el hijo contra el padre*”. Acá, el curita obrero había apuntado: “*Y esta vez el crucificado será el padre*” (YCCG, 116-7).

If for the traditional priest the division is between ‘the righteous and the wicked’, for the ‘workerist priest’ it is between generations. The Biblical line he selects comes from Luke 12. 51-3 where all the family divisions are indeed generational:

The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

It is, as the Biblical text goes on to say (as Machiavelli would), the nature of the times.<sup>69</sup>

Since it links the profane with the sacred, the notion of sacrifice is central to both discourses. The novelty of the New Testament is, in Adolfo Chaparro Amaya’s words,

*la sublimidad por la cual el sacrificio de Cristo en la cruz habría inaugurado una nueva relación de los hombres con Dios, en la cual el sacrificio humano, de carácter espiritual, haría indigno cualquier sacrificio animal o puramente material.*<sup>70</sup>

The specificity of Christianity is, then, that this new relationship between men and God is shaped through human sacrifice. An early connection with anthropophagic practices in pre-Hispanic American communities was traced by Indian chronicler Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566). In human sacrifices, ‘Las Casas descubre los signos de una participación universal en el ámbito de lo religioso,’ since ‘se asoma a un punto de coincidencia polémico y crucial: *la posible “traducción” del sacrificio del corazón* [en

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<sup>69</sup> Luke 12. 56.

<sup>70</sup> Adolfo Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar canibal. Una perspectiva amerindia de la guerra, lo sagrado y la colonialidad* (Katz, 2013), p. 21.

los pueblos prehispánicos] *al misterio del sacrificio de Cristo*.<sup>71</sup> This also introduces a substantial trait that will be later analysed: the notion that sacrifice's ultimate purpose is to *sustain*—rather than to *confront*—an order interwoven with the religious and the political. As one of the Montoneros puts it, referring to an antagonist with regard to the decisive means for the materialisation of the sacred nation: 'Lo único que falta es que me salgas con *el valor sagrado de la vida humana*' (ABE, 246). Given, then, that human life has no 'sacred value' when the 'sacred nation' is at stake, it is also understandable that both sides of the nationalist field spare no human lives in their fight for the meaning of sacred Fatherland.

Since the sixteenth century, Landi elucidates, 'degustar la carne de los enemigos [...] se convirtió en un lugar común para las representaciones [en Europa] del Nuevo Mundo,' a fact that abolished the distance between tribal societies and sophisticated European urban centres by exposing their common deep mechanisms: 'en ambos casos la guerra y la consiguiente devastación de los enemigos permite *fundar o refundar* [...] *la comunidad política*.'<sup>72</sup> This aspect was seen by Machiavelli, who in his *History of Florence* describes a popular revolt resulting in the cannibalistic end of the *podestà* and his young son in 1343. To the Medieval chronicles he is following, Machiavelli adds vivid details of that anthropophagic act.<sup>73</sup> In Machiavelli's text,

they who could not wound them [the *podestà* and his son] when alive *wounded them when dead* and, not sated by rending them with steel, *tore them with their hands and teeth* [...] so that, since *all the outside parts had been sated, those within might also gain satiety*.<sup>74</sup>

Machiavelli's emphasis on the literal internalisation of the enemy by his being eaten endorses notions of those communities of the recently discovered lands, where, Chaparro Amaya outlines, 'el consumo del cuerpo de la víctima [...] entra así en composición con el cuerpo de los vivos y *aumenta su potencia comunitaria*.'<sup>75</sup> The paradigm of militant nationalism is thus reinforced, in my interpretation, through the

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<sup>71</sup> Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar canibal*, pp. 162 and 165.

<sup>72</sup> Landi, *La mirada de Maquiavelo*, p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> Landi, *La mirada de Maquiavelo*, p. 125.

<sup>74</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The History of Florence*, in Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, trans. by Allan Gilbert, 3 vols (Duke University Press, 1989), III, pp. 1025-435 (p. 1132).

<sup>75</sup> Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar canibal*, p. 224.

utilisation of enemies as sacrificial figures in the rhetoric employed by the two fictional Catholic priests.

An anecdote that Vezzetti recalls serves to illustrate this point. It involves former Montonero leader—and at the time successful businessman—Rodolfo Galimberti (1947-2002) in a friendly conversation with a military officer during a social meeting: ‘Alguien, ajeno a la cofradía, cuestiona que puedan estar juntos los que antes quisieron exterminarse; el que responde es un mayor en actividad: “*Vos no entendés una mierda, nosotros nos matamos porque teníamos una idea de la Patria*”.’<sup>76</sup> Once again this appreciation of the enemy finds echoes in pre-Hispanic America, where some communities were able to imagine,

un futuro posible que *únicamente los enemigos* pueden garantizar. De ahí *la complicidad entre matadores y víctimas* que dejó perplejos a los europeos. La memoria del futuro se da por *interpuestos enemigos, irreconciliables e indisociables entre sí* [...]. El enemigo, como objeto de pulsión caníbal [apunta] a la *intercesión necesaria para construir una inmortalidad* que se otorga como don a través del ritual [...] derivado del *deseo colectivo de inmortalidad*.<sup>77</sup>

The virtues of the enemy-warrior are acknowledged in his ‘sacralización a través de la consumición de la carne.’<sup>78</sup> He thus becomes part of a cycle which has the ultimate purpose of securing the life of his own—as well as his enemy’s—community. Hence, the notions of sacrifice promoted by both priests forcefully lead to the consolidation of those communities that killed each other because they each had an idea of Fatherland.

In his process of re-insertion into ‘los ordenados circuitos de la sociedad’ (*ABE*, 13), Marroné tortures his former lover, María Eva. He is complimented by the military, who ‘le palmeaban la espalda y le decían cosas como: “Debutaste, pibe” y “¿Le viste la cara a Dios?”’ (*YCCG*, 368). Apart from the already analysed belief among the perpetrators that in the concentration camps they were God, such expressions seem to confirm thinkers of Enlightenment who, in George Steiner’s words, believed

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<sup>76</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, pp. 133-4. Italics in the original.

<sup>77</sup> Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar caníbal*, p. 230.

<sup>78</sup> Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar caníbal*, p. 223. Bataille notes this religious aspect of cannibalism ‘in the communion feast following on the sacrifice. The human flesh that is eaten then is held as sacred [...]; the object is “forbidden”, sacred, and the very prohibition attached to it is what arouses the desire.’ See Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, pp. 71-2.

that “[t]orture and the annihilation of human communities [...] sprang directly from religious dogmatism [as by] proclaiming individuals or entire societies to be damned, by treating their convictions as pestilential heresies, church and state had deliberately loosed fanaticism and savagery on often helpless men.”<sup>79</sup> Those expressions also link sexual passion with sacred violence while verifying the co-existence of the military with revolutionary groups in the same rhetorical field. In this regard, Vezzetti quotes a former Montonero militant affirming that ‘en la clase política argentina existe una suerte de respeto o de *envidia* hacia los militantes de los 70 *porque nosotros le vimos la cara a Dios*.’<sup>80</sup> Such belief, Vezzetti continues, ‘saca a la luz una extraordinaria condensación de política, pulsión erótica y religión’ apt to explore,

la violencia revolucionaria concebida como **una acción humana que toca “lo intocable”**. Durkheim ha descrito en la religión primitiva “un estado de eferescencia” surgido del contacto con lo *sagrado*: “[...] las energías vitales están sobreexcitadas, las pasiones son más vivas, las sensaciones más fuertes” [...] puede surgir en épocas en las que **no se vive normalmente, en períodos revolucionarios o creadores** [...] en los que el sujeto “**deviene otro**”, capaz de **actos de “heroísmo sobrehumano o de barbarie sanguinaria”**.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to being shared by both sides of the militant nationalist field, these sexual images are uttered in ‘the inner sanctum of the nation’, i.e., the concentration camps, where ‘the “sacred” ideology of Argentine fascism was made tangible.’<sup>82</sup> Marroné’s initial act of profanation of the sacred is his participation in guerrilla movements. His active collaboration with torture procedures will allow him to complete that profanation and subsequently question the “generación entera [que] se había *inmolado en el altar de dudosos ídolos* (ABE, 14). His declaration strips the sacrificial event of its sacred essence, thereby condemning the entire nationalist militant sphere. Since the sacredness was vested in the notion of ‘la Patria’ itself, he consequently rejects the sanctity attributed to the Fatherland.

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<sup>79</sup> George Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle. Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* (Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 42-3.

<sup>80</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 131. Italics in the original.

<sup>81</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 131. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>82</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, pp. 154 and 10.

The onset of the 1973-1976 period witnessed a notable convergence between Perón and significant segments of the middle class, a relationship historically characterised by mutual rejection.<sup>83</sup> Prior to the 1955 coup, Perón vilified his adversaries as ‘la *anti-Patria*’, successfully polarising the political landscape for the subsequent two decades into Peronists and anti-Peronists, as studied by Silvia Sigal and Eliseo Verón.<sup>84</sup> In my examination, this division marks the initial Baroque distinction within Argentine society, predicated on the dichotomy of sacred/profane. This dichotomy emerges from the nationalist conviction that the sacred encompasses the Fatherland itself, juxtaposed with Evita’s proclamation that ‘Perón is the Homeland’.<sup>85</sup> Her identification of Perón with the sacred and the Fatherland can be seen, for instance, in a declaration of 1951: ‘Perón es el rostro de Dios en la obscuridad, sobre todo, en la obscuridad de este momento que atraviesa la humanidad.’<sup>86</sup> Middle classes, who at this point were largely opposed to Perón, were thus expelled from the sacred.

The years after Perón’s overthrow witnessed middle-class sectors (Marxist intelligentsia, university students, and progressive groups of the Catholic Church) evolving from anti-Peronist positions to Peronism. Each of these sectors perceived in ‘el peronismo combatiente’ the appropriate political movement for channelling their own aspirations, as the Montoneros themselves stated in a document of 1970.<sup>87</sup> In the firm loyalty that the masses felt for the deposed leader, Marxism now recognised “‘el pueblo peronista” como pueblo irrendento,’ while prominent leftist intellectuals labelled their generation as ‘peronista’.<sup>88</sup> For their part, Carassai explains that university youth embraced Peronism ‘como un medio para impugnar todo un orden (profesoral, policial, político, familiar) que ellos sentían que los limitaba primeramente como

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<sup>83</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, pp. 23 and 25.

<sup>84</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 69. Italics in the original.

<sup>85</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 89.

<sup>86</sup> In José Pablo Feinmann, *La sangre derramada. Ensayo sobre la violencia política*, 2nd edn (Seix Barral, 2010), p. 85.

<sup>87</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción* (Siglo XXI, 2003), p. 264.

<sup>88</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, pp. 154 and 70. The author quoted is David Viñas, in 1959. Sebrelí also expresses that ‘[t]oda una generación, que es la mía, está indisolublemente unida al peronismo para siempre.’ See Juan José Sebrelí, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo* (Sudamericana, 1992), p. 17.

juventud.<sup>89</sup> Finally, the slide of progressive Catholics was exposed by the emblematic priest Carlos Mugica (1930-1974), who explained that ‘mi proceso de acercamiento al peronismo coincidió con mi cristianización’:

Del *Evangelio* y del *ejemplo de Cristo* había aprendido que debía mirar “la historia humana desde los pobres”. Y en la Argentina, “la mayoría de los pobres son peronistas, para decirlo simplemente”.<sup>90</sup>

In *La aventura*, this convergence is depicted during the occupation of ‘Yesería Sansimón’ by its laborers. Set within a characteristically Peronist place, a factory placed somewhere in the Greater Buenos Aires area, typical Peronist workers articulate their customary demands for enhancements in wages and working conditions when they receive unsolicited assistance from a Montonero cell. On the one hand, this scene exemplifies the tactic of ‘entrismo’ employed by the leftist movement to engage with the masses through the platform of Peronism;<sup>91</sup> on the other, it shows the methodological alliance between union leaders and repressive forces against the same ideological ‘enemy’, i.e., Marxism.<sup>92</sup> The episode also makes possible Marroné’s reunion with his former classmate Paddy, known as ‘El Colorado’ after his recent joining the Montoneros. The dialogue between them exposes both the misunderstandings within their social class and the convergence of the middle classes with Marxism, and with Catholicism, inside Peronism:

—Proletarizando —escupió exasperado Paddy—. Me estoy *haciendo proletario*.  
—Pero por qué. ¿Tu familia *cayó en la ruina*?  
—No, no. Con ellos *ya no me hablo*. Es una decisión personal, entendés, un renunciamiento. Una *opción por los pobres*.  
—¿Te hiciste cura? —preguntó con cierto alivio Marroné. La familia de Paddy *siempre había sido muy católica*.  
—No. *Peronista* (ABE, 145).

Contrasting with Marroné’s concerns about his social class, Paddy/‘El Colorado’ shows his ideological sources by using classical Marxist rhetoric (workers are referred to as ‘proletarios’ rather than as ‘descamisados’ or ‘cabecitas negras’, the more

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<sup>89</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, p. 153.

<sup>91</sup> Feinmann, *La sangre derramada*, p. 152. n120.

<sup>92</sup> Alejandro Horowicz, *Los cuatro peronismos* (Hyspamérica, 1986), p. 186.

traditional Peronist terms) and by drawing upon the Priests for the Third World's 'opción por los pobres'. His antagonism with the preceding generation (although he defends his decision as 'personal'), to whom he no longer talks, is emphasised when, talking about *Hamlet*, he says: 'Si Hamlet dejara de mirarse el ombligo [...] podría ejecutar su venganza, porque *ya no sería en nombre del padre* —a fin de cuentas, un oligarca más— sino de *las oprimidas masas danesas*' (ABE, 155). He thus completes his middle classes' transformation regarding Peronism.

In my perspective, the evolution of these groups establishes a second Baroque split, as other segments of the middle classes maintained 'softer' non-Peronist stances, yet broadly upholding their political identity in opposition to that party.<sup>93</sup> Upon his return in 1973, Perón acknowledged this shift and explicitly sought to dissolve the dichotomy that had shaped Argentine politics for nearly two decades.<sup>94</sup> If the division between Peronists and anti-Peronists had previously led to the exclusion of the middle classes from the sacred via labelling them as 'la anti-Patria', Perón's declaration in 1973 aimed to integrate those 'profane' sectors into the sacred. It is within this altered context that Marroné will enact his profanation.

