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Poetry as *testimonio*:
Writing Human Rights
in Alicia Partnoy

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Abstract

This thesis studies the poetry of Alicia Partnoy (Argentina, b. 1955) as a form of *testimonio*. Partnoy is a survivor of disappearance, imprisonment and torture during the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina. She was forced into exile in the United States, where she now works as an academic, writer and human rights activist.

Partnoy has testified about her experiences at the United Nations, Amnesty International and CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas). As a writer, she is best known for the testimonial short stories of *The Little School* (1986) / *La Escuelita* (2006). My research argues that Partnoy's literary *testimonio* also encompasses the poetry collections *Venganza de la manzana / Revenge of the Apple* (1992), *Volando bajito / Little Low Flying* (2005) and *Fuegos florales / Flowering Fires* (2014).

Chapter 1 outlines existing scholarship in the field of *testimonio* studies, including Beverley (1987; 1993), Sklodowska (1992), Strejilevich (2006), Partnoy (2009), Portela (2009) and Forcinito (2012). I explore debates regarding testimonial 'truth' and attitudes to *testimoniantes*, before using the work of Scarry (1985) and Forché (2012) to understand how figurative language functions in the communication of suffering.

Chapter 2 establishes the importance of the paratext in *testimonio*, building on the theories of Genette (1997). I reflect on the role of information provided by the publishers and the translator Gail Wronsky, in addition to analysing paratexts written by Partnoy herself. Dedications, a prose introduction and prefatorial poems all serve a significant testimonial purpose in the collections.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 comprise thematic close readings of Partnoy's poems. Chapter 3 explores Partnoy's approach to testimonial poetry, and her development of the poetic 'I', as a challenge to the maxim that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno 1967). Chapter 4 examines Partnoy's portrayal of the effect of dictatorship on family, drawing on the intimate relationships with her daughter, brother, and life partner. Chapter 5 considers the creation of a collective testimonial voice. I conclude that in response to state violence in Argentina and beyond, Partnoy creates a poetic *testimonio* that is a chorus against injustice and a demand to be heard.

Lay Summary

This thesis studies the poetry of Alicia Partnoy as *testimonio* (testimonial literature). *Testimonio* is a form of writing that denounces human rights abuse, produced by a person who has first-hand experience. Partnoy is a survivor of kidnap, imprisonment and torture during the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina, a period of state terror during which 30,000 people were 'disappeared'. After being forced into exile, she now lives and works as an academic, writer and human rights activist in the United States.

Partnoy has testified about her experiences at the United Nations, Amnesty International and the Argentine National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, CONADEP). As a writer, she is best known for the testimonial short stories of *The Little School* (1986) / *La Escuelita* (2006). My research argues that Partnoy's literary *testimonio* also encompasses the poetry collections *Venganza de la manzana / Revenge of the Apple* (1992), *Volando bajito / Little Low Flying* (2005) and *Fuegos florales / Flowering Fires* (2014).

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Chapter 2 establishes the importance of the paratext in *testimonio*, building on the theories of Genette (1997). Paratexts consist of any textual elements that are part of a book, outside of the main text. I reflect on the role of information provided by the publishers and the translator Gail Wronsky, in addition to analysing paratexts written by Partnoy herself. Dedications, a prose preface and introductory poems all serve a significant testimonial purpose in the collections.

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brother, and life partner. Chapter 5 considers the creation of a collective testimonial voice. I conclude that in response to state violence in Argentina and beyond, Partnoy creates a poetic *testimonio* that is a chorus against injustice and a demand to be heard.

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Content Note

This thesis analyses poetic *testimonio* about human rights abuse. While Alicia Partnoy's poems do not typically contain detailed depictions of violence, her writing touches on a number of distressing topics.

Readers should be aware that the following subjects will be discussed throughout: kidnap, disappearance, imprisonment, torture, forced separation of parent and child, suicide, trauma, psychological dissociation and exile.

I indicate in footnotes when secondary sources are particularly distressing, including Appendix E to the thesis, which contains graphic descriptions of torture.

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Introduction

Alicia Partnoy is a survivor of human rights abuse during the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina. Throughout the period of state terror, military forces abducted, clandestinely imprisoned, tortured and killed their fellow Argentine citizens. An estimated 30,000 people were 'disappeared' and Partnoy is one of the few who lived to tell about what happened in the dictatorship's secret detention centres.¹

Following her exile to the United States in 1979, Partnoy has been a prolific human rights campaigner and has denounced her treatment by the Argentine military in multiple contexts, most notably in the legal, academic and literary spheres. Focusing on Partnoy's collections *Venganza de la manzana* (1992), *Volando bajito* (2005c) and *Fuegos florales* (2014b), this thesis considers her poetry as *testimonio*.²

Partnoy is most recognised for the testimonial short stories of *The Little School* (1986; 1998) / *La Escuelita* (2006b). While there has been significant scholarship on *The Little School*, in the form of numerous articles, books and PhD theses (including Forcinito 2012; Ghiggia 2012; López-Gay 2020; Portela 2009), there are only two articles about her poetry, by Michelson (2013) and by me (Dunn 2016). My research constitutes the first long-form study of Partnoy's poetry.

Testimonial poetry has also been largely overlooked in *testimonio* studies, aside from my 2016 article and Partnoy's unpublished PhD thesis, 'The Discourse of Solidarity in Testimonial "Poemarios" from Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay' (1997c).³ As a practitioner of *testimonio*, as well as an academic, Partnoy takes as read the

¹ The purposes of this thesis are literary. Although appropriate contextual information is given throughout the thesis to support my readings and analysis, for more detailed information on the historical context of the 1976-1983 dictatorship, see Sheinin (2013), Feitlowitz (2011) and Canelo (2008).

² All further references to these texts will be to these editions, with the corresponding page numbers indicated in brackets, following the abbreviated titles of the collections, *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos*.

³ Partnoy includes only two of her own poems in her thesis (1997: n.p.), the unpublished 'Homenaje' and 'A un amigo cristiano asesinado por los militares' (*Venganza*, 30). I discuss neither in my thesis, since they are less directly relevant to the themes on which my argument focuses.

testimonial nature of the texts she discusses. Her thesis focuses instead on solidarity and recurrent themes across seventeen collections.

By contrast, my methodological approach centres close reading to show in detail how Partnoy's poems function as *testimonio* on multiple levels. Given the absence of poetic texts from the accepted testimonial canon, and their resulting absence from scholarship on *testimonio*, I seek to demonstrate from the perspective of literary criticism that testimonial poetry belongs in the field of human rights studies.

Partnoy and Dictatorship in Argentina

On 12 January 1977, Partnoy was kidnapped by military personnel from her home in Bahía Blanca, and forcibly separated from her 18-month-old daughter, Ruth (Partnoy 2006b: 10).⁴ From that moment, she became a *desaparecida*. Partnoy survived 'torturas físicas y psicológicas' during the three and a half months she was held at La Escuelita concentration camp in Bahía Blanca (A.M. Partnoy 1981c). She was then taken to Villa Floresta prison (Bahía Blanca) and held in solitary confinement for 52 days (A.M. Partnoy 1981c). In June of 1977, Partnoy's family were informed of her whereabouts and she was permitted to see her daughter again (Partnoy 2006b: 12).

Although Partnoy had 'reappeared', she remained a political prisoner. On 22 August 1977, she was taken to a prison in Buenos Aires, 630km from her family home in Bahía Blanca. Partnoy states that she was: 'trasladada a Villa Devoto, esposada, vendada y sentada (con la cabeza entre las piernas) sobre el aparato de calefacción del avión en un viaje con escalas que dura 10 horas' (A.M. Partnoy 1981c). She would remain imprisoned for almost two and a half years longer.

On 23 December 1979, Partnoy was forced into exile in the United States (A.M. Partnoy 1981c): 'me liberaron bajo la condición de que abandonara el país' (Partnoy 2006b: 13). The Argentine military's treatment of Partnoy constitutes violations of

⁴ At the time, Partnoy was a twenty-one-year-old activist with the Juventud Universitaria Peronista, involved in secretly distributing information 'sobre la situación económica, las huelgas de los trabajadores y la represión' (2006b: 9).

Articles 3, 5 and 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 3 states that 'everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person'; Article 5 states that 'no one shall be subjected to torture'; Article 9 states that 'no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile' (United Nations n.d.).⁵

Partnoy, Human Rights and Writing

Partnoy's response to her experiences has been to dedicate her life to human rights activism. She explains that: 'al poco tiempo de mi llegada [a los EEUU], comencé a trabajar por la libertad de los presos y desaparecidos que habían quedado en Argentina. [...] Como sobreviviente, sentí que era mi deber ayudar y dar testimonio de lo ocurrido' (Partnoy 2006b: 13). Partnoy testified before 'the United Nations, the Organization of American States [and] Amnesty International' (Cleis Press 1992: n. pag) as well as the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP). Her testimony is included in *Nunca Más* (1984), the report published by CONADEP about human rights abuse during the 1976-1983 dictatorship, as well as in *The Breaking of Bodies and Minds: Torture, Psychiatric Abuse, and the Health Professions* (Stover and Nightingale 1985).

Despite denouncing her experiences to multiple international organisations, Partnoy could not legally seek justice in Argentina. The amnesty laws, *Ley de Punto Final* (1986) and *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (1987), prevented the prosecution of human rights abuses committed during the dictatorship. Although Partnoy participated in the 1999 truth trials in Bahía Blanca (n. auth. 2011a), Argentina's amnesty laws remained in place until they were annulled by the National Congress in 2003 and ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2005 (Human Rights Watch

⁵ In Chapter 4 (p.160), I discuss the human rights violations imposed upon Partnoy and her daughter as mother and child, as well as Partnoy's experience of being prohibited from returning to Argentina during the dictatorship.

2005).⁶ The first trials ‘contra genocidas en Bahía Blanca’ began in 2011 (Centro Nueva Tierra 2011); Partnoy’s case was brought before the court in 2012 (Martínez 2012).⁷

Partnoy’s writing about human rights is an integral part of her activism and fight against impunity. *The Little School* and the collections studied in this thesis (*Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos*) illustrate the experience and repercussions of political oppression. *Ecos lógicos y otros poemares* (2019b), Partnoy’s latest poetry collection, considers the ramifications of contemporary environmental issues. She edited *Call Me Libertad: Poems Between Borders* (2016), an anthology of writing about the immigrant detention system in the USA, and *You Can’t Drown the Fire: Latin American Women in Exile* (1988b).

Collaborations feature significantly in Partnoy’s work and she has jointly published a number of texts. The children’s book *¡Escuchá!: Cuentos y versitos para los más chiquitos* (2016) was compiled with Partnoy’s daughter, Ruth Irupé Sanabria. *¡Escuchá!* collects poems, stories and jokes that Partnoy wrote, during her imprisonment, for Ruth. Over a number of years, she has worked closely with Evangelina Arce, a mother of a *desaparecida* from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.⁸ Together they published a dual-language edition of Arce’s poems about femicide in Mexico, *Para mi hija Silvia / For My Daughter Silvia* (2017). Most recently, Partnoy co-authored a book with Martina Giselle Ramirez about transgender rights, *Happier as a Woman: Transforming Friendships, Transforming Lives* (2019c).

Further to her scholarship on *testimonio* and dictatorship, Partnoy’s academic work centres human rights. She explains that ‘in my case, creative work and scholarship fuel each other and in turn nurture and are nurtured by my activism. I see my writings and academic pursuits as venues to help me expose and combat social

⁶ In recent years, there has been controversy in Argentina about the legality of reducing the sentences of convicted perpetrators of human rights abuse. In 2017, the Supreme Court appeared to approve the reduction of sentences with the so-called ‘dos por uno’ rule. However, in 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that the ‘dos por uno’ rule is not applicable to cases relating to crimes against humanity (n. auth. 2019).

⁷ As of July 2021, trials are still taking place in Bahía Blanca (Ministerio Público Fiscal 2021).

⁸ In Chapter 5, I discuss the case of Evangelina Arce, and her daughter Silvia, in relation to Partnoy’s ‘Palabras por Silvia’ (pp.247-260).

injustice’ (Partnoy 2020b). Exiled to the United States, she studied for her MA and PhD at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and is now a professor of Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California.

Partnoy ‘presides over Proyecto VOS – Voices of Survivors’ (Partnoy 2019a), an organisation she co-founded in 2005, dedicated to coordinating ‘visitas a universidades de los Estados Unidos por sobrevivientes de violaciones de derechos humanos’ (Ghiggia 2007: 29). She has also undertaken multiple projects with her students to translate ‘into English the words of human rights victims in Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and the U.S.’ (Partnoy 2020b).

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the existing field of *testimonio* studies, building on the work of Beverley (1987; 1993), Forcinito (2012), Jelin (2003), Portela (2009); Partnoy (2005a; 2009); Sklodowska (1992), Strejilevich (2006a; 2006b) Vezzetti (2009) and Yúdice (1996; 2006). Scholars of testimonial writing have, so far, focused almost exclusively on prose and I examine the difficulties that have arisen in attempts to define *testimonio* and categorise it as a form of literature.

Taking the controversy over Rigoberta Menchú’s testimony about human rights abuse in Guatemala as a starting point, I review broader debates on ‘truth’ and attitudes towards the *testimoniante*. Exploring the relationship between reader and testifier, I consider the possibilities and complexities of conveying the experience of atrocity. To explore the relationship between language and the communication of suffering, I draw on the work of Scarry (1985) and Forché (2012) before offering an initial insight into the expressive potential of testimonial poetry.

Chapter 2 sets out the importance of the paratext for the reader of *testimonio*. I investigate the textual elements surrounding the main body of Partnoy’s poetry collections, written by Partnoy and others, on the theoretical basis of Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997). Bearing in mind existing academic discourse on the ‘trustworthiness’ of the *testimoniante*, I reflect on the function of

biographical information and praise for Partnoy in paratexts included by her publishers (Cleis, Red Hen, Settlement House) and her translator (Gail Wronsky).

Paratexts to the collections authored by Partnoy include dedications, a prose preface and prefatorial poems. As pieces of writing transmitting personal information about Partnoy, I consider the paratexts in the context of *testimonio* and discuss which of them can also be read as testimonial texts. I also explore the function of Partnoy's paratexts in terms of their effect on the relationship between the reader and the *testimoniante*.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 comprise close readings of Partnoy's poetry as *testimonio*. I delve into her use of language and stylistic technique to enhance the texts' testimonial content. Further to the role played by figurative language, I study the function of metre, sound and non-verbal elements in poetic *testimonio*. I seek to demonstrate what is communicated through textual hesitations and omissions – often conveyed through ellipses, punctuation, line breaks and spacing – especially in terms of the speaker's state as a survivor of extreme violence. A sense of irony is, nevertheless, recurrent across Partnoy's collections and I reflect on the significance of tone in her poems.

Chapter 3 studies Partnoy's writing as a literary challenge to the maxim that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno 1967: 34).⁹ With Partnoy's metapoetic manifestos 'Arte poética' and 'Arte política' as initial guides, I examine her approach to testimonial poetry. Emphasising subtlety, as well as the rendering of emotion and physical sensation, Partnoy's poems illustrate the power of resistance against oppression.

I consider the development of the poetic 'I' as *testimoniante* and Partnoy's rendering of the act of testifying, both in terms of audience reactions and how the testifier is affected. Further to her depictions of the poetic voice's speech, Partnoy uses the outer reaches of linguistic expression. From the fracturing of words to the

⁹ I refer to the literal interpretation of this phrase, albeit a thinner understanding of Adorno's argument. Partnoy responds to those who take the statement as moral absolute, and who might use it as a means of justifying opposition to testimonial writing about atrocity. (For further discussion of Adorno, see Chapter 3, p.108).

complexities of metaphor, I analyse how Partnoy represents the extremities of human experience under state terror.

Chapter 4 explores Partnoy's portrayal of the effect of dictatorship on family. Partnoy depicts the traumatic effects of state violence on interpersonal connections through her rendering of her own familial experiences, specifically the relationships with her daughter (Ruth Sanabria), brother (Daniel Partnoy) and life partner (Antonio Leiva).¹⁰ Through poems written during imprisonment and in exile, Partnoy shows a poetic 'I' attempting to transcend the limitations of the circumstances imposed upon her.

I reflect on Partnoy's illustration of the forced separation of mother and daughter, as well as the speaker's attempts to maintain an intimate bond with her child. Partnoy's poems about her brother are written after his death by suicide and I explore her portrayal of grief, through a re-evaluation of their sibling relationship and through poetic efforts to maintain the connection between them. I examine Partnoy's representations of her relationship with Antonio Leiva, interweaving representations of love with the ever-present reality of their situation as survivors in the aftermath of dictatorship.

Following my discussion of the most intimate and personal aspects of Partnoy's poetry, Chapter 5 considers how she creates a sense of the collective testimonial voice. I examine how Partnoy addresses the ethics of *testimoniantes* speaking about *compañeros* who did not survive, as well as her use of multiple voices – both singular and plural – to evoke a community of people fighting persecution.

Most of Partnoy's poems about dictatorship relate to her experiences in Argentina, yet her work speaks to a universal experience of suffering and resistance. Chapter 5 explores poems about human rights violations across different Latin American countries. I analyse Partnoy's use of individual and non-specific circumstances to develop a sense of shared experiences that go beyond geographical borders, thereby creating a poetic *testimonio* that is a chorus against injustice.

¹⁰ Leiva is Partnoy's second husband. Her first husband and Ruth's father, Carlos Sanabria, will briefly be mentioned in Chapter 4, in my discussions of the military's targeting of Partnoy's family (p.159) and my analysis of 'Visita' (p.171).

My conclusion draws together recurrent features, both stylistic and testimonial, of the poems studied in this thesis. Partnoy's literary approach to denouncing dictatorship centres resistance and resilience; her poetry pushes the boundaries of what has thus far been thought of as *testimonio*. Taking the idea of poems as 'empathy machines' (Robinson 2020), I reflect on how Partnoy renders traumatic experiences in poetic form, creating texts that are at once highly literary and a powerful denunciation of dictatorship.

Chapter 1

Approaching Poetic *Testimonio*

Testimonial poetry has been described as ‘una especie de Cenicienta entre los textos, despreciada por los estudiosos del testimonio por eludir el supuesto pacto de verdad, despreciada por los estudiosos de la poesía por considerarla de escaso valor estético’ (Partnoy 2014a). This initial chapter sets out to explore the field of *testimonio* studies and identify its main theories and debates, ahead of my investigation of Alicia Partnoy’s poetry as testimonial. I will contextualise poetic *testimonio* in relation to academic study of testimonial prose, as well as laying the theoretical foundations for my understanding of poetry as *testimonio*.¹¹

To begin with, I will consider approaches to understanding and classifying testimonial texts, following the work of John Beverley and Elzbieta Sklodowska. Scholars of *testimonio* have tended to be disinclined to refer to the mode of writing as a genre, and I will explore the reasons for this hesitancy. At the same time, the literary nature of testimony has been called into question. *Testimonio* simultaneously denounces the experience of human rights abuse and puts a claim on its reader. Demanding a response from anyone who engages with it, *testimonio* asserts that acts of atrocity cannot be ignored.

Exploring charged discussions on the ‘truth’ of *testimonio*, I will analyse the relationship between reader and *testimoniante*. Taking *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú: y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) as a starting point, I will touch on the political nature of testimonial writing and how this upends hegemonic assumptions about what is true and who is permitted to present their version of events. Questions about the sincerity of testimonial accounts appear to indicate an immense gap in understanding between readers of *testimonio* and its producers. Discussing the urgent need to communicate that is inherent to the form, I will reflect on survivors’ rationale for producing testimonial texts.

¹¹ Some of these arguments have been rehearsed in my article “‘Clases de español’: Education and *testimonio* in the Poetry of Alicia Partnoy’ (Dunn 2016).

Debates about the truthfulness of *testimonio* and the trustworthiness of its producers inevitably cast doubt on the figure of the survivor. In response, Partnoy's theoretical work on testimony emphasises the issue of solidarity. Focusing on the articles 'On Being Shorter: How Our Testimonial Texts Defy The Academy' (2005a) and 'Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life | Is Based | on a Real Story' (2009), I will analyse Partnoy's use of provocative language to challenge academic approaches to *testimonio* and how she reinforces the unique perspective of the *testimoniante*.

Testimonio emphasises the perspectives of survivors of atrocity and this is an approach that has called into question received ideas about how history should be written. I will consider the controversial theories set out by Beatriz Sarlo in *Tiempo pasado* (2005), with regard to the position of the *testimoniante*. Sarlo creates a hierarchy, which privileges historical texts and legal documents over testimonial writing. Using the work of Dominick LaCapra and Elizabeth Jelin as counterpoint, I will discuss the importance of the unique view on state terror and trauma that is provided by *testimonio*.¹²

Considering the theories of Jorge Semprún, Giorgio Agamben and Ana Forcinito, I explore the (im)possibility of communicating about mass human rights violations. Forcinito's *Los umbrales del testimonio* (2012) stresses the limits of knowing for most readers of *testimonio*, who do not share the *testimoniante's* experiences. The figurative 'umbral' is used by Forcinito to explore how testimonial writing attempts to bridge a gap in understanding. She also emphasises the importance and function of lacunae: gaps and silences in the *testimonio*, which work to communicative effect.

¹² When I use the terms 'trauma' or 'traumatic', I refer to deeply distressing experiences: events or circumstances (and their ramifications) that fundamentally destabilise a person's sense of safety, whether physical, mental or emotional. My methodology does not engage with trauma theory as a field of academic study – I feel that its tendencies towards a somewhat clinical perspective do not sit comfortably with my approach Partnoy's work. While I acknowledge that she has survived immense trauma, I am reluctant to talk about Partnoy (or her poetic 'I') as 'traumatised'. Instead, as a scholar of *testimonio*, my focus is on Partnoy's literary rendering of her experiences and I choose to engage with her concept of the 'solidarity pact' (see pp.26-27 of this chapter).

Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) also discusses the limitations of expression, specifically in relation to corporeal suffering. I review her theories in relation to the physical and psychological pain caused by state terror, both during and in the aftermath of dictatorship. Scarry emphasises the political significance of articulating pain and I will illustrate how this notion relates to *testimonio*.

Taking into account the difficulties implicit in communicating about traumatic experiences, I will examine Carolyn Forché's understanding of 'testamentary writing' as set out in 'Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art' (2012). Considering both Forché's emphasis on figurative language and Scarry's concept of the 'language of agency' (1985: 15), I explore the function of metaphor in relation to testimonial writing. Following an analysis of Nora Strejilevich's promotion of a 'literary approach to testimony' (2006b: 710), I will draw the chapter to a close by highlighting aspects of poetic form that lend themselves to – and may augment – the production of *testimonio*.

1.1 What is *testimonio*?

Latin American testimonial writing, in the form of *testimonio*, came to prominence in the last decades of the twentieth century as a means of denouncing state violence and communicating the experiences of oppressed citizens. In the cases of many Latin American countries, periods of state terror were followed by impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations, due to the creation of amnesty laws. Consequently, the publication of *testimonio* has challenged 'la historia oficial transmitida por las instituciones oponiéndole la historia marginal del grupo sobreviviente' (Giordano 2005: 157).

The critical reception of *testimonio* peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following scholarship on testimonial writing in the US academy, where the work of John Beverley (1987; 1993), René Jara and Hernán Vidal (1986) and Elzbieta Sklodowska (1992) laid foundations for the field. Approximately twenty years later, a renewed interest emerged with regard to testimonial fiction. In the Argentine context, this can be seen with the publication of Nora Strejilevich's *El arte de no olvidar*:

Literatura testimonial en Chile, Argentina y Uruguay entre los 80 y 90 (2006a), M. Edurne Portela's *Displaced Memories: The Poetics of Trauma in Argentine Women's Writing* (2009) and Ana Forcinito's *Los umbrales del testimonio: Entre las narraciones de los sobrevivientes y las señas de la posdictadura* (2012).

The first recognised example of Latin American *testimonio* is Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966). It records the life story of Esteban Montejo, who escaped from slavery in Cuba before its abolition in 1886 (Spence 2006: 1471). Barnet was the first to use the term *testimonio* to refer to a literary form, calling *Biografía de un cimarrón* 'la novela-testimonio' (1983: 286). The text by Barnet is what is known in *testimonio* studies as a 'mediated narrative', one recounted to 'an interlocutor who is an intellectual or professional writer from the middle or upper class [...], who then edits and textualizes the account, making it available to a similarly positioned national and international reading public as a printed book or pamphlet' (Beverley 1993: 88). The term 'mediated narrative' is not, however, universally applicable to *testimonio* since many *testimoniante*s communicate their story without an intermediary.

Following Barnet, Sklodowska writes in *Testimonio hispanoamericano: histórica, poética, teoría* (1992) that:

el éxito internacional de esta primera novela-testimonio fue crucial para la incorporación del término al vocabulario de la crítica latinoamericanista. El subsiguiente florecimiento de la narrativa no-ficticia en Latinoamérica (1970-83) seguido de un auge de la actividad crítica (la década del 80) terminó por canonizar al testimonio como modalidad literaria "auténticamente" latinoamericana. (1992: 1)

Sklodowska's choice to refer to the testimonial as a modality, rather than a genre, signals the difficulty that *testimonio* criticism has encountered in attempting to classify this style of writing: 'parte de la razón de ser del testimonio es que escapa a nuestras categorizaciones usuales' (Beverley 1987: 9). Although *testimonio* is referred to as a genre by recent scholars (García (2014); Acedo Alonso (2017); Forné (2018)), their

work deals exclusively with testimonial prose. Accordingly, the historical reluctance to define *testimonio* in terms of genre is pertinent to my discussion of testimonial poetry.