Although at the time of Marroné's endeavours, Perón, Evita, and Che Guevara are all dead, I contend in the subsequent sub-sections that these three pivotal political figures continue to exert influence over the country's trajectory, forming a trinity analogous to the Christian doctrine. While the triangular relationship of father, mother, and son/daughter has long been ingrained in Western culture, inherently echoing the Oedipal model as described by Chaparro Amaya, 'por la fuerza configuradora que el núcleo familiar tiene como átomo social [...] como arquetipo de la fábula con que se relata cada nuevo proceso de individuación,'<sup>95</sup> similarly, the association of Perón, Evita, and Che with the Trinity resonates with the implications Christianity imbues into an essential notion for the revolutionary groups of the 1970s: that of *human* sacrifice. In this context, as I shall demonstrate, the Montoneros consciously adopt the notion of sacrifice from the guiding figure of Eva Perón (who embodies the roles of wife, mother, and daughter concurrently), while drawing closer inspiration from Che

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<sup>93</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, pp. 23 and 25.

<sup>94</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 89.

<sup>95</sup> Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar caníbal*, p. 125.

Guevara, to challenge the paternal authority represented explicitly by Juan Domingo Perón.

#### (I) THE FATHER RETURNS

At his return to the country after eighteen years of exile and banishment, Perón offered Argentinian society a renewed version of himself. According to Carassai,

[e]ste nuevo Perón, conciliador y fraterno con la oposición, logró que temporariamente una parte de las clases medias se aproximase a tener de él la visión que ya hacía tiempo el propio líder tenía de sí mismo: *el “padre eterno” capaz de abarcar con su abrazo a todos los hijos*, al margen de la mayor o menor simpatía que despertase en ellos.<sup>96</sup>

As Carassai implies, the idea that Perón conceived of himself as a ‘padre eterno’ had a long history. In 1951, he delivered one of his lessons of ‘conducción política’ in which he lectured about his leadership: ‘Cuando se hacen dos bandos peronistas, yo hago el *Padre Eterno*: los tengo que arreglar a los dos. [...] A mí me interesa solamente que **no se dividan**.’<sup>97</sup> Perón maintained this role during his exile. In a letter of 1958, for instance, he reminded his correspondent about ‘mi función de “padre Eterno” que *bendice a todos*, pero a condición de que *profesen*.’<sup>98</sup> The ineffectiveness of his position—by the early 1970s there were indeed two irreconcilable ‘bandos peronistas,’ both professing devotion to the ‘padre Eterno’—did not bode well for his paternal aspirations regarding the whole of Argentinian society. As a traditional Peronist puts it in *La aventura*: ‘Ese Perón que vino *ya no era el nuestro*’ (*ABE*, 377). Perón and Peronism thus undergo a division like those verified in the middle classes and in the Catholic Church, accounting thus for the general, Baroque condition of society.

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<sup>96</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, p. 44. In *Las Islas*, this vision is expressed by the character reminiscent of traditional Peronism, Don Benito, who, as seen in chapter 1, writes about ‘el cuerpo de un hombre tan ancho que *todos creyeron que podía contener al país entero en su abrazo*’ (*LI*, 130). In Don Benito’s conception, this failed feat led to the destruction of that same body/image while maintaining the association of Perón with the severed national territory.

<sup>97</sup> In Feinmann, *La sangre derramada*, p. 46. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>98</sup> In Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 122.

After the 1955 coup, Altamirano outlines, ‘la imagen del peronismo se hizo *doble*’, split in a ‘*peronismo verdadero pero virtual y exilado*’ and a ‘*peronismo empírico, privado de verdad aunque no de poder.*’<sup>99</sup> Perón himself did not escape the effects of such a division. Again in Altamirano’s analysis,

incluso el propio Perón no fue, siempre y en todo momento, el depositario del peronismo verdadero [...]. A veces Perón mismo era colocado en el registro del peronismo empírico y entonces el evocador de lo virtual era otro: el pueblo (el peronismo-pueblo [...]), la clase obrera, *Evita*.<sup>100</sup>

The question of the ‘true’ Perón at his return to the country would be indeed a matter of deep conflicts, even to the point, as Altamirano suggests, of being opposed by the people and Evita.

The rupture unfolds after a fundamental change in Perón’s discourse with regard to truth. In 1945 he had demanded to be trusted in his military capacity ‘ya que la mentira no puede integrar el equipo ni la mochila de un soldado’, as Perón himself put it, assuming a quality that would guarantee, for Sigal and Verón, that ‘la palabra peronista representa, en el campo político, la **palabra verdadera**.’<sup>101</sup> Perón’s subsequent metamorphose from a soldier into a father with godlike aspirations enacts the Hobbesian choice of *authoritas* over *veritas*, studied in chapter 3. However, this option does not appear inappropriate for somebody who entered the political arena describing the conditions of the country in terms resembling Hobbes’s state of nature. In 1944, for instance, Perón said that ‘[c]omenzábamos a ser, cada uno de nosotros, *enemigo de todos los demás*,’ a situation that would only be left behind through ‘*la unión de todos los argentinos para que esa lucha se convierta en colaboración y en cooperación, [...] que son las únicas fuerzas que pueden hacer felices a los hombres y grandes a las naciones.*’<sup>102</sup> Perón’s allusions to an author who advocates the obedience of the subjects to the

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<sup>99</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, p. 130.

<sup>100</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, p. 131.

<sup>101</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 63. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine. For the authors, this constitutes a key feature of ‘el estatus del discurso de Perón-enunciador: *por la boca de Perón, es la verdad misma que se expresa*’ (p. 61). Italics in the original.

<sup>102</sup> In Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, pp. 49 and 66. The authors also highlight ‘la caracterización de la situación anterior a la aparición de Perón como una suerte de *estado de lucha de todos contra todos*’ (p. 66).

sovereign and his law,<sup>103</sup> is corroborated by a leadership that follows Hobbes's notion of civil power. In fact, as Finchelstein states, 'for Perón leadership could not be shared, not with God nor with his nacionalista crusaders [...], the leader was the temporal analogy of the sacred. *The conductor was the political leader on earth, not God.*'<sup>104</sup> In Galimidi's words, the power of the sovereign can reside

tanto la creencia en el carisma del individuo excepcionalmente poderoso y bendecido por la fortuna (la cual, para Hobbes, recordemos, es *la ayuda secreta de Dios* [...]), como *la convicción de sacralidad* y destino colectivo que genera, por ejemplo, *el mito de la nacionalidad*.<sup>105</sup>

If Perón thus fulfils a Hobbesian notion of sovereignty, the figure of a father he proposes also finds significative echoes in political thought apropos authority. The tradition linking 'paternal government of the family' and 'despotic government' dates back Aristotle, since, as Norberto Bobbio affirms, in 'the traditional family [...] the head of household was at the same time **husband, father, and master**,' a notion that later led to that "*Fathers of Families*, by an insensible change, became the *politick Monarchs* of them too" [...] "they laid the **Foundations of Hereditary, or Elective Kingdoms**".<sup>106</sup> Perón's addition of a divine-like feature to his paternal role, then, completes a figure that fusions the sacred and the profane, with the consequent separation of authority and truth, which in Peronism is fundamentally defined by its *exclusion* from power.<sup>107</sup>

The theological reminiscences of this political subject, the Peronist 'Padre Eterno', align with the ideological frame of the period. In Beatriz Sarlo's words:

*No hay reino de Dios y reino del César*, porque aquí y allá los cristianos deben construir *un solo reino de justicia* [...] son enemigos del Evangelio quienes sostienen *una separación* entre lo

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<sup>103</sup> In *De Cive*, XIV. 1, Hobbes defines law as '*the command of that person, whether man or court, whose precept contains in it the reason of obedience.*' See Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, p. 164. Italics in the original.

<sup>104</sup> Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, p. 80.

<sup>105</sup> Galimidi, *Leviatán Conquistador*, p. 173.

<sup>106</sup> Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, pp. 178, 14-15, and 16. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>107</sup> Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, p. 135.

público y lo privado, la moral y la economía, los intereses particulares y los intereses colectivos.<sup>108</sup>

Perón achieves thus the unity of the two realms with the subjection of the spiritual to the earthly one. If Hobbes sustains that '[t]emporal and spiritual government, are but two words brought into the world, **to make men see double**,<sup>109</sup> he consequently warns about the action of the Roman church that '*disseminates rebellion*' by means of excommunication, in addition to coming to use 'well-informed political theories [...] to preach the *assassination of kings* to its followers.'<sup>110</sup> While the revolutionary generation have decided that 'esta vez el crucificado será el padre' (YCCG, 116-7), according to Christian dogma it is possible to assassinate a king but not to crucify the father. Not only is the victim of the Christian sacrifice the Son, but he is also given up by the Father/God. Therefore, in a kingdom that equally belongs to God and Caesar, those revolutionary children are pushed towards the realm of the latter, for which Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* constitutes an explicit reference in Gamero's fictional reality.

In *La aventura*, it is Marroné who first recalls this play when, listing several of Shakespeare's works adapted by management literature, he remembers that 'el discurso de Marco Antonio en *Julio César* ofrecía una lección de cómo hablar bien en público que combinaba lo mejor de la oratoria clásica con la eficientísima utilización de los apoyos materiales de una moderna presentación audiovisual (a saber: el manto tajeado, la sangre, el cuerpo mismo del líder asesinado)' (ABE, 70-1). The political (generational) reading of *Julius Caesar* is given by Marroné's former schoolmate, and now Montonero militant, Paddy/'El Colorado' at the time of their being reunited in the Peronist space:

—Una obra donde los revolucionarios que quieren salvar a la república aparecen como villanos y el dictador y sus esbirros como héroes. ¿Y el pueblo? O te los ponen como idiotas que se dejan llevar de la nariz o como una turba salvaje que asesina e incendia a mansalva. Lo único que les falta es meter las patas en la fuente y quemar iglesias. Te digo, si en lugar de Shakespeare la escribía Borges no le salía más gorila (ABE, 155).

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<sup>108</sup> Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, p. 168.

<sup>109</sup> *Leviathan*, XXXIX. 5. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>110</sup> Bobbio, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, p. 77.

The Montonero reading of *Julius Caesar* brings to the fore the classic Machiavellian conflict between ‘what you seem to be’ and ‘what you are.’<sup>111</sup> Apart from the diverging views on Caesar as either leader or tyrant, it subtly displays the split between those who are perceived as ‘el dictador y sus esbirros’ and ‘el pueblo’, clearly delimited by two key actions of Peronism: ‘meter las patas en la fuente’ of 17 October 1945, and ‘quemar las iglesias’ of June 1955. However, the ‘gorila’ interpretation of *Julius Caesar* hides from the Montoneros the impossibility of enacting, in 1970s Argentina, the opposition they read in this Shakespeare’s play.

Undoubtedly, numerous political characteristics draw parallels between Caesar and Perón, thereby establishing *Julius Caesar* as a distinct subtext within Gamerro’s novel. Both leaders experience triumphant returns to their respective political places: Caesar following his victory over Pompey, and Perón through a sweeping electoral triumph that concludes eighteen years of exile.<sup>112</sup> Both figures are enveloped in an aura of divinity: if, as seen, Perón presented himself as a ‘Padre Eterno’, Cassius scornfully reflects on Romans considering that Caesar has ‘now become a god.’<sup>113</sup> Finally, the two are, as Rinesi puts it referring to Caesar, ‘amado[s] por el pueblo, que lo[s] aclamaba y vitoreaba a su paso.’<sup>114</sup>

In Gamerro’s fictional reality, the voice of the ‘eternal father’ is not heard. Instead, the person who in *Las Islas* wondered ‘¿[q]uién, alguna vez, tuvo más derecho a llamarse padre que yo?’ (*LI*, 393), that is, Tamerlán, performs the part of Antony in front of a hostile tribunal, voicing the reasons of the dead. The mogul is indeed being judged by the Montoneros, who have told him that ‘lo está juzgando el pueblo’ (*YCCG*, 318). After mocking ‘la representatividad de Montoneros’ (*YCCG*, 319), Tamerlán’s criticism centres on, precisely, what separated the ‘tyrant’ from the conspirators—the favour of the masses:

Mientras *ustedes se hacen cagar a tiros* luchando contra la dictadura, y mastican pastillas de cianuro como si fueran chicles, ¿*el pueblo dónde está?* Metido debajo de la cama, o la cucheta, o la catrera, parando cada tanto la oreja para ver si pararon los tiros [...]. *La*

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<sup>111</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 62.

<sup>112</sup> On 23 September 1973, Perón was elected for a third period in office with a historical 62% of the votes. See Liliana de Riz, *La política en suspenso: 1966-1976* (Paidós, 2000), p. 142.

<sup>113</sup> *Julius Caesar*, I. 2. 115.

<sup>114</sup> Rinesi, *¿Qué cosa, la cosa pública!*, p. 109.

*masa no es boluda: se para al costado del camino y aplaude a los que van al sacrificio, o sea, ustedes (YCCG, 319).*

Based on Hobbes's main traits of life in state of nature, i.e., fear and war, Tamerlán's description is reminiscent of Perón's description of the country in the 1940s, earlier discussed. By upholding Hobbes's concerns about religious groups undermining Leviathan—those who volunteer to *sacrifice* themselves—, Tamerlán/Antony is fundamentally telling the Montoneros/conspirators that, in Argentina like in Ancient Rome, masses ultimately have remained loyal to the dead leader.

Two essential facts complete the connections of Shakespeare's and Gamero's fictions. As Roe highlights, among the issues *Julius Caesar* raises, there is '[t]he crisis facing the monarch and nation [...] on *who was to succeed her*, and when.'<sup>115</sup> The question of Perón's inheritance, eagerly demanded by the youth incorporated to Peronism in the 1960s, was referred to as 'trasvasamiento generacional.'<sup>116</sup> While both Caesar and Perón were not, or seemed not to be, what the youth expected from them, the two faced those generational demands with mistrust. Caesar personifies in Cassius those of 'lean and hungry look,' who will '*be never at heart's ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves, / And therefore are they very dangerous.*'<sup>117</sup> For his part, Perón characterised them as 'muchachada apresurada,' as well as violent.<sup>118</sup> The connections between these two leaders can be perceived by Rinesi suggestively drawing upon terms of the Peronist generational conflict—'muchachada', 'líder', and 'pueblo'—to explain that 'la conjura era una causa contra César y *contra el pueblo*, al que esta muchachada odiaba tanto como a su líder.'<sup>119</sup>

Like Perón, Caesar mastered 'el arte de la conducción', was the leader of his people, and left a 'testamento que indica que *el único heredero de César es el pueblo.*'<sup>120</sup> After reminding people around Caesar's body that 'you know *how Caesar lov'd you*', Antony indirectly informs them 'that *you are his heirs,*'<sup>121</sup> unconsciously anticipating Perón's

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<sup>115</sup> Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, p. 135.

<sup>116</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, pp. 192 and 196.

<sup>117</sup> *Julius Caesar*, I. 2. 191 and 205-7.

<sup>118</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 190.

<sup>119</sup> Rinesi, *¿Qué cosa, la cosa pública!*, p. 111. Italics in the original.

<sup>120</sup> Rinesi, *¿Qué cosa, la cosa pública!*, p. 210.

<sup>121</sup> *Julius Caesar*, III. 2. 143 and 147.

words in his last public speech: ‘mi único heredero es el pueblo.’<sup>122</sup> In Sigal and Verón’s analysis, these words constitute ‘el núcleo del funcionamiento discursivo del peronismo [...]’: *Nadie puede ocupar mi lugar*,<sup>123</sup> or, as De Riz puts it, that ‘[e]l hábil conductor [...] sólo puede heredarse a sí mismo.’<sup>124</sup> If Perón—like Caesar—named the people of his city his exclusive heir, consequently denying that ‘muchachada’ the recognition of being his offspring, it is then that *Julius Caesar* fails to provide the suitable pattern for their aspirations. In Shakespeare’s play, the Romans’ assumption that Caesar begat Brutus finds no trace.<sup>125</sup> Even though Rosler reminds us that Caesar’s murderers were considered by many Romans ‘peores que sicarios, peores que homicidas, peores incluso que parricidas, si ciertamente es más atroz matar al padre de la patria que al propio,’<sup>126</sup> the bond is validated neither by Shakespeare nor by the final utterances of Caesar and Perón. Not only, then, as seen in *El secreto*, does a political system deny the young generation a paternal/filial bond, but it also prevents the crucifixion of a father by the disavowal of that tie.

The political situations after the death of Caesar and Perón constitute the final link between them. After his funeral eulogy, Antony predicts:

*Domestic fury and fierce civil strife*  
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;  
*Blood and destruction shall be so in use,*  
And dreadful objects so familiar,  
*That mothers shall but smile when they behold*  
*Their infants quartered with the hands of war.*<sup>127</sup>

Perón’s death, Alejandro Horowicz explains, denoted the end of ‘la autoridad del líder [que], aun cuestionada, había fijado *los límites del juego* [...]’. De ahora en más, todo quedaba librado a *la naturaleza de las cosas* y los efectos de esta naturaleza serían alucinantes.<sup>128</sup> Towards the end of 1975, Marróné ironically perceives that ‘game’ between the two Peronisms (the ‘verdadero’ and the ‘pragmático’): ‘tenía la impresión

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<sup>122</sup> Hugo Chumbita, ‘Juan Domingo Perón’, in *Líderes políticos del siglo XX en América Latina*, ed. by Marcos Álvarez García (LOM, 2007), pp. 317-36 (p. 331).

<sup>123</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 242. Italics in the original.

<sup>124</sup> De Riz, *La política en suspenso*, p. 147.

<sup>125</sup> Dorsch in *Julius Caesar*, p. 67. n77.

<sup>126</sup> Andrés Rosler, *Razones públicas. Seis conceptos básicos sobre la república* (Katz, 2016), p. 290.

<sup>127</sup> *Julius Caesar*, III. 1. 263-8.

<sup>128</sup> Horowicz, *Los cuatro peronismos*, p. 243.

de que lo que mejor distinguía a los *peronistas auténticos* es cómo *se mataban entre ellos* (ABE, 380). Death sets, then, the new rules of the game.

If the notion of human sacrifice, essential to Christianity and the endeavours of the revolutionary groups of the 1970s, could be assimilated to anthropophagic practices in pre-Hispanic American communities, the period of extreme violence unleashed after the death of the ‘eternal father’ can be understood through that of a sovereign in ancient societies in Oceania. For those communities, the death of the ‘*sacred person of a king*’, who sums up sacred and profane worlds, indicates that ‘the *law has become powerless* [and] there is *nothing to keep violence firmly within bounds* in the future.’<sup>129</sup> The decease of the person whose word is law opens thus a ‘critical period of decay and degradation represented by death’ that,

ends when all the rotting flesh has finally disappeared from the royal corpse, when nothing is left of the remains but a hard, clean, incorruptible skeleton [...]. As long as the king’s body was given over to an active decomposition the whole of society was under the sway of violence. *The barrier that had not saved the king from the ravages of death could not withstand the excesses that constantly endanger the social order.*<sup>130</sup>

Leaving aside the particularities of the historical period, the end of that phase of extreme violence in 1970s Argentina will certainly take place when the bones of the ‘eternal father’ are but an ‘incorruptible skeleton’. The Argentinian ‘muchachada’ could neither assassinate Caesar nor crucify the father, yet it is worth noting the rhetorical operation by which, in Sigal and Verón’s words, they could eventually ‘kill’ Perón:

Nos encontramos, en los textos de la JP [Juventud Peronista], con el silencio, un silencio que no es otra cosa que tratar a **Perón como si hubiera muerto** y reemplazar al Perón actual por el emblemático Perón del pasado [...]. La JP [...] **puede declararlo implícitamente difunto** y anunciarse como **sus únicos herederos**. La **ejecución simbólica de Perón** es la condición indispensable para escapar a la intransferibilidad de la enunciación.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, p. 66.

<sup>130</sup> Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, p. 67.

<sup>131</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 241. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

When Marroné hastily makes his way to Ciudad Evita as a last resort to procure the busts demanded by the Montoneros, he is welcomed into a family luncheon, the peaceful atmosphere of which entices him into a vision of himself ‘dentro de treinta años o tal vez cuarenta, en *otra vida posible*: un *patriarca peronista* en una casa como ésta, rodeado de hijos y nietos, alcanzando una *longevidad serena y plena*, comiendo *en paz* bajo su viña el fruto seguro de su cosecha’ (ABE, 370). The materialisation of the Peronist father is certainly visualised after Perón’s bones are well whitened. The version Perón enjoys in the ‘ciudadela peronista’ (ABE, 376) is this eternal, peaceful, working father, full of loving memories of his dead wife, certainly far away from any conflict involving the other iconic figure of his movement, Evita.

## (II) A HOLY MOTHER

As seen in the preceding sub-section, Perón’s public image underwent a fundamental change from his rise to power, in 1946, to his return to the country in 1973, i.e., from a soldier who can only utter truth to a father with godlike features whose word is law. Eva’s image is more complex. Although her appearance on the public political scene is due to her relationship and subsequent marriage to Perón, those bonds will produce different family and religious evocations in the field of politics.

Eva’s love for Perón is, Sigal and Verón note, ‘el de una esposa y, en consecuencia, *único y natural*,’ adding that, ‘la equivalencia entre su amor por Perón y su amor por el Pueblo’ enacts, ‘**sobre todo después de la muerte**, la posición única y natural donde el amor por Perón y el amor por el Pueblo son un mismo amor.’<sup>132</sup> For Sarlo, the ‘pasión, sentimiento de lo excepcional’ in Eva was a determining factor in the constitution of the political association between herself and Perón, since ‘[e]l secreto de Eva es un *desplazamiento* [...]. A Perón la unió primero una relación sentimental que, en pocos meses, *se transformó en un amor político*, que Evita *transfirió del hombre al líder y del líder al pueblo*.’<sup>133</sup> Since her political activity begins with a sentimental

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<sup>132</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 208. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>133</sup> Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, p. 24.

bond, it is not surprising that Eva was later perceived, from the psychoanalytic field, as,

*una madre ideal. Es la madre que adora al padre. En su libro [La razón de mi vida (1951)] promete al pueblo que nunca lo angustiara con disputas con Perón, el “líder”, tal como la mayoría de los padres angustian con sus desavenencias a sus hijos. Da a entender que ni tiene hijos, ni los precisa, para que cada uno pueda sentirse hijo de ella y ella madre de todos [...] que nunca se interpondrá entre el padre y ellos [...]. No puede provocar sus celos porque si se acerca al “líder”, lo hace, porque él los quiere y con el único fin de hablarle de ellos. Eva en este momento se ha transformado así para la masa peronista, en la madre perfecta, la madre sexual.<sup>134</sup>*

Eva's further transformation, Marie Langer continues, is to become “la dama de la esperanza”, la que *por su sacrificio redime a su pueblo*,<sup>135</sup> while during her illness, “[e]mpezó a transformarse en *una mártir, la santa, la madre muerta*, adorada, inolvidable e intocable.<sup>135</sup> Although this appears to be the final, ‘historic’ version of Eva, the question about her definitive, true image, as shown in Gamero’s fictional reality, remains. In my view, the difficulties of this definition depend upon the conditions of her dead body. If Perón’s is a ‘padre eterno’ whose materialisation will occur once his bones are whitened, Eva’s dead body definitively prevents her from suffering the same fate.

In this context, revisiting the mythological beliefs of ancient societies, which inherently associate death with an act of violence, Bataille outlines:

*Death is a danger for those left behind. If they have to bury the corpse it is less in order to keep it safe than to keep themselves safe from its contagion. Often the idea of contagion is connected with the body’s decomposition where formidable aggressive forces are seen at work.<sup>136</sup>*

Since ‘the survivors perceive in the horror aroused by corruption *a rancour and a hatred projected towards them by the dead man*,’ this archaic thinking understands that only ‘the

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<sup>134</sup> Marie Langer, *Fantasías eternas a la luz del psicoanálisis*, 2nd rev. edn (Hormé, 1966), p. 98.

<sup>135</sup> Langer, *Fantasías eternas a la luz del psicoanálisis*, p. 99.

<sup>136</sup> Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, p. 46. The disturbance that the rotting body causes appeared also in pre-Hispanic American communities, and it would be one of the reasons of the practice of cannibalism, as ‘*el individuo repudia la putrefacción del cuerpo post mortem, y prefiere ser comido por sus enemigos como parte de un rito funerario que le ofrece un túmulo digno de su ser guerrero.*’ See Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar caníbal*, p. 109. Italics in the original.

drying up of the bones [is] the proof that the threat of violence arising at the time of death had passed over.<sup>137</sup> Unlike Perón's, Eva's body is certainly not allowed this process of pacification.

In their analysis of Rodolfo Walsh's short story 'Esa mujer' (1965) through Robert Hertz's developments on cultural and political implications of death, Paola Cortés Rocca and Martín Kohan affirm that,

el problema que plantea *ese cadáver es que es eterno* [...]. Diluir el cuerpo en ácido serviría para suprimirlo, pero *no para revertir esa conversión de muerte en inmortalización* que significaron la preservación y la estetización logradas por el doctor Ara [...]. La continuación de la muerte [...] ya no puede advertirse: *el cuerpo no se deteriora, no hiede, no se echa a perder*.<sup>138</sup>

In fictional reality, the question of one's definitive, true version is significantly raised by María Eva, the character embodying the Montoneros' claim that '*si Evita viviera, sería Montonera*,<sup>139</sup> in a Borgesian manner. After reading aloud the passage of 'Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)'—seen in pp. 114 and 135 of this thesis—in which the narrator expresses that '[c]ualquier destino, por largo y complicado que sea, consta en realidad *de un solo momento*: el momento en que el hombre sabe para siempre quién es', María Eva reflects:

Y tampoco sé si uno puede saber quién es para siempre, como dice Borges. La vida es tan larga... A veces me lo pregunto... ¿Sabés con qué? Con la tortura. Cuando me toque... Porque me va a tocar, tarde o temprano, es algo a lo que una, cuando se mete en esto, está resignada... Me pregunto... si voy a aguantar o no... sin cantar... Dicen que no es tanto la resistencia al dolor, sino el grado de conciencia, de solidaridad... Ahí es donde vas a saber la verdad sobre vos mismo, ¿no? Si gana el individualismo de querer salvarse uno, o sos capaz de sacrificarte... (YCCG, 150).

This 'Evita montonera' suggests, then, that if such a moment of truth exists, it only emerges at life's conclusion. Prior to this juncture, the specificity of a body that cannot return to death fosters the proliferation of their images. This is exemplified by the

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<sup>137</sup> Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, pp. 56 and 47.

<sup>138</sup> Paola Cortés Rocca and Martín Kohan, *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte. Eva Perón: cuerpo y política* (Beatriz Viterbo, 1999), pp. 80-1.

<sup>139</sup> Cortés Rocca and Kohan, *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte*, p. 109. Italics in the original.

numerous prostitutes assuming various incarnations of Eva, thereby fulfilling a multitude of sexual fantasies of both Peronist and anti-Peronist undertones at the 'Fundación de Ayuda Sexual Eva Perón' (*ABE*, 329). Marroné's wandering among these Evas, from his meeting María Eva in the occupied factory to the final moment of her torturing (which will verify her foreseen fate), is, as I see it, a representation of the variable, contradictory outlooks that the middle classes held regarding Peronism until the uttering of Marroné's/the middle classes' truth puts a definitive distance between them.

If 'Evita montonera' is the person who leads Marroné to that place where '[t]odos tus deseos serán satisfechos' (*ABE*, 329), i.e., the 'Fundación de Ayuda Sexual Eva Perón', her re-appearance constitutes a confirmation of her immortality via resurrection. After his escape to the shanty town, Marroné has been informed that María Eva was killed in the violent liberation of Yesería Sansimón (*ABE*, 286), yet he later spots a ghostly Eva. Marroné instinctively follows her believing that she is 'el espectro de María Eva, muerta en combate y regresada a la tierra en toda su pompa y gloria para encabezar a los oprimidos en su batalla final contra las fuerzas del antipueblo' (*ABE*, 321-2). He soon realises that 'si esta Eva que brillaba en la oscuridad y flotaba a ras del suelo no era la suya, sólo podía ser *la verdadera*' (*ABE*, 322). That true Eva is actually leading him to the Baroque situation that will end up by muddling his convictions and those of the middle classes, as eventually Marroné comes to believe that,

Evita está entre nosotros, Evita ha vuelto. Evita vive, como se leía en las pintadas, que tan absurdas siempre le habían parecido, en portones, carteles y casas. No había muerto en el 52, de alguna manera la habían salvado, quizá para sustraerla a las garras de sus enemigos, y el tan cacareado cadáver que habían paseado de aquí para allá nada más que un simulacro (*ABE*, 327).

Marroné's conviction certainly alludes to Borges's 'El simulacro' (1960), a short story that through farce and the Baroque procedure of reproduction attaches a note of falsehood to Eva Perón's funeral.<sup>140</sup> If the funeral was a simulacrum, so was her death,

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<sup>140</sup> In their analysis of this Borges's story, Cortés Rocca and Kohan maintain that 'en el simulacro, la copia acaba precediendo al original y ocupando su lugar, hasta volverse

with the consequence of adding yet another layer of un/reality to this experience of a man who definitively cannot assert whether he is living or dreaming.<sup>141</sup> Marroné is thus granted to see all the possible versions Eva can enact in the Argentinian imaginary, ranging from anti-Peronist fantasies that echo Copi's play *Eva Perón* (1970)<sup>142</sup> to the image venerated by union leaders, 'metalúrgicos nostálgicos la mayoría. Están llenos de plata pero todavía añoran los años dorados de su infancia pobre, cuando recibían los regalos de Eva' (ABE, 341), including 'una réplica exacta de las habitaciones del prostíbulo que doña Juana, la madre de Eva, regenteaba en Junín' (ABE, 344) or even what is claimed to be the true corpse, which—as in Walsh's 'Esa mujer'—is 'la más codiciada, por lejos. Los milicos, sobre todo, se vuelven locos por ella' (ABE, 343).