Margaret Randall asks, '¿qué es, por tanto, el testimonio? Si partimos en busca de su etimología vemos que entronca con la de testigo. La palabra tiene su cabida dentro de la literatura jurídica, no dentro de la literatura artística' (1992: 23). The consideration of testimony that is published and read in a non-legalistic context poses a challenge for the literary establishment. An eye-witness account in a court of law serves a specific purpose that has been predefined by societal convention. Conversely, *testimonio* is produced by a writer or speaker, who has experienced social or political marginalisation.

Testimonio challenges the normative role of the reader by urging them to action. Yet what seems to be most problematic about testimony is not so much its political element, but that *testimoniante*s are people who have been, or continue to be, marginalised and oppressed. The academy and the literary establishment are used to speaking for and about such communities, but not listening to what they have to say.

Laura P. Rice-Sayre writes that:

the reason we are hearing these testimonios as more than mere recordings of historical fact and are beginning to pursue their study as literature may have less to do with any newly discovered literary qualities in the testimony than with a challenge to the category of literature itself. (1986: 49)

Although *testimonios* that later came to prominence were often composed by people who were writers before their experience of state violence, the first testimonial texts to attract critical attention were 'not usually produced by great writers, and often not by writers at all' (Marín 1991: 51). As such, *testimonio* constitutes a 'rejection of master narratives' (Yúdice 1996: 44). Through giving voice to people in a marginalised position, *testimonio* presents a challenge to the hierarchical structure of the literary hegemony.

Testimonio's role in denouncing human rights violations politicises the literary act and brings with it the expectation that the reader will act as witness to this account of atrocity. By putting different demands on the reader than other forms of literature, the *testimonio* blurs the boundaries between the literary and the nonliterary: 'testimonio is testimonio because it suspends the literary at the very same time that it constitutes itself as a literary act: as literature, it is a liminal event' (Moreiras 2001: 212).

Testimonio theorists have struggled to come to an accord on the form's parameters and some opt for a restricted interpretation in their work. In Beverley's *Against Literature* (1993), he asserts that 'by testimonio, I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet [...] told in the first person by a narrator who is the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts'. (1993: 70)

While he chooses a limiting approach, Beverley acknowledges that:

a variety of different kinds of texts [...] can fit under the label of testimonio: for example, oral history, memoir, autobiography, chronicle, confession, life history, *novela-testimonio*, documentary novel, nonfiction novel, or "literature of fact." [...] Since testimonio is by nature a demotic and dynamic form, not subject to critical legislation by a normative literary establishment, any attempt to specify a generic definition for it, as I do here, should be considered at best provisional, at worst repressive. (1993: 71)

Beverley's concerns that giving a prescriptive meaning could be 'repressive' alludes to the marginal position of *testimonio* within the literary canon, as well as the further peripheral situation of the socially or politically oppressed, whose story *testimonio* relates. To definitively limit the possibilities of the testimonial would be to remove communicative, creative and literary agency from the *testimoniante* and, thereby, to ignore the desire for redressing the power imbalance that is integral to the form.

George Yúdice's observation that *testimonio* 'es un término que se refiere a muchos tipos de discurso' admits the possibility for a more inclusive interpretation of this form of writing (1992: 211). With the complexities of stipulating the boundaries

of *testimonio* in mind, he proposes in the article ‘*Testimonio* and Postmodernism’ (1996) that:

testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasising popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the course of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history. (Yúdice 1996: 44)

The highlighting of orality signals a feature that was integral to the first *testimonios* to attract critical attention.

It has been claimed that the testimonial form does not constitute ‘a new genre’, but that it ‘derives from a long oral history of witnessing’ (Rice-Sayre 1986: 49). As Beverley notes, the initial *testimonios* usually had their basis in ‘an oral narrative told by a speaker from a subaltern or “popular” social class or group’ (1993: 88). Arguably the most renowned *testimonio*, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), is a mediated testimony.¹³ In its composition, native Maya-Quiché speaker Menchú ‘se expresó en español, lengua que [dominaba] desde hace sólo tres años,’ while Elizabeth Burgos edited the account into written form (Burgos 1993: 9).¹⁴

Yúdice also stresses the concept of authenticity, which is seen as a fundamental element of *testimonio*. Elizabeth Jelin notes that testimonial texts are ‘essential sources of information’ about the experience of state violence and, as such,

¹³ While *testimonio* is not necessarily a gendered form of writing, it is notable that that its best known practitioners are women, including Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú (1983) and, in the case of Argentina, Alicia Partnoy (1986; 2006), Alicia Kozameh (1987) and Nora Strejilevich (1997).

¹⁴ For further discussion of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, particularly in relation to debates about ‘truth’, see section 1.2 of this chapter.

the accounts they offer speak with authority (2003: 74). As Sklodowska's term 'narrativa no-ficticia' suggests, *testimonio* must bear witness to genuine occurrences. The reader must feel able to believe in the truthfulness of the account that is being told by a survivor, who has first-hand experience of oppression.

1.2 Rigoberta Menchú and the Debate about Testimonial 'Truth'

What I mean by 'truthfulness' in relation to *testimonio* is not the same as 'accuracy' in the empirical sense. Rather, I refer to the reader's faith in the *testimoniante's* genuine approach to presenting their version of events. As will be discussed over the course of this chapter, 'truth' is a fraught term in *testimonio* studies. Before the emergence of the testimonial, nonfictional texts were expected to communicate objective facts to a reader who would accept their veracity. *Testimonio* challenges this format on a number of levels.

As a personal account, the *testimonio* relates a subjective experience of oppression and atrocity. Engaging with an account of the suffering of others elicits an emotional response from the reader, who the *testimoniante* hopes to encourage to take preventative action against further instances of state violence and oppression. The intended audience for *testimonio*, one that is outside the persecuted group, tends to be educated – often intellectual – and living in an urban Western setting. It is hoped that a significant number of *testimonio* readers will be in a social and geographical position that enables them to act in response to what they have read, for example, in the form of petitioning a government, educating others or ensuring the wider dissemination of the testimony.

As John Beverley writes, 'we are placed under an obligation to respond; we may act or not on that obligation, we may resent or welcome it, but we cannot ignore it. Something is asked of us by *testimonio*' (2004: 1). Further to the expectation that the reader will respond to the explicitly politicised nature of *testimonio*, it is anticipated that the reader will put their faith in a first-person account of events that are far removed from their own life experience. This has

proved problematic for the interpretation of *testimonio* according to the norms of academia.

Since testimonial writing relates to historic events, it is commonly expected to provide objective 'facts', irrespective of its evidently subjective style and its transmitter's state as the survivor of violence. Thus, if there is any suggestion or indication that the *testimoniante* is not presenting the whole 'truth', the tendency exists to interpret this as an attempt to deceive or mislead the reader. This notion is exemplified by the case of Rigoberta Menchú and the Stoll controversy.¹⁵

Menchú is an indigenous Guatemalan and survivor of state violence during the 1970s in her home country. With the publication of the English-language translation of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 'in recognition of her work for social justice and ethno-cultural reconciliation based on respect for the rights of indigenous people' (Nobel Media AB 2020b), Menchú became an internationally renowned figure, respected as a campaigner against injustice.

It was, therefore, polemical when David Stoll published the provocatively titled *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999). Based on fieldwork conducted in the late 1980s in Guatemala, where he spent time interviewing survivors of political violence, Stoll disputes the reliability of Menchú's account. He poses the question: 'what if much of Rigoberta's story is not true?' (1999: vii).

According to Stoll's research, some of the events depicted in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* do not coincide with 'what was told him [ten or more years later] by people who were part of the same history in the region' (Smith 2006: 243). In challenging Menchú's approach to telling this story, Stoll highlights the thorny issue of how far readers can put their faith in the testimonial voice, as well as bringing up the question of who has the authority to speak.

Dorothy E. Smith addresses both of these topics in her analysis of the controversy, where she writes that *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* 'comes directly

¹⁵ My discussion of the Menchú-Stoll polemic in this chapter is brief. For a detailed study of Menchú's *testimonio* and the surrounding controversies, see Kolar (2015).

out of the intensity of oppression and struggle' and in it Menchú 'draws together the experiences of her people', telling this as a 'direct personal account'. Smith asserts that Stoll's version of events, on the other hand, 'is an empirical argument, claiming objectivity for his findings constructed [out] of multiple fragments from interviews he did with various informants and some rather sparse documentary sources' (2006: 243).

What Stoll's questioning of Menchú makes clear is that the *testimonio* cannot be read in the same manner as an historical account. The testimonial text is a subjective rendering of personal experience, yet it is one that always implies the collective experience of oppression.¹⁶ Furthermore, *testimonio* puts a claim on its readers and the wider community: acts of atrocity cannot be ignored. The political aspect of testimonial writing provokes a response from its audience.

1.3 *Testimonio*, the *testimoniante* and the Reader of Testimonial Texts

Testimonio challenges the hegemonic version of 'truth' as it has been established by the state. Consequently, the notion of authenticity plays a central role in interpretations of testimonial writing. In the introduction to *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (2012), Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore write that: 'beyond finding language sufficient to the telling of the experience of atrocity, the primary question haunting modern testimonials has to do with veracity' (2012: 8). Goldberg and Moore ask, 'is what the survivor relays "true" in the sense that it happened to her exactly in the way that she has claimed?' (2012: 8). In other words, can the survivor be believed?

Discussions regarding the truthfulness of testimony inevitably bring with them implications of, if not direct accusations about, the untrustworthiness of the testifier. Ana Forcinito identifies this in her discussion of the:

¹⁶ I discuss Partnoy's approach to the testimonial collective in Chapter 5.

permanente cuestionamiento de la integridad del sobreviviente, que viene de la mano de la sospecha: son sospechosos por el hecho de haber sobrevivido y por ser las presencias que dan cuenta del mundo que habitaron, tanto en la militancia política como en el horror que le siguió. (2012: 17)

It seems that the survivor risks having their position challenged and undermined because they survived a situation that so many others did not. Furthermore, the survivor acts as a human witness of the atrocities of state terror. Their testimony serves as an equally uncomfortable reminder of events that some would wish to forget, or not learn about in the first place.

Yúdice emphasises that, with testimonial writing, the reader must feel able to put their faith in the accuracy of the text and Beverley supports this idea, writing that ‘we are meant to experience as real both the speaker and the situations and events recounted. The legal-religious connotation implicit in its convention implies a pledge of honesty or sincerity’ (1993: 73). The fundamental purpose of *testimonio* is to denounce injustice and, in doing so, it constitutes what Barnet calls ‘la representación de un mundo al revés’, a state of exception in which the basic rights of a group of people have been violated (1980: 140).

Hugo Vezzetti similarly refers to this as ‘una experiencia muy particular [...]’; es decir que no hablamos de condiciones “normales” de la memoria y de la recuperación testimonial, sino de condiciones excepcionales, que tocan un límite de la experiencia’ (2009: 23). In describing *testimonio*’s subject matter in terms of the boundaries of what can be known or comprehended, Barnet and Vezzetti allude to the deeply traumatic events that testimony discusses, as well as the difficulty that readers may have in grasping a sense of what the *testimoniante* lived through.

Although the reader is expected to become a kind of witness, Doris Sommer writes that ‘the testimonial “I” does not invite us to identify with it. We are too different, but there is no pretense here of universal or essential human experience’ (1988: 108). Sommer’s point is that *testimonio*, unlike some other forms of literature, does not strive to convey circumstances that are fundamental to the human condition. While I would argue that empathy, the ability to have a sense of shared humanity with

the *testimoniante*, is essential to *testimonio*, Sommer is specifically discussing the lived experience of human rights abuse. The events written about in *testimonio* are integral to the form precisely because of their abnormality, precisely because the reader *should not* be able to identify with the situation of the testimonial speaker.

Jelin stresses the role of the listener who engages with *testimonio* and she avers that 'testimony includes the listener, and the listener becomes a participant' (2003: 64). I would argue that the reader plays a like role by witnessing the events and actions that are denounced in the text. This role is vital for *testimonio* because those who engage with this kind of writing are urged to act to stop current injustices or prevent future atrocities. Beverley explains that they are encouraged to do this by the person who produces the testimony, yet 'each individual *testimonio* evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences' (1993: 75).

Beverley asserts that:

testimonio is the affirmation of the authority of a single speaking subject, even of personal awareness or growth, but it cannot affirm a self-identity that is separate from a group or a class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle. (1993: 83)

The *testimoniante*, thus defined by the act of giving testimony, is inherently linked to the group experience of the situation about which they speak. The events lived through took place not because of their status as an individual, but rather due to their identity, or perceived identity, as part of that socially or politically oppressed group.

It is the *testimoniante's* state as a survivor, a person who has the opportunity to act as a witness, that compels them to speak. Portela points out that:

The moral imperative to tell the individual and collective story is associated with the idea that the one who survives is the closest to the truth of what happened to the ones who did not. To answer the call of memory is then a way of paying tribute to those who did not survive. Therefore the testimony of a survivor is also a political

imperative against those who deny the obvious and want to relegate the history of repression to oblivion. (2009: 47)

The *testimoniante's* story does not claim to be exceptional with regards to the group. It cannot tell the entirety of those circumstances, but instead stands as a representation of what has been experienced by the collective.

In discussing the telling of the 'individual and collective story', Portela might be seen as conflating the two and I would stress that the person producing the *testimonio* does not purport to be speaking for the group as a whole. Rather, because their individual experience occurred as a result of what was inflicted upon the group, 'the voice that speaks in *testimonio* [...] is metonymically representative of the group it speaks for' (Moreiras 2001: 214-215).

An individual *testimoniante* 'achieves [their] identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole' (Sommer 1988: 108). It is this distinct testifying survivor that Yúdice identifies in '*Testimonio* and Postmodernism' (1996) as 'an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity' (1996: 44). Through differentiating between the terms 'agent' and 'representative', Yúdice reflects on the function of the testifier's role. He depicts this position as active, one that works to encourage those from outside the community to engage with an experience that is so far removed from their own.

1.4 *Testimonio* and Solidarity

Partnoy elaborates the connection between *testimonio* and its audience in her discussion of testimony and solidarity. She writes that '*testimonio* is *not* about the truth. Rather, the form serves as a tool for building a discourse of solidarity with victims of state terrorism' (2005a: 175, emphasis in the original). In making this assertion, Partnoy focuses critical consideration of *testimonio* on the motivations for the form's production.

Composed against the state violence experienced by a group, 'los testimonios son dirigidos a lectores externos a la comunidad, precisamente para inculcar la solidaridad' (Yúdice 2003: 112). Although Partnoy argues that truth is not the central feature of testimonial writing, she is not advocating fabrication. Rather, by making what might appear to be a controversial statement, Partnoy is reacting to what she perceives as the misguided approach taken by many academics when considering testimony.

By primarily centring on the so-called 'truth value' of testimonial writing, certain scholarly responses to the survivors' accounts appear unsympathetic and they disregard *testimonio's* search to create solidarity between communities. Indeed, the subtitle of Partnoy's 'On Being Shorter: How Our Testimonial Texts Defy The Academy' (2005a) is a provocative riposte to such critics.

Using the first-person plural possessive, Partnoy depicts herself not as an individual *testimoniante*, but rather as a part of a group of testifiers, who share motivation and ideology in producing their texts. Furthermore, in the title, Partnoy positions producers of *testimonio* in a stance against the academy, creating a dichotomy between those who have survived oppression and an institution of the hegemony. Partnoy's article presents a strong sense of defiance by examining *testimonio's* creation of solidarity despite of attempts to undermine its legitimacy.

The tone established by Partnoy at the outset of the article is continued through the piece. It can be observed when she writes that 'what really infuriates Stoll and the accuracy squads in academia is our building of a discourse of solidarity around testimonial texts' (2005a: 183). Referring to the notorious Stoll controversy, Partnoy undermines what she interprets as his challenging of Menchú because of 'an excessive preoccupation with either the truth or the literariness of the text' (2005a: 176), by aligning him with 'the accuracy squads in academia'.

Partnoy's use of an uncomfortable metaphor emphasises the potential for violence inherent in the critical interrogation of texts produced by those who have survived massive trauma. It implies that a number of academics have set out to destroy the reputations of certain *testimoniantes*, as some have interpreted Stoll's work on Menchú, through a blinkered focus on the 'bare facts' of the *testimonio*. Such

an approach demonstrates limited concern for the post-traumatic situation of the testifier and disregards the brutality of their experiences.

Partnoy advocates a solidary approach to *testimonio*, which counteracts the academic methodology conventionally employed in the discussion of literature. To this end, she writes in the article 'Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life | Is Based | on a Real Story' (2009) that 'our testimonial texts do not rely on what Philippe Lejeune has called *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975), but on a solidarity pact' (2009: 17). Partnoy explains that the pact she proposes, 'in which the reader places higher degrees of trust on survivors than on scholars, journalists or human rights professionals, is puzzling and often disturbing to those traditionally vested with authority to speak on behalf of others' (2009: 20).

Partnoy's critical writing on *testimonio* theorises an approach that privileges the voice of the survivor. Now that the formerly oppressed person has the opportunity to speak, those who wish to engage with the study of *testimonio* should listen, demonstrate compassion and acknowledge the position of the testifier as the authority on their subject.

The recurrence of debates about truth in *testimonio* studies is connected to the denunciatory nature of the form. Unlike legal testimony, however, *testimonio* has no judicial power.¹⁷ *Testimonio* can and does condemn acts of oppression and violence, but its main objective is not to secure the indictment of those responsible for atrocities. Therefore, it should be approached in a different manner from witness statements given in tribunals:

the care for certain details demanded before a court of law is not exercised by former victims when producing testimonial texts. Memories can be freer as they circulate in friendlier territories populated by sympathetic listeners and potential allies. Those

¹⁷ The only exception to this rule, that I have encountered, is Partnoy's own work. She writes, in the paratextual 'Anexo 5' to the 2006 Argentine edition of *La Escuelita*: 'en diciembre de 1999, ante la iniciativa del fiscal Hugo Cañón, este texto fue incluido como evidencia en los juicios por la verdad que se llevaron a cabo en Bahía Blanca' (Partnoy 2006b: 123).

listeners and readers enter into a solidarity pact with the narrators:
they trust their sincerity, which is different from expecting the truth.
(Partnoy 2009: 19)

The use of the term 'allies' creates a clear distinction between those who actively place their trust in the voice of the survivor and those who begin their reading from a position where the testifier is treated as suspect.

Partnoy's choice to use the terms 'friendlier', 'sympathetic' and 'trust' represent the emotive response to *testimonio* that she proposes, instead of the emotionally detached manner of approaching literature that is traditionally advocated by academia. Since testimonial texts are composed by survivors of abuse, the pieces of writing require 'sympathetic listeners' in a way that other forms of literature do not. As Partnoy's uneasy use of imagery in her theoretical writing on *testimonio* implies, an unsympathetic reading, or public and personal censuring of its writers, can be perceived as tantamount to further abuse.

A means to combat the perpetuation of violence is to engage with the solidarity pact and believe in the sincerity of the testifier. Partnoy avers that this 'is different from expecting the truth', but I would argue for a different conception of the word 'truth', interpreting it in terms of honesty. Thereby, even if the *testimonio* is written as fiction, the testifier's sincerity is aligned with what they understand to be true about the events they lived through and the reality of their experiences as a survivor. I think that Partnoy avoids complicating her argument with this nuance because her goal is to persuade the academy to address *testimonio* in a manner that does not pivot on the demonstrability of fact.

1.5 *Testimonio* and the Telling of History

As the debates on testimonial truth discussed so far in this chapter have indicated, the story *testimonio* tells is often questioned, casting doubt on the reliability of the account and, thereby, on the testifier's authority to speak. This may be partly the case because, as Dominick LaCapra indicates in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001),

‘trauma and its symptomatic aftermath pose particularly acute problems for historical representation and understanding’ (2001: ix).

LaCapra notes that ‘witnessing – typically witnessing based on memory – has emerged as a privileged mode of access to the past and its traumatic occurrences’ (1998: 11) What LaCapra calls the privileging of this form of witness suggests that the closest anyone can come to understanding traumatic experience is by listening to the person who has lived through it. Jelin asserts that ‘through personal testimony, those who suffered directly begin to speak and narrate their experiences and their suffering. These testimonials are at the same time essential sources of information about what happened during the repressive regimes’ (2003: 74). As LaCapra indicates, though, the existence and dissemination of witness accounts challenge received ideas of what history is and who gets to tell it.

The relationship between the testimonial and the historical is explored in Beatriz Sarlo’s *Tiempo pasado: cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión* (2005). Sarlo sets out to examine the construction of memory in the contemporary Argentine context, with respect to the last period of dictatorship in the country. For the purposes of the current discussion on *testimonio*, I will focus on Sarlo’s review of the ways in which first person testifier is regarded. Sarlo explains, in the initial chapter of *Tiempo pasado*, that she proposes to analyse:

la primera persona como forma privilegiada frente a discursos de los que la primera persona está ausente o desplazada. La confianza en la inmediatez de la voz y del cuerpo favorece al testimonio. Lo que me propongo es examinar las razones de esa confianza. (Sarlo 2005: 23)

The mention of forms of discourse where the first person figure is absent, or does not form a central role, is a reference to historical or legalistic accounts.

Like LaCapra, Sarlo identifies that the first person *testimoniante* occupies a position of privilege. In *Tiempo pasado*, she seeks to understand the way in which the first-person testimonial speaker is interpreted. Any investigation of the figure of the

witness in *testimonio* is bound to be fraught with divided opinion, as is the subject of historical memory in contemporary Argentina:

el campo de la memoria es un campo de conflictos que tienen lugar entre quienes mantienen el recuerdo de los crímenes de estado y quienes proponen pasar a otra etapa, cerrando el caso más monstruoso de nuestra historia. [...] Es un campo de conflictos también para quienes sostenemos que el “nunca más” no es un cierre que deja atrás el pasado sino una decisión de evitar las repeticiones, recordándolo. Desearía que esto queda claro para que los argumentos que siguen puedan ser leídos en los que realmente tratan de plantear. (2005: 24-25)¹⁸

Sarlo makes note of the tensions that exist with regard to opinions on how the Argentine past should be treated and she is careful to state her own position on modern-day Argentina’s relationship with its dictatorial past. I believe this to be because Sarlo is conscious that the arguments she constructs in *Tiempo pasado* may be construed as controversial as a result of her deconstruction of the first-person testifier, and her privileging of historical and juridical discourse over *testimonio*.¹⁹

Sarlo sets out that:

mi argumento aborda la primera persona del testimonio y las formas del pasado que resultan cuando el testimonio es la única fuente (porque no existen otras o porque se lo considera más confiable que

¹⁸ Sarlo’s use of the term ‘nunca más’ alludes to *Nunca Más* (1984), the report published by the Argentine Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP) which details their investigation into human rights violations committed during the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

¹⁹ Sarlo’s text was the subject of debate and controversy during a 2006 seminar series on *testimonio* (Vallina 2009: 10). The series, ‘El relato testimonial, entre la verdad y la representación’, was held in Rosario to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the 1976 coup d’état in Argentina (Centro Cultural Parque de España: 2006). Vallina notes that Sarlo ‘fue invitada a participar en el encuentro aunque declinó hacerlo’ (2009: 10).

otras). No se trata simplemente de una cuestión de la forma del discurso, sino de su producción y de las condiciones culturales y políticos que lo vuelven creíble. (2005: 25)

LaCapra writes that 'historians who see testimonies as sources of facts or information about the past are justifiably concerned about their reliability' (2001: 86) and it is this very notion of believability that Sarlo is concerned with.

Advocating historical writing and legalistic approaches over the accounts of *testimoniante*s, Sarlo places a question mark over the credibility of survivors' testimonies. She writes that 'sólo una confianza ingenua en la primera persona y en el recuerdo de lo vivido pretendería establecer un orden presidido por lo testimonial. Y sólo una caracterización ingenua de la experiencia reclamaría para ella una verdad más alta' (2005: 63). Repeated references to what Sarlo sees as the naïvety of these positions indicates the strength of feeling behind her own position, yet she disregards the emotion integral to *testimonio* and the affective response it elicits from its reader.

Sarlo's dispute with testimonial discourse seems to be based on literary and academic structures that privilege an hierarchical approach to texts. In adhering to this schema, Sarlo undermines the authority of survivors to speak about the extreme violence they have experienced. Indeed, after discussing what he sees as the justifiable concerns of historians, LaCapra writes that:

Less justifiably, they are at times prone to dismiss an interest in them [testimonies]. The importance of testimonies becomes more apparent when they are related to the way they provide something other than documentary knowledge. Testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with – or denying and repressing – the past. (2001: 86-87)

Emphasising the alternative approaches to knowledge that can be offered by testimonial writing, LaCapra does not seek to interpret it in the same manner as an historical account. Rather, he stresses the distinct way it can offer a means of

understanding trauma, which has ramifications for the survivor far beyond the occurrence of specific events.

Instead of acknowledging the difficult, post-traumatic situation of the survivor – as well as the complexities inherent in the act of testifying – Sarlo advocates that *testimonio* should be read and analysed in the same manner as other texts which provide information about the past. She writes of *testimonio* that:

por su autorrepresentación como verdad de un sujeto que relata su experiencia, pide no someterse a las reglas que se aplican a otros discursos de intención referencial alegando la verdad de la experiencia, cuando no la del sufrimiento, que es la que precisamente necesita ser examinada. Acá hay un problema. (Sarlo 2005: 48-49)

Questioning the approach taken to interpreting *testimonio*, Sarlo touches on an issue central to studies of the form. That is, the reasons for its being different from other kinds of literary and historical texts.

As a version of events told by a survivor of trauma and human rights violations, *testimonio* is necessarily different in style and emotional content. Furthermore, testimonial writing anticipates that its reader will approach the text with empathy for the testifier. Precisely because it is the account given by a person who has survived immense trauma, *testimonio* cannot be examined according to the same standards as a piece of historical writing. That is not to say that those working in *testimonio* studies ought not to engage in dialogue with *testimoniantes*.

Instead, it should be acknowledged that testimonial writing is produced under different circumstances. Where the historian chooses to carry out research into a particular period of time, the *testimoniante* speaks out against human rights violations that were imposed upon them. The testifier may be a sole survivor of certain events and many of the abuses they denounce, such as disappearance or torture, may be

impossible to prove.²⁰ Moreover, *testimonio* relates the experience of great trauma, which has long-lasting ramifications for the survivor.

1.6 *Testimonio* and the Possibility of Bearing Witness

How, then, can *testimoniante*s find a way of communicating their experiences? Jorge Semprún, a survivor of Buchenwald concentration camp, suggests that what escapes language is not so much the details of the events that occurred. He wonders if it is possible for the immense trauma of mass human rights abuse to be approached through storytelling (Semprún 1997: 25).

In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (2002), Giorgio Agamben approaches what he calls 'the impossibility of bearing witness' from another angle (2002: 34). *Remnants of Auschwitz* deals exclusively with Holocaust testimony and Agamben considers this 'impossibility' in terms of what cannot be spoken about, because there are no survivors, namely the experience of dying in gas chambers. Testifiers who speak about state violence can give witness about their own experiences and what they know to have happened to others, but those who were murdered by the state cannot speak. If the state had succeeded in its aims, there would be no survivors to testify about the atrocities it perpetrated. Agamben refers to this absence of testimony as the 'lacuna'.

Ana Forcinito considers the strengths of *testimonio*, precisely in relation to its structural gaps and silences in *Los umbrales del testimonio: Entre las narraciones de los sobrevivientes y las señas de la posdictadura* (2012). Focusing on the contemporary Argentine case, Forcinito's method of discussing testimony has similarities to *Remnants of Auschwitz*, in that there is a stress on what cannot be communicated. Whereas Agamben highlights the impossibility of telling, Forcinito emphasises the impossibility of what can be known as far as the reader is concerned.

Taking the metaphor of the 'umbral', Forcinito explores the possibilities *testimonio* affords for communication, both in terms of what can be enunciated and

²⁰ Partnoy discusses the difficulty proving disappearance in 'Juicio' (see Chapter 3, pp. 115).

how its gaps may be interpreted. *Los umbrales del testimonio* centres on testimonial narrative and proposes that the form:

[ha] servido para dar cuenta de las fronteras de toda práctica testimonial: de los umbrales que no podemos cruzar, tal vez porque el testimonio nos lleva hasta allí en sus narraciones, pero sólo hasta ahí, hasta el borde entre la vida y la muerte, la memoria y el olvido, la reconstrucción del saber y la aceptación del no saber, la zona indeterminada que separa al exdetenido como víctima y como testigo, como militante y como sobreviviente. Tampoco deberíamos recortar el testimonio en sus lagunas, sus ausencias y, en definitiva, su “falta” epistemológica[.] (Forcinito 2012: 15)

Forcinito’s repeated use of metaphors of liminality echoes Moreiras’s notion of *testimonio* as a ‘liminal event’ (2001: 212).

The figure of the *testimoniante* occupies a position that could be construed as liminal because they represent the bridge between those who share the experience of atrocity and those who do not. Similarly, their testimony functions as a means to begin to address this disparity in knowledge. Forcinito’s notion of liminality refers not only to knowledge, but it also involves a temporal void. The *testimoniante* was a victim of state violence and now acts as a witness; they once were defined by their identity as a political militant, now their situation is determined by the state of being a survivor.

Forcinito also regards the ‘laguna’ as an important feature of *testimonio*. She emphasises the space between ‘la reconstrucción del saber y la aceptación del no saber’, which can be interpreted as referring to both testifier and reader. In the face of ‘el no saber’ – the gaps in knowledge and memory that the *testimoniante* has – the testifier attempts to structure their experiential knowledge. The reader has a minimal understanding of what has been lived through and Forcinito highlights the role and responsibilities of the readers in *testimonio*. She stresses that they can only approach some comprehension through what is able to be expressed in the testimony.

Forcinito's analysis is continued through an extension of the concept of the 'umbral', wherein she explores the contradictions implicit in testimony. She writes that:

En esa zona ambigua entre el ver y el no ver, entre lo visible y lo inaccesible, el testimonio de los ex detenidos y ex presos políticos da cuenta de una experiencia irrepresentable, de una experiencia simultáneamente real y fantasmal que no puede sino instigarnos a poner en duda los modelos de representación y Verdad. Y en la narración de esa experiencia como umbral, los sobrevivientes, no ya como figuras sino como sujetos históricos, ejercitan su poder de gestión cultural y simbólico en la lucha contra la impunidad. (2012: 15)

Forcinito emphasises the conflicting nature and structure of *testimonio*. Its subject matter is one that is very real for all who experienced it, but for those who did not, it is unfathomable.

Testimony affords the reader glimpses, but in doing so makes it apparent that the reality of terror is ultimately inaccessible, which Vezzetti suggests when he refers to the 'límite de la experiencia' (2009: 23). The manner in which *testimoniante*s approach writing their texts compels the reader to question 'los modelos de representación y Verdad'. The existing structures for representation, and the uncompromising way in which truth is understood, are challenged by testimonial writing. In spite of – or perhaps more accurately because of – its 'lagunas' and 'umbrales', the producers of *testimonio* find a way to communicate. Forcinito stresses the agency of the survivor by referring to their subjectivity. She alludes to the denunciatory role of testimony by emphasising its part in the struggle for justice.

Forcinito develops the notion that it is the liminality of testimonial writing that provides it with its power. She draws attention to the expressive possibilities of *testimonio*, asserting that:

El umbral queda, de alguna forma, marcado por silencios y lagunas que lejos [de] dar cuenta de la debilidad de lo testimonial pueden estar apuntando justamente a una revuelta en términos de la construcción del saber y los métodos que reducen las narrativas de testigos o bien a un reclamo de verdad o bien a la mentira o la sospecha. (Forcinito 2012: 16)

In claiming that the testimonial gaps and omissions do not undermine the cogency of the text, Forcinito seems to be responding to analyses that question the truthfulness or authority of the *testimoniante*. From a legalistic perspective, a witness account must be watertight, but the porous makeup of literary testimony allows the survivor greater freedom in presenting their story.²¹

The concern of literary *testimonio* is less to do with the presentation of facts than it is with the stylistic way in which the truth is communicated. The reader's attention, for example, is drawn to gaps and silences in the text not merely as omissions, but more as voids imbued with meaning: aesthetic inclusions on the part of the writer that encourage the reader to glimpse the expressive possibilities and impossibilities of *testimonio*. The reader may engage with emotional aspects of the text and begin to grasp a sense of the disruptive nature of memory, challenging conventional modes of interpreting knowledge and truth.

Forcinito writes that 'la no transparencia de la memoria más que al confianza absoluta en el recuerdo, implica un aceptación de que el pasado, como tal, no es del todo recuperable sino a través de sus fragmentos, lagunas y zonas opacas' (2012: 24). If the human experience of the past is to be represented as a testimonial account, particularly the experience of extreme violence, it must allow for spaces to represent the fragmentation of memory and the 'lagunas' of the unspeakable – experiences the *testimoniante* cannot or does not wish to talk about.

²¹ In the poem 'Juicio' (see my analysis on pp.114 of Chapter 3), Partnoy depicts the situation where her own testimony about being kidnapped was deemed insufficient in a court of law, owing to a lack of witnesses who were willing to testify to having seen the incident. In writing 'Juicio', Partnoy insists that her *testimonio* is heard.

The readers, then, 'quienes desde afuera y desde el presente escuchamos, leemos, juzgamos e intentamos comprender', must accept on engaging with *testimonio* that, in learning about what it has to teach, they will also come to the realisation that much is unknowable (Forcinito 2012: 13). As Forcinito makes clear, *testimonio* 'nos deja a nosotros, sus lectores, también en esa zona indeterminada, invitándonos a pasar, pero nunca totalmente, como si nos dejara en un suspenso irrevocable frente a relatos que se vislumbra pero cuyas imágenes no podemos restituir' (Forcinito 2012: 15).

1.7 Testimonial Texts and the Communication of Suffering

When Forcinito asserts that testimonial writing 'permite hacer visible un mundo, pero también permite hacer visible el límite de lo visible' (2012: 18), she is referring to the world of dictatorial violence. Elaine Scarry makes a similar argument about how people communicate their experience of pain in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). Scarry discusses the relationship between pain and language, and the difficulty of attempting to verbally convey the experience of pain. She refers mostly to physical pain, but here I will understand 'pain' to mean suffering, both physical and psychological, caused by state violence. *Testimonio* rails against this suffering and the testimonial text's ability to communicate the realities of dictatorship serves a vital political role.

Scarry avers that:

ordinarily there is no language for pain, that it (more than any other phenomenon) resists verbal objectification. But the relative ease or difficulty with which any given phenomenon can be *verbally represented* also influences the ease or difficulty with which that phenomenon comes to be *politically represented*. (1985: 12, emphases in the original)

In order for any kind of denunciation to happen, the *testimoniante* must find a way to verbalise what has happened to them. If there is to be any form of political action against such suffering, either in the form of prosecutions or in attempts to stop or prevent further atrocities, this vocalisation is imperative.

Reflecting on the work of Amnesty International, Scarry writes that the organisation's 'ability to bring about the cessation of torture depends centrally on its ability to communicate the reality of physical pain to those who are not themselves in pain' (1985: 9). The means to stop torture that Scarry alludes to are the letter-writing campaigns for which Amnesty International is famous. She refers to both the activists who campaign with the organisation and the politicians and heads of state who, typically, are the recipients of the aforementioned letters.

Scarry writes that: 'embedded in Amnesty's work, as in medical work, is the assumption that the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing pain' (1985: 9). Medical professionals require a patient to be able to communicate discomfort before any treatment may be discussed. Similarly, campaigns against the deliberate infliction of suffering through human rights abuse are dependent on torture victims being able to communicate their experience of pain. In order to be motivated to take action, human rights campaigners must be able to understand 'the aversiveness being experienced inside the body of someone whose country may be far away [...] and whose ordinary life is unknown except that it is known that ordinary life has ceased to exist' (Scarry 1985: 9).

Testimonial writing similarly necessitates the articulation of suffering, and its producer is faced with the complexities of attempting to explain their situation to people so far removed from it. As Scarry notes, pain brings about an 'absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons' (1985: 4). She posits that 'pain enters our midst as at once something that cannot be denied and something that cannot be confirmed [...]. To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*' (Scarry 1985: 13, emphases in the original). It is impossible to fully know pain other than from personal experience and it is from this that any uncertainty regarding the pain of others arises. Furthermore, pain is aversive, as is the subject of *testimonio*, and 'the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness' (Herman 1992: 1).

Reluctance to heed an account of trauma may come from an unwillingness to believe, or to be capable of believing, the human capacity for violence. Consequently, in the absence of evidential proof, it may appear preferable to doubt the voice that tells of suffering. Doing this, however, would be to doubt the reliability of the speaker and undermine the authority of the testifier. Herman asserts that ‘certain violations of the social compact are terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*’ (1992: 1). Nevertheless, to succeed in its goal of raising awareness of the realities of state terror and encouraging global action against such violations, *testimonio* must find a way to speak about extreme violence.

Jara suggests the most *testimonio* can do is to attempt to approximate the experience of state violence, asserting that:

el testigo [...] no puede capturar toda la realidad – nadie puede hacerlo –, pero puede fijar y escudriñar sus huellas, trazar su imagen, proyectar la inmediatez de su inscripción, *re-presentar* aquello que por su lejanía – geográfica, histórica, corporal – amenaza con volverse inaccesible. (1986: 2, emphasis in the original).

Jara makes it clear that it is impossible to fully recreate the reality of what the *testimoniante* has lived through. In order for the experience to be communicated in any form, it must be shaped by oral and literary constructions.

Nora Strejilevich explores these issues in her article ‘Testimony: Beyond the Language of Truth’ (2006b), where she writes that:

tension exists between the ways in which testimonies voice their truth, and the expectations readers or listeners have regarding what truth means and how it should be voiced. Society favors systematizing testimony as a collection of facts whereas testimony after genocide does not abide by the rules established by the scientific/academic/legal apparatus. Rather, it voices the intimate, subjective, deep dimension of horror. (2006b: 701)

Strejilevich acknowledges the social desire to compartmentalise testimony, which can also be observed in the debates regarding the status of *testimonio* in terms of literary genre. However, she makes it clear that testimonial writing does not fit within the normative boundaries of the literary establishment, precisely because it is born of a state of exception.

Asserting that ‘las memorias del horror no son exactas’, Strejilevich argues that ‘para que un recuento de este tipo pueda manifestar su verdad tiene que darle su lugar a memorias que irrumpen en desorden, con discontinuidades, blancos y silencios’ (2006a: 14). The linguistic possibilities that the *testimoniante* finds must extend beyond the act of naming traumatic events and allow for the fragmentation and lacunae that are central to the human experience of trauma.

1.8 *Testimonio*: Writing in the Aftermath

Carolyn Forché discusses twentieth-century poets who lived through ‘the extremity of war, military occupation, dictatorship, imprisonment, torture, forced exile and harsh forms of censorship’ in her article ‘Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art’ (2012).

She asserts that these writers:

wrote their poetry not *after* such experiences, but in their *aftermath* – in languages that had also *passed through* – languages that also continued to bear wounds, legible in line-breaks, in constellations of imagery, in ruptures of utterance, in silences and fissures of written speech [...] writing in the *aftermath*, with awareness of the debris field, is testamentary writing [...]. As such, it calls upon the reader, who is the *other* of this work, to be in turn marked by what such language makes present before her, what holds open and begets in

the reader, for witness *begets* witness. (2012: 137, emphases in the original)

It is significant that Forché distinguishes between the neutral temporality suggested by the preposition 'after' and the sense of devastation inherent in the noun 'aftermath'. She seeks to draw her reader's attention to the destruction, whether physical or psychological, caused by trauma and the fragmentary remains that are left following traumatic experiences. Forché calls writing in the aftermath – conscious of the abnormality of the present – 'testamentary writing', which I understand to be synonymous with *testimonio*.

The metaphorical language used by Forché in 'Reading the Living Archives' is noteworthy. Use of imagery is common not only to *testimonio*, but also to theoretical writing on the subject, as can be observed with Barnett's 'mundo al revés' or Forcinito's conception of *testimonio* as 'caleidoscopio, como ese mundo visible, pero fragmentado y habitado de partes nunca fijas' (2012: 36). Forché asserts that:

In this *aftermath*, we are able to read, in the scarred landscape of battlefields, bomb craters and unreconstructed ruins, in oral and written testimony and in literary art, the mark or trace of extremity. The poem bears the wound in its language: in unexpected and at times broken rhythms, hesitations, ruptured narratives, temporal distortions, polyphony, and in its silences, synaesthesias and resistances to poetic norms. (Forché 2012: 145, emphasis in the original)

Highlighting poetic techniques that linguistically, semantically and sonically challenge normative language, Forché suggests how poetry can provide a means through which the reader can access, or catch glimpses of, the devastation caused by traumatic occurrences.

Forché's mention of extremity stresses the destructive nature of such events and she posits that the remnants of this can be seen within the text. The choice to discuss the legibility, rather than the visibility, of the 'trace of extremity' places an

emphasis on the role of the reader. It is not only the writer who bears witness, but upon interacting with the text, the reader is compelled to witness the trauma whereof it speaks. Indeed,

The poem inscribes the *risky crossing*, marked by that which happened, bearing the legible trace of extremity, at the same time enacting the rupture of the first-person, and hence voicing its inception and henceforth holding it open to the reader's encounter. Such utterance is as much evidence of what happened as the spatter of spilled blood. (2012: 141, emphasis in the original)

The figurative 'risky crossing' described by Forché alludes to the testimonial transmission from writer to reader, and the potential dangers and difficulties for the reader in engaging with the textual account of trauma. Furthermore, the uneasy simile implies the violence of the situations which testimonial writing discusses. It alludes to the ability of poetic language to serve as trace, while Forché's reference to spilled blood demonstrates the evocative powers of literary technique.

The repeated use of metaphorical phrasing when expressing, or referring to, suffering is explored by Scarry in *The Body in Pain*, where she coins the term 'language of agency' (1985: 15). It is a manner of understanding the expression of pain, where the 'agent' of the hurt is described either as external or internal to the body. Scarry explains that:

because the existing vocabulary for pain contains only a small handful of adjectives, one passes through direct descriptions very quickly and [...] almost immediately encounters an "as if" structure: it feels as if...; it is as though... [...] Thus a person may say, "It feels *as though* a hammer is coming down on my spine" even where there is no hammer; or "It feels *as if* my arm is broken at each joint and the jagged ends are sticking through the skin" even where the bones of the arms are intact and the surface of the skin is unbroken. Physical pain is not identical with (and often exists without) either agency or

damage, but these things are referential; consequently we often call on them to convey the experience of the pain itself. (1985: 15, emphasis mine)

The 'language of agency' is figurative. Scarry suggests that if suffering cannot be fully communicated in terms of literal details, then metaphorical language may provide a means by which traumatic experience can be approached: 'given the expressive potential of the language of agency, it is not surprising that it reappears continually in the words of those working to objectify and eliminate pain' (Scarry 1985: 16-17).

Jelin discusses the potential 'impossibility of constructing a narrative' in the face of 'the symbolic lapses and voids involved in trauma' (2003: 61). Bernard-Donals and Glejzer note that 'the distance between what has been witnessed and what can be committed to testimony [...] is often wide and always palpable [...] in the shrugged shoulders, the wincing, the tears, and the silences that punctuate written and oral testimonies' (2003: 7). Still, Scarry argues, fractured language contains the possibility to be communicative. She writes:

though the total number of words may be meager, though they may be hurled into the air unattached to any framing sentence, something can be learned from these verbal fragments not only about pain but about the human capacity for word-making. (1985: 6)

Scarry is implying that glimpses of imagery, spoken by someone about their suffering, offer a form of access to knowledge about a deeply individual experience. Furthermore, she is concerned with the creativity and imagination that it takes for someone to utter such speech. As Scarry points out, it is when the survivor is able to speak, to elaborate on their experience, to find and forge suitable linguistic modes of expression, that something can be learned about trauma.

From the perspective of being a *testimoniante* and as a *testimonio* scholar, Nora Strejilevich also discusses linguistic rupture.²² She promotes a narrative 'literary approach to testimony' and claims that the literary:

allows for a distancing in relation to the intimate memories. The way to create an account of this sort is to piece together the fragments, the ruins of spared recollections in order to produce some meaning. Rather than knowledge, the witness/writer searches for understanding. (2006b: 710)

Highlighting the notion of fragmentation, Strejilevich advocates literature as a means by which the *testimoniante* can attempt to approximate understanding of their situation. However, she continues that testimonial texts are preoccupied with 'structure and language. The focus turns out to be language itself, and narrative is often fragmented in order for the text to expose the collapse of identity, of community, of social networks, of political projects' (2006b: 710). The extent to which any experience can be transmitted in the text is limited by the available linguistic codes. In the case of *testimonio*, the circumstances that are being communicated are traumatic. As such, they are difficult for the survivor to relate: the way in which events are recalled may be fractured because of the trauma suffered and some memories may be too painful to be shared.

The writing of testimony involves the negotiation of multiple potential barriers, but it seems that poetry could provide a medium suited to exploring some of these linguistic and structural complexities. Unlike prose, the construction of poetry is less rigid, which gives the writer greater opportunity for typographical experimentation and the possibility to visually and aurally represent a sense of fragmentation. Orality is considered to be a significant dimension of *testimonio* and the centrality of the spoken word to poetry could allow for an exploration of the expressive potential offered by sound.

²² Strejilevich wrote the 'testimonial novel' *Una sola muerte numerosa* (1997), based on 'her personal experiences as a *desaparecida*' during the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina (Breckenridge 2003: 42).

Like the testimonial prose writer, the poet must overcome a fraught relationship with language. However, the employment of language can be used to transmit nuanced meaning beyond mere word choice. Metrical composition, use of rhyme and poetic techniques such as alliteration, assonance and homoeoteleuton might allow for the text to create rhythms and patterns that add an aural subtlety to the text that relates to its affective content. In tandem with what may be sonically represented, poetry provides space for what can be communicated through silence.

Narrative *testimonio* transmits a sense of what the survivor is able to share through the text. Yet much of the trauma the *testimoniante* has lived through falls outwith the bounds of what can be communicated by language. In poetry, breaks in the text, syntactical omissions or use of the ellipsis may provide room to insinuate that which cannot be expressed through words.

Perhaps poetic testimonial writing has been largely overlooked because poetry is itself a minority genre. In writing that 'Latin American testimonial writing has been noted for its nonliterariness, a kind of no-nonsense approach to getting the facts straight', Amy Kaminsky alludes to the disinclination in conventional *testimonio* criticism to acknowledge the literariness of the medium (1993: 52).

Poetry is often regarded as an exceptionally literary form. Consequently, to place poetry alongside the 'highly politicized texts' that constitute *testimonio* (Partnoy 2009: 17) – many of which have been produced by people who are not established writers – is to contradict the hierarchical structures imposed by the literary and critical establishment. When a poet has first-hand knowledge of the circumstances that they are communicating, and the writing works to denounce state terror, there is no reason that poetry may not also be read as *testimonio*.

1.9 Conclusion

Since the publication of Barnet's 'novela-testimonio' in 1966, scholars have attempted to define *testimonio*. Lynda Marín claims that 'the testimonial almost always raises issues about genre which remain irresolvable' (1991: 51). Following various discourses on the literariness of *testimonio*, it has become apparent that testimonial texts need

not be presented in a strictly non-fictional prose format. The identification of the malleable nature of *testimonio* lends itself to a broader understanding of the form, which, in my opinion, ought to include poetry.

Academic approaches to testimonial writing have also evolved by way of debates about testimonial 'truth'. From Stoll's controversial take on the work of Menchú to discussions about the relationship between reader and *testimoniante*, scholarship on *testimonio* repeatedly emphasises the importance of the testifying witness. A *testimoniante's* reliability and sincerity may be placed in doubt: survivors who find ways to communicate their experiences can often find their testimonial authority being questioned.

Reacting against the hierarchical methods of certain *testimonio* critics, Partnoy stresses the role of solidarity in relation to testimonial writing. She implies that responses to *testimoniante's* accounts that lack compassion risk causing further harm to people who have lived through human rights abuse. Partnoy's theoretical work highlights the importance of the survivors' voices and the need for readers to empathise with people who have experienced immense trauma.

The production of *testimonio*, and its emphasis on the *testimoniante's* point of view, destabilises conventional ideas about the perspective from which history ought to be written. Sarlo's *Tiempo pasado* seeks to address the connection between testimonial and historical writing. Controversially, Sarlo creates a hierarchy that privileges historical and legal writing about dictatorship above *testimonio*. So doing, she minimises the importance of the *testimoniante* as an expert witness to state terror. However, the work of LaCapra and Jelin stresses the significance of the survivor's perspective as a unique means of approaching an understanding of psychological trauma caused by mass human rights violations.

Forcinito's *Los umbrales del testimonio* explores the communicative significance of testimonial silences. Stressing the liminality of *testimonio*, she highlights the function of *testimonio* in addressing the gap in understanding between the *testimoniante* and the reader. Forcinito stresses the impossibility of what can be known, by the person who has not experienced dictatorship. She posits that testimonial lacunae challenge received notions about 'truth' and that they are deliberate, meaningful spaces in the text, filled with expressive possibility.

The difficulty of finding words to communicate suffering is discussed in Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. She emphasises the connection between the ability to convey pain and the political potential for action against torture: the articulation of suffering is fundamental to *testimonio*. Scarry states that those listening to another's account of pain often respond with doubt, an absence of empathy that reflects the reluctance to listen to *testimoniante's* accounts and to question the veracity of testimonial texts. Strojilovich acknowledges the critical tendency to approach *testimonio* in terms of 'facts', while stressing that writing about trauma does not correspond to normative expectations of witness accounts.

Forché's 'Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art' considers the idea of writing in the aftermath of atrocity. Her concept of poetry as 'testamentary writing' centres the expressive nature of textual rupture and fragmentation. The emphasis Forché places on figurative language is echoed by Scarry's 'language of agency', which illustrates the role of metaphor in the articulation of pain.