During his concealment in the shanty town, Marroné characterises the residents as 'estos dilectos hijos de Eva' (ABE, 202). In line with previously discussed psychoanalytic perspectives, Eva is depicted as a universal mother figure, with everyone portrayed as her offspring. This interpretation also suggests that, unlike Don Urbano Pedernera in a similar Baroque scenario in *El sueño*, all patrons/children at the 'Fundación de Ayuda Sexual Eva Perón' are engaging in acts of incest, that is, breaking Law and Order.<sup>143</sup> This adds another layer of complexity to the multifaceted imagery associated with Eva. Paradoxically, among the many versions of Evita as the means of breaking Law and Order, Marroné realises that the one who had explicitly assumed that particular purpose is missing:

—Y... ¿Evita montonera?  
 Su guía pegó un chistido y para indicarle que bajara la voz  
 abanicó el aire con los dedos.  
 —Shhht. Ni la nombres. ¿Qué querés, que se caguen de miedo?  
*Con algunas cosas no se juega* (ABE, 342).

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indistinguibles el objeto original y su mera reproducción. [...] El simulacro pone en cuestión, no ya la fidelidad de la representación al original, sino *la entidad misma del original*, su derecho a preceder y regular la representación.' See Cortés Rocca and Kohan, *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte*, p. 73.

<sup>141</sup> Gamerro, *Ficciones barrocas*, p. 19.

<sup>142</sup> For some of these fantasies, see Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, pp. 235-6.

<sup>143</sup> Kozicki remarks that, '[e]l incesto, por vocación, tiende a la omnipotencia. Si no se hiciera obstáculo *jurídicamente* [...] a la presión incestuosa, no serían pensables ni posibles las estructuras familiares y sociales. Está en juego el orden del mundo.' See Enrique Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley* (Gorla, 2004), p. 95. Italics in the original.

‘Evita montonera’ finds, then, no place in that milieu where all desires are fulfilled. The revolutionary Peronism she guides is either impossible or has to be verified outside the dialectics established by the traditional opposition between Peronist and anti-Peronist fantasies. In order to be ‘montonera’, Evita cannot be a mother, but rather a daughter.

### (III) DAUGHTERS AND SONS

From the early days of her relationship with Perón, as Sarlo notes, Eva expressed her willingness to sacrifice herself for ‘*su marido, que es su padre espiritual como lo es de todo el pueblo.*’<sup>144</sup> Reminding us that Eva—unlike her siblings—was never recognised by her biological father, Horowicz analyses that above all, for her,

importa *el coronel-padre* que finalmente se aviene a reconocer —a reconocerla— y, al hacerlo, se constituye en un elemento indispensable, decisivo, de *su autorreconocimiento* [...] él es el eslabón central de una relación radial y casarse con la mediación es como *casarse con el padre* (Perón tenía 49 años, Evita 24): es decir, *incestuoso* y convenientemente deseado y terrible.<sup>145</sup>

While in Western culture the trinity father-mother-son/daughter leads to the myth of Oedipus, Eva’s double role of wife and daughter echoes that of Antigone, as it places her at the core of indeterminable family relations with crucial political consequences.

This connection is appropriately traced by the ‘Evita montonera’. In their first meeting, María Eva tells Marróné that she had been an actress until she realised that her play-acting only helped to assuage the ‘conciencias culpables’ of the bourgeois, after which ‘*pasé de la actuación a la acción. Como Evita*’ (ABE, 261). Among her roles she lists Ibsen’s Nora, as well as,

Antígona: enterraba a mi hermano para que al otro día al leer el diario los espectadores no se alarmaran por las listas de desaparecidos y muertos (ABE, 260-1).

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<sup>144</sup> Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, p. 25. Adding another family bond, Perón ‘called himself a “big brother” of the people.’ See Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, pp. 88-9.

<sup>145</sup> Horowicz, *Los cuatro peronismos*, p. 116.

While her playing Antigone had not succeeded in altering a reality in which the law of a father (Perón) ranks his children among those allowed or denied a burial, her new status as a Montonero militant is not entirely satisfying either. In fact, not only does she express a certain distance regarding the outcome of a ‘fotonovela’ that sought to ‘recuperar a la Eva verdadera’ through a script that ‘lo retocaron un poco, le metieron más militancia, más consigna’ (ABE, 259), but also Marroné meets her while she is reading Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* bound in a pocket edition of ‘*Los condenados de la tierra*’ (ABE, 253). The contrast between the passages of an author who ‘es re-oligarca’ (ABE, 256) and the book she is assumed to be reading is all the more striking since for the revolutionary militants of the 1970s, as Feinmann explains, Frantz Fanon’s text was ‘bibliografía obligatoria’, in which ‘los jóvenes escuchaban la voz arrasadora de Fanon y la mezclaban con el Che, con Perón y con Cooke. Allí donde Fanon decía *Argelia* aquí se leía *Argentina*, y donde Fanon decía el *colonizado* aquí se leía la *clase obrera* o el *pueblo peronista*.’<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, María Eva acknowledges that Fanon

tiene razón en todo lo que dice, sobre la cultura del colonizador y del colonizado, ¿no? Claro que son un poco distintas la situación de África y la nuestra... digo, cuando lo escribió, allá eran *colonia en serio*... (ABE, 256).

The Montoneros’ search for a true Evita cannot conceal from María Eva the notion that there is a *genuine* reality, that does not coincide, or at least not fully, with the Argentinian one. Her words imply thus a set of pairs (true/false, genuine/deceptive, real/imagined) that, in my analysis, establishes another fold in the Baroque situation of the country.

It is in the logic of these pairs that disagreements between Perón and María Eva’s generation can be read. As Carassai suggests, there was a basic misunderstanding between those ‘jóvenes militantes, provenientes en su mayoría de familias antiperonistas, [que] hacia fines de los años sesenta comenzaron *un éxodo de clase* hacia un líder que *soñaban* revolucionario y obrerista,’ and Perón himself, who at his return to power placed his expectations in the seduction of the middle classes for ‘la obtención de *un consenso inédito* que relegase a los sectores radicalizados al confín solitario de *la*

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<sup>146</sup> Feinmann, *La sangre derramada*, pp. 50 and 49. Italics in the original.

*inadaptación y la irracionalidad.*<sup>147</sup> The increasingly striking contradictions exposed by the dreamed revolutionary and workerist leader and the Eternal Father who demanded national pacification ‘sin que cueste la vida de un solo argentino,’<sup>148</sup> are to be resolved, by the Montoneros, through their interpretation of that word—the law.

One of the characteristics of law, Rosler elucidates, is its authoritative origin, ‘simplemente porque es [la autoridad reconocida] quien lo dice.’<sup>149</sup> In the tradition of Judaism, ‘Dios es el único legislador,’ implying the effect that ‘es imposible cambiar la legislación y, por lo tanto, *la única manera de que tenga lugar un cambio es a través de la interpretación.*’<sup>150</sup> Following Hobbes’s dictum on the separation of *authoritas* and *veritas* for the making of law, the Montoneros’ interpretation of Perón’s word will dissociate it from the rationale of truth. Indeed, as Sigal and Verón show, the Montoneros denied Perón’s contradictions considering that

*los enunciados de Perón no son ni verdaderos ni falsos, son solamente “Lo que dijo Perón”, y pueden tener ese status porque constituyen [...] un mensaje cifrado; el semanario [El Descamisado, órgano oficial de Montoneros] posee el código que le permite presentar lo que Perón piensa en realidad.*<sup>151</sup>

The plausibility of an interpretation diverging significantly from Perón’s literal word owes itself to its alignment with *veritas*, namely, the viewpoint of Eva. Truthfulness has frequently been associated with Eva’s rhetoric, despite, or perhaps due to, its hyperbolic features, as Sarlo elucidates that

*funciona como recurso retórico: dice la verdad exagerándola, no miente, simplemente presenta una modalidad estética, cultural, de los atributos. Ningún peronista podía percibir ese discurso como falso.*<sup>152</sup>

During the occupation of the factory, Marróné happens to read the ‘fotonovela’ that seeks to capture ‘la Eva verdadera’. Amongst other relevant passages of her life, in that Baroque recreation Evita is shown in a series of images, after a ‘primera intentona

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<sup>147</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, p. 47.

<sup>148</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 166.

<sup>149</sup> Andrés Rosler, *La ley es la ley. Autoridad e interpretación en la filosofía del derecho* (Katz, 2019), p. 63.

<sup>150</sup> Rosler, *La ley es la ley*, p. 163.

<sup>151</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 173. Italics in the original; bold characters are mine.

<sup>152</sup> Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, p. 35.

golpista' frustrated by the mobilisation of the masses, 'examinando ella misma, en ropa de fajina y pelo suelto, como una joven guerrillera, una pistola 9 mm', and reflecting that '[e]l pueblo, además de movilizado, debía estar armado'; while later addressing a group of five kids on her deathbed:

*Yo les pido hoy, chicos, una sola cosa: que me prometan **defender a Perón y luchar por él hasta la muerte**. Cuando yo no esté ustedes deberán tomar mi lugar: ustedes serán el puente entre Perón y el pueblo, ustedes serán los eternos vigías de la revolución, porque **ustedes son mis herederos** [...] los cinco chicos, ya crecidos y con fusiles en las manos, no olvidaron nunca el mensaje de Evita; y hoy donde haya un niño con hambre, donde haya un obrero que luche contra la explotación, donde haya un pueblo que luche por su liberación, **siempre habrá un montonero** (ABE, 188-90, italics and bold characters in the original).*

This characterisation of the true Evita in the hands of the Montoneros agrees with Sigal and Verón's analysis, for whom 'la construcción es transparente: el colectivo Montoneros, la juventud peronista, no es otra cosa que *la reencarnación de Eva Perón*.'<sup>153</sup> Further to this, Carassai adds that 'Montoneros encontró en Eva el costado antiburgués y hasta anticapitalista de la doctrina de Perón' as their way to impugn 'hasta al propio líder justicialista.'<sup>154</sup> Confirming the view that opposed Perón and Eva in the early 1970s, Cortés Rocca and Kohan describe her as 'la figura *verdaderamente revolucionaria* dentro del primer gobierno peronista [...] *Evita habría de resucitar* con el proyecto transformador que impulsaba[n] los montoneros', at the time evoked 'en la consigna: "Perón/ Evita/ la patria socialista":

en la transcripción más acertada de ese cántico debe anotarse "evita" con minúscula [...], no el diminutivo del nombre Eva, sino la tercera persona del singular en presente del indicativo del verbo evitar; con el sentido de: "Perón / impide / la patria socialista", que es lo que efectivamente estaba sucediendo.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 202.

<sup>154</sup> Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común*, p. 61.

<sup>155</sup> Cortés Rocca and Kohan, *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte*, p. 104 and 114. n7. Destéfani introduces a subtle modification to the pun: 'Virajes de una época clave: de "Perón, Evita, la Patria Socialista" a... ¿Perón evita la patria socialista?'. See Destéfani, *El trabajo sobre la identidad en la narrativa de Carlos Gamerro*, p. 163.

Should the Montoneros be Evita's re-incarnation, assuming her role as the word of *veritas* to question that of *authoritas*, it follows that they are also inherently expressing their love for Perón. In Sigal and Verón's analysis, this ultimately constitutes 'una operación grave, ya que la prueba final del amor (la única prueba, podría decirse) es *el sacrificio*. Evita dio su vida por el Pueblo y por Perón: así la construyó la memoria del peronismo,' which also implies that the only word that can ever be uttered in opposition to that of the leader is 'en la muerte.'<sup>156</sup> Sacrifice thus being essential both to Eva and the Montoneros, the pattern of Antigone—as she rebels against the word of a father/king, but ends her life by her own hand—appears ineffective. The example is still to be found in Christ.

Searching for Evita's legacy of death and sacrifice, the Montoneros find in Ernesto 'Che' Guevara the figure that embodies these notions, physically in addition to ethically. If Feinmann describes the dead Guevara as, 'un mártir de la revolución, un Cristo que sonreía rodeado de sus asesinos, como si se burlara de ellos,'<sup>157</sup> Sarlo goes further, arguing that Che Guevara,

había definido *una ética sacrificial para el revolucionario*. Sus escritos modulan *la felicidad y la inevitabilidad del sacrificio* y proclaman que *la gloria del revolucionario es la de una entrega sin cálculo* "[...], que *no tiene más fin que la muerte*, a menos que la construcción se logre en escala mundial". La efigie del Che [...] era *una imagen de Cristo*, una síntesis de belleza inmóvil y determinación fatal. En *un cristianismo de los pobres, un cristianismo de la cólera y de la violencia, la imagen del revolucionario muerto participaba de lo sagrado*, porque su muerte resultó de *una búsqueda consciente y aceptada del sacrificio*.<sup>158</sup>

In *La aventura*, both Perón and Eva (depicted as a maternal figure) were able to project their ultimate, Baroque representations: one as the 'patriarca peronista'; the other in the multiple versions of Peronist and anti-Peronist fantasies. In *Un yuppie*, the true Evita, 'Evita montonera', and Che Guevara are likewise granted to stamp their own definitive images as the perfect revolutionary fighters. Both are exclusively achieved in death, as Vezzetti analyses that

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<sup>156</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, p. 208. Italics in the original.

<sup>157</sup> Feinmann, *La sangre derramada*, p. 66.

<sup>158</sup> Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, p. 173.

esa figura heroica *resultaba incompatible con la vida*. El hombre nuevo era finalmente el héroe, y el héroe era sobre todo (allí está *el ejemplo insuperable del Che*) *el que dio su vida por la revolución*. El nuevo hombre, al menos hasta la victoria, se encarnaba en *el héroe muerto*, porque sólo una muerte heroica terminaba de completar y suturar el sentido de esa militancia en una imago compacta, sin defectos.<sup>159</sup>

While their meeting in a factory (the Peronist milieu *par excellence*) has produced no relevant political consequences, the images of ‘Evita montonera’ and Che Guevara can only be achieved in the Guevarist place, i.e., the forest. It is only there that the perfect revolutionary fighter is materialised, yet again through a Baroque technique. As part of their political action, the group is producing a ‘fotonovela’ devoted to Che’s life by superimposing events of Che’s guerrilla episodes with those the group is carrying out in the Delta. When the decisive moment of recreating Guevara’s death arrives, Marroné’s role as Che is not convincing any longer, despite his putting ‘mi mejor cara de Che muerto...’ (YCCG, 228). The crisis is solved after a real skirmish with security forces ends in the death of the former leader of the guerrilla group, Miguel, who had unsuccessfully wanted to perform Che in the ‘fotonovela’:

Lo acomodamos sobre los tablones y lo rodeamos, mirándolo en silencio. En vida, Miguel no se había parecido en nada a Ernesto Guevara. *Muerto, era el Che* (YCCG, 229).

The only possibility of *being* Che Guevara is dead, which tautologically confirms death as the defining feature of the perfect revolutionary fighter. During the Montoneros’ trial, Tamerlán highlights that deadly destination for the guerrilla fighters via their religious pursuits:

ustedes pareciera que *no quieren aprender*, che. Porque ya veníamos del Congo, ¿no? ¿Se imaginan, los negros, cuando les larga eso del *revolucionario que se consume en esa actividad ininterrumpida que no tiene más fin que la muerte*, a menos que la

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<sup>159</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 106. See Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, pp. 93-101, for the notion of the ‘new man’, its origins during the French Revolution, its use by Mussolini’s Fascism, and its religious connotations; and pp. 157-8 for an analysis of Bolshevism, Fascisms, and Nazism as ‘*political religions* [...] whence a “new man” should emerge, regenerated and totally integrated into the community’ (p. 158, italics in the original).

construcción se logre a escala mundial? *Entre eso y el reino de los cielos, ¿qué diferencia?* (YCCG, 320).

‘Evita montonera’ will also meet her fate in death and sacrifice, in specific defiance of Perón’s authority. Not only was Perón’s law at his return to power a peaceful one (‘sin que cueste la vida de un solo argentino’), but he also deprived the actions of the Montoneros and other armed organisations of the 1970s of any political content. As Rosler explains, the distinctive feature of a political crime is that of ‘actuar al servicio de una causa [que tiene] un *fuerte componente sacrificial* o de abnegación, ya que *el principio que inspira el acto hace que el agente esté dispuesto a dar la vida por su causa.*’<sup>160</sup> It is this sacrificial trait that is cancelled by Perón when he calls the Montoneros ‘una banda de asaltantes que invoca cuestiones ideológicas o políticas para cometer un crimen.’<sup>161</sup> By denying the quality of sacrifice, Perón is ultimately robbing ‘Evita montonera’ of *veritas*, given that, according to Vezzetti,

con *el martirio*, el cristianismo ha edificado *otra figura del sacrificio* que depende menos de las virtudes personales y de la búsqueda de la gloria futura del héroe, en la medida en que *es una forma suprema del testimonio de una verdad y una fe* que se imponen sobre el destino mortal.<sup>162</sup>

María Eva/‘Evita montonera’ will die after repeated torture sessions that certainly constitute, for the armed organisations, a martyrdom. On the one hand, she does not commit the crime of ‘confesión’ typified in the Montoneros’ ‘Código de Justicia Penal Revolucionario’;<sup>163</sup> on the other, she complies with the Christian meaning of the term, which, after alluding to those apostles who bore testimony of Christ, ended by referring ‘de manera exclusiva a quienes murieron por la fe [...] ofrecían su vida por el salvador de la humanidad’, making of the martyrdom ‘una forma radical de *imitatio Christi*.’<sup>164</sup> Since María Eva also becomes one of the ““true” witnesses, the “complete witnesses” [...] those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness’ of the

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<sup>160</sup> Rosler, *Razones públicas*, p. 290.

<sup>161</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 72.

<sup>162</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 153.

<sup>163</sup> Passed by the Consejo Nacional de Montoneros on 4 October 1975; later reproduced in *Lucha armada en Argentina*, 3.8 (2007), pp. 124-7.

<sup>164</sup> José Emilio Burucúa and Nicolás Kwiatkowski, “*Cómo sucedieron estas cosas*”. *Representar masacres y genocidios* (Katz, 2014), pp. 96 and 113. Italics in the original.

concentration camp,<sup>165</sup> in the final section I will analyse the confession of the survivor of the ‘grey zone’—the agent of profanation.

#### THE MACHIAVELLIAN ACT OF PROFANATION

Perón’s purpose of embracing ‘a todos los hijos’ affected two political groups with metonymic aspirations: firstly, the middle classes, who Ezequiel Adamovsky describes as ‘una identidad que se confunde con *la nación toda*. Argentina ha aprendido a pensarse como un país “de clase media” [...]. Esta identidad, que *ligaba fuertemente el ser argentino con la presencia de esa clase*, tuvo efectos muy profundos en la historia nacional;<sup>166</sup> and secondly Peronism, especially in the phase of violence in the 1970s, that, in Vezzetti’s words,

se mostraba como *un microcosmos de la sociedad* [que] encarnaba *un cierto estado colectivo* y se ofrecía como *una condensación representativa de procesos más amplios en la sociedad*: la lógica de una guerra total, indiscriminada, que luego animó las peores faenas de la dictadura, se puso en acción primeramente en la masacre de Ezeiza.<sup>167</sup>

These two social and political universes, both aiming to represent the totality of the nation, maintain a conflictive relation that would only end in mutual disappointment. I contend that this discord primarily stems from the inherent disparity between a political entity rooted in secular concerns and one that symbolises the sacred by evoking the Christian trinity.

As previously observed, Perón’s utilisation of Hobbesian concepts of the state of nature, coupled with his political leadership’s subordination of the ‘priestly powers’, facilitated a paternal authority invested with pronouncing law over both sacred and profane worlds. In parallel, he showed himself to be against Machiavellian principles. In 1944, for instance, he accused politicians of following ‘siempre ese *sofisma*

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<sup>165</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>166</sup> Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina. Apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003* (Planeta, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>167</sup> Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente*, p. 67.

*maquiavélico*: dividir para reinar,’ while the next year he rejected Machiavelli’s famous counsels by affirming that ‘no transijo con *el engaño y el disimulo*.’<sup>168</sup> These criticisms on the part of Perón were echoed by prominent members of Catholic and Peronist traditions, who questioned Machiavelli for his promoting the separation of the two realms via ‘una libertad individual y exclusivamente *de este mundo*, disociada del deber, puramente *concreta y sensible*, ajena a toda noción de *perfeccionamiento moral y proyección trascendente*.’<sup>169</sup> These expressions, ultimately lamenting the end of the transcendental unity of the Christian-Medieval mind, align with a central preoccupation of the Baroque as a response to that loss prompted by the appearance of the bourgeoisie.<sup>170</sup> In this regard, the Baroque conceived a world constituted by ‘two floors’, one standing for physical gravity and the other for religious elevation: the body and the soul, inseparable though distinct, the soul being placed in an area of the body.<sup>171</sup> One of the products of this new unity was the Baroque becoming a crucial state policy for the Spanish conquest of America, an ‘*utopía fundacional de América, eminentemente religiosa*,’ in Marzo’s words, whose aim has significant resonances with 1970s Argentina as it allowed political factions to conceive

un *espacio social sacralizado* [...] una *comunidad cultural nueva*, una cultura forjada por *la devoción de los hombres* a su destino manifiesto [...] el *inexorable tiempo cristiano*, precisamente visible en *la negación explícita de cualquier otro relato histórico*.<sup>172</sup>

Denying ‘lo plural [...] toda otra realidad que no fuera la propia,’ Feinmann affirms with reference to totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, ends up in necessarily violent outcomes, since ‘toda voluntad de silenciamiento conduce a la violencia.’<sup>173</sup> The Baroque therefore appears a particularly appropriate strategy for the manipulation of truth(s) in relation to state policies that led to the massacre of populations. This is a consequence of the lie attaining ‘*estatus filosófico*’ in the seventeenth century, in the wake of the advice of Baltasar Gracián (1601-1658), who,

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<sup>168</sup> In Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, pp. 70 and 74.

<sup>169</sup> Losada, *Maquiavelo en la Argentina*, p. 109.

<sup>170</sup> Marzo, *La memoria administrada*, p. 170.

<sup>171</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>172</sup> Marzo, *La memoria administrada*, p. 123.

<sup>173</sup> Feinmann, *La sangre derramada*, p. 11.

nos dice que no hay que mentir, sino “no decir la verdad”, hacer uso del artificio, de los dobles sentidos, de los equívocos, de los disfraces o de la comedia, “para ocultar y *endulzar* las verdades más terribles”. Resulta lícito el “engaño ajeno”; o sea, se considera legítimo que, como consecuencia de la disimulación o de las palabras equívocas, el otro “no entienda lo que es”.<sup>174</sup>

In a country belonging to the Catholic tradition, the profanation of the sacred is materialised within the domain of truth. While the Baroque is a strategic policy to conceal and sweeten harsh realities, and Machiavelli has rationalised the necessity of falsehood and duplicity *in specific circumstances*, it was the Florentine who articulated the unspeakable truths about the realities of his time. Lying and deceiving in Machiavelli can therefore be considered exceptional moments in relation to truth. On the contrary, as Marzo elucidates, the Baroque eventually became ‘una estructura de pensamiento [...] por la cual *la mentira y la disociación serán las principales herramientas para transmitir la historia.*’<sup>175</sup> Of the two, then, Machiavelli’s is the only paradigm that admits, whenever opportune, the uttering of a truth based on a direct and concrete experience of reality—a *profane* truth.

Marroné’s Machiavellian *virtù* is exposed during Tamerlán’s pretended funeral by the false widow. When discreetly explaining to Marroné the reasons for his being chosen as the family’s liaison with the Montoneros, she says:

—Durante los últimos días, señor Marroné, he escuchado toda clase de rumores sobre usted. Rumores que van *de lo muy malo a lo muy bueno*; que ya me lo pintan de *empleado más fiel de mi marido a dirigente guerrillero infiltrado en la empresa* [...]. En este caso, *lo mismo da*, por raro que suene. Me veo en la paradójica situación de tener por aliados a los secuestradores de mi marido. *Si usted está con ellos, está con nosotros, y viceversa* (YCCG, 39).

In *La aventura*, Marroné had come to realise his Machiavellian ‘double personality’, in that ‘no era ni de aquí ni de allá, participaba de los dos mundos’ (ABE, 320): the Peronist world and that of the company. These worlds have now become those of the Montoneros and the Tamerlán family, connected by a plot of the millionaire that has

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<sup>174</sup> Marzo, *La memoria administrada*, p. 47. Italics in the original.

<sup>175</sup> Marzo, *La memoria administrada*, p. 44.

indeed been characterised as ‘Machiavellian.’<sup>176</sup> If all this suits the unstable and deceitful nature of the times, the words of Tamerlán’s widow are later endorsed by a member of the Montoneros: ‘Sos nuestro hombre en la empresa’ (YCCG, 90). This duplicity will be exacerbated as reality becomes ever more oppressive, producing internal divisions in Marroné of explicit or implicit opposite pairs, for example: ‘el lado menos luminoso de su mente’ (YCCG, 60) and ‘el lado avieso de su mente’ (YCCG, 272); ‘el lado viejo de su mente’ and ‘el nuevo’ (YCCG, 280); ‘el lado blanco de su mente’ and ‘el rojo’ (YCCG, 299); ‘el lado paranoico de su mente’ (YCCG, 312) and ‘el lado malévolo de su cerebro’ (YCCG, 330). While these splits sharply reflect the Baroque situation of the country, they will disappear with the dictatorship, as it represents the victory of a single notion of the sacred Fatherland triumphing over the profane.

Marroné’s dual identity is underscored by his being an adopted child. Apart from suggesting the ambiguous roots of the middle classes, this biographical aspect enables him to establish connections with both Peronist laborers occupying the factory and guerrilla fighters, who predominantly hail from upper- and middle-class backgrounds.<sup>177</sup> He is aware of this social composition right from the beginning of *La aventura*, when he dispels his suspicions about the concierge belonging to an armed organisation with words that, in its schematic racism, reveal his middle-class identity: ‘demasiado negro para ser guerrillero’ (ABE, 54). Furthermore, his meeting the ‘curita obrero’—of whom he notes ‘el cabello rubio y la pinta general de nene bien de San Isidro reformado’, an ‘ex rugbier’ (YCCG, 114 and 115)—gives him the occasion of verbalising that duality:

Claro, así, rubio y de ojos azules [...] cualquiera se daba el lujo de proletarizarse. Pero a él bastaba que le pusieran un morocho a cada lado, y se fundía con ellos, desaparecía, *se mimetizaba*. Ellos podían optar por los pobres pero a él no le había quedado otro camino que optar por los ricos... (YCCG, 114, italics in the original).

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<sup>176</sup> Ben Bollig, ‘Theories of Money in Argentine Crime Fiction’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 94.3 (2017), pp. 505-25 (p. 519).

<sup>177</sup> Pablo Giussani, *Montoneros. La soberbia armada*, 2nd edn (Planeta, 1997), pp. 31-3.

Marroné's unclear origins constitute a distinctive trait of the figure of the knight errant. While he thinks of himself in the guise of an 'ejecutivo andante', De Riquer explains that a highly frequent subject in chivalric novels 'es el que se refiere al *nacimiento y oscura crianza* del futuro héroe caballeresco' who is hidden and bred outside his family until the moment in which 'gracias a *alguna señal que lleva impresa en el cuerpo* [se descubre que] es hijo de nobilísimos padres, las más de las veces reyes o emperadores, y entonces, en posesión de un nombre y de un linaje, emprende su *gloriosa carrera militar*.'<sup>178</sup> Marroné's physical aspect persuades him that he is a 'peronista de la primera hora' (*ABE*, 319), revealing at the same time that the *natural* bond between the middle classes and the 'eternal father' has been altered by Law. Since Law implies 'prohibición del incesto [...] imperativo de *diferenciación subjetiva, de separación, de alteridad*,'<sup>179</sup> that separation between Peronism and the middle classes has therefore to be kept to uphold Order.

In 1992, when he is evoking those events, Marroné enjoys a well-off position as 'gerente de Finanzas' (*YCCG*, 14) of the Tamerlán corporation, leading an upper middle-class lifestyle in an exclusive gated community. This emphasises his change from 1975, when he only owned a modest chalet purchased with the financial help of his in-laws, in the typically middle-class suburban area of Olivos, and drove a standard middle-class car assigned to him (and owned) by the company, while he had to give up his small studio to be converted into his new-born baby daughter's room. At that time, Marroné's situation could be likened to the one that his former classmate describes, referring to administrative staff during the occupation of 'Yesería Sansimón', with words shaped by the leftist notion of the bourgeoisie:

Los oficinistas, como típicos representantes de la pequeña burguesía, ponen todo su empeño en parecerse a la burguesía, a la cual aspiran, y en diferenciarse del proletariado, en el cual tienen terror de caer (*ABE*, 152).