Building on the function of imagery in communicating suffering, and the poetic potential for linguistic, aural and visual expression, I contend that poems can be read as testimonial texts. In its denunciation of the experience – and aftermath – of dictatorship, I will demonstrate in the following chapters how Partnoy's poetry is *testimonio*.

Chapter 2

'My Life | is Based | on a Real Story':

The Role of Paratexts in Partnoy's Poetry Collections

Following the theoretical investigation of testimonial writing in Chapter 1, this chapter will analyse how the paratext frames *testimonio* in Partnoy's *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos*. My approach will be based on Gérard Genette's *Paratexts* (1997), considering Genette's theories in light of the previous discussion of *testimonio* and making particular reference to Forcinito, Moreiras and Beverley. I will then explore the function of the paratexts that appear in Partnoy's collections. The focus will first be on texts not authored by Partnoy: the publishers' paratexts and Gail Wronsky's 'Translator's Notes' in *Volando*. Illustrations by Raquel Partnoy are included in all three collections, but I will not discuss their role as paratexts at present.²³

After reflecting on paratextual material written by the publishers and Wronsky, the chapter will shift its focus to authorial paratexts, namely the dedications and prefaces written by Partnoy. I will discuss the effect of dedicatory paratexts in the context of *testimonio* and examine Partnoy's use of prose and poetic prefaces to introduce her readers to the collections in light of her personal circumstances. Exploring the content and style of the collections' paratexts, this chapter will assess how they inform and guide the reader's approach to Partnoy's poetry.

2.1 Genette, Paratexts and Partnoy

The full title of Genette's book, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, draws attention to the liminality of the paratext. Where the 'liminal event' of *testimonio* endeavours to create a connection between the experiences of the testifier and the reader (Moreiras 2001: 212), the paratext attempts to bridge the gap between

²³ See discussion in Chapters 3 and 4 of Raquel Partnoy's illustrations, accompanying the poems 'Los molinos de la memoria' (p.143) and 'Balance' (p.204) respectively.

information contained within the text and the expectations and assumptions of the reader who is about to engage with it.

Genette stresses the concept of the liminal in the opening section of *Paratexts*:

More than a boundary or a sealed border the paratext is, rather, a *threshold* [...] that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary [...] or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text.' Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (1997: 1-2, emphases in the original)

The notion of transaction is key in transmitting the sense that the paratext's purpose is to guide the reader. Where *testimonio* seeks to encourage its reader to take some form of action – 'we are placed under an obligation to respond' (Beverley 2004: 1) – the paratext to a *testimonio* provides the reader with details that will inform their understanding of the main text.

Genette's mention of the influential nature of the paratext, and its shaping of a 'pertinent reading' of a text (1997: 2), refers to the theoretical field of authorial intention. Although Genette's overall method of approaching paratexts is enlightening for my study of *testimonio*, I do not consider the paratexts through the lens of authorial intention.²⁴ My thesis argues that Partnoy's poetry constitutes *testimonio*

²⁴ For a recent exploration of authorial intention, see Farrell's *The Varieties of Authorial Intention: Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy* (2017).

and I contend that, for *testimonio* to be understood as such, some supplementary information is essential. Partnoy explains that writers of *testimonio* ‘preface it with helpful reflections, mostly for the benefit of readers who did not endure the same torments’ (2005a: 236). The ‘influential’ nature of the paratexts in *Venganza, Volando* and *Fuegos* is that they provide any reader willing to engage with Partnoy’s ‘solidarity pact’ with sufficient information to do so (2009: 17).²⁵

In his discussion of the paratext, Genette distinguishes between what he calls the ‘peritext’ and the ‘epitext’ (1997: 5). The former encompasses all paratexts contained within a book and on its covers, alongside the main text, and the latter refers to:

all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others). (Genette 1997: 5)

For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus almost exclusively on peritexts, although I will make epitextual reference to Partnoy’s *The Little School* (1986; 1998), ‘Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life / Is Based / on a Real Story’ (2009) and Rodrigo Caprotti’s documentary film *La escuelita* (2012).

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, I will first consider paratexts not composed by Partnoy: ‘the outmost peritext (the cover, the title page, and their appendices)’ (Genette 1997: 16) and the biographical information provided about Partnoy. Wronsky’s ‘Translator’s Notes’ fall under Genette’s category of the ‘allographic preface’ (1997: 263), in which ‘high praise of the text becomes a recommendation, and information about the text becomes a presentation’ (1997: 265).

The recommending function served by Wronsky’s allographic preface is also applicable to the publishers’ paratexts. In the case of Partnoy, her English-speaking American audience cannot be expected to be familiar with the particulars of her

²⁵ See discussion of Partnoy’s ‘solidarity pact’ in Chapter 1 (pp.26-27).

biography, nor necessarily with the political and historical circumstances of Argentina under dictatorship. Therefore, the publishers of her collections have a need to provide their readers with certain facts if her poetry is to be read as testimonial: 'a paratextual element can communicate a piece of sheer *information*' (Genette 1997: 10-11, emphasis in the original).

The paratext can also serve to guide readers as to what they might expect: 'it can involve a *commitment*: some genre indications (autobiography, history, memoir) have as we know, a more binding contractual force' (Genette 1997: 11, emphasis in the original). The 'contractual' emphasises the reader's desire for and dependence on the trustworthiness of the account provided in the genres mentioned by Genette. *Testimonio* shares certain qualities with autobiography, history and memoir, and likewise its reader must be able to rely on the author and believe that their intention is to be truthful.

Genette writes that 'just as the presence of paratextual elements is not uniformly obligatory, so, too, the public and the reader are not unvaryingly and uniformly obligated: no one is required to read a preface' (1997: 4). I acknowledge that this is the case with the paratexts of *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos*. However, for texts to be identified and understood as *testimonio*, some relevant paratextual information is imperative. The reader of this form must be equipped with sufficient knowledge to be able to interpret it as testimonial.

For her work to be seen as *testimonio*, Partnoy's readers must be made aware of the historical and political context about which she writes, both with regard to what she experienced in Argentina and her situation in the USA. Her status as an exile has a direct bearing on her work and testimony.

2.2 Publishers' Paratexts – Cover Material

A publisher's endorsement of a book can frame a reader's approach to it and Cleis Press describes *Venganza* in the blurb on its back cover as Partnoy's 'collection of intimately powerful poems written before her "disappearance" in Argentina, in prison and in exile in the United States (Cleis Press 1992: n. pag.). The publisher uses

a qualifying adjective and adverb to describe Partnoy's poems and this praise of the writer's work forms, as Genette asserts, a recommendation. *Venganza* is the second book authored by Partnoy: a publisher's endorsement is more likely to encourage prospective readers to engage with a relatively unknown author, and one who is not from the United States. Furthermore, the recommendation from Cleis lends a sense of sanctioned legitimacy to Partnoy's story. Her readers are asked to trust in testimony transmitted through poetry and the publisher's framing allows them to do so with increased confidence.

Each publisher frames all books they distribute according, to some extent, to their particular publishing agenda. It may, therefore, seem unusual that Partnoy's writing, with its unequivocal human rights focus, was published by Cleis. The publisher defines itself as 'the largest independent queer publishing company in the United States' (Marler n.d.), which now focuses 'most of [its] work with acquisitions on Cleis' romance/erotica titles and Viva's self-help/inspirational titles'.²⁶ The original background of Cleis, however, was broad: a 'women's publishing company committed to publishing progressive books by women (Cleis Press, 1986, n.pag.).

Partnoy came to be in contact with Cleis because 'Susana Blaustein Muñoz [...] me dijo que tenía unas amigas que habían creado un editorial feminista en San Francisco – que es Cleis – y que querían publicar algo de una latinoamericana' (Partnoy 2007: 32).²⁷ Frédérique Delacoste (n.d.), one of the joint founders of Cleis, asserts that she has 'always been interested in books on human rights. In 1986 we published Alicia Partnoy [*The Little School*], who had been imprisoned during the Dirty War in Argentina, I knew it was going to be a larger theme in Cleis.' Partnoy explains that:

en cuanto a la publicación como a la recepción dentro de la crítica,
las feministas de este país fueron muy solidarias conmigo. Las

²⁶ Personal email correspondence with Sarah Abrams, Marketing Associate for Cleis Press and Viva Editions (6 June 2015).

²⁷ Susana Blaustein Muñoz directed 'el documental *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* que estuvo nominado para el Oscar el año que *La Historia Oficial* fue premiada como Mejor Película Extranjera' (Partnoy 2007:32). This was the 58th Academy Awards in 1986.

editoras de Cleis, una editorial lesbiana, me publicaron *La escuelita* – la versión en inglés, *The Little School* – y continuaron siendo fieles a mi obra. (2007: 31-32)

Cleis's continued interest in Partnoy is evidenced by the publication of her edited collection *You Can't Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile* (1988b), *Venganza* (1992) and the second edition of *The Little School* (1998).²⁸

The connection between writing and human rights is reinforced on the back cover of *Venganza*, where Cleis states that 'Alicia Partnoy is a member of the board of directors of Amnesty International USA' (1992: n. pag.). The assertion of Partnoy's affiliation with a globally-recognised organisation is a further signal of her credibility to the reader. Mention of Partnoy's involvement with Amnesty International creates a link between her activities as a poet and as a human rights activist. Such fusion of writing and activism is a fundamental element of literary *testimonio*.

Cleis also identifies Partnoy as 'the author of *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina*' (1992: n. pag.). By mentioning *The Little School*, Cleis sets *Venganza* in a testimonial context. Readers who know Partnoy's first book will be aware that it is composed of testimonial short stories about *La escuelita*, the concentration camp in Bahía Blanca where Partnoy was first taken after her kidnap in 1977. For those readers unfamiliar with *The Little School*, the inclusion of its subtitle – 'Tales of Disappearance and Survival' – suggests its subject matter and reinforcement of the expectation that Partnoy's writing in *Venganza* is testimonial.

On the back covers of *Volando* and *Fuegos*, Partnoy is similarly described as 'the author of *The Little School. Tales of Disappearance and Survival*' (Red Hen Press 2005: n. pag.; Settlement House 2014; n. pag.). These paratexts mention Partnoy's previous poetry collections and name her as 'editor of *You Can't Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile*'. Again, the extended titles of *The Little School* and *You Can't Drown the Fire* indicate situations of human rights abuse and signal the politicised nature of Partnoy's writing. In this respect, the publishers' paratexts serve

²⁸ *The Little School* and *You Can't Drown the Fire* were also published by Virago, London (1988a and 1989).

a similar purpose in all three of Partnoy's collections. However, where Cleis' publication arose from a commitment to human rights, Red Hen and Settlement House emphasise the literary nature of Partnoy's work.

Red Hen describes itself as 'one of the few literary presses in the Los Angeles area'. It was co-founded by:

Kate Gale and Mark E. Cull with the intention of keeping creative literature alive. Our focus as a literary press is to publish poetry, literary fiction and nonfiction. Red Hen Press is committed to publishing works of literary excellence [...]. (Red Hen Press nd.)

The publisher's explicit attention to the literary in their mission statement suggests that, in opting to publish Partnoy's collection, they have high regard for her skills as a writer. Red Hen is, of course, mindful of Partnoy's personal circumstances and ensures that the reader is too, by including statistical information about the dictatorship on the back cover of *Volando*. The paratext states that 'Alicia Partnoy is a survivor from the secret detention camps where about 30,000 Argentinians disappeared' (Red Hen Press 2005: n. pag.).

In providing biographical information about Partnoy, Red Hen's paratext informs the reader of facts that are directly relevant to the understanding of her poems as testimonial. The publisher has put its faith in the story that Partnoy tells, and provides paratextual information to the reader in expectation that they will do the same. At the same time, Red Hen Press uses the back cover paratext to direct the reader towards an appreciation of Partnoy's poems in terms of their literary qualities. Positioned on the back cover, above biographical information and a photograph of Partnoy, Red Hen includes laudatory reviews from three other writers: Claribel Alegría, Gail Wronsky and Adrienne Rich.

The inclusion of a review by Adrienne Rich carries significant cachet, particularly considering her prominence in second-wave feminism, in addition to her work as a poet. Rich's review of *Volando* affirms that she has 'the utmost admiration for Alicia Partnoy's work and spirit' (2005: n. pag.). Furthermore, to the reader aware of Rich's interest in Nicaraguan art and politics, particularly the Sandinistas (Rich 1983),

her comments can be understood as an endorsement of Partnoy's politics as well as her poetics.

Like Partnoy, Alegría is a writer known for her focus on social justice and who was forced into political exile. As a child, Alegría was exiled from her country of birth (Nicaragua) and then from her country of exile (El Salvador) because 'her elegant poems and testimonies about human-rights violations [...] earned her a place on the death list in El Salvador' (Taylor 2007: 49).²⁹ Shortly after the publication of *Volando*, Alegría was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2006 (The Neustadt Prizes n.d.).³⁰

By positioning Partnoy in relation to Alegría, Red Hen Press signals – to the reader already familiar with Alegría – the literary and political connections between the two. Furthermore, Alegría describes *Volando* as 'a book of testimonial poems' and writes that it is 'a strong, raw, transparent book that makes us tremble. Readers can feel every poem with their entire body, their entire soul' (2005: n. pag.). Alegría makes evident the link between her regard for Partnoy's poems as *testimonio* and as works of literature.

Similarly, Gail Wronsky avers that: 'the terse sensuality of these poems – their gentleness and unflinching courage in the face of devastation, genocide – is so much more than instructive. It is poetry with the subtlety and insight of our greatest resources, intelligence and compassion' (2005a: n. pag.).³¹ Gail Wronsky is an established American poet, having published four collections prior to her translation of Partnoy's work, including *Poems for Infidels* (2004) with Red Hen Press, one year before the publication of *Volando*. Through situating Partnoy in the context of

²⁹ In Chapter 5, I discuss Partnoy's two poems about human rights violations in El Salvador, 'Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador' and 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador' (pp.237-247).

³⁰ Among the shortlisted for the Neustadt Prize in 2006 were the international group of writers Hélène Cixous (France), Alice Munro (Canada), Orhan Pamuk (Turkey) and Philip Roth (USA) (The Neustadt Prizes n.d.). Pamuk went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature that year (2006) and Munro would receive the same prize in 2013 (Nobel Media AB 2020a). Roth won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1998 (The Pulitzer Prize 2020). Cixous is a renowned feminist theorist.

³¹ The quotation from Wronsky is an excerpt from her 'Translator's Notes' to *Volando*, which I will discuss later in this chapter (pp.59-62).

Wronsky, Rich and Alegría, Red Hen uses the paratext to demonstrate its belief in Partnoy's skills as a writer. Moreover, the inclusion of the quotation from Wronsky and her use of the first person plural possessive encourages the reader to participate in this understanding of Partnoy's poetry.

Settlement House similarly presents *Fuegos* with an emphasis on Partnoy's poetic expertise. The publisher, founded by Joseph Ruth and Larry Moffi in 2007, exclusively issues books of poetry. Its name is taken:

from the settlement houses of the late 19th and 20th centuries that provided community through their social and cultural support and services to the urban poor and immigrant populations. We think of ourselves as a home for some of the fine – and frequently disparate – poetic voices deserving of readership but often ignored in publishing today. (Ruth and Moffi n.d.)

Settlement House frames its publications in the context of a concern for social issues, which can be seen with the establishment of the annual Settlement House American Poetry Prize. The award:

acknowledges the importance of the immigrant legacy and its potential as a force for social justice, tolerance and goodwill in the United States. Initiated in 2014, the Prize includes publication by Settlement House of a collection of poems by a first-generation American (including both immigrants and children born of immigrants to the United States). The Prize alternates annually between a book written in the language of the poet's ancestry and translated into English and a collection written in English. (Settlement House n.d.)

Partnoy's *Fuegos* was the first winner of the Settlement House American Poetry Prize, announced in the first line of the publisher's paratext on the back cover of the collection.

Fuegos is described as ‘a work of wisdom born of witness and tempered by a lifetime of commitment to [Partnoy’s] craft’ (Settlement House 2014: n. pag.). Thus, the paratext unites the politics of Partnoy’s writing with its literary purpose. The circumstances of this testimonial ‘witness’ are later elucidated in this publisher’s paratext. What follows the blurb by Settlement House, though, is the first stanza of Partnoy’s ‘Nana sin la cebolla’, quoted alongside its English translation.

I will analyse this poem in depth in Chapter 4 (pp.173-177), exploring its reference to Miguel Hernández’s ‘Nanas de la cebolla’, written during his imprisonment in the Spanish Civil War. For now, the purpose of citing the stanza is to explore its paratextual function in *Fuegos*. The poem begins:

Tu madre no está presa
tu madre tiene
pájaros en la sangre,
no la detienen
las rejas, los barrotes
ni lo [sic] candados,
ni tu madre está presa
ni te ha dejado. (*Fuegos*, n. pag.)

The inclusion of this particular stanza on the back cover of the book is significant because these are the first lines of *Fuegos* that the reader is likely to encounter.

‘Nana sin la cebolla’ begins with the defiant line that resists physical imprisonment, ‘tu madre no está presa’. Partnoy’s speaker is shown opposing the dictatorial authorities that imprisoned her, and the rejection of confinement builds within the stanza. Settlement House’s choice to include these lines on the back cover paratext provides the reader with the opportunity to encounter Partnoy’s perspective before reading biographical information about her. Of course, the publisher ultimately has no say in how the reader engages with the text provided on the back cover of *Fuegos*, but typography serves to guide the reader through the paratext in order.

The titles of the collection, in English and in Spanish are printed in capitals at the top of the page. The majority of the paratext is printed in brown, but the name of

the collection and the heading for the excerpt from 'Nana sin la cebolla' (in the middle of the page) are both printed in larger font and in red, which is eye-catching. The passage providing biographical information about Partnoy is positioned towards the bottom of the page. It has no heading and is printed in smaller font, although Partnoy's name is printed in bold. I do not think this is an attempt to minimise Partnoy's personal circumstances, nor the mention of her other publications, but it places greater emphasis on the poet's words and the story that she chooses to tell.

2.3 Publishers' Paratexts – Biographical Information

In both *Venganza* and *Volando*, the biographical information given on the covers is expanded in sections entitled 'About the Author'. The biographical section about Partnoy in *Fuegos* included on the back cover is reprinted, and slightly extended, alongside biographical information about the collection's translator, Gail Wronsky, and illustrator, Raquel Partnoy. In the paratexts of all three collections, references are included to Partnoy's previous testimonial work, building on the connections established between writing and activism. I will consider how these paratexts guide the reader's understanding of the testimonial nature of the collections.

For the purposes of this analysis, I will cite the passage entitled 'About the Author' from *Venganza* in full:

Alicia Partnoy was born in Argentina in 1955. During her years as a political prisoner her stories and poems were smuggled out of prison and published anonymously in human rights journals. Since her arrival in the United States, she has lectured extensively at the invitation of Amnesty International, universities and community groups. Alicia has presented testimony on human rights violations to the United Nations, the Organization of American States, Amnesty International, and human rights organisations in Argentina. Her testimony is quoted in *Nunca Más: The Final Report of the Argentine Commission for the Investigation of Disappearance*. She is best

known as the author of *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina* (Cleis Press, 1986). Alicia Partnoy also edited *You Can't Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile* (Cleis Press, 1988b). *Revenge of the Apple* is her first collection of poetry. (Cleis Press 1992: n. pag)

The paratext establishes basic biographical details about Partnoy, emphasising the political context of her experiences and writing.

Mention of Partnoy's lectures 'at the invitation' of various organisations, is a paratextual device recommending Partnoy to the reader. It is strengthened by her association with renowned institutions. Credibility is given to Partnoy's story by the fact that her testimony was given at the United Nations, the Organization of American States and Amnesty International. Furthermore, inclusion of the English-language subtitle of *Nunca Más* indicates the importance of the report in the area of human rights work, reinforcing Partnoy's commitment to this field.

The form of testimony that is mentioned in the paratext refers to legalistic testimony. The United Nations, Amnesty International and the Organization of American States would have the possibility to use Partnoy's testimony for legal campaigns and prosecutions, even if this would not be possible within Argentina until after the Supreme Court ruling of 2005, deeming the *Ley de Punto Final* (1986) and *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (1987) to be unconstitutional. I contend that Partnoy's poetic *testimonio* is an extension of this work, and *Venganza's* paratext frames the collection in the context of Partnoy's human rights activism.

The sections inside the covers of *Volando* and *Fuegos* providing biographical information are similar to *Venganza's*, the prominent difference being that they demonstrate the connection between Partnoy's work as an academic and as a human rights practitioner. Her role as an academic follows the award of her PhD (Partnoy 1997c) from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and subsequent positions as 'chair' and 'associate professor' of the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles (Red Hen Press 2005: n. pag.; Settlement House 2014: n. pag.).

Both *Volando* and *Fuegos* mention Partnoy's work as 'co-editor of *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*' and her involvement in founding and presiding over 'Proyecto VOS – Voices of Survivors, an organization that brings survivors of human rights abuses to lecture at colleges in the US' (Red Hen Press 2005: n. pag; Settlement House 2014: n. pag.). The academic journal *Chicana/Latina Studies* stresses an association between the academy and social activism with a feminist slant, while Proyecto VOS unites Partnoy's role as an activist with her position as an academic. Beyond giving her own testimony in a variety of settings and locations, Partnoy actively encourages other survivors of human rights violations to participate in the testimonial act. At the same time, she compels US academic audiences to listen to their stories. In turn, the location of these *testimonios* within academia serves as further recognition of their importance.

2.4 Allographic Paratext – Wronsky's 'Translator's Notes'

Gail Wronsky's 'Translator's Notes' in *Volando* extend the paratextual endorsements of Partnoy and the sense of her trustworthiness as a testifier. In an allographic preface:

the function of recommending usually remains implicit because the mere presence of this type of preface is in itself a recommendation. For an original preface, this support is generally provided by a writer whose reputation is more firmly established than the author's [...]. For a translation, it is generally provided by a writer who is better known in the importing country'. (Genette 1997: 268)

The very existence of an allographic preface is a signal that the text is being vouched for. Wronsky's name is more likely to be recognised by an English-speaking American audience than Partnoy's, although there is no 'importing country' for *Volando*: Partnoy also lives in the United States. Since she came to the USA in 1979, as a politically exiled adult, it is unsurprising that Partnoy chooses to write in her mother

tongue. Nevertheless, if an English-speaking audience is to be encouraged to engage with her work, some form of recommendation is beneficial.

Wronsky's 'Translator's Notes' might initially be expected to discuss issues that were faced in the translation of *Volando*. Although Wronsky does address her translation process at one point in the preface, the 'Translator's Notes' function largely to inform the reader about Partnoy and to praise her skill as a writer. Both the literary and the political are stressed in Wronsky's discussion of Partnoy. She writes that: 'it is not only with pleasure as a poet and a reader of poetry but with urgency as a citizen and activist that I introduce this book' (Wronsky 2005b: xiv-xv).

Further to her recommendation of 'the insight, the power, the authority, the wisdom and the beauty of Alicia Partnoy's writing' (2005b: xiv), Wronsky exhorts readers to engage with the collection and she stresses the necessity of this. In so compelling the readers, Wronsky reflects the urgency of *testimonio* that has been identified in studies of this form. Also recurrent in *testimonio* criticism is the notion of the reliability of the testifier and the story they tell. Wronsky's endorsement of Partnoy indicates that she puts her faith in the poet and the story she tells, implying that the reader, too, should trust her.

Reflecting on her own work with the collection, Wronsky had concerns that her translations might not succeed in being faithful to the original text. She writes:

My fear in translating these poems was that some of Partnoy's strength, some of her, at times, most forceful and beautiful music, some of the sly humor, the self-deprecating refusal to say too much, to speak for others, would be watered down, would be somehow delayed or de-positioned. I feared that in speaking for her through the translations I would distort her voice (2005b: xvi)

The concern that Wronsky expresses is more than aesthetic. In the article 'Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life / Is Based / on a Real Story', Partnoy discusses Wronsky's assertion that 'what often gets lost in translation is not poetry, but politics' (Partnoy 2009: 17). Wronsky wishes to ensure that is not the case with her translation of *Volando*. She writes that her aim has been 'to allow the poems to speak for themselves

as much as possible. To be as bold as they are, to be as unafraid as they are to utter what might be uncomfortable, or unapologetically difficult, truths.’ (Wronsky 2005b: xvii).

Through the discussion of the problematic nature of the translations, the preface is also used to emphasise to the reader that they should trust Partnoy’s testimony. Wronsky makes explicit reference to particular poems and the events they discuss:

Mothers are left with gravestones which in no way resemble their dead children (“Voice of the Mother”); [...] the ability of human beings to torture other human beings is so intrinsically human that it is built into our language (“Torture Machine: Vocabulary”); in some places in the world, women carry onions in their pockets to reduce the effects of tear gas (“Old Jerusalem: Chronicle of the Intifada”). These things are true. It is necessary for us to know them. And only a poet of Alicia Partnoy’s great skill, great ear, great eye, and enormous heart could have rescued them from the lowlands of defeat and given them to us in such a compelling and immediate form. (2005b: xvii)³²

Wronsky’s paratext emphasises the necessity, the ‘immediacy’, of the information that is transmitted through Partnoy’s writing, which again echoes the sense of urgency associated with *testimonio*. Wronsky explicitly states that ‘these things are true’. Partnoy is not just recommended as a writer, but factual authority is given to what she tells. The reader is encouraged to rely on Partnoy and trust that their knowledge and understanding will be enhanced through the reading the collection’s poems.

³² Of the poems mentioned by Wronsky, I analyse ‘Torture Machine: Vocabulario’ in full (see Chapter 3, pp.134-141). In the poem ‘La vieja Jerusalén: Una crónica de la Intifada (1987)’, Partnoy recounts the experience of being part of a group of writers who travelled to the Middle East ‘para levantar testimonio de la represión contra el pueblo palestino. Descubrimos allí, por experiencia propia, que el oler un trozo de cebolla disminuye los efectos de los gases lacrimógenos’ (*Volando*, 80).

Situating *Volando* in the context of *The Little School's* 'testimonial prose' and the 'testimony' of *Venganza* (Wronsky 2005b: xiv), the 'Translator's Notes' guide the reader to engage with Partnoy's poetry as *testimonio*.

2.5(a) Authorial Paratexts – Dedications in *Venganza* and *Fuegos*

The dedications in *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos* are used by Partnoy to address persons she holds in great esteem. So doing, she offers the reader a glance at her intimate relationships. In this section, I will discuss the dedications to family members in *Venganza* and *Fuegos*; in the next section, my analysis will be of Partnoy's dedication to fellow human rights activists.

On the subject of dedications, Genette asserts that, irrespective of 'the official addressee' of a dedication, 'there is always an ambiguity in [its] destination'. He writes that the dedication:

is always intended for at least two addressees: the dedicatee, of course, but also the reader, for dedicating a work is a *public act* that the reader is, as it were, called on to witness. (1997: 134)

The dedication in Partnoy's first collection is 'a mis padres' (*Venganza*, n.pag.). While it is not uncommon for a writer to acknowledge their parents in the paratext to a creative work, it is pertinent to consider the inscription in light of Genette's definition. The dedicatory message is directed to Partnoy's parents, but also to her reader. In her testimonial work, Partnoy reveals private – and often acutely painful – details about her life. Thus, through being tacitly included in the address to Partnoy's parents, the reader is brought into a confidential space.

Genette's particular word choice, when he calls on the reader to act as witness, highlights a similarity between his theory of the dedication and *testimonio*. Where any reader can witness a paratextual inscription, the reader of *testimonio* is an integral part of the testimonial act, attesting to the information provided in the text. *Testimonio* is a public denunciation of injustice, produced with overt political intent.

Equally, it is important to consider the author's motivation for a dedication. After all, it is not a private, hand-written inscription. Rather it has been written as a public text, which anyone who looks at the book could read.

It is not immediately apparent that the dedication to Partnoy's parents in *Venganza* has any direct relation to the testimonial nature of the collection. In the authorial preface, however, the reader learns that Partnoy's parents looked after her daughter [Ruth Irupé Sanabria] and 'desperately searched for her [Partnoy] while trying to cope with the unbearable pain of her disappearance' (*Venganza*, 13). Describing her parents - like herself - as 'hostage[s] of the military regime' (*Venganza*, 13), Partnoy makes it clear that dictatorial violence was not experienced solely by those imprisoned, tortured or murdered by the regime. Their families, as well as Argentine society at large, were directly affected. With this reminder, the reader is brought beyond the glimpse of familial intimacy afforded in Partnoy's dedication in *Venganza* and further into the confidential space of *testimonio*.

The dedication in *Fuegos* is intimate, too, coming from the writers' perspectives as mothers, rather than Partnoy's position as a daughter. Partnoy and Wronsky write the address together, which I understand as a reflection of their collaborative work and of their friendship.³³ The dedication is written in English and in Spanish, as in all of Partnoy's collections. However, the use of first person in English suggests that this is not merely a translation and indicates Partnoy's involvement in the writing of both versions of the dedication.

Apparent in Partnoy's work is 'Alicia's stance [...] that she lives in a world of "interchangeable" languages'.³⁴ *Fuegos'* dedication reads:

Gail and I wish to dedicate this book to our daughters.

All fire.

All flower.

³³ Wronsky and her husband Chuck Rosenthal told me that their closest friends are Partnoy and her husband Antonio Leiva. Personal conversation with Wronsky and Rosenthal in Oxford, 30 July 2013.

³⁴ Personal email correspondence with Larry Moffi, co-founder and publisher, Settlement House (16 December 2014).

Con Gail, queremos dedicar este poemario a nuestras hijas.

Todas fuego.

Todas flor.

Ruth Irupé.

Marlena Virginia.

Eva Victoria.

Anahi [sic] Paz.

(*Fuegos*, n. pag.)

As I have mentioned, Ruth Irupé Sanabria is Partnoy's daughter, as are Eva Victoria Leiva Partnoy and Anahí Paz Leiva Partnoy; Marlena Virginia Rosenthal is Wronsky's daughter.

Similarly to the dedication to Partnoy's parents in *Venganza*, here too the reader is drawn into the writers' private domain and is offered a more intimate connection with the collection's subject matter. Furthermore, the attribution of the nouns 'fuego' and 'flor' to the dedicatees connects the address to the collection's title, *Fuegos florales*, which I interpret as a metaphorical union of emotion and aesthetics. Fire represents the rage felt in the face of injustice, as Partnoy writes in the poem 'Preposiciones':

Impotencia de fuego

en la garganta:

con eso hablamos,

[...]. (*Fuegos*, 18)³⁵

Fire connotes the power of this anger that compels *testimoniantes* like Partnoy to share their experiences of human rights abuse, while the flower alludes to the creative works that this can produce. As Partnoy writes in *Venganza's* 'Introduction' (see

³⁵ For analysis of these lines from 'Preposiciones', see Chapter 5, p.218.

pp.69-84 of this chapter), 'poetry is her last refuge, the only place where her bitterness and rage blossom' (*Venganza*, 15).

Fuegos' dedication draws on intimate familial knowledge of its addressees, yet it is worth noting that all four have publicly produced creative work in response to injustice. Sanabria has written two poetry collections, *The Strange House Testifies* (2009) and *Beasts Behave in Foreign Lands* (2017), both of which draw on her personal and familial circumstances, as well as broader human rights issues.³⁶ For her undergraduate thesis for a 'BA in Film Production from Loyola Marymount University' (Oxford Art Factory 2012), Rosenthal made *I Have Two Voices* (2008), an 'anti-torture documentary [...] featuring interviews with Antonio Leiva and Alicia Partnoy' (Rosenthal 2010). The documentary is named after the second line of Partnoy's 'Canción de la exiliada', which she reads in the film, 'me cortaron la voz | dos voces tengo' (*Venganza*, 94). Eva Leiva-Partnoy is listed as one of the actors. She also travelled to Nepal with Partnoy in 2019 to perform a stage adaptation of *The Little School* (Manandhar 2019). In the 2005 publication of *Volando*, aged 13 and 8 respectively, Eva Victoria and Anahí Paz Leiva Partnoy translated and wrote the anti-war poems 'Promesa urgente a una niña de Bagdad/An Urgent Promise to a Girl in Baghdad' and 'War' (2005: 74-75).

The metaphorical meaning of 'fuegos florales' is not explicitly explained in the collection and the reader is left to come to their own conclusions about how to interpret it. Another layer of meaning, which is also not mentioned in the collection's peritext, exists in the literary play on words: the title alludes to los Juegos Florales (Partnoy 2015). These are 'certámenes literarios especializados en el [...] arte poética' (Ferrera Cuesta 2012: 144). As a literary tournament, the Juegos Florales has its roots in medieval Europe (Bedoya Sánchez 2018: 55). In the modern era, the Juegos Florales were established in Barcelona in 1859 and 'en la década de los 1880 se implantaron en Argentina y en otros lugares del continente americano' (Ferrera Cuesta: 2012: 144), though the prominence of the Juegos Florales declined as the twentieth century progressed (Ferrera Cuesta 2012: 144).

³⁶ Sanabria's *Beasts Behave in Foreign Lands* was awarded the 2014 Letras Latinas/Red Hen Press Award (On Being n.d.).

Partnoy (2015) explains that, for her, the 'Juegos Florales implied constraints, and these poems have some kind of constraints too'. While the format of a literary competition might involve the restrictions of poetic form and its conventions, the 'constraints' of *Fuegos florales* speak to the difficulties of writing about human rights abuse and the limits of expression. There is also a gap in understanding between the writer and reader, especially one who has not experienced dictatorship or human rights abuse. Authorial and allographic paratexts seek to bridge this gap, while authorial dedications simultaneously draw the reader further into the world of the text, as well as into Partnoy's intimate sphere.

2.5(b) Authorial Paratexts – Dedication in *Volando*

The relationship between the authorial dedication and testimonial writing is arguably more apparent in Partnoy's second collection, *Volando*, which she dedicates 'a la memoria de Blanca Ciammaichella y Ernesto Malisia porque se les fue la vida trabajando por la recuperación de la voz de los vencidos' (*Volando*, n. pag.). Partnoy does not provide further information about Ciammaichella and Malisia in *Volando*. Consequently, I will analyse the dedication in light of research I have done and considering the initial impression a reader might have of the paratextual address.

From the information provided on the back cover of *Volando* alone, as well as paratexts written by Red Hen (publisher) and Gail Wronsky (translator), the reader will have some awareness of the political-historical context of Partnoy's experiences and poetry. The reader can be expected to broadly assume that this dedication relates to the circumstances of the 1976-1983 Argentine dictatorship. Specific information about the dedicatees confirms this assumption, but Partnoy leaves it to her reader to decide if they wish to investigate this.

Partnoy told me that Blanca Ciammaichella was:

una querida amiga que vivía en el exilio en los EEUU, regresó a Argentina y trabajaba en el Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales en Buenos Aires, cuando llegó la democracia, y ella escuchaba los

relatos de los familiares esperanzados a encontrar a sus hijos todavía después de años de desaparición.³⁷

Ernesto Malisia was also a human rights practitioner, a member of CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas) and founder, in 1985, of the Delegación Bahía Blanca de la APDH Nacional, now known as the Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos de Bahía Blanca (APDH Bahía Blanca 2011).

The organisation, set up in Partnoy's home city, 'se comprometió con la defensa de la vida y de los Derechos Humanos a partir de la búsqueda de justicia para los crímenes de lesa humanidad cometidas durante la última dictadura militar (1976-1983)':

cuando en el año 1987 los juicios fueron suspendidos por las leyes de Obediencia Debida y Punto Final y más tarde por los indultos, la A.P.D.H. Bahía Blanca no cesó su lucha sino que, por el contrario, redobló su esfuerzo para que se conozca la verdad de los años oscuros de la dictadura. (Quartucci 2010)

Malisia is known for publicly declaring his opposition to the amnesty laws and for his commitment to human rights work. 'Falleció militando en 2002', the year before the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* and the *Ley de Punto Final* were repealed by the Argentine government (APDH Bahía Blanca 2011).

Partnoy's dedication in *Volando* is notable for having no direct mention of death. She writes of Ciammaichella and Malisia, 'se les fue la vida', placing instead an emphasis on life to highlight the work of these people when they were alive. Furthermore, Partnoy's use of the gerundial form 'trabajando' suggests the continuity of this action and that Ciammaichella and Malisia were interrupted in the midst of something unfinished. Changes to the Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos de Bahía Blanca were agreed with Malisia 'días antes de su fallecimiento', indicating his commitment to the organisation (Quartucci 2010).

³⁷ Personal email correspondence with Alicia Partnoy (19 June 2015).

Partnoy refers to the work of Ciammaichella and Malisia being for 'la recuperación de la voz de los vencidos', referring to the attempt to seek justice for people murdered or disappeared by the state. Although the noun 'vencidos' implies defeat, alliteration and sibilance stress the idea of continuity, repetition and resistance. Partnoy refers to people overcome by genocidal force, yet her reference to their voice suggests the potential for their resistance to be carried on, echoing and continuing to resonate.

The allusion to speech is symbolic for the hope that justice can be achieved when members of the military regime are officially tried for their crimes in a court of law. The emphasis on denunciation is a fundamental part of *testimonio* in Partnoy's work, often conveyed through references to speech. Introducing this concept in *Volando's* dedication, Partnoy signals an element that will be recurrent in her poetry. The dedication functions as a bridge between the publishers' and allographic paratexts and main text. Further to the acknowledgement of her dedicatees, Partnoy uses the dedication as a gradual means of introducing the reader to her literary work.

2.6 Authorial Paratexts – Preface to *Venganza*

Genette argues that the preface 'constitutes an unbalanced and shaky situation of communication: its author is offering the reader an advance commentary on a text the reader has not yet become familiar with' (1997: 237). He argues that it is potentially disadvantageous to its author because the reader may prefer to proceed directly to the main text and return later – if at all – to engage with the preface. Genette centres on the idea that the preface offers an 'advance commentary' on the main text and I would argue that this is not quite the function of Partnoy's 'Introduction'.

In the case of Partnoy's *Venganza*, her authorial preface works in the opposite way to that which Genette suggests. Although Partnoy makes some proleptic references to the collection and sets out a manifesto for *Venganza* through the extended metaphor of the apple, the main function of the 'Introduction' is to give the reader an advance understanding of the context of her writing and thereby introduce

them to the concept of literary testimony. Like *Volando's* dedication, *Venganza's* preface works as a bridge between reader and collection.

The 'Introduction' to *Venganza* is an authorial preface, written in prose and in English. Partnoy does not directly state why she chose to write this in English, yet she acknowledges the need to tailor her story – 'in the United States the woman [Partnoy] knows she must understand her audience for her message to be effective' (*Venganza*, 15). Genette writes that:

the most common formal (and modal) status of the preface is, clearly, that of a discourse in prose, which in its discursive features may contrast with the narrative or dramatic mode of the text [...], and in its prose form may contrast with the poetic form of the text [...]. (1997: 171)

Partnoy's 'Introduction' follows Genette's assertion in that its prose format differs from the poetry of *Venganza*. Where my understanding of her preface differs from Genette, however, relates to the 'discursive features' of the 'Introduction'. I would argue that, like *Venganza's* poetry, the paratext is testimonial.

The 'Introduction' primes the reader by providing a contextual understanding that, together with the publishers' paratexts (in *Venganza*), serves for a greater awareness of the circumstances about which Partnoy testifies. Her preface may be seen as a 'hook', where the story is constructed to intrigue the reader, encouraging them to engage with the subsequent collection and discover more about matters discussed in the 'Introduction'.

Venganza's prose preface is literary in its construction and Partnoy's stylistic use of this paratext is significant beyond the historical context provided for the reader. Genette argues that:

The paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its *raison d'être*. This something is the text. Whatever aesthetic or ideological investment the author

makes in a paratextual element (a 'lovely title' or a preface-manifesto), whatever coquettishness or paradoxical reversal he puts into it, the paratextual element is always subordinate to 'its' text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and its existence. (1997:12)

It is the 'aesthetic and ideological investment' that I would like to explore. Considering how Partnoy uses the 'Introduction' to accustom her reader to the idea of the testimonial as literature, I will analyse the paratext through close reading. Taking into account Genette's assertion that the 'authorial preface [...] has as its chief function *to ensure that the text is read properly*', I will analyse the function of the 'Introduction' as a preface-manifesto.

The authorial preface begins with a broad introduction to the connection between human rights abuse and writing: 'In a prison cell in South America, a woman is trying to remember every single poem she has ever written' (*Venganza*, 11). Partnoy does not remark upon the circumstances that brought the woman to be in detention until the next paragraph. However, it is likely that most readers in the United States – with a broad awareness of Latin American politics – would assume that the connection between 'prison cell' and 'South America' may have something to do with dictatorship. Such readers will presumably be aware of the wave of state violence that swept Latin America from the 1970s and that was ongoing in some parts at the time of *Venganza's* publication in 1992.

While Partnoy begins in the third person singular, the reader can guess after a few paragraphs that the 'woman' is the author herself. Partnoy makes meta-textual reference to this device later in the paratext, when the perspective shifts to the first person singular (*Venganza*, 16).³⁸ At first, this literary technique works to demonstrate that Partnoy's experiences of dictatorship were not unique. Disappearance and torture were experienced by many women in many South American prison cells.

³⁸ My analysis of *Venganza's* 'Introduction' is sequential. I will discuss Partnoy's auto-referential allusion on p.81 of this chapter.

Partnoy's choice to write about herself in *Venganza's* introduction in the third person also mirrors her initial method of writing about herself. She explains that, in the process of writing *The Little School*:

cuando me puse a escribir el primer cuento de la chancleta con una sola flor, el que trata de mi detención, lo escribí en tercera persona porque cada vez que yo pensaba en esto lo pensaba como en una película, como que le hubiera pasado a otro. (2007: 33)³⁹

Opening the 'Introduction' with the third person, Partnoy constructs a kind of literary dissociation.

The present continuous – 'a woman is trying to remember' – simultaneously creates a sense of immediacy and distance. Partnoy's omniscient narrator recounts seemingly contemporaneous action to the reader, yet the speaker may, in fact, be the woman herself. Perhaps she is attempting to distance herself from trauma by narrating her immediate experiences in the third person *and* psychologically distancing herself by recalling the past accomplishments ('every single poem she has ever written'). Furthermore, the realisation that the 'woman' is Partnoy means that the reader is again distanced from the present of the paratext's action.

Partnoy's use of the third person may also be a means of reflecting on the process of rendering her life experiences in narrative form for the paratext. What is clear from the outset is her emphasis on writing, as well as on the violation of human rights. The opening line of the 'Introduction' presents an image of imprisonment, juxtaposed with the establishment of the cell's inhabitant as a writer. Partnoy uses a comma to typographically highlight a distinction between the location and its occupant. From the preface's first line, Partnoy refuses to allow her subject to be defined by the physical circumstances into which, as it will be revealed, she has been forced. It is also significant that the imprisoned writer is depicted as one who remembers. Although her current focus is presented as recording previous creative

³⁹ The testimonial story Partnoy refers to is 'The One-Flower Slippers' (1998: 25-28) / 'Chancletas con una sola flor' (2006: 21-24).

work, a clear parallel is drawn with Partnoy's testimonial poetry, for which memory is fundamental.

Further to the prison cell's geographical location being in South America, the enclosed area of the cell contrasts with the vastness of the continent, emphasising the restricted space in which the woman finds herself. Partnoy's mention of what is outside the cell suggests the possibility for imagination to transcend the prison walls.⁴⁰ It also alludes to a sense of solidarity between people persecuted by their state, prefiguring the poems included *Venganza*, which address human rights violations that have occurred in countries other than Argentina.⁴¹

The subject of the preface's first line is female, which I read as a reflection of Partnoy herself, rather than indicating a specifically gendered story. After all, Partnoy is telling her own story in the third person, but she conveys the sense that the imprisoned woman could be any imprisoned person. Nevertheless, Partnoy does not define the woman by her incarceration. Instead, she is identified as a writer and, as Partnoy will go on to explore, it is her activity as a writer that helps her survive her time in prison.

Such momentary freedoms are, however, quickly undermined by the following paragraph, which reveals the reality of the situation in which the subject of the 'Introduction' finds herself: 'the woman is a "disappeared." No one, except from the military authorities who kidnaped [sic] her from her home, knows her whereabouts. The year is 1977. The country, Argentina' (*Venganza*, 11). Partnoy contrasts the imprisoned woman's poetic work with her political status: she is experiencing human rights abuse at the hands of the state. Already in the 'Introduction', Partnoy is combining the literary with the denunciation of dictatorial crimes.

The juxtaposition of 'disappeared', at the end of the first sentence, with 'no one', at the beginning of the second, can be read as an allusion to the military's

⁴⁰ I discuss Partnoy's poetic exploration of this notion in Chapter 4, in my analyses of 'A mi hija' (pp.161-170), 'Visita' (pp.170-174) and 'Nana sin la cebolla' (pp.174-178).

⁴¹ In Chapter 5, I consider Partnoy's portrayal of human rights violations Haiti ('Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haiti' (pp.225-236)), El Salvador ('Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador' and Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador (pp.237-247)) and Mexico ('Palabras por Silvia' (p.247-260)).

attempts erase the identities of the people they disappeared, as if they had never existed. Yet Partnoy undermines such a notion. In the preface's first paragraph, she creates an identity and vocation for the woman, before the circumstances of her kidnap and disappearance are mentioned.

The reader conceives of the subject as a poet before coming to understand the context of her detention. Furthermore, the 'no one' to whom Partnoy refers does indeed have an identity, as will be later revealed in the 'Introduction'. They are the woman's family, who are who are trying to find out what has happened to her. Partnoy contrasts 'no one' with 'the military authorities', signalling a clear division in culpability: nobody but the military authorities is responsible. The naming of her kidnap and disappearance demonstrates that the woman's imprisonment is a violation of her human rights.

By giving temporal and spatial information at the end of the second paragraph – 'The year is 1977. The country, Argentina' – Partnoy aligns the preface with more standard elements of *testimonio*, where specific details of events are expected. In the first two paragraphs of the 'Introduction', Partnoy alternates aspects of the testimonial with storytelling. She establishes the agency of her subject by offering memory and creativity as a counter-narrative to the circumstances that have been imposed upon her.

It is at this point that Partnoy uses the first person plural possessive and the reader becomes part of the story:

the prisoner of our story has been transferred to a new location with new rules. Her wrists no longer bound, she is now 'free' to dance around this nine-by-six cell, to wash her hands and to enjoy the 'privilege' of her own toilet. No longer blindfolded, she is now 'free' to read the hundreds of messages scratched into the walls with the bottom edges of toothpaste tubes. Most importantly, her captors

have given her a precious pen and a brand new notebook.
(*Venganza*, 11)⁴²

Genette argues that the reader is 'called on to witness' the dedication to a text (1997: 134). In the case of *Venganza's* 'Introduction', the reader is prevailed upon to witness what Partnoy tells. In choosing to read beyond the first two paragraphs, the reader has invested in the story and Partnoy uses a rhetorical device to hold them to the obligation of acting as testimonial witness.

Partnoy extends the juxtaposition of space and confinement that began in the preface's first line. She ironically highlights the supposed freedoms and privileges, afforded by commonplace amenities, and the permission for the woman to move her hands and body at will. The presence of irony and dark humour are literary techniques used by Partnoy that are not expected in testimonial writing. They are recurrent in Partnoy's poetry, as well as in this preface. The existence of humour in writing with such serious intent as *testimonio* might seem unusual, but I believe it is used to multiple effect.

Partnoy states that Amnesty reports on dictatorial abuses are too distressing to read: 'los informes de Amnistía eran demasiado terroríficos: ni bien uno comenzaba a leer, no podía continuar' (2007: 32). Consequently, her use of irony briefly lightens the mood, allowing the reader momentary relief before they continue. Furthermore, irony is a signal of the subject's humanity. Partnoy writes:

I recall that even in The Little School, blindfolded, hands tied, under the constant vigilance of guards, I would exchange ironic comments and silly jokes with Zulma Izurieta, my best friend from college who was later executed by the army. Laughter, humor, irony, helped both of us deal with the cruelty of the situation (2005a: 240).⁴³

⁴² The 'new location' is a reference to Villa Floresta prison in Bahía Blanca, where Partnoy was taken on 25 April 1977 (A.M. Partnoy 1981c).

⁴³ On 12 April 1977, Zulma was taken from La Escuelita and killed in a simulated "confrontation" with military forces in a house in General Cerri near Bahía Blanca' (Partnoy 1998: 124-5). Partnoy mentions

By emphasising the wit and intellect of the subject of *Venganza*'s 'Introduction', Partnoy encourages the reader to further identify with the woman.

The reference to the woman reading 'hundreds of messages scratched into the walls' suggests solidarity between her and the many previous occupants of the cell. It is a further mention of writing and allusion to creativity in confinement, both in terms of the writing itself as well as the innovative use of 'the bottom edges of toothpaste tubes' as writing implements. By contrast, the pen and unused notebook the woman is given seem luxurious. Yet Partnoy's use of the term 'captors' to refer to the woman's jailers emphasises the powerless, restrictive situation into which she has been forced. Still, the pen and notebook symbolise the potential, in the context of *Venganza*, for denunciation and testimony.

Any testimonial potential will have to be explored in the future, for:

Our prisoner does not write new poems. It would hurt her immensely to search for words to describe the past three and a half months of her life in a concentration camp where torture, executions, sexual harassment, hunger, and the certainty of an imminent death haunt the victims. How could she bear, in the solitude of this cell, to write about the loss of her closest friends, killed by the military after months of torment in that secret detention place? Where could she find the spiritual strength to write about her eighteen-month-old daughter, left behind, and whom the torturers insisted they were going to kill? What words could express the horror of knowing that a baby born in that place, cynically called the Little School, was "adopted" by one of his mother's torturers. (*Venganza*, 11)

Zulma in three poems that I discuss in Chapter 3, 'Respuesta' (p.12), 'Los molinos de la memoria' (p.145) and 'Cuatro postales' (p.153).

In giving these details about what happened in the detention centre, Partnoy now provides testimony that would not have been possible from within the camp.