With a note of archetypal racism, the viewpoint of one of those 'oficinistas' has already anticipated the Marxist social scheme: 'Al final siempre es la misma historia en este país. O la tienen los garcas, o la tienen los grones, y nosotros siempre nos la quedamos viéndola pasar' (*ABE*, 121). Although Marroné is not a simple 'oficinista',

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<sup>178</sup> De Riquer, *Para leer a Cervantes*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>179</sup> Kozicki, *Hamlet, el padre y la ley*, p. 93.

his belonging to the middle classes is supported, in Marxist's terms, by 'subjective' and 'objective' conditions.

In addition to his already mentioned 'objective' circumstances, Marroné's 'subjective' middle-class identity is characterised by frustration and humiliation. These features are shown in two key aspects of his life: the origins and outcomes of his marriage, and his being hired as 'jefe de Compras' of the Tamerlán corporation. The first is the result of a systematic frustration of the sexual act since the time of his unsuccessful sexual debut. The only occasion in which he is able briefly to have sexual intercourse ends up in pregnancy and in forced marriage to an unappealing university student. That effective attempt is significantly marked by social and political conditions of the time, as he comes to get intimate with his future wife 'en alguna de las interminables interrupciones producto de asambleas y tomas y juicios a profesores y homenajes a Eva Perón y el Che Guevara, de las cuales huían con parejo fervor' (*ABE*, 78). In addition to his puzzlement about 'cierta ironía en el hecho de que Mabel hubiera sido la única mujer con la cual había podido mantener una relación sexual normal, justamente porque no lo atraía lo suficiente' (*ABE*, 79), he later perceives in his daughter 'los inconfundibles rasgos del señor Tamerlán' (*ABE*, 24), an allusion to adultery that only stresses Marroné's and the middle classes' sense of uncertainty and humiliation.

The second aspect is shown in the job interview with the recently appointed president and owner of the company. In a characteristically bizarre manner, Tamerlán's test of aptitude and loyalty consists of putting his finger into his potential employee's anus. The 'dystopia of literality' analysed in chapter 2, by which verbal metaphors become literal actions—in this case: 'Bájese los pantalones, por favor' (*ABE*, 28)—is once again evidenced here, strengthening the notion of a shameful 'open secret'. At the end of the meeting that grants Marroné a position in the corporation, though not the desired one of 'jefe de Marketing', he seems to perceive 'sonrisas mal disimuladas en cada mirada, risas ahogadas a sus espaldas' (*ABE*, 33-4) that denote a knowledge given by a shared, direct experience. As a result, Marroné begins to suffer 'la inveterada constipación que desde sus comienzos en la empresa lo acompañaba como un perro fiel' (*ABE*, 40). His sexual and intestinal dysfunctions, epitomising both his frustration and humiliation will undergo 'liberating' cures during the events in the factory and the

forest—that is, at the time of the middle classes’ forays into Peronist and Guevarist places—, hinting at the suitability of the Marxist scheme of redemption for the middle classes.

Marroné experiences the job interview as a humiliating event. For Tamerlán, on the contrary, it merely serves as a means of tangibly demonstrating to his subordinates that he has identified ‘la ubicación física del alma’ (ABE, 30). This ostensibly anachronistic assertion reformulates central ideas of the Baroque regarding the ‘complex relation’ that the soul maintains with the body.<sup>180</sup> However, it is only the foreword for the mogul to make the middle classes aware that ‘no hay mejor antídoto contra cualquier estúpida tentación de *independencia* o *rebeldía* que un culo bien fruncido’ (ABE, 33). This humiliating submission aligns with Chaparro Amaya’s account of the notion of soul as a key tool for Spain’s religious, social, and political domination in America through confession. The concept of soul indeed allowed the subduing of

el entramado de los diversos elementos —vida, muerte, sexo, verdad, obediencia, productividad, individualidad, identidad— que otorgan un *sentido de gobernabilidad* a la pastoral cristiana y le permiten apuntalar un *determinado régimen disciplinario de organización social*. Al modernizar el *sacramento de la confesión* [...] elaborando *manuales de confesión* con alto contenido etnográfico, se constituye un *saber gobernar* cuyos ámbitos, técnicas y objetivos coinciden en varios puntos con *los dispositivos de la máquina productiva y las medidas de control estatal*. Lo que había funcionado como aparato inquisitorial puramente exterior [...] —*preguntas, cuestionarios, torturas, secuestros*—, ahora se ha interiorizado, ha tenido que *inventar un alma* [...] *la confesión* estará articulada a una formación de saber [...] los dispositivos que garantizan, a largo plazo, *las estructuras de sujeción* y la producción de sujetos coloniales.<sup>181</sup>

The feelings of frustration and humiliation inflicted by the upper classes upon the middle classes will be demonstrably internalised through the act of confession. Again, confession serves to reinforce the existing social order and its emphasis on Law and Order.

Marroné’s ‘objective’ middle-class position appears besieged by the working-class representative (his cleaning lady doña Ema) and obstructed in his ambitions by

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<sup>180</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 11.

<sup>181</sup> Chaparro Amaya, *Pensar canibal*, pp. 204-5.

the upper-class one (represented by his colleague in the company Aldo Cáceres Grey). Doña Ema purposely harasses Marroné in the only space left to him for reading the books that will allow him to climb the social ladder—to become an ‘ejecutivo *top*’ (*ABE*, 57, italics in the original)—, the guests’ toilet. Hence, ‘doña Ema, la voluminosa mucama’,

perversamente elegía limpiarlo en ese horario o, si Marroné lograba sortear su vigilancia y parapetarse adentro, optaba por encerrar los aldaños y se la pasaba embistiendo contra la puerta cerrada y trabada con el trapo de pasar cera primero y después, para rematar, con la ululante lustradora (*ABE*, 41).

If his way to reach a better social position has become for Marroné ‘una misión poco menos que imposible’ (*ABE*, 41) besieged by the lower classes, the confirmation of those fears will come in *Un yuppie* when, leading a clandestine life as a guerrilla fighter, he manages to behold the enactment of the classic, Cortazarian horror fictionalised in ‘Casa tomada’ (1946). In a scene that ‘le anudó las tripas a la garganta’, Marroné then witnesses the apparition at the front door of the house of,

la rotunda figura de doña Ema, que parecía haber crecido en su ausencia y se mostraba más *rozagante y satisfecha* que nunca [...]. *Él había perdido su casa*, pensó apretando los dientes, y ahora *ella era la dueña*: al final los proletarios habían terminado *echando a los burgueses de sus casas*, pero no por el avance de la revolución sino por su retroceso (*YCCG*, 280).

Although Marroné’s immediate reaction—the ‘new’ side of his mind—is to think that ‘cuando la revolución barriera con aberraciones como la propiedad privada y la servidumbre personal él mismo se encargaría de conseguirle a doña Ema un trabajo digno en un complejo fabril o una granja colectiva, y una vivienda digna en un barrio obrero’ (*YCCG*, 280), his afterthought is irrelevant, as the true occupant of his house is the army. A Montonero militant had made it clear to him a few days before: ‘*Ya no tenés más casa*, Ernesto. Te la allanó el ejército. *Están adentro*. [...] Piensan que *estás con nosotros*’ (*YCCG*, 138). The consequences of Marroné and the middle classes leaving the house/country in order to join the guerrilla are thus exposed.

Even though Cortázar denied any political intentions in the writing of ‘Casa tomada’, indicating on several occasions that its origin was a nightmare which

constituted, in his own words, ‘el espanto total en estado puro’, Carolina Orloff expands Sebrelí’s reading to see this short story ‘as an allegory of the invasiveness of the Peronist hegemony.’<sup>182</sup> The influence of Peronism on Cortázar’s story would thus be at one remove since, as Gamarro points out, ‘el peronismo engendró la pesadilla y la pesadilla inspiró el cuento.’<sup>183</sup> Hence, for the Argentinian middle classes the restoration of order/taking back of the house can only occur once the origin of the nightmare has been excluded from the public sphere/the house. This occurs after the coup, when doña Ema’s purpose of maintaining her domestic order is aborted by a new alliance: that of Marroné with his wife, i.e., the anti-Peronist middle classes—embodied by Marroné’s in-laws, whose financial help imposed on him family events full of ‘opiniones gorilas que no admitían ningún disenso’ (*ABE*, 370)—with those segments of the same social class that had been receptive to ‘el canto de sirena de los impacientes y los violentos’ (*ABE*, 13). Marroné’s repossession of the house is enacted, after returning from his Guevarist sojourn, by his aggressive interruption of doña Ema’s usual cleaning, to make her aware of his new rules: ‘A mí, por si todavía no se dio cuenta, me gusta *leer* en el baño. Y cuando *leo*, quiero silencio’ (*YCCG*, 393, italics in the original). Middle-class ambitions are no longer to be hampered by the working class. As the ‘cabecita negra’/Peronist cannot be completely expelled from the house/country, the place assigned to him/her is now ‘la cocina’, i.e., a space of confined, non-visible work, from where, in addition, ‘sólo sale cuando yo o la señora se lo decimos’ (*YCCG*, 394). If later on Marroné’s wife verbalises the terms of the middle classes’ reconciliation, based on silence and amnesia apropos their own disgraceful deeds (*YCCG*, 398), Marroné also warns doña Ema that the alliance by which he has recovered his house is safeguarded by the armed forces, those ‘señores que me vinieron a buscar los otros días’ with whom ‘nos podemos dar una vueltita *por su casa*, en la villa’ (*YCCG*, 394) in case she fails to comply with the rules of the re-established political order.

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<sup>182</sup> Carolina Orloff, *The Representation of the Political in Selected Writings of Julio Cortázar* (Famesis, 2013), p. 55. n123. Sebrelí had summarised the short story as ‘esta angustiosa sensación de invasión que el cabecita negra provoca en la clase media.’ See Juan José Sebrelí, *Buenos Aires, vida cotidiana y alienación* (Siglo Veinte, 1965), p. 104.

<sup>183</sup> Gamarro, *Ficciones barrocas*, p. 82.

The military thus guarantee that ‘el espanto total en estado puro’ of the middle classes has been exorcised, yet they still behave as if they were the owners of the house. Immediately after Marroné’s return, ‘se le instalaron en el living y se quedaron charlando y tomando whisky hasta la una de la madrugada’, checking with him the information they had about the guerrilla fighters, and even taking Marroné with them in forays in which explicitly ‘salían a cazar’ (YCCG, 395). His collaboration through denouncing people who were not involved, a former fellow Montonero, and eventually torturing the person thanks to whom his middle-class life became an idyllic one in ‘su isla paraíso’ (YCCG, 293), namely, María Eva, will eventually ensure him and the middle classes no further ‘alteraciones a *la paz hogareña*’ (YCCG, 396). The terms of the new order are yet again voiced by Marroné’s wife, once relatives of the guerrilla fighters still seek for solidarity in the middle classes:

estás llamando a una *casa de familia* y mi esposo —sí, mi esposo, escuchaste bien— es un padre con dos hijos chicos y si anduvo *en malas compañías* ahora *volvió con nosotros* y entre todos lo vamos a ayudar, así que si volvés a llamar a este número *te voy a mandar a la policía a tu casa*’ (YCCG, 398).

The scenario where a house is again a home, inhabited by its owners, and protected by the military/repressive forces will be prolonged up until the democracy of the early 1990s. One of the guards of the gathered community to which Marroné and his family have moved is an unemployed torturer, whom Marroné gets that ‘*trabajo de guardia* en el country’ (YCCG, 405). Those who once by torturing and murdering kept peace and order continue to protect the middle classes’ houses even though the epoch of fighting ‘contra privilegios mucho menos injustos que los que ahora detentaban’ (ABE, 12) has been left far behind.

While the conflict with the lower classes is resolved by means of violent interventions of the state forces, middle class dealings with the upper segments of society primarily draw upon education. In the autobiography he imagines dictating in *La aventura*, Marroné recalls: ‘Mi familia no reparó en gastos a la hora de procurarme una educación *first-class*, que se desarrolló en el *exclusive and expensive* Colegio St. Andrew’s’ (ABE, 59, italics in the original). The implicit prospects placed in education echo a well-rooted tradition in the Argentinian middle classes, particularly of recent

immigrant origins, which saw in obtaining a university degree the way of making fast social advances, even within the same generation.<sup>184</sup> Marroné has even got a postgraduate diploma in Marketing in Stanford (*ABE*, 22), yet the position he desires is ‘usurped’ by a member of the Tamerlán family, Aldo Cáceres Grey, an ‘ejecutivo de buena cuna, que debe su puesto menos al currículum que al *pedigree* y más a su *handicap* golfístico que a su *scoring* académico’ (*ABE*, 47, italics in the original). The network of family relations within and between the upper classes that restricts middle-class ambitions is emphasised by the fact that Cáceres Grey’s incompetence is balanced by his ‘vicegerente [quien] era obsesivamente eficiente pero impresentable en sociedad’ (*ABE*, 47). If the upper classes enjoy privileged positions thanks to their social skills and family connections, while the middle ones are sustained by their competence for work, Cáceres Grey’s behaviour also locates him above the rules that explicitly or implicitly regulate a social group, as Tamerlán’s nephew is shown getting into his car without taking any of the security measures learnt in the ‘cursillo de supervivencia’ (*ABE*, 51) which Marroné, for his part, strictly follows. The unfeasibility of the middle classes’ ambitions to achieve social progress is emphasised when, after being commissioned with the purchase of the busts, Marroné returns to his office Quixotically dreaming about the (all positive for him) effects of the release of Tamerlán. These are to be crowned by his marriage to Tamerlán’s daughter and the realisation of the family alliance that will place him in the upper class:

Llegado el día de su boda con Clara Tamerlán el ascensor alcanzó el sexto piso y la burbuja de su imaginación reventó por enrarecimiento de la realidad circundante: el señor Tamerlán *no tenía hijas mujeres y además él ya era casado* (*ABE*, 38).

What Marroné and by extension the middle classes cannot perceive is that, as analysed in *El sueño*, the key alliance is constituted by the state and the big family fortunes of the country. Apart from committing crimes ordered by the upper classes, as shown in *El secreto*, the state saves the life of the man who embodies that alliance. It happens following Tamerlán’s failed execution. After deciding with his vote the death of the mogul and asking to carry out the deed, Marroné

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<sup>184</sup> Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina*, p. 10.

apretó el gatillo. Nada. Ni un click. Estaba trabado, como un soldado, su dedo *no podía moverlo* (YCCG, 341).

Once again, as discussed in chapter 2, immobility imposed on individuals is a tool of totalitarian regimes to keep social order. Marroné's new failure is explained by Tamerlán with the use of a first-person plural that overtly displays the alliance that has aborted the idyllic life of the middle classes with revolutionary Peronism: 'No se gaste, Marroné. *No íbamos a arriesgarnos a que de los nervios se le escapara un tiro*' (YCCG, 341). If a social alteration regarding a member of the upper classes is allowed, it is at the expense of the *inefficient* one: Cáceres Grey, who is shot dead by the Montoneros following Marroné's suggestion. The essential bond between climbing the social ladder and crime is acknowledged by Tamerlán when he offers Cáceres Grey's position to Marroné: 'Usted, ahora, es un burgués probado' (YCCG, 380). The middle classes, then, can only reach their coveted status through *violence* rather than through *education*.

Although he takes part in guerrilla activities, Marroné never achieves the condition of a guerrilla fighter, as he refuses to perform the defining act of a revolutionary: that of *voluntary* sacrifice by offering his life either as 'un león, entre zarpazos y rugidos' (YCCG, 290), i.e., the heroic death that would be 'la confirmación de que el guerrero, por sus dotes personales, forma parte de un círculo de elegidos,'<sup>185</sup> or as 'una rata que comió arsénico' (YCCG, 290), that is, by swallowing the cyanide pill, 'un talismán [para] una militancia que ya no estaba en condiciones de elegir un camino excepto *el de ese último acto de la voluntad: la forma de una muerte.*'<sup>186</sup> This way of death constituted, in Sarlo's words, 'un *arte de morir*' by which the guerrilla fighter '*moría bellamente.*'<sup>187</sup> Marroné hints at that 'revolutionary death' by his unconsciously repeating Che's final words, 'Póngase sereno, cobarde, que va a matar a un hombre' (YCCG, 299), as well as Vicki Walsh's: 'Ustedes no nos matan, nosotros elegimos morir' (YCCG, 300). The cyanide pill thus implies an aesthetical conception, to which is added a religious trait. If the cyanide pill, as Vezzetti observes, is still 'un acto de

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<sup>185</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 153.

<sup>186</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *Zona Saer* (Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2016), p. 75.

<sup>187</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, 'Una alucinación dispersa en agonía', *Punto de Vista*, 21 (1984), pp. 1-4 (p. 3). Italics in the original. Feinmann draws upon the same idea when describing Che Guevara's 'mito infinito: el de la muerte bella. La muerte del Che nutre ese concepto, lo corporiza.' See Feinmann, *La sangre derramada*, p. 66.

combate; en el límite, eliminarse como posible delator significaba *producir una baja al enemigo* [...] cumplía con *la función del sacrificio* en el destino del combatiente heroico,<sup>188</sup> for Calveiro it implied that ‘*el suicidio, como un último acto de voluntad*, les arrebatava [a los perpetradores] ese derecho de muerte que los convertía en “dioses”’.<sup>189</sup> The cyanide pill thus appears a religious act (a ‘sacrificio’) that ultimately strips the perpetrators of their supposed divinity. In the final pages of *Un yuppie*, Marroné confirms this religious sense of the revolutionary death: ‘*era nuestro deber morir en el intento*’ (YCCG, 407), being aware that ‘*un simple apretón de mandíbula redimiría una vida de dudas con un instante de certeza absoluta*’ (YCCG, 304). His refusal to perform the revolutionary death, when being chased in the subway, outlines the futility of their sacrifice:

si ahora levantarás la pastilla en alto y les dijeras, hermanos, esto lo hago por ustedes, por todo el amor que les tengo y te desplomaras a sus pies, ¿habría uno, uno solo, que se agachara sobre tu cuerpo postrado para levantarte y sostenerte en sus brazos, para poner bajo tu cabeza una almohada de saco doblado, que derramara así fuera una lágrima por vos y esta noche regresara a su casa para decir con voz solemne: “A partir de hoy vamos a ser más justos, más solidarios, más buenos; hoy he visto morir a un héroe”? No, claro que no [...] van a volver todavía más rápido para escupirte y patearte mientras a espumajo limpio echás el alma del cuerpo (YCCG, 298-9).

The cyanide pill shrewdly becomes Marroné’s ‘liberating’ factor from the trap, as he will tempt the head of the military squad with a cookie in which he hides the pill. From the middle classes’ perspective, it hints at the interchangeability of those enemies that killed one another (like pre-Hispanic American communities did) in the name of Fatherland, producing in either case a sacrificial ‘baja al enemigo’ that denies any divine quality to the act. This is also Marroné’s last profane act before the single conception of the sacred is imposed on the country by the military. If Machiavelli has written that ‘men cannot be splendidly wicked or perfectly good’ and that ‘it is necessary for him who lays out a state and arranges laws for it *to presuppose that all men are evil* and that *they are always going to act according to the wickedness of their spirits* whenever they have free

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<sup>188</sup> Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria*, p. 148.

<sup>189</sup> Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (Colihue, 1998), p. 55. Italics in the original.

scope,<sup>190</sup> the elimination of this duality becomes central for the dictatorship to produce a type of criminal that, in Claudia Hilb's description, is

alguien a quien apenas puede corresponder el nombre de persona, si llamamos persona, con Arendt, a quien resguarda en sí *la pluralidad propia de la condición humana*. [...] un personaje que está dispuesto a *hacer cualquier cosa*, a *subsumir sus actos bajo cualquier norma que se le proponga*, porque ha renunciado a pensar, porque ha renunciado al diálogo consigo mismo, a la interrogación acerca de *lo que está bien y lo que está mal*.<sup>191</sup>

This 'plurality of the human condition', Hilb continues, implies that 'los hombres son, cada uno, *dos-en-uno en el pensar*, en el diálogo silencioso con ellos mismos [...] obturando esa capacidad —esto es, *quien logra olvidar* aquello que ha hecho, y por lo tanto, *haciendo el mal no tiene que convivir con un asesino en él mismo*— estará dispuesto a hacer lo que fuere.<sup>192</sup> It is this faculty that allows us to discern good from evil which is annulled by the dictatorship: the 'inner awareness' that, even though in the concentration camp does not suffice to alter the events, allowed 'the prisoner to remain a human being.'<sup>193</sup>

Marroné and the middle classes recover this faculty with the return of democracy, even though their impunity is not affected. While he abandoned the social order to be in 'tune with the times', Marroné utters his middle-class truth/confession to prevent his son's becoming the victim of a false sacrifice (a prey of the 'impatient' and 'violent' elements of society), as sacrifices, according to Machiavelli, may create or recreate 'una fe que, *como la de Jesucristo*, une de manera indisoluble, en un lazo de sangre, a unos con otros y así todos juntos [...] *a la autoridad que en la tierra —en esta tierra— tiene el poder de la vida o de la muerte*.'<sup>194</sup> In other words, a sacrifice that in the name of Christ merely serves to consolidate the power of Caesar. In Giussani's analysis:

un "montonerismo subjetivo", que creía estar desarrollando una estrategia de choque *contra el ordenamiento existente*, [y] un "montonerismo objetivo" que, por el contrario, estaba dando

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<sup>190</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, in Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, I, pp. 188-529 (pp. 255 and 201).

<sup>191</sup> Claudia Hilb, *¿Por qué no pasan los 70? No hay verdades sencillas para pasados complejos* (Siglo XXI, 2018), p. 19.

<sup>192</sup> Hilb, *¿Por qué no pasan los 70?*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>193</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 56.

<sup>194</sup> Landi, *La mirada de Maquiavelo*, p. 93.

vida a una refinada política diseñada para *proteger y consolidar ese orden*.<sup>195</sup>

The scheme of Christian sacrifice the Montoneros had taken from the examples of Evita and Che may thus explain that, in Horowicz's words, '[*Los hijos políticos del tercer peronismo no serían capaces de sobrevivir la muerte del padre*].'<sup>196</sup> It is this sacrality that Marroné denies:

Le habían dicho que estaba construyendo el hombre nuevo, cuando en realidad lo único que hacían era *engordarlo para el sacrificio* con valores éticos y buenos sentimientos, como a *un pavo con castañas* (YCCG, 401).

Marroné's endeavours in Peronist and Guevarist spaces become an imperious search for truth, when he wonders: '¿Cuál era el mensaje lejano que persistentemente buscaba *su* oído?' (YCCG, 89, italics in the original). Rinesi has noted that 'el tópico del envenenamiento de los oídos, de la corrupción por los oídos' is central to set in motion the family and generational revenges in *Hamlet*.<sup>197</sup> Regarding his own past, Marroné wonders whether he must '*verterlo* en los oídos despavoridos de su ingenuo vástago' (YCCG, 401). That past includes his having been a helpless witness of the massacre of 'su amigo' Paddy/'El Colorado' by state repressive forces, as 'no había manera de sacarlo de ahí, ni de pedir ayuda' (ABE, 285), and an active (even though 'aterrorizado') collaborator of the dictatorship in the torture of María Eva (YCCG, 368). If he thus becomes the emblematic accomplice in the 'grey zone' of totalitarian rule, María Eva is similarly the emblematic 'complete witness': through the testimony given during the 'Juicio a las Juntas' by another victim, it is known that she died in a subsequent torture session, having been indeed 'capaz de sacrificar[se]' (YCCG, 150) with no confessions.

Marroné finally gives Tomás 'una versión de los principales acontecimientos, resumida y editada, claro' (YCCG, 406) that leaves out his own crimes (both as a generation and as a social class) thus achieving, by means of confession, his re-insertion 'en los ordenados circuitos de la sociedad' (ABE, 13). If his confession/truth

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<sup>195</sup> Giussani, *Montoneros*, p. 208.

<sup>196</sup> Horowicz, *Los cuatro peronismos*, p. 246. Italics in the original.

<sup>197</sup> Rinesi, *¿Qué cosa, la cosa pública!*, p. 80.

serves the purpose of shielding his son from becoming the victim of a renewed, anthropophagic sacrifice, it simultaneously ensures his own generational safety by demonstrating the futility of paternal crucifixion. Significantly, Marroné's confession occurs on the morning of 1 June 1992, en route to the Tamerlán Towers, where, a few hours later, the meeting between Felipe Félix and Fausto Tamerlán will transpire. It is the return to the beginning of a cycle of state crimes committed for the meaning of Fatherland, and the struggle of survivors for reclaiming a language that allows the reestablishment of bonds and the articulation of truth.

## CONCLUSION

In an early meeting, Tamerlán complains to Felipe: ‘Si algún escritorzuelo ambicioso tomara conocimiento de esta historia y se decidiera a contarla, seguramente elegiría *su* versión, Félix, en lugar de la mía.’ The mogul’s lament was that ‘[l]a fuerza se ha deshumanizado hasta tal punto que sólo parece humana la debilidad’ (*LI*, 182 and 181, italics in the original). These words summarise well the main concerns of Carlos Gamerro’s fictional universe. Indeed, as this thesis demonstrates, the stories of the analysed corpus strictly follow the point of view of a person who, to employ Tamerlán’s words, at some point has been ‘weak’ in front of a state power that showed a distinct totalitarian drive. Choosing that ‘weak’ individual as the narrator is, in my view, an ethical choice in favour of the survivors of state policies of extermination, who were left without an adequate language to give testimony of the events they suffered. Like other regimes of radical evil, the Argentine ‘Proceso de Reorganización Nacional’ converted these people into victims, witnesses, and ultimately somewhat reluctant accomplices of its deeds, placing them all into what Primo Levi called the ‘grey zone’ of the concentration camp. Since there is no human tribunal able to measure the survivor’s guilt, as Levi states implying the frequent estrangement of truth and justice, these novels by Gamerro show the essential solidarity of a writer who sees himself as ‘the last guarantee of truth’, with those narrators seeking to reconstruct their experiences and utter some kind of truth about them.

This study also exposed the extremely difficult conditions under which such utterings of truth were produced. Dehumanisation was indeed a trait of the world inferred by Tamerlán, though rather than the ‘strong’, it concerned the ‘weak’. In this regard, I drew attention to those survivors (Felipe Félix, in *Las Islas*), victims (Darío Ezcurra, in *El secreto y las voces*), and witnesses/accomplices (Ernesto Marroné, in *La*

*aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* respectively) who suffered processes of animalisation resulting from the intended dehumanisation strategies of such regimes. Dehumanising potential victims is indeed a tool, as well as an outcome, of systems of administrative massacres to facilitate their policies of extermination. Hence, the recovery of language becomes essential not only to give testimony of what the victim/survivor witnessed (to utter their ‘unbearable’ truth), but also to reconstruct the memory and collective identities that the destruction of language necessarily entails. I have argued that, if in Agamben’s words, the ‘grey zone’ ‘knows no time and is in every place’,<sup>1</sup> the eventual restoration of language recreates essential elements to confront the consequences of totalitarian regimes.

In following Lamarque and Olsen’s notion of truth as a property not of objects or facts to be found in the world, but of a specific predicative construct, I argued that the intellectual utterances bearing a degree of truth in Gamero’s Tamerlán/Malihuel cycle are produced within the frame of speech genres. In this regard, Mikhail Bakhtin emphasises the essential link between the history of society and the history of language. In the introduction to this thesis, I listed several essays on Gamero’s novels, and noted their focus on his employment of literary genres. I proposed that underpinning Gamero’s extensive use of various genres and literary traditions was a unifying purpose requiring further elucidation. I argued that that unifying purpose revolves around the principal yet understudied theme of truth. Additionally, I claimed that Gamero’s crucial use of literary genres is his tool to repair the ‘interrupted chain’—broken by radical evil—between the words and their meanings, allowing thus the survivor/witness to utter his/her truth.

This thesis has shown that what set in motion those fictions was always a question related to truth at a fictional level, which led to the ulterior uttering of a truth at the level of real reality. This was the case of *Las Islas*, where an investigation began seeking out key information in order to conceal the truth of a crime. In turn, this led to the uttering of truths regarding the state crimes of the dictatorship, as well as concerning the political and economic present of the narration and its implications for the future. In *El sueño del señor juez*, the wrongdoings and offences attributed to the

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 1999), p. 26.

inhabitants of Malihuel, which were ‘true’ only because the state authority had dreamed them, led to the uttering of a truth about state authority. In *El secreto y las voces*, research carried out with the purpose of writing a piece of fiction ended up uncovering the truth about a state crime and the identity of the narrator. Finally, in *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and its sequel, *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara*, Ernesto Marroné felt he had to confess to his son the truth about his past as a guerrilla fighter. In all of them, then, there was a purposeful quest that led to a truth involving a regime that emerged as a state with authoritarian/dictatorial features, even in those of Gamarro’s novels not unfolding during the ‘Proceso’ itself.