Writing such *testimonio* while imprisoned would have been extremely dangerous, with the likelihood of a violent reaction had a guard found it. Partnoy's mention of pain relates to the process of creative expression and not to the pain directly inflicted by the camp's torturers. It is an important distinction. In no way is Partnoy denying the suffering inflicted on her *compañeros* and on her, but she deflects attention from it by focusing on the writing process, 'search[ing] for words'. Again emphasising the humanity of her subject, Partnoy demonstrates, even if the passage of time makes writing about atrocity more approachable, its production will always be painful. *Testimonio* has strong ideological motivations, but it will never be possible to write without grave emotional ramifications for the *testimoniante*.

Partnoy extends the depiction of the imprisoned writer, all the while reminding the reader of the danger the woman is in:

She chooses, then, not to write new poems. Instead, she makes a long list: the titles of all the poems she has written since childhood. Every day she tries to remember and record them in her notebook. Every night she fears for the arrival of the jailers. They will inject her with an anesthetic [sic] and, once she is unconscious, kill her in a faked "confrontation" with the Army. Or they will let her go, only to shoot her in the back. Or drop her from a helicopter into the Atlantic Ocean, a few miles away from her hometown of Bahía Blanca.
(*Venganza*, 11-12)

The woman is unable to escape her physical circumstances, but she can opt to control what she writes.

Partnoy's mention of the woman's having written poems since childhood again suggests that being a poet is her vocation. Furthermore, reference to her youth connotes the safety and comfort of childhood and home. The remembering and rewriting of these poems is a survival mechanism: 'Many years later the woman will come to realise that the recovery of her old poems in that notebook amounted to the

recovery of her soul, her history' (*Venganza*, 12). The opportunity to write has given the woman the possibility to reclaim her identity, something the military sought to erase with her disappearance.

At this point in time, however, the woman is not safe. Using anaphoric repetition of 'every', Partnoy contrasts the woman's attempts to comfort herself with the constant threat to her life and wellbeing. Daytime represents the moments when the woman feels more in control of her surroundings, when there is at least enough light for her to see and write in her notebook. Night, and its implied darkness, symbolises her fear and vulnerability, although it does not literally mean that night was the only time she had reason to be afraid. Partnoy explains:

She does not know why she still fears the worst at night. It was noon, after all, when they arrested her. Daylight was never a deterrence for the thousands of kidnappings [sic] and murders conducted by the military since the coup of March 1976. (*Venganza*, 12)

The time that the woman spends incarcerated is measured in terms of her poetry: 'the woman writes in her notebook for fifty-two days. (*Venganza*, 12)

The day she records the last poem that she can remember, the authorities notify her that she is no longer a "disappeared.'" (*Venganza*, 12). Through marking this period in days spent writing, Partnoy determines the woman's imprisonment on her own terms. She cannot change the fact that she was kidnapped and imprisoned, but she need not permit that the military define her entire experience. The woman is not freed, but instead, 'in October 1977, ten long months after her capture, the woman is transferred to a prison for political prisoners in Buenos Aires' (*Venganza*, 13).⁴⁴ Previously the woman's geographical location has been unknown, to the reader as well as to her family. Knowing that the prison is in Buenos Aires is a signal of the woman no longer being a *desaparecida*, although her status as a political prisoner is still a human rights violation.

⁴⁴ This is a reference to Villa Devoto prison, where Partnoy was held as a political prisoner.

In this new prison, the woman's development as a poet is noted: 'it is in the prison showers that the woman of this story first recites her own poetry. She encounters then what years later she will call "a truly captive audience."' (*Venganza*, 13). Partnoy again uses irony to give her reader a moment's relief, mimicking what she does in front of audiences to whom she testifies.

The trope of poetry being used to subvert the military recurs in *Venganza's* 'Introduction'. The prison becomes an agora, where 'theatre performances and poetry readings' take place (*Venganza*, 13). Partnoy's description of the showers as 'a large area whose location at the end of a long corridor gives artists and audience the necessary time to flee or jump under the water when the guards approach' suggests an ideal location for acting and artistic recital, rather than the basic facility that is part of the prison. She represents prisoners as 'artists and audience', unlike the 'guards'. Partnoy refuses to allow the political prisoners to be defined by their circumstances as detainees, yet the prison guards are represented as devoid of identity.

The makeshift stage provides the woman with the chance to share her poetry and practise her performing skills in a supportive environment. Nevertheless, it does not prepare her for what she will encounter in an artistic context when she is no longer a prisoner:

She does not know yet that she will have to defend these poems once she leaves jail. Then she will have to "explain" her verses, something most poets dread. In this way her poetry, too tied to the situation that generated it, will finally regain its original strength when used as a tool to denounce injustice. But the woman of our tale is not concerned with these problems yet, for she does not know when or if she will be released. Meanwhile, poetry helps her survive, helps her lift the spirits of her friends. (*Venganza*, 14)

Partnoy's use of the future tense is a proleptic reference to the testimonial power of poetry after the woman is freed from prison.

The references Partnoy makes to a time post-incarceration removes any suspense that the reader might have about the woman's survival. This narrative device

allows the reader to step back from the immediacy of the danger faced by the preface's subject. By sharing her privileged knowledge about the woman's future, Partnoy reassures her reader so they do not share in the woman's uncertainty as to 'when or if she will be released'.

It is notable that Partnoy chooses the verbs 'defend' and 'dread' in the context of the woman's situation once in exile. While her personal security is no longer at risk, Partnoy's word choice suggests a lack of safety, relating to the recital of poetry to unfamiliar audiences. Such groups might not be sympathetic to the situation of the survivor. Her poetry – previously used as a coping mechanism and as form of artistic solidarity with her fellow prisoners – may now be receive a critical response, for which the woman is unprepared. Furthermore, the notion that the poetry is 'too tied to the situation that generated it' can be understood in light of critical readings of testimonial writing, discussed in Chapter 1, which are hesitant to view *testimonio* in terms of literature. However, it is precisely when it is used as *testimonio*, 'a tool to denounce injustice' that the woman's poetry can fulfil both its literary and political objectives.

This proleptic moment in the preface's narrative gives the reader some notion of the woman's future activities. However, the next paragraph brings the reader back to Argentina, where the subject of the 'Introduction' is released from prison:

On a bright December morning in 1979, the woman is transferred from jail to an airport. She has been expelled from her country. After briefly meeting family and friends, she takes her child's hand and boards the plane that will bring her to the United States. (*Venganza*, 14)⁴⁵

Partnoy's use of the adjective 'bright' signals a sense of hope and connotes the sun and fresh air, in contrast to the darkness and confinement of the prison. Yet the moment of optimism is coupled with the fact that the woman is being forced into exile. The reunion with her family and friends is brief and bittersweet because it is unclear

⁴⁵ Partnoy went to the US as a refugee and is listed as a 'prominent refugee' on the UNHCR website (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees n.d.).

if or when she will see them again. The relief of seeing her 'daughter, left behind' when the woman was kidnapped and 'whom the torturers insisted they were going to kill' (*Venganza*, 11) is represented by a basic act of parenting and care, shown by the holding of hands, that has been denied while the woman was imprisoned.⁴⁶

While in prison, writing and poetry have provided the woman with a means to survive a situation of extremity, through recording memories of her life before being arrested. With the spatial shift to exile, however, she feels an urgency to tell about what happened to her, and was still happening to others, as a consequence of the dictatorship. Partnoy writes:

Once in exile, she feels the pressing need to tell her story to let everyone know how many were left behind in an Argentina swept by state terrorism. She also needs to tell people that they must do something so their nation, the United States of America, stops fostering dictatorships in Latin America. (*Venganza*, 14-15)⁴⁷

Partnoy's denunciation of the United States' foreign policy works to ensure that her American readers are reminded, or made aware, of their country's involvement and complicity in dictatorial regimes in Latin America. It is also used as a means to signal that Latin America is not so distant from the United States and that there can be scant relief for the American reader who reacts saying 'it's good that those things don't happen here' (*Venganza*, 15).

As a writer living in exile, the woman of the 'Introduction' must find ways of building a narrative that will be accessible. Partnoy explains that:

⁴⁶ In Chapter 4, I discuss Partnoy's poetic rendering of her relationship with her daughter Ruth in 'A mi hija' (pp.161-170), 'Visita' (pp.170-174) and 'Nana sin la cebolla' (pp.174-179). In my analysis of 'Visita', I consider Partnoy's illustration of the physical distance between parent and child – and deprivation of touch – even during prison visits.

⁴⁷ This quotation echoes what Partnoy told Diana Taylor in an interview. She explains that when she arrived as a refugee in the USA in 1979, 'I [Partnoy] wanted to tell my story to everyone, the bus driver, the person at the cash register of the supermarket, everyone. I wanted them to know that my friends had not been released' (quoted in Taylor 1997: 158).

In the United States, the woman knows she must understand her audience for her message to be effective. She learns that when people eagerly demand the details of her torture, they may be trying to protect themselves: the more horrendous the experience, the more removed from everyday life. Something so alien to their humanity can never really happen to them. (*Venganza*, 15)

An audience may be (perhaps morbidly) intrigued by her story, but once they hear it, they need reassurance that such circumstances do not pose a threat to them. However, the purpose of telling testimony, in addition to the quest for justice, is to work to prevent such atrocities from happening again.

If the testifier's 'message [is] to be effective', it must not alienate its listeners. They should be urged to action by hearing the testimony. Furthermore, the woman of the introduction has not experienced dictatorship alone. She has lived through it as part of a persecuted community and has lost 'her closest friends, killed by the military after months of torment' (*Venganza*, 11). Her testimony is not only about what has happened to her, but what has been experienced by many.

The stories about her *compañeros* must also be shaped in such a way that her audience will listen to them:

She also learns that people can't relate to the other stories she wants to tell until they hear hers. By now, the woman is tired of speaking of herself. She finds a device: She tells her own tale in the third person. (*Venganza*, 16)

'By now' marks a temporal shift to the moment of telling the story at hand, that is, writing the 'Introduction'. What Partnoy has been doing in the introduction mimics what has happened in front of these audiences: her readers are also an audience and Partnoy expects that they, too, will witness what she has to say. The self-referential technique demonstrates both that the writer knows her audience and that she's in control of how she presents her story.

It is at this point that any doubts that the reader might have over the woman's identity are assuaged. Partnoy uses the first person narrative voice to address the reader:

Yes, I am the woman of this story. I was the rotten fruit repressed by the military because I was just not going to accept the rule of dictators.

Let my juices ferment and join those of other troublemakers. Let us become the cider that inebriated the torturers to the point of nausea. We will be the refreshing, sparkling drink that the poor in my country, those who cannot afford champagne, pour into their glasses to celebrate life and the New Year.

Ours will be the revenge of the apple. (*Venganza*, 16)

Partnoy uses the rhetorical device of answering the reader's unspoken question, once again, involving them more closely in the story. Like with the dedications, Partnoy's reader is invited to join in her act of testimony. She reveals certain details about her experiences that the reader is expected to witness.

As she has done throughout the authorial preface, Partnoy continues to interweave overtly testimonial statements with literary writing: her use of the phrase 'rotten fruit' is a metaphor that hints at the meaning of the collection's title, *Venganza de la manzana*, and foreshadows the poem of the same name. The mention of cider is, too, a proleptic reference to the same poem, which culminates in the production of 'la Gran Sidra Nacional' (*Venganza*, 72). The extended metaphor of the apple is used to demonstrate how a form of revenge will be achieved. Usually, revenge is based around the idea of violent retribution, but that is not contemplated here. Instead, what the 'rotten fruit' will do is to 'inebriate the torturers to the point of nausea'. The worst suggested here is that the torturers will feel mildly unwell.

It is the non-violent pursuit of justice with which Partnoy is concerned. Her writing seeks to inform those who are interested in her experiences and who can take peaceful actions in the hope of preventing similar atrocity and injustice in the future. When she writes 'my revenge is to survive to tell the story' (*Venganza*, 16), Partnoy

highlights the power of storytelling and literature. If she can tell the story, she can testify, which can in turn be used to prosecute those responsible for dictatorial crimes. The quest for legal justice directly opposes the manner in which the Argentine military dictatorship operated and Partnoy stresses that her survival, too, is a form of revenge.

She survived a situation in which it is very likely that she could have been killed. The reclaiming of her identity and the denunciation of what she experienced, is a wilful defiance of everything the military intended when they kidnapped and disappeared her. The recuperation of identity is performed in the 'Introduction' through the establishment of the woman/Partnoy's role and development as a writer. Partnoy confirms this at the end of the prose preface, which is signed:

Alicia Partnoy

Washington, D.C.

July 1992[.] (*Venganza*, 17)

Genette writes that, 'after all, to sign a work with one's real name is a choice like any other, and nothing authorizes us to regard this choice as insignificant' (1997: 39-40).

He asserts that:

the author's name fulfils a contractual function whose importance varies greatly depending on genre, slight or nonexistent in fiction, it is much greater in all kinds of referential writing, where the credibility of the testimony or its transmission rests largely on the identity of the witness or the person reporting it. (Genette 1997: 41)

In the case of *Venganza's* 'Introduction', Partnoy's signature indicates that this preface is authorial. It is a significant statement of identity. In being able to openly state her name, Partnoy is defying the erasure of identity that disappearance forced upon her. Furthermore, she is putting her name to her denunciation of the military regime and that is an act of testimony.

2.7 Authorial Paratexts – Prefatorial Poem (*Venganza*)

Partnoy's authorial paratext written in prose – the 'Introduction' to *Venganza* – is stylistically distinguished because its form contrasts with the collection's poetry. Consequently, judging by the content and style of the prefatorial poems used by Partnoy – 'Datos biográficos' in *Venganza* and 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' in *Fuegos*, they would not seem out of place in the main text of the collections.⁴⁸ However, as Genette explains, 'a paratextual element [...] necessarily has a *location* that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself (1997: 4, italics in the original). Partnoy has chosen to situate both poems as paratexts and I will analyse the effect that this produces.

Each prefatorial poem appears separately from the other poems in their respective collections. 'Datos biográficos' is situated after the contents page, which follows the title page and dedication to Partnoy's parents. It is grouped together with the 'Introduction', distinct from the main body of the collection. 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' also occurs after the title page and dedication to Partnoy's and Wronsky's daughters, but it is placed before the contents page.

I read both poems as prefatorial following Genette: 'I will use the word *preface* to designate every type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it' (1997: 161, italics in the original). 'Datos biográficos' and 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' provide an 'advance commentary' on their respective texts (Genette 1997: 237). The poems give the reader an insight into the material they will encounter in the main text, in terms of the collections' basis in historical events and Partnoy's poetic approach.

In the prose preface to *Venganza*, Partnoy creates the figure of the poet-survivor,⁴⁹ the person who has lived through extreme violence and who responds by writing about it. The poem 'Datos biográficos', which directly follows *Venganza*'s

⁴⁸ Transcriptions of both poems are included in Appendix A.

⁴⁹ 'Poet-survivor' is my term. I refer to the 'survivor' of human rights violations as Partnoy does in her theoretical work.

'Introduction', is where this figure is put into action. At the same time, Partnoy follows the prose preface by extending its linguistic play on the use of third and first person.

The adjective 'biográficos' (rather than 'autobiográficos') in the title suggests that the information revealed in the poem will be about a third person, yet the speaker of the poem is a poetic 'I' (*Venganza*, 18).⁵⁰ This voice can be read as a poeticised version of Partnoy, though her allusion to the third person may be interpreted as an authorial gesture of separation. Partnoy's ambiguous poetic 'I' reminds the reader that individual testimony also reflects a collective experience.

The noun 'dato', used in the poem's title, is significant in the testimonial context of the collection. It alludes to the 'factual' information provided in *testimonio*, where the testifier is commonly expected to produce verifiable details. Partnoy alludes to this approach to *testimonio* through the inclusion of 'datos' in her title, yet the poem is devoid of specific details. The poetic voice makes reference to certain human rights violations – exile, kidnap, illegal imprisonment, forced removal of child from parent, coup d'état – but the reader relies on the prose preface in *Venganza* for a deeper understanding of what happens to the poetic 'I'.

Unlike *Venganza's* prose preface, 'Datos biográficos' does not provide details of names, dates or statistics. Partnoy seeks to demonstrate a degree of universal experience amongst those persecuted by dictatorial states. She has already provided the reader with personal and historical information in the 'Introduction', sufficient for an understanding of the context of her poetry. Thus, *Venganza's* prefatorial poem prepares the reader for the manner in which Partnoy will present testimony in the collection ahead.

The testimonial first-person voice is present from the start of the poem, emphasised by Partnoy's anaphoric repetition of the personal pronoun 'me'. She denounces the abuses of dictatorship, yet the events presented are depicted in a temporally reversed manner. Each stanza is a complete sentence, which strengthens the divisions of time in the poem. The first stanza illustrates the speaker's forced exile,

⁵⁰ In Chapter 5, I discuss Partnoy's 'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro, y un país' (pp.260-274). Its chorus speaks in the first person.

then the following three stanzas discuss the event that led to the speaker's removal from her country.

Partnoy makes it clear that exile was not a destiny chosen by the poetic 'I': she was the object of a violent act: 'me sacaron la tierra | de debajo' (*Venganza*, 18). The action taken in the first two lines is performed by an unknown third person plural subject. The unnamed 'ellos' – later referred to as 'los milicos' – are part of the military regime responsible for human rights crimes. Removing any distinctive characteristics from the military, Partnoy refuses to give them an identity, contrasting with the poetic construction of her speaker's history. Partnoy reverses the destruction of identity and silencing of opposition that the dictatorship sought to achieve, a technique that she uses repeatedly in her poetry.⁵¹

The metaphor of exile constructed by Partnoy emphasises the lack of control the poetic 'I' had over her situation. The speaker is not portrayed as being uprooted, rather that the earth is taken from beneath her, an unnatural image emphasised by the stuttering sound in the stressed, repetitive first syllables of 'de debajo'.⁵² Partnoy continues, '– a eso llaman destierro –' (*Venganza*, 18). Opting for 'destierro' rather than 'exilio' and thus deconstructing the term for 'exile', Partnoy demonstrates the instability of the speaker's position through the image of the earth being removed from beneath her feet. As a symbol of the poetic voice's home country, earth is stressed through the half-rhyme 'tierra | destierro'. Partnoy's use of dashes typographically distinguishes the definition of exile from the experience of it, also

⁵¹ I discuss Partnoy's dehumanisation of the military in the following poems: 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' (Chapter 3, p.141), 'Balance' (Chapter 4, p.204), 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' (Chapter 5, pp.231-232). 'Preposiciones' (Chapter 5, p.221) and 'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país' (Chapter 5, p.264).

It is a literary technique that is notably different from her discussion of La Escuelita's prison guards in the appendix to *The Little School* (1998: 133-136) and in her CONADEP testimony (1981b). In both of those instances, Partnoy provides as many identifying details as possible, in the hope of the perpetrators of torture being brought to justice.

⁵² Unless otherwise indicated, all underlined sections in this thesis are mine, with the purpose of making clear to the reader my discussion of poetic form.

...serving as a visual marker of rupture. The separation of the line about the term 'destierro' from the rest of the stanza represents the speaker's spatial displacement.

Where the first half of the stanza represents the poetic voice being forced into exile, the second part of the sextet explores her response to the expulsion from her country. Partnoy writes:

o sea que, de pronto,
me faltó el suelo
y me sobró distancia. (*Venganza*, 18)

The first comma in the poem's fourth line is the first instance of caesura in 'Datos biográficos'. It works as a visual representation of the phrase 'de pronto', where the line is bisected by the comma before these words are read. The punctuation again suggests rupture, representing the sudden and rapid nature of the speaker's exile, as well as the lack of control she has over her circumstances.

Partnoy repeats the personal pronoun 'me' and it is only as the grammatical object that the poetic 'I' can be perceived in 'Datos biográficos', an indication of her vulnerability in circumstances of dictatorship. The speaker's experience of exile is portrayed spatially through contrast of lack and surplus. 'El suelo' is emphasised by Partnoy's use of half-rhyme as well as the definite article, which does not occur in the next line, presumably for reasons of metric stress. Partnoy uses 'el suelo' to mirror 'la tierra' as metaphorical representation of the speaker's home country, suggesting that the poetic 'I' has been detached from her gravitational centre and is now in unearthly imbalance.

The absence of *terra firma* is counterposed with an image of abundance, 'y me sobró distancia'. The surplus is an unwelcome, intangible geographic separation. Its abstract nature means the poetic 'I' is unable to take action to redress the balance. Partnoy highlights the image with sibilance, building on her use of sound in the stanza. Homeoteleuton is recurrent – in the form of repeated '-o' endings and echoed by the 'o' at the beginning of the fourth line – creating the impression of a lament in the sextet, which can be read as a sonic allusion to the speaker's anguish.

Partnoy's use of homeoteleuton is carried into the second stanza, where the discussion of events prior to the speaker's exile begins. She writes:

Pero un día
antes de aquello
me habían arrancado
la libertad de cuajo,
[...]. (*Venganza*, 18)

The first stanza's absence of temporal specificities is extended with 'un día'. The indeterminate past setting sounds fairytale-like, which could be read as an early indication of the tone that will be taken in the first poems of the collection.⁵³ It maintains Partnoy's non-specific rendering of events in 'Datos biográficos'. Alliteration – 'antes de aquello' – emphasises that the events of the second stanza took place before those of the first, while the metaphor 'me habían arrancado | la libertad de cuajo' mirrors the previous discussion of exile.

The image of the poetic voice being pulled out by the roots is a literal 'des-tierra'.⁵⁴ It is not, however, a reference to exile and instead alludes to the disappearance and imprisonment of the poetic 'I', with which the reader is already familiar from *Venganza's* prose preface. Partnoy mirrors the poem's first line, reinforcing the speaker's vulnerability. She has no power against the dictatorial oppressors, who are again unidentified and depicted solely through the third person plural conjugation. Assonance and eye-rhyme ('arrancado | libertad') highlights the relationship between the terms, stressing the role the first plays in the destruction of the latter. Partnoy uses enjambment to quicken the pace between the second stanza's third and fourth lines. So doing, she suggests the suddenness and speed at which the speaker's freedom has been removed. Partnoy uses heptasyllables for the third and

⁵³ Directly addressing a child listener, these poems are 'A mi hija (Cartas desde la cárcel)' and 'Visita', which I analyse in Chapter 4 (pp.161-170 and pp.170-174).

⁵⁴ In her poetry, Partnoy repeatedly depicts exile in terms of a physical removal from the earth. I discuss this motif in Chapter 4, in my analyses of 'Compañero de juegos' (p.192) and 'Mi madero y yo' (p.196).

fourth lines, which form a split fourteen-syllable line – a technique that recurs in the second stanza. The metrical composition of the lines reflects their content: the division of the poetic ‘I’ from her freedom of person.

As she provides more information about the speaker’s circumstances, Partnoy echoes the *faltar/sobrar* construction introduced at the end of the first stanza. She writes ‘[...] me faltaba el aire | y me sobraban rejas,’ (*Venganza*, 18). Air serves metaphorically represents freedom, although it can be read more literally as a lack of access to the fresh air or open sky for the speaker. The sense of suffocation implies both the absence of freedom and the constant threat experienced by the poetic voice while she is imprisoned. Partnoy writes in *Venganza*’s ‘Introduction’ of being ‘in a concentration camp where torture, executions, sexual harassment, hunger, and the certainty of an imminent death haunt the victims’ (*Venganza*, 11). The synecdochic ‘rejas’ refer to the prison and, by alluding to the speaker’s imprisonment without naming it as such, Partnoy undermines the extent of the power that the speaker’s captors have. Yet through the juxtaposition of symbols of freedom – ‘el aire’ – and captivity – ‘rejas’, Partnoy reinforces the absence of liberty for the poetic ‘I’.

The poem’s discussion of the speaker’s emotions, in response to the violation of her human rights, is unexpected. Partnoy writes that:

me sentía
un poco mejor que antes,
que cuando me quitaron
a mi hija de los brazos:
en ese entonces
me faltaba todo – el futuro –
(podría decir que me sobró la vida). (*Venganza*, 18)

The reader is taken further back in the speaker’s history, to another ‘antes’, when she was forcibly separated from her daughter. Although the ambiguity of the poetic ‘I’ is still at play here, the mention of a daughter reminds the reader of the similarity with Partnoy’s situation. She writes in the ‘Introduction’ that, after her kidnap, ‘her eighteen-month-old daughter [was] left behind, [...] whom the torturers insisted they

were going to kill' (*Venganza*, 11). Partnoy's parents looked after her daughter and, while Partnoy was a political prisoner (no longer a *desaparecida*), she was allowed to see her family and daughter (*Venganza*, 12). It is with this prior knowledge that the reader can understand why the speaker, a poeticised Partnoy, might feel 'un poco mejor', even though she is still imprisoned.

The phrase 'me sentía | un poco mejor' mimics the irony used in *Venganza's* 'Introduction' to discuss the relative 'freedoms' Partnoy experienced in the final prison. Her use of the velar plosive in these lines – 'un poco mejor que antes, | que cuando me quitaron' – produces a repeated hard sound, which does not sonically correlate with the notion of the poetic 'I' feeling 'un poco mejor'. Partnoy emphasises that the speaker is not in a situation conducive to emotional wellbeing, although her own imprisonment is marginally more bearable than the threat of her child being at risk.

Irony highlights the injustices experienced by the poetic 'I', while the downplaying of her emotions is starkly juxtaposed with the removal of her child. The lines 'que cuando me quitaron | a mi hija de los brazos' are two heptasyllables and the enjambment at the end of the first allows for them to be read as a broken fourteen-syllable line. This echoes the previous split fourteen-syllable line in the poem, 'me habían arrancado | la libertad de cuajo'. Metric rupture reflects the traumatic situations that poetic 'I' and child are experiencing. Moreover, both lines are structured in a similar manner. They begin with the temporal situation of events in the past, followed by verbs of violent removal. In the second half of both lines, the nouns and phrases relate to each other: 'la libertad' is mirrored by 'mi hija' and 'de cuajo' by 'de los brazos'. Freedom is embodied by the child and the speaker's arms can be read as standing for the earth in which her daughter is rooted. Thus, the extreme events experienced by parent and child are poetically intertwined.

Using the poem's recurring formulation of lack and surplus, Partnoy illustrates the speaker's emotional response to the separation from her daughter:

en ese entonces
me faltaba todo – el futuro –
(podría decir que me sobró la vida). (*Venganza*, 18)

In the first line quoted above, Partnoy's use of alliteration, assonance and sibilance echoes 'los brazos' of the previous line. Repetitive sounds suggest the constant stress felt by the poetic 'I'. Where in the previous *faltar/sobrar* formulations, a specific noun has been described as lacking ('el suelo' or 'el aire'), in this instance, the poetic voice misses 'todo'.

Partnoy linguistically approaches the parent's anguish at being forcibly separated from her child. The dashes on the page, as earlier in the poem, are a typographic representation of this figurative wound. The noun Partnoy uses to elaborate on the lack of 'todo' is 'el futuro', which alliterates with 'faltaba'. It implies that, in the absence of her daughter, the speaker finds it impossible to have positive aspirations. The child is part of the next generation and, as such, represents the future. Until she can be certain that her daughter is safe, the speaker's emotional distress will be continuous, emphasised by the imperfect conjugation.

Partnoy's use of the imperfect is juxtaposed with the following line's preterite, a snapshot of the moment in which the speaker and her child were separated. Stating that 'me faltaba todo', the speaker has reached the extreme and continuing the *faltar/sobrar* formulation could diminish its impact. Accordingly, parentheses work to maintain repeated phrasing without undermining the speaker's grief.

The phrase in brackets can be read as a poetic aside to the reader.⁵⁵ So doing, Partnoy signals that it is a literary device. Through the inclusion of a metapoetic comment in 'Datos biográficos', Partnoy acknowledges the force of the poem as a literary object. Her work is testimonial, but these poems are poems in their own right. Metre is used to both poetic and testimonial effect in the parenthetical line. It is the poem's only dodecasyllable and its traditional poetic format is contrasted with the portrayal of instability and anguish. A flashback to the moment of separation is provided by the preterite: 'me sobró la vida'. It was too much for the speaker to bear.

⁵⁵ I discuss Partnoy's further use of asides in 'Cuatro postales' (Chapter 3, p.154), 'Epitafio' (Chapter 4, p.180), 'Mi madero y yo' (Chapter 4, p.197), and 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' (Chapter 5, pp.227-228 and 233-234).

Partnoy does not linger on her speaker's grief and, instead, uses the third stanza to reinforce the role of memory in the story related in 'Datos biográficos'. She writes:

Y sin embargo
todavía me acordaba
del día que los milicos
metieron a mi patria entre barrotes,
[...]. (*Venganza*, 18)

The new stanza is linked to the last two lines of the previous stanza through the unstressed homeoteleuton of 'futuroo' and 'sin embargo', and the stressed vowel in 'sobro'. Partnoy suggests that, even during this time of intense distress for the speaker, there was something that helped animate her. This is revealed to be her political convictions.

Partnoy's use of the verb 'acordarse' is key and speaks to the important role memory plays in *testimonio*, as well as in the personal history of the poetic 'I'. Occurring at the same position in respective lines, the rhyme 'todavía | del día' highlights the link between the speaker's memory and the events that took place. Partnoy presumably refers to the coup on 24th March 1976 in Argentina. However, the ambiguity of the poetic 'I', and the lack of geographical location, allow for this to be read in a broader sense. The speaker in 'Datos biográficos' is associated with citizens of many countries who have resisted the dictatorial takeover of their nations.

The pejorative term 'los milicos' builds on the opposition established between the poetic 'I' and 'ellos' earlier in the poem. It further undermines the position of the military and shifts the balance of power in favour of the poetic voice, in spite of the multiple abuses they have carried out against her. The use of 'patria' instead of 'país' in the next line – 'metieron a mi patria entre barrotes' – indicates the affect the speaker has for her home country. Furthermore, the etymology of 'patria' suggests the country has a parental relationship with the speaker, as she does with her missing daughter. Partnoy reminds the reader of the destructive force that dictatorship has on family and community, as well as on the lives of individuals. The reference to

‘barrotes’ is a metaphor for widespread repression, although it more literally references the imprisonment of those who were seen to display opposition to the regime.

So far in the stanza, the pace of the lines has been increased by enjambment. Consequently, the comma after ‘entre barrotes’ indicates a pause. It separates the memory of what happened to the speaker’s country from how she responded. She was motivated by injustice and this can be seen in her response to the action of ‘los milicos’: ‘ese día me sobró la fuerza | y me faltó el miedo’ (*Venganza*, 18). Partnoy reverses the order of the *faltar/sobrar* formulation to demonstrate the strength of her poetic ‘I’, where the previous formulations portrayed her vulnerability.

The sibilance in the first of these lines, ‘ese día me sobró la fuerza’ stresses the speaker’s opposition to dictatorship and the early stage at which she took up this position: ‘ese día’. Her response to the military takeover was immediate and the depiction of strength is heightened through contrast with the absence of fear. Through structuring ‘Datos biográficos’ in reverse temporal order, Partnoy addresses human rights violations that her poetic ‘I’ has experienced – forcible separation from her child, imprisonment, exile. She touches on the speaker’s emotional response to these events, yet the poem ends up with the poetic ‘I’ in a position of fortitude. She is still the grammatical object, but Partnoy structures the last lines in such a way that her defiance is palpable.

In the poem, there are only two instances where the subject of a verb is named. These occur in the third stanza, where ‘los milicos | metieron a mi patria entre barrotes’ and in the fourth and final stanza, composed of a single line: ‘Allí empezó la cosa.’ (*Venganza*, 18). These two lines are set in opposition. The adverb ‘allí’ is used temporally, referring back to the day of military takeover, when the poetic voice’s resistance began. The line mirrors Partnoy’s personal involvement in political activism, which she dates to the same moment: ‘en realidad yo no pensé a militar [...] a fondo hasta el momento del golpe’ (Partnoy 2012). ‘La cosa’ is the ambiguous subject of the verb, though it can be understood to refer broadly to the resistance movement against the dictatorship. Partnoy constructs the speaker’s ‘datos biográficos’ in relation to the political conviction that drives her. The connection between the poetic voice’s

resistance and strength is reinforced by the half rhyme between ‘fuerza’ and ‘cosa’, the last word of the poem.

Like the allographic paratexts and authorial preface, ‘Datos biográficos’ can be read as a means of recording the details of a life story. Where the identity of Partnoy is evident in the other paratexts, ambiguity makes the poetic voice’s identity uncertain in ‘Datos biográficos’. The speaker’s biography closely resembles that of Partnoy and the poetic ‘I’ may be read as a poeticised version of the writer, although the reader cannot be certain about this.

I think the ambiguity is an indication of Partnoy’s solidarity with people who have shared her experiences and a desire to deflect attention from herself. However, the reader will be able to perceive connections between *Venganza*’s ‘Introduction’ and the prefatorial poem that directly follows it. The prefatorial poem functions to take the reader yet farther into the liminal space between the covers of the book and the collection’s main text. Partnoy’s development of the poet-survivor in the prose preface segues into the poetic ‘I’-survivor in ‘Datos biográficos’. The reader is invited to make a connection between the two, and is gradually introduced to the idea of poetic *testimonio*. The poetic ‘I’ need not be read as entirely autobiographical, but in order for the collection to be understood as *testimonio*, information about Partnoy’s life is essential.

2.8 Authorial Paratexts – Prefatorial Poem (*Fuegos*)

The prefatorial poem in *Fuegos*, like ‘Datos biográficos’, provides the reader with a poetically-constructed life story. ‘Disclaimer *intraducible*’ acts as a transition into the main text, though its title prefigures a potentially fraught relationship between the reader and the collection. It ‘begs for lenience and understanding on the part of the reader’ (Partnoy 2009: 16).

The poem appears with English and Spanish language versions on the same page:

Disclaimer *intraducible*

My life	Mi vida
is based	se basa
on a true story.	en una historia real. (<i>Fuegos</i> , n. pag.)

Notable here is the introduction of the legalistic term ‘disclaimer’, which alludes to the judicial implications of *testimonio*. It also responds to the contractual nature of autobiography, where according to Lejeune’s autobiographical pact, ‘the reader can be assured that the “I” of narrative is equal to the “I” of author’ (Leggott 2001: 12).⁵⁶ In prose works, disclaimers are often used to protect the author and publisher from legal action in the event of a disgruntled reader’s conflation of narrative voice with the author’s: ‘all the characters in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental’ (Freight Books 2015: n. pag).

Partnoy, however, uses her ‘Disclaimer *intraducible*’ to highlight the similarity between herself – the poet – and her poetic ‘I’. The noun ‘disclaimer’ is defined as ‘a renunciation or denial of a legal claim or interest’ (Oxford English Dictionary), but Partnoy does have a vested interest in how her own story is portrayed, as well as the other instances of human rights violations she discusses in her poetry. This disclaimer is ironic and serves as a notice to the reader of the poet’s personal involvement in the subject matter she will discuss in the collection. Partnoy also uses the poem as a warning to the reader that they cannot have the comforting reassurance that any similarity to real people or events is purely coincidental.

⁵⁶ ‘Disclaimer *intraducible*’ was first published as the title poem of an article written by Partnoy in 2009 (‘Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life / is Based / on a Real Story’ in *Biography*, 32: 1, 16-25). The article was published in 2009, following Partnoy’s attendance at the International Auto/biography Conference in 2008 at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa. It is not a reproduction of the ‘testimonial performance’ that was her keynote speech, but the article discusses ‘the same issues and proposals that [she] presented at the Sixth Biennial IABA Conference’ (Partnoy 2009: 17). Philippe Lejeune gave the opening plenary at this conference (Prosser 2007: 289).

'Disclaimer *intraducible*' is unusual in all of Partnoy's collections for its inclusion of the English-language and Spanish-language versions of the poem, and their shared title, on the same page. All other poems in *Venganza*, *Volando*, and *Fuegos* are presented with the original title and poem on the left-hand page and the translated poem and title on the right-hand page. The bilingual nature of 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' represents Partnoy's fluid use of the languages in *Fuegos* as well as referencing her situation as a native Spanish-speaker in the United States, a majority English-speaking country. Depending on which language is taken to be dominant, the title's meaning can be interpreted differently.

If read from an English-speaking perspective, what might be seen as untranslatable is Partnoy's experience of dictatorship. She is able to write about her experiences, but there will always be a gap in understanding between the survivor of atrocity and the person who has not been through similar circumstances: the *umbral* identified by Forcinito, that I discussed in Chapter 1 (see pp.33-34). From a Spanish-language perspective, however, the title of 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' speaks to a difference in cultural understanding.

Partnoy discusses cultural differences in the article where the poem was first published, 'Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life / is Based / on a Real Story'. She writes:

Both the heavy legal connotations of the word "disclaimer," and the fascination in the US with actual life stories of redemptive value, are so hard to translate into Latin American cultural parameters that the word "untranslatable" does not begin to address the task. The Spanish term "intraducible" enacts that difficulty on the page, while asserting my US Latina identity as a poet and scholar who thrives in crossing borders. (2009: 17)

Partnoy stresses in her article that the poem 'showcases the tensions between the need of survivors to tell our life stories, and the constraints exercised by publishers, translators, scholars and human rights professionals' (2009: 17).

Partnoy has personal experience of these 'constraints', which she encountered when trying to publish *The Little School*. 'Los doce o trece cuentos de la versión original'

were written in Spanish 'para mandarla al concurso de testimonio de Casa de las Américas' (2007: 32). When Partnoy was communicating with Cleis Press, she explains that:

después de mandar la traducción, recibo una llamada de Cleis diciendo que estaba todo bien pero que el libro iba a ser muy finito, que no iba a tener un lomo y que no se iba a ver en los estantes; por consiguiente, no se iba a vender. A esto se sumaba que, al ser tan finito el libro, no se iba a poder cobrar lo suficiente para recuperar los gastos de publicación y propaganda. Resultado: yo tenía que escribir más. ¿Te imaginas? (2007: 32).

The publishing industry has certain models that it maintains for practical, financial reasons. Its writers are expected to comply with these specifications, which may not seem unreasonable in the case of fiction. However, in the context of *testimonio*, where the writer has revisited traumatic events in order to write about their experiences, the demands of the industry are at odds with the solidarity that the publisher presumably has with the *testimoniante*.

In her theoretical work, Partnoy is critical of traditional scholarly approaches to *testimonio*, particularly with respect to academics who she perceives as unsympathetic towards survivors (for example Beatriz Sarlo or David Stoll), and it is interesting to see how she incorporates this into her poetic work.⁵⁷ Genette reminds us, however, that 'no one is required to read a preface' (1997: 4) and neither can it be expected that the reader will have encountered Partnoy's epitextual work, including 'Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life / is Based / on a Real Story'. Consequently, I seek to analyse the stanza that forms 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' in its role as paratext to the collection and consider the effect it may have on the reader who is not familiar with Partnoy's academic writing, although I will refer to her article to enhance my argument.

⁵⁷ This is particularly notable in 'Preposiciones' (see Chapter 5, pp.214-225).

At first glance, the poem may be read in reference to the allographic paratextual information in *Fuegos* that mentions Partnoy's experience of dictatorship in Argentina and her forced exile to the United States. The 'real story' mentioned in 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' can be seen as the author's confirmation of the details provided by Settlement House, and the poem addresses a potential unwillingness or inability on the part of the reader to conceive of such atrocity. A 'story' is typically construed as fiction, yet Partnoy's qualification of this tale as 'real' indicates its factual foundations.

The reader has not yet encountered Partnoy's telling of her experiences in *Fuegos* and, so, the prefatorial poem functions as an 'advance commentary' on the text. It reminds the reader that what they are about to read is not fiction and it prepares the reader to understand the poems in relation to the events they discuss. Furthermore, the poet's word choice with the phrase 'is based | on a real story' instead of writing 'is | a real story' is significant.

The phrase 'true story' is perhaps more common in English, but it is likely that Partnoy mimics what sounds more natural in Spanish, 'una historia real'. Its cinematic connotations echo the line 'this film is based on a true story', which in turn makes proleptic reference to the poem 'Escenas perdidas de la película "Los funerales de nuestra generación"' in *Fuegos* (*Fuegos*, 52-54).⁵⁸ Partnoy writes that 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' 'is drenched in irony, a reaction to the current mass media interest in "real" stories, and their obsessing over the truth when dealing with survivors' life accounts' (2009: 18). Partnoy describes her attitude in 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' as 'tongue in cheek', mocking approaches to *testimonio* which focus on the quantifiable veracity of a testimony, rather than listening to the story it tells.

⁵⁸ 'Escenas perdidas' is dedicated to 'Marta Landí [sic]' and is about an Argentine activist who, like Partnoy, was involved with the Juventud Peronista (Zoglin 2001: 72). Dora Marta Landi Gil 'fled to Paraguay escaping from the harsh repression in Argentina' (Osorio and Enamoneta 2007). In March 1977, she was kidnapped in Asunción (Paraguay), then taken to Argentina by 'secret rendition' (Osorio and Enamoneta 2007). This was part of Operation Condor, an international political scheme between dictatorial nations whereby 'Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay engaged in the clandestine exchange of intelligence and prisoners from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s' (Zoglin 2001: 58). Landi remains disappeared.

At the same time, the speaker of ‘Disclaimer *intraducible*’ can be understood as making an internal, as well as external, address. Partnoy has discussed her initial approach to writing and thinking about traumatic experiences in the third person as ‘una técnica de protección psicológica’ (2007: 33). While recognising that personal experience of human rights abuse might once have seemed unimaginable (for example, in pre-dictatorial Argentina), the prefatorial poem in *Fuegos* is an assertion of the first person narrative. When Partnoy’s poetic ‘I’ utters ‘mi vida’, it is simultaneously a claiming of personal experience and an affirmation that the speaker is still alive.

‘Disclaimer *intraducible*’ also gestures towards the reluctance of some readers to recognise the reality of human rights violations. Whether through denial as a knee-jerk reaction to the recounting of distressing events – or the assumption that a person could not survive so much trauma – Partnoy signals that some audiences may not be willing to accept that the story of her life is non-fiction. The inclusion of ‘Disclaimer *intraducible*’ as a preface to *Fuegos* is a declaration of her authority and lived experience, and it is a demand that her poetic *testimonio* be witnessed.

2.9 Conclusion

The paratexts in Partnoy’s *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos* occupy the liminal space between her poetry and the reader as testimonial audience. Without paratextual information about Partnoy’s life, the poems could be interpreted as addressing issues of human rights, but the reader would not be aware of their testimonial nature. Paratexts play the role of ensuring that the reader has access to sufficient contextual information to read and respond to poetry as *testimonio*.

Scholarly studies have often struggled to place *testimonio* in the category of ‘literature’, yet the allographic paratexts in Partnoy’s collections do just that. The publishers’ paratexts confirm the connection between Partnoy’s writing and her lived experience of human rights violations. Particularly in the case of *Volando* and *Fuegos*, the publishing houses set Partnoy in the context of their work as distributors of poetry, emphasising the literary nature of her writing. Laudatory reviews by Rich, Alegría and

Wronsky, as well as the latter's 'Translator's Notes' function, in *Volando*, to reinforce the publisher's endorsement of Partnoy's skill as a poet.

The authorial paratexts in all three collections highlight the union of literature and *testimonio*. Dedications speak beyond their apparently private address, inviting the reader into Partnoy's intimate sphere. In *Volando* and *Fuegos*, the phrasing of the dedications relates to metaphorical elements present within the collections, hinting at what is to come in the texts ahead. *Venganza*'s prose preface similarly draws the reader in to the collection by piquing their interest in the narrative Partnoy constructs.

The prefatorial poems in *Venganza* and *Fuegos* are paratexts that take the reader yet closer to the main text of the collections, urging this reader to continue and learn more about the circumstances alluded to in the poems. Like all of the paratexts to Partnoy's collections, 'Datos biográficos' and 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' serve to bridge the gap in knowledge and experience between Partnoy and her readers, most of whom have presumably not lived under dictatorship. However, their form as poems is significant. As I will demonstrate in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the *testimonio* of *Venganza*, *Volando*, and *Fuegos* involves a balancing act between the political and the literary. Partnoy blends names, dates, locations and statistics with a wide range of poetic techniques to create a literary denunciation of dictatorship. Prefatorial poems in *Venganza* and *Fuegos* serve to introduce Partnoy's readers to this possibility.

The allusive nature of 'Datos biográficos' combines metaphor with references to human rights violations that the reader can recognise from *Venganza*'s other paratexts. Partnoy's emphasis on the emotions of her poetic 'I' helps the reader relate, despite great differences in personal experience, to the *testimoniante*'s inner experience. The concluding line of 'Datos biográficos' – 'Allí empezó la cosa' – is more than an allusion to the beginning of Argentina's 1976-1983 dictatorship. It is a metapoetic reference to 'Datos biográficos' being the very first poem in the collection. Partnoy encourages the reader to proceed, to find out more about what happened next and, similarly, 'Disclaimer *intraducible*' intrigues with the idea of 'a real story'. The inclusion of auto-referential elements in Partnoy's prefatorial poems is an advance signal that her testimonial poems are literary objects in their own right.

Testimonio seeks to urge its readers to action, in the hope of preventing future atrocities. Yet testimonial writing must first be approachable for those readers. While

reports by human rights organisations, such as *Nunca Más*, are essential for legal campaigns against impunity, they are extremely distressing to read. The Black British poet Roger Robinson asserts that poets ‘can translate trauma into something that people can face [...] allowing others to bear the idea of trauma safely. [...] Poems are empathy machines.’ (Robinson 2020).

Partnoy’s rendering of dictatorial violence emphasises the humanity of the people who were harmed by the regime. Her poetry encourages the reader to develop an emotional connection with the *testimoniante*, a person who has experienced trauma that may seem too frightening to grasp. It is through fostering empathy that Partnoy seeks to expose the brutality of human rights abuse, engage her reader and nurture continued participation in activism against injustice.

Chapter 3

‘Abro bastante la boca | y ahí les cuento’:

Towards a Poetics of Testimony

The purpose of this chapter is to understand Partnoy’s approach to writing poetic *testimonio*.⁵⁹ Taking the metapoetic ‘Arte poética’ and ‘Arte política’ as my starting point, I will analyse the elements that are key to Partnoy’s poetry about dictatorship. Emphasising subtlety as a form of resistance, she also combines the representation of emotions and corporeal experiences with explicit writing about human rights violations.

I will then consider Partnoy’s development of the first person testimonial voice, as well as her depiction of the testimonial act and the ramifications this has for the *testimoniante*. *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos* all confront the issue of speech and how a survivor can communicate their experiences: trauma, and specifically torture, can profoundly affect on a person’s relationship with language. Partnoy explores this through a combination of *testimonio* and metaphor, all the while emphasising resistance and the denunciation of the military dictatorship.

Throughout the chapter, I will focus on Partnoy’s use of poetic technique and will comment on how these literary devices mimic and complement the directly testimonial elements of the poems. Partnoy issues a challenge to the prevalent interpretation of Adorno’s assertion that ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’ (1967: 34), demonstrating instead the importance of poetry that denounces atrocity.

3.1 ‘Allí está la palabra’: Partnoy’s Poetic Manifestos – ‘Arte poética’ (*Venganza* and *Volando*) and ‘Arte política’ (*Fuegos*)

The poems ‘Arte poética’ and ‘Arte política’ are fundamental to Partnoy’s poetics and her approach to *testimonio*. Neither of the poems is testimonial, yet I will discuss their function as literary manifestos in the context of Partnoy’s work. While ‘Arte poética’

⁵⁹ Transcriptions of all poems analysed in Chapter 3 are included in Appendix B.

follows in the *Ars poetica* tradition, first associated with Horace, 'Arte política' has an explicit focus on human rights.

Both 'Arte poética' and 'Arte política' are metapoetic: they comment on the form, content and function of poetry. Each sheds light on Partnoy's three collections and the title of *Volando bajito* makes intertextual reference to 'Arte poética', indicating the poem's significance to Partnoy's poetics.⁶⁰ 'Arte poética' stresses the connection between language, metaphor and understatement as a means of resistance. 'Arte política' explores the relationship between poetry and politics through the literary technique, the portrayal of speech and the body, as well as references to historical sites of mass human rights abuse. Both poems demonstrate attitudes that are recurrent in Partnoy's poetry and illuminate her approach to *testimonio*.

The use of metapoetic writing is in evidence from the first two lines of 'Arte poética', which compose a single sentence. They set out a literary manifesto: 'Eso que vuela bajito | es mi poesía.' (*Venganza*, 68). The speaker, portrayed as a poet, is a recurrent figure in Partnoy's collections and can be read as a version of the writer herself.⁶¹ Partnoy first introduces the poetic 'I' through use of the possessive 'mi', but she does not appear as the subject until the poem's fifth line.

Poetry is the first subject of the 'Arte poética'. The pronoun 'eso' suggests that the speaker guides the reader to look in a particular direction, as the anthropomorphised 'mi poesía' initially portrayed in terms of space. Aural alliteration ('vuela bajito') is used to stress the connection between movement and the height at which it takes place. Partnoy's use of the diminutive 'bajito' is characteristic of

⁶⁰ 'Arte poética' is published in two of Partnoy's collections (*Venganza*, 68) and (*Volando*, 4). For simplicity of referencing, I will refer to the earlier publication of the poem.

⁶¹ For this reason, I will refer to Partnoy's usual testimonial poetic 'I' as 'she', even when the speaker's gender is unspecified. In Chapter 5, I discuss Partnoy's atypical use of the first person poetic voice in the poems 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' (pp.225-236), 'Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador' (pp.238-240), 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador (pp.240-247) and 'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país' (pp.260-274).

understatement in her work.⁶² Although this thesis considers *testimonio* in Partnoy, the poems are rarely graphic. Many of her texts are metaphorical and focus on the emotional and personal impact of atrocity. Partnoy writes from her situation as a survivor, and from the perspective of having been a *desaparecida*, to undermine the actions of the Argentine dictatorial authorities. Focusing on emotion, Partnoy's poetry is subtle, rather than overtly accusatory. 'Arte poética' illustrates this approach to poetic *testimonio*.

Each couplet in the poem is a split dodecasyllable. Bearing in mind the metapoetic nature of 'Arte poética', this seems to be an understated means of manipulating poetic form. There is no rhyme scheme that would immediately draw the reader's attention to the structure of the poem. Where each successive couplet is made up of a heptasyllable and a pentasyllable, the first two lines are an octosyllable and a tetrasyllable. Perhaps this serves to discreetly distinguish the poem's thesis, encapsulated in the initial couplet.

The low-flying image of poetry is reinforced through the third line's nominalisation of the verb 'rastrear': 'Rastreadora de olores | dentro del pasto' (*Venganza*, 68). Partnoy's feminine 'rastreadora' could be read as an echo of Sarmiento's *Facundo*, where he names the defining characteristics of gauchos. Described as 'el más extraordinario [de los gauchos]', the 'rastreador' has unparalleled tracking skills and is depicted in the determined pursuit – and subsequent apprehension – of a thief (Sarmiento 1921: n.p.). Illustrating 'mi poesía' in terms of this epithet, Partnoy may be seen as simultaneously claiming an innately Argentine identity for her poetic vocation, whilst asserting of her dedication to the pursuit of justice.

The personification of poetry builds through the image of it possessing a sense of smell, attempting to pick up the scent of things that have been concealed. Partnoy's

⁶² For further discussion of Partnoy's use of understatement and minimisation, see also my analyses in this chapter of 'Arte política' (pp.110), 'Testimonio' (pp.130) and 'Cuatro postales' (pp.151-152); in Chapter 4, 'Lo fatal' (pp.184), 'Compañero de Juegos' (pp.191) and 'Balance' (pp.202) and in Chapter 5, 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador' (pp.244-246), 'Palabras por Silvia' (pp.252) and 'Tragedia' (pp.268) in Chapter 5.

depiction of searching 'dentro del pasto' connotes the pampa and tallies with the gauchesque elements connoted by the term 'rastreadora'. The low level of the grassland reinforces the concept of poetry travelling at a low level, while the allusion to tracking suggests the ongoing search for information about the *desaparecidos*. The inclusion and significance of smell is perhaps unexpected in poetry, yet it features as a strong and unpleasant sensation in several of Partnoy's poems. For example, in 'Cuatro postales', she describes her poetic 'I' being covered with blankets 'que olían | a cuerpos sucios y aterrados' and in 'Clases de español' (*Volando*), Partnoy refers to 'el tufo de la muerte'.⁶³ These miasmas are used to describe extremely distressing circumstances, like the odour of fear in the twelfth line of 'Arte poética'.

Partnoy changes the subject of her poem from poetry itself to the first person poetic voice. She suggests an alignment between both through the similarity of their portrayal in 'Arte poética', as if poetry were an abstract extension of the poetic 'I'. The initial focus, however, is not on the speaker's actions, but on what the voice does not do. The position of poet, poetic 'I' and her poetry are encapsulated by the assertion: 'Yo no busco la altura.' (*Venganza*, 68). Partnoy's speaker further expresses a dislike of elevation with the phrase 'Vértigo el vuelo' (*Venganza*, 68). Its omission of a verb and subject increases the pace of the image, suggesting a kinaesthetic reaction to height and expanding sensory awareness in the poem. Homeoteleuton mimics the sound of an echo into the void, while alliteration emphasises the link between travelling at height and the sensation of vertigo.

The speaker's actions are reinforced through the sound in the next two lines: 'embisto la distancia | volando bajo' (*Venganza*, 68). Aural alliteration ('b', 'v'), assonance ('a' and 'o') and half-rhyme ('embisto | distancia' and 'distancia | volando') are used to highlight the developing portrayal of the poetic 'I'. The force evoked by the verb 'embestir' indicates that the voice has greatest strength at a low level. Enjambment between the lines increases the speed at which they are read, building on the energetic image. 'La distancia' is presented as something to be challenged,

⁶³ I analyse 'Cuatro Postales' in the final section of this chapter (pp.150-156). For a detailed reading of 'Clases de español', see my 2016 article "'Clases de español": Education and *testimonio* in the Poetry of Alicia Partnoy'.

which contrasts with the poem's focus on the vertical. Distance may indicate Partnoy's situation in exile or, earlier, the forced separation from her daughter, as I discussed in my analysis of the prefatorial poem 'Datos biográficos' in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, the opposition mounted by the poetic 'I' is subtle, 'volando bajo'.

'Arte poética' starts out by depicting 'mi poesía' in an abstract manner whereby poetry is at once personified and illustrated as mobile. In the ninth line, Partnoy returns to the metapoetic mention of the text, writing:

Allí está la palabra,
olvidadita,
fresca con las raíces
u oliendo a miedo. (*Venganza*, 68).

Using hyperbaton for emphasis, Partnoy's inclusion of the adverb 'allí' directs the reader to the location of 'la palabra'. She mirrors the poem's opening couplet, which also seem to point out a hidden object to the reader, grammatically reflecting this notion through the parenthetical inclusion of 'olvidadita'.

'La palabra' is depicted as out of plain sight and, similarly, the adjective 'olvidadita' is tucked away in the clause. The diminutive '-ita' recalls the first line's adverb 'bajito', emphasising the concept of understatement. It is ambiguous whether 'la palabra' refers to a specific word or if it is a symbol for writing. In light of the metapoetic connection with 'mi poesía' of line two, I interpret 'la palabra' as a metaphor for poetry. In the context of Partnoy's writing, I would add that it can be read as a reference to *testimonio*, strengthened by the following two lines, which mark the change to a darker tone.

The word is portrayed as a living thing, which is 'fresca con las raíces | u oliendo a miedo.' (*Venganza*, 68). Where the diminutive 'olvidadita' minimises the significance of 'la palabra' and make it seem unthreatening, Partnoy's extended personification creates a sense of unease in the poem. She does not expand, here, on the significance of the roots or what there is to fear, but this can be inferred contextually from *Venganza* and *Volando*, the collections where the poem is published. The sense of a spreading, unspecific threat recreates the climate of the dictatorship.

‘Las raíces’ can be understood as a metaphor for memory. The underground position of the roots maintains the low level of action in the poem and extends the image of the grassland. ‘La palabra’ is a synecdochic representation of poetry and Partnoy stresses the connection between the written word and the metaphor for memory. The adjective ‘fresca’ suggests that memory has not been dulled by time. In conjunction with the written word, it remains a powerful tool. In the context of Partnoy’s oeuvre, I understand this as a comment on the power of *testimonio*. Nonetheless, the next line’s synaesthetic description of ‘la palabra’, ‘oliendo a miedo’, is unsettling. Assonance emphasises the olfactory image, which illustrates the intangibility of fear. Partnoy’s inclusion of this line reinforces the connection between the synecdochic ‘palabra’ and her testimonial writing, which explores the emotional experience and the impact of atrocity.

In her poetry, Partnoy repeatedly refuses to let the military have the last word about the people they murdered. Instead, she relates the deaths of her *compañeros* to positive future events and the campaign for justice. The last four lines of ‘Arte poética’ extend the reification of ‘la palabra’ to represent Partnoy’s poetic homages to those who did not survive:

Tornasoleándose algo
como la carne
cadáver que transita
a la semilla. (*Venganza*, 68)

Where the poem’s previous sensory emphasis has been on smell and movement, ‘la palabra’ is described in terms of sight. The gerundial conjugation of ‘tornasolearse’ gives the sense that the transmission of light is ongoing. Stressed syllables (‘tornasoleándose’ and ‘algo’) link the qualifying adverb to the verb and, like Partnoy’s earlier use of the diminutive, ‘algo’ works as a form of minimisation. Yet the light produced is a symbol of hope.

‘La semilla’ represents the continuation of a political legacy: the struggle against oppression. Partnoy maintains natural imagery through the notion of the seed being fertilised by ‘la carne’, although alliteration in the words ‘como’, ‘carne’ and

'cadáver' stresses that the nourishment comes, in fact, from a dead body. In the context of Partnoy's writing, the 'cadáver' may be understood as a metonymic representation of those who were murdered in the 1976-1983 period in Argentina. Enjambment emphasises the connection between the elements in the last four lines, but the division of the lines separates 'carne' from 'cadáver'. Alongside the verb 'transitar', Partnoy emphasises transformation rather than creating a macabre image. The final image in 'Arte poética' is the seed, a metaphor for the written word and its potential.

Partnoy's discussion of the function of poetry is expanded in 'Arte política' (*Fuegos*), where she makes a more explicit connection to human rights. Like 'Arte poética', 'Arte política' opens with the metapoetic: 'Un verso desnudo de todo malabar | y *adorno*' (*Fuegos*, 42). The singular 'verso' is auto-referential and 'Arte política' comprises one sentence, composed of 3 stanzas. 'Desnudo' seems to imply that the poetic voice will be plain-speaking and the allusion to juggling – 'malabar' – hints at the linguistic play common to poetry. The speaker appears to be suggesting that the reader should expect no poetic sleight of hand, but this is upended by the second line's pun.

The noun 'adorno' comes from the verb 'adornar' and echoes 'malabar'. At the same time, however, Partnoy makes reference to the philosopher Theodor Adorno and his oft-quoted statement in 'Cultural Criticism and Society' that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (1967: 34). Many have taken this literally to mean that it is impossible to write poetry, or that it is unethical to do so, in the aftermath of atrocity. However, as Partnoy asserts, 'muchos lo interpretaron de que no se puede escribir poesía después del Holocausto, pero él dice que tenemos que escribir de otra manera' (Partnoy n.d.: 0:58). Partnoy writes 'Arte política' conscious of the debate around Adorno's words. The phrase 'desnudo de todo [...] *adorno*' simultaneously functions as an engagement with Adorno and an indication that his statement will not deter Partnoy from writing poetry. Partnoy typographically reinforces her play on words by 'adorning' the noun with italics, which appear more visually florid.

While the first two lines of 'Arte política' poetically perform the inverse of what their semantics suggest, the remainder of the first stanza is unequivocal. Partnoy uses 'Arte política' to stress the importance of fighting for human rights in the aftermath

of atrocity. Contrary to Adorno – or in opposition to the prevailing interpretation of Adorno – ‘Arte política’ demonstrates the significance of writing and speaking out about injustice. Partnoy does so, however, through illustrating what should *not* be said (i.e. that there is nothing left to say). It is only in the final stanza that her assertion becomes explicit.

Partnoy begins to explain the purpose of her ‘verso’ through the prohibition of speech in the first stanza: ‘para que nadie diga’ (*Fuegos*, 42). Her reference to ‘nadie’ can be read in relation to Adorno, but it is a generalised statement that encompasses everyone. The concatenation of lines that follows refers to historic instances of genocide:

que después de Auschwitz,
que después de la Conquista,
que después de tantas
diminutas ESMAs
de tantas pequeñas Sabras y Shatilas
de Ruanda y Kosovo
[...]. (*Fuegos*, 42)

By prolonging the conclusion of the main clause, the list mimics the suppression of speech. Anaphora indicates the repetition of violence in the locations and events referred to, while the creation of the list is reinforced by the presence of commas.

When enjambment is introduced in lines 8 and 9, the pace is increased. The references to one atrocity after another become difficult to grasp and the speed at which the lines are read reflect a sense of being overwhelmed. The repetition of ‘después’ in these lines can be thought of in terms of *el después*, the aftermath of dictatorship which Partnoy discusses in ‘Arte política’, many of her other poems, and in her theoretical writing.

In first mentioning Auschwitz, Partnoy makes a further connection to Adorno and makes it clear that she *is* writing poetry after Auschwitz. The name of the extermination camp has become synonymous for the Holocaust and all the nouns used in the stanza are symbolic for mass events. Specific locations are referred to, as

well as 'la Conquista', where no site is given because it refers to the broad Latin American context.

The lack of a noun in the sixth line, 'después de tantas', can be read as a hesitation on the part of speaker. It creates stress on the adjective 'tantas', while leaving the reader to imagine the innumerable possibilities that could follow. The voice moves from mentioning the immensely violent consequences of the arrival of Europeans in the Americas to the context of the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina.

ESMA, the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada in Buenos Aires is now nationally and internationally infamous. Partnoy does not refer to any of the prisons where she was held,⁶⁴ but rather chooses ESMA as a synecdoche for the human rights violations that took place during the dictatorship. The pluralisation of ESMA, in conjunction with the adjectival agreement of 'tantas' alludes to the hundreds of concentration camps that existed during the 1976-1983 period: there were approximately 340 clandestine detention centres in Argentina (CONADEP 1984).

Partnoy's use of the adjective 'diminutas' is the first instance of minimisation in this poem. It is not an attempt to diminish the experiences of the people who were imprisoned in ESMA, rather Partnoy uses sarcasm as she builds towards her central thesis in 'Arte política'. The poem works to counter any notion that there may be nothing left to say in the aftermath of mass human rights abuse. Consequently, Partnoy's use of understatement is used rhetorically to stress the dictatorial violence symbolised by ESMA. The diminutive 'pequeñitas' works to similar effect in the next line.

Partnoy refers to events that took place during Lebanon's 1975-1990 Civil War. A massacre occurred on 16-18 September 1982, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon on 6 July of that year (Gilbert 2012: 124). 'Hundreds of members of the Phalange party – a Lebanese Christian militia – in collaboration with the Israeli army, slaughtered about 2,000 Palestinian refugees [...] in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp located in Beirut' (Samaha 2012). Partnoy's use of 'tantas' and pluralised 'Sabras y Shatilas' emphasises that the events were not isolated and were part of widespread violence carried out against civilians.

⁶⁴ La Escuelita (Bahía Blanca), Villa Floresta (Bahía Blanca) and Villa Devoto (Buenos Aires).

In the last two lines of the stanza, Partnoy continues the list that began earlier, but the prepositional phrase 'que después' is removed; the reference to aftermath is now implicit. With this, the anaphora is reduced to the almost stuttering repetition of 'de'. In the final line of the first stanza, two countries are named, 'Ruanda y Kosovo' and are used as synecdoche for events that took place there. Partnoy refers to the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the 1998-1999 War in Kosovo.

The anaphoric 'de' is carried to the second stanza, which is composed of a single line: 'de todas las Faluyas bombardeadas' (*Fuegos*, 42). Its pluralisation and synecdoche mirror the lines of the first stanza. Partnoy has chosen for it to be a stand-alone line, which gives the imagery greater impact. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 is within recent memory, as is the 2004 siege of Fallujah, which 'killed thousands of civilians, and displaced hundreds of thousands more' (Caputi 2011). Partnoy lives in the USA and all three of her poetry collections have been published there. As she points out in the 'Introduction' to *Venganza*, US citizens are implicated in the actions of their government. The single-line stanza is used in 'Arte política' to highlight its significance to Partnoy's American readers.

The final stanza opens with a repetition of the poem's third line, 'para que nadie diga' (*Fuegos*, 42), and it is now that Partnoy defines what should not be said. The poem is written:

para que nadie diga
que nada que decir
nos queda
[...]. (*Fuegos*, 42)

Alliteration stresses the interconnectedness of these lines. The negation implied by 'nadie' and 'nada' stresses the prevention of speech. Hypothetical speech, represented by the subjunctive is juxtaposed with its absence, 'nada que decir'. This last phrase mimics spoken language, reinforcing the poetic illustration of speech.

Hyperbaton is used for emphasis in the stanza's first two lines, highlighting the relationship between speech and lack of speech before the introduction of the first person plural. Partnoy's use of reported speech makes it unclear whether the poetic

'I' is included in the 'nosotros' or not. The poetic voice reacts against a particular kind of speech and the metapoetic form of 'Arte política' is a rejection of the idea that 'nada que decir | nos queda'. However, the speaker alludes to a community – one that includes the reader, implying collective responsibility. Partnoy maintains that people must not remain silent after atrocity. Her position as a survivor is what motivates her activism and her testimonial writing.

The first person plural speaker is developed in the last five lines of the poem. Partnoy focuses on depicting the body, writing:

que nada ya nos parte en seco
el cerebro la lengua
y alguna otra víscera
que se da el lujo
de palpar los duelos. (*Fuegos*, 42)

The repetition of the phrase 'que nada', combined with the adverb 'ya', is a reassertion that there is no excuse for remaining silent. Societal responsibility is emphasised by the inclusion of the first person plural pronoun. The conjugation of the term 'partir en seco' refers to the excision of parts of the body that experience and express pain. The fourth last line poetically represents the notion of 'partir en seco', where 'el cerebro' and 'la lengua' are both mentioned. Partnoy's use of asyndeton visually represents the division of parts of the body.

The brain and the tongue are symbols of thinking and talking and Partnoy stresses that these activities should not be prevented. Contrasting with the poem's earlier depiction of geographically disparate locations, Partnoy concentrates in the third stanza on the interior space of the body. Her mention of 'víscera' alludes to the internal sensation of emotion, reinforced by the verb 'palpar', which extends the representation of bodily sensations by referring to actions of the heart. Although 'palpar' describes a regular heartbeat, the verb is also used to mean the quickened contractions of the heart, caused by the experience of stress. Thus, the phrase 'palpar el duelo' speaks to the emotional experience of grief as well as metaphorically representing the voicing of that emotion.

Apart from the penultimate line, the last four lines are heptasyllables and the metric repetition stresses the connection between their imagery. The interruption of the penultimate line's arrhythmic pentasyllable suggests a hiatus in the heartbeat, highlighting the noun 'lujo'. Partnoy's use of the term is partly hyperbolic and it is certainly unexpected against the backdrop of atrocity in 'Arte política'. She alludes to the unlikelihood of surviving a genocidal dictatorship and the 'privileged' position of the survivor. It is exceptional to be alive when so many have been murdered, yet the fact of being alive should not be unusual.

The central premise of 'Arte política' is the obligation to speak out against atrocity, as it is the main concern of Partnoy's testimonial work. She demonstrates how poetry can work toward that end through her response to the *Ars Poetica* format. In 'Arte poética', Partnoy explores subtle forms of expression and resistance, while in 'Arte política' her human rights agenda is overt and the poetic voice leaves no room for opposition. The metapoetic nature of each poem draws the reader's attention to literary and linguistic techniques, while setting out a manifesto for Partnoy's poetry. 'Arte poética' and 'Arte política' illuminate the approach Partnoy takes to writing and I seek to demonstrate how she puts this into action as poetic *testimonio*.

3.2 'Ellos sí saben': The Poetic 'I' as *testimoniante* in 'Juicio' (*Venganza*), 'Respuesta' (*Volando*) and 'Testimonio' (*Venganza*)

The act of testifying is portrayed by Partnoy in multiple poetic settings where her speaker struggles to talk about her experiences in front of unsympathetic audiences. In 'Juicio', Partnoy discusses the impossible circumstances of the *testimoniante* in a court setting, when there are no corroborating witnesses who are also willing to testify. 'Respuesta' renders an interaction with a person that is antagonistic to the poetic 'I', while 'Testimonio' is a meta-testimonial poem portraying the testimonial act and the figure of the *testimoniante*. I will explore the proximity between Partnoy and the poetic voice in these three texts, as well as the difficulties faced by a person testifying about atrocity.

The events represented in 'Juicio' may be familiar to the reader from *Venganza's* prefatorial 'Introduction'. In the paratext, Partnoy describes returning 'to Argentina in 1984 to appear before the Commission for the Investigation of Disappearances. Three years later she learns her testimony has been dismissed because the witnesses to her kidnaping [sic] were too frightened to speak up.' (*Venganza*, 15). The poem is dated '*Bahía Blanca, Semana Santa de 1987*' (*Venganza*, 84) and a reader familiar with the authorial preface would recognise the 3-year interval between the writer's 1984 testimony and the 'juicio' in 1987.

Opening with the adverb 'aquí', Partnoy situates the poem at the 'juicio', while her use of the present and perfect tenses involves the reader in the immediacy of the speaker's situation (*Venganza*, 84). The remainder of the first stanza sets out the legal requirements, demonstrating the obstacles to investigating certain crimes committed during the dictatorship:

Aquí
mis muertos tienen
que probar que sus muertes se debieron
a "circunstancias extremas y aberrantes." (*Venganza*, 84)

The first two lines' short lengths give a sense of breathlessness as if the poem were jotted down rapidly, suggesting a raw account of events. Building sibilance suggests a spitting or hissing sound as the frustration grows in the speaker's voice. The possessive pronoun and alliteration indicate a close relationship between the poetic 'I' and the deceased. Partnoy highlights obstacles faced at trial, using the verbal periphrasis 'tener que' to ironic effect. The dead are forced into the position of active subjects. Moreover, the 'tener | que' line break creates an awkward visual-linguistic fracture, suggesting the poetic voice's discomfort.

Legalese is signalled by quotation marks – ' "circunstancias extremas y aberrantes" ' – and to emphasise the absurd situation of the trial. Official linguistic formulations sound unsympathetic and it is grotesque to suggest that the victims of genocide died in anything other than extreme and aberrant circumstances.

The speaker's frustration is extended in the second stanza, where the voice becomes sarcastic:

A mí se me ha exigido una evidencia
de que no fué [sic] mi voluntad la de esfumarme
entre enero y abril, hace diez años. (*Venganza*, 84)

As the reader is aware, the speaker has survived traumatic experiences (kidnap, illegal detention, torture, exile). Yet when there is no official proof of such dictatorial crimes, the judicial onus is on the survivor to prove their occurrence. In contrast to the heavy connotations that the use of 'desaparecer' would bring in this context, Partnoy instead uses the verb 'esfumarse' to irreverent effect and mocks the inadequacy of the juridical system.

If the witnesses are unwilling to testify, it is of course impossible for the speaker to prove in a courtroom that she was kidnapped and held against her will. The verb 'exigir' (rather than 'pedir') emphasises the pressure put on the speaker. Assonance stresses the demand for evidence and, furthermore, Partnoy extends this poetic technique into the other two lines of the stanza. She creates a kind of poetic proof, whereby the court's demands are sonically connected (through the 'e'-assonance) with the fact of her forced disappearance from January to April, ten years before the date of the 'Juicio'. The lines thereby constitute poetic *testimonio*.

The absence of a named location alludes to the disorientation experienced by a person who has been kidnapped. However, the dates refer to the time Partnoy was held at La Escuelita, from 12 January 1977 to 25 April 1977 (A.M. Partnoy 1981c). While at the eponymous trial, the poetic 'I' is unable to provide the officially required proof. Bearing in mind the difficulties of providing or sourcing legally-recognised forms of evidence, the majority of Partnoy's published work is literary testimony, both *The Little School/La Escuelita* (now recognised as part of the Argentine testimonial canon) and, as I argue in this thesis, her poetry.

In the authorial paratext to the first Argentine edition of *La Escuelita*, Partnoy writes: 'en diciembre de 1999, ante la iniciativa del fiscal Hugo Cañón, este texto fue

incluido como evidencia en los juicios por la verdad que se llevaron a cabo en Bahía Blanca.’ (2006b: 123). She explains in an interview that:

when the prosecutor [...] wrote to me and asked to introduce it as evidence, I thought he was nuts [...] and then it was truly useful because there are things that I’m saying that other witnesses were not remembering. (Partnoy 2015: 10:21)

Witness testimony is of great judicial importance, especially in cases where official written records are not forthcoming.

While Partnoy’s work to disseminate her testimony is prolific, others have not always felt able to speak openly about their experiences. The third stanza of ‘Juicio’ is composed of a rhetorical question posed by the poetic ‘I’:

Cómo consigo pruebas convincentes
de aquel que se tragó el miedo caliente
y le arden la laringe y el esófago
la punta de la lengua y las verdades? (*Venganza*, 84)⁶⁵

The presence of the first person singular conjugation in the stanza’s opening line emphasises the absurdity of the speaker’s situation. It might be understandable for the poetic ‘I’ to feel frustrated with the witness who does not speak up. However, Partnoy demonstrates empathy for the fear the witness experienced as a citizen living in a genocidal regime – and how they continue to be adversely affected in the present. Since the ‘Introduction’ to *Venganza* makes reference to the witnesses (plural) to Partnoy’s kidnap, it is notable that the singular ‘aquel’ is used in the third stanza of ‘Juicio’. The unspecific pronoun can be read broadly as a symbol for the many persons terrorised by the dictatorship.

In *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s ‘Dirty War’*, Diana Taylor coins the term ‘percepticide’, which she defines as the ‘self-

⁶⁵ There is no opening question mark to this stanza in the original 1992 publication.

blinding of the general population' (1997: 123). Writing about 'the military spectacle' (1997: 123), Taylor refers to the military's perpetration of human rights crimes within public view. Those present were coerced into being an audience of sorts – unable to avoid seeing a kidnapping, for example, yet too frightened to make any protest for fear of endangering their own lives. Taylor continues:

The military violence could have been relatively invisible, as the term *disappearance* suggests. The fact that it wasn't indicates that the population as a whole was the intended target, positioned by means of the spectacle. People had to deny what they saw and, by turning away, collude with the violence around them. They knew people were 'disappearing.' Men in military attire, trucks, and helicopters surrounded the area, closed in on the hunted individuals and 'sucked' them off the street, out of a movie theatre, from a classroom or workplace. And those in the vicinity were forced to notice, however much they pretended not to. (1997: 123)

As the visceral imagery in the third stanza of 'Juicio' demonstrates, 'seeing without the possibility of admitting that one is seeing further turns the violence on oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses' (Taylor 1997: 123-124).

Partnoy redirects the reader from the perspective of the poetic 'I' to that of the witness, using poetic technique to convey bodily distress. The half-rhyme in 'pruebas convincentes' and 'miedo caliente' connects the witness' knowledge with their fear and the effect it has on their body, while assonance further stresses the image of 'miedo caliente'. It is unusual to use high temperature to describe fear, where