Furthermore, I have drawn attention to the narrative scheme in two temporal levels of all these novels: one in which the quest is performed (the moment in which truth is uttered) and the other of the recreated events. I observe in this pattern the weight of truth for Gamarro’s fictional endeavours. Bearing this structure in mind, I found that *Las Islas* displays such a high degree of complexity in either level that it required two separate in-depth analyses. The first of the two chapters devoted to this novel focused on the Malvinas/Falklands War arguing that the dominant literary genre at play was utopia. Since this genre imagines an ideal community yet located in this world, most frequently in remote islands, I have posited that utopia accounts for the lasting nationalist construct, conceived by nationalist ‘intellectuals/teachers,’ that culminated in the military adventure of 1982, carried out by ‘soldiers/schoolboys.’ I have then demonstrated that truth is uttered by Felipe with regard to that nationalist construct, contained in Major X’s diary, as sheer adolescent hallucinations; by his videogame of the war, showing the future of the country if Argentina had won the military conflict; and the fake battle against ‘los ingleses’, again devised by Felipe, to pronounce the military as the true enemies of the nation.

Chapter 2 analysed the outcomes of that endeavour of nationalist utopian features. I have spotted that during the war Felipe employs for the last time the word ‘amigo’, which enacts, in my view, how radical evil annihilates language and annuls the most essential human bonds. I have also noted that the last stages of the war showed the Argentine conscripts transformed into insects, a perception still in place ten years later, when Felipe describes himself as a fly trapped in a cobweb. As appropriate to what I have considered to be a post-utopian (rather than a post-war) moment, I have

studied the present of the narration following Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia to analyse a world in which 'the destruction of syntax' expresses the shortcomings of language for representing reality. In heterotopian Argentina, then, I have identified three zones constituted by different places, times, and genres. The first is embodied by Tamerlán's economic empire. It regards a dystopic future that—as Tamerlán has succeeded in replacing expressions, images, and metaphors distinctive of language, with literal actions—I have called 'dystopia of literality'. This zone explores the furthest outcomes of the destruction of language, giving rise to a world of totalitarian features in which the economic corporation has substituted the state as the regulator of community life, and the evolutionist predator-protector-prey scheme has replaced human bonds. The second zone reviews the present, showed by the pyramid scheme organisation *Surprise from Spain*. This scheme enacts the anxiety of impoverished middle-class characters to belong to the upper classes by joining an association based on the dictatorship's methods of betraying friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Finally, the third space is the evocation/reconstruction of a state's criminal past, after Felipe meets a direct victim of the dictatorship's concentration camps. The relation between Gloria and Felipe enacts the extreme difficulties survivors face to recover language, memories, and bonds.

Chapter 3 is geographically located in the fictional village of Malihuel, which works as an explicit metonymy of the nation. The novels analysed in this section are *El sueño del señor juez* and *El secreto y las voces*, a pair of fictions that unfold respectively in two key moments of Argentina's history: the formation of the state at the end of the 'Campaigns to the Desert', and its consolidation during the period of radical evil in the 1970s. I have argued that the dominant genre of the first period—the gauchesque—was insufficient in isolation to account for the changing reality of the nation. Articulating my analysis through the thought of Thomas Hobbes, I have suggested that an agreement between the *gaucho* and the *juez de paz* was not only required to ensure their positions in the new times of the Republic, but that it was essential for articulating the notion of truth. While the state authority pronounced the law, civil society retained the right to utter truth. One century later, this covenant will result in a clash between the descendants of the *gaucho* and the *juez de paz*. The uttering of truths related to the joint, violent origin of landed fortunes and the state will be the cause of

the disappearance of the person who utters that truth. I have detached my analysis from the prevalent readings of *El secreto y las voces* as noir, crime, or detective fiction. Through close textual study, I have shown that this novel rather belongs to tragedy, as it is the staging of an insoluble conflict (the uttering of truth versus law bestowed by the nineteenth-century agreement) that exposed the falsity of the notion of sacrifice as a justification for the dictatorship's disappearance and extermination policies.

Finally, I devoted chapter 4 to the analysis of the last two novels of the corpus: *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara*. While agreeing with previous readings that place these novels within the Cervantine tradition of *Don Quixote*, I argued that Ernesto Marroné's attitudes essentially belong to the bourgeois mindset, well represented by the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli. Also, my reading somewhat diverges from the predominant lines of analysis, which seemed to unquestioningly follow Gamerro's own notion of Baroque. Instead, I studied Marroné's endeavours within the original religious conception of the Baroque, seeing it as appropriate for the 1970s pattern of politics, as well as drawing upon the Baroque as a policy to cover up massacres of the population. In this understanding of the genre, I showed that Marroné survived times of extreme violence precisely thanks to the Machiavellian features of his social class. Marroné's uttering of his truth is produced as a confession, which in the Christian tradition enacts the restoration of the outlaw/sinner to the broken order, just as the middle classes did after their rapprochement with Peronism and revolutionary organisations in the 1970s. In addition to analysing the pervasive complicity of civil society intrinsic to radical evil, I also concluded my study of the Argentinian nationalist field, begun in chapter 1, with their internal dispute for the meaning of Fatherland.

As stated in the introduction, then, this thesis is the first book-length study in English of these novels by Gamerro. It aimed to articulate a coherent reading of a corpus of fictions that consistently explores a past through a compactly intertwined universe of characters, episodes, and concerns—a past that, in many respects, is still alive and deeply affects the present of Argentina. In this regard, this thesis sought to elucidate the weight of truth as a tool to deal with the most lasting heritage of a regime of radical evil—the problematic space of complicity and collaboration that Primo Levi named the 'grey zone'—in the work of a writer who has indeed chosen the version of

the 'weak' to be 'the last guarantee of truth'. The analysis carried out throughout these pages, and the conclusion arrived at, thus demonstrate that the recreation of languages, memories, and collective bonds for victims and witnesses of radical evil, as well as for society in general, are essential to utter 'la verdad que nadie quiere oír'.

## APPENDIX

# Chronology of Events

DATE	REAL REALITY	FICTIONAL REALITY
1806	British invasion of Buenos Aires	The <i>Fortune</i> arrives in Malvinas/ Falklands carrying the Viceroy Sobremonte's treasure.
1807	Second British invasion of Buenos Aires.	
1810	'Revolución de Mayo'.	
1816	Argentina declares Independence.	
1829	Juan Manuel de Rosas begins his first period as Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires. He appoints Luis María Vernet commander of the Malvinas/ Falklands Islands.	
1833	British occupation of the Malvinas/ Falklands Islands. Antonio 'el gaucho' Rivero rebels against the British.	
1834	Charles Darwin arrives in Malvinas/ Falklands with the <i>Beagle</i> expedition.	
1835	Rosas is appointed Governor of the Buenos Aires Province for a second period.	
1852	J. M. de Rosas is defeated in Caseros.	
1853	Argentina has a Magna Carta.	
1861	Buenos Aires joins the Argentine Republic after the Battle of Pavón.	
1877	3 Nov  Death of Adolfo Alsina, War Secretary. General Julio A. Roca replaces him.	First dream of Don Urbano Pedernera. <i>El sueño del señor juez</i> begins.

- 1878 Roca's first 'Campaign to the Desert'.
- 1879 Roca's second—and definitive—  
'Campaign to the Desert'.
- 1880 Federalisation of Buenos Aires.  
Roca is elected President for his first  
period (1880-1886).
- 1898 Roca begins his second period in office  
(1898-1904).
- 1916 Masculine universal suffrage. Hipólito  
Yrigoyen is elected President for the  
first time. After Marcelo T. de Alvear's  
government (1922-1928), Yrigoyen is  
elected for a new period in office.
- 1930 6 Sept Coup against President H. Yrigoyen.
- 1937 Fausto Tamerlán is born.
- 1943 Darío Ezcurra (Fefe's father) is  
born.
- 1943 4 June Military coup against President Castillo.  
Colonel Juan Domingo Perón is  
appointed Vice-President and Secretary  
of Work and Pension.
- 1945 17 Oct Demonstration asking for the  
freedom of J. D. Perón. Wolf and Fausto Tamerlán arrive  
in Buenos Aires. They are the first  
to put their feet in the Plaza de  
Mayo fountain.
- 1946 10 Feb Ernesto Marroné is born.  
  
Perón elected President for the first  
time.
- 1947 Sept Feminine suffrage law is passed.
- 1949 Reformation of national Magna  
Carta allows Presidential re-election.
- 1951 Perón is re-elected.
- 1952 Fausto Tamerlán, aged 15, meets  
Eva Perón.
- 16 July Eva Perón dies.

1955	16 Sept	Military coup 'Revolución Libertadora'. Perón goes to exile.	
1956			(c.) Gloria is born.
1962			Fausto Tamerlán II is born. Two months before, Wolf Tamerlán has died in a suspicious plane crash. Felipe Félix is born. Fausto I is 25 years old.
1964		Tacuara's 'Operación Rivero' is aborted.	
	Dec		Ernesto Marroné graduates from St. Andrews High School.
1965		UN Resolution 2065.	
1966	28 June	Coup against President A. Illia.	
	28 Sept	'Operación Cóndor' deviates a commercial aircraft to Malvinas/Falklands islands.	
1972	Nov	Brief return of J. D. Perón to Argentina after 17 years.	
1973	25 May	Elected President H. Cámpora takes office.	
	20 June	Definitive return of Perón. 'Masacre de Ezeiza'.	
	July	Cámpora resigns.	Tomás Marroné is born.
	Sept	Perón is elected President for the third time.	
	Oct	Parapolice organization 'Triple A' begin its activities.	
1974	1 July	Perón dies. His wife María Estela 'Isabel' Martínez replaces him as the new President of the country.	
1975	May		Fuchs, commercial partner of Tamerlán, is kidnapped by the Montoneros. As the money for the ransom never arrives, he is murdered. Tamerlán betrays both

		Fuchs and the Montoneros.
	July	Fausto Tamerlán is kidnapped by the Montoneros. His son—a secondary student—gives him up to the group. A double agent, Alfredo Canal, takes part in the kidnapping and subsequent liberation.
	Oct	Cynthia Marroné is born.
	Dec	Montoneros demand a bust of Eva Perón to be placed in every office of Tamerlán premises. Charged with their commission, Marroné visits 'Ysería Sansimón'. The factory is occupied by its workers, later by a Montoneros cell, and eventually liberated by repressive forces.
	27 Dec	Fake death of Fausto Tamerlán.
	28 Dec	After escaping the factory and spending some time in a shanty town, Marroné gets the busts of Eva Perón. <i>La aventura</i> ends.
1976	1 Jan	Fake funeral of Fausto Tamerlán. <i>Un yuppie</i> begins. Marroné is now commissioned with contacting the Montoneros in order to pay Tamerlán's ransom. He joins a Montoneros cell, eventually sent to the Delta area.
	10 Feb	Marroné turns 30.
	15 Feb	Marroné begins his diary in the Delta.
	24 Mar	Military coup. 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional' begins.
	April	Fausto Tamerlán is liberated after nine months in captivity. Captain Arturo Cuervo (Major X during the Malvinas/Falklands War) takes part in the operation.
1977	Jan	The construction of the Tamerlán

			Towers begins.
	28 Feb		Darío Ezcurra is murdered.
1979		Argentina and Chile at the verge of an armed conflict regarding three small islands in the Beagle channel.	(c.) Gloria is kidnapped by military forces. His boyfriend was killed during the last months of Isabel Perón's government. Gloria is systematically tortured and raped, and is kept in clandestine prison until mid-1981. One of her torturers is the then Captain Arturo Cuervo (Major X), whom she later marries.
1980			The Tamerlán Towers are finished.
1982	2 Apr	Argentine invasion of Malvinas/ Falklands Islands.	Arturo Cuervo is supposed to be part of the Argentine troops. Malvina and Soledad, Gloria's and Cuervo's twin daughters, are born.
	16 Apr		Felipe Félix is sent to the islands as part of the Argentine troops. Captain Héctor P. Verraco arrives the same day.
	1 May	The war begins.	
	21 May		Mayor X commences his diary.
	14 June	Argentine forces surrender. End of the war.	Construction of the new building of the Intelligence State Agency (SIDE).
1983	10 Dec	End of the dictatorship. Democratically elected President Raúl Alfonsín takes office. CONADEP is created by a presidential decree.	
1985	April/ Dec	Trial to the three military juntas.	
1986	April	Alfonsín puts forward the 'Proyecto Patagonia', which includes establishing the new capital district of the Republic in the cities of Viedma and Carmen de Patagones.	About this project, in <i>Las Islas Tamerlán</i> states: 'No permití que un presidente con vocación de fracaso se llevara en un patético rapto de megalomanía la capital lejos de mí.'

	Dec.	'Punto final' law is passed.	
1987	April	First 'carapintada' mutiny demanding the end of the trials to military for their actions during the 'Proceso'.	
	June	'Obediencia debida' law is passed.	
1988	Jan	Second 'carapintada' mutiny.	
	Dec	Third 'carapintada' mutiny.	
1989	8 Jul	President Carlos Menem takes office.	
	Oct.	Berlin Wall falls. Menem's first presidential pardons.	
1990			Felipe Félix hacks different bank accounts to benefit unidentified 'patriotic funds'.
	Dec.	Fourth 'carapintada' mutiny. Menem's second set of presidential pardons (Junta members and Montonero leaders among the main beneficiaries).	
1992	Feb.		<i>Surprise from Spain</i> rents the Silver Tamerlán Tower in order to hold weekly meetings.
	27 May		A murder is committed in the Golden Tamerlán Tower by César Tamerlán. The body of the victim never appears.
	30 May		Ernesto Marroné discovers a poster of Che Guevara in his son's room. <i>La aventura de los bustos de Eva</i> begins. He spends the night recollecting his past as a guerrilla fighter.
	1 June		In his way to work, the following morning, Marroné retells that past to his son Tomás. <i>Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara</i> ends. Felipe Félix attends a meeting with Fausto Tamerlán. <i>Las Islas</i> begins.
	3 June		As part of his investigation, Felipe Félix attends a <i>Surprise from Spain</i> meeting.

14 June	Tenth anniversary of the Argentine surrender in Malvinas/Falklands.	Tamerlán signs his confession and is killed by a bodyguard at César and Canal's order. <i>Las Islas</i> ends.
1994	New reform of the Magna Carta.	
1995	Menem is re-elected as President of the Nation.	
1996	Winter	Fefe (Felipe Félix in <i>Las Islas</i> ) returns to Malihuel to investigate his father's murder. <i>El secreto y las voces</i> begins. It ends a couple of months later.

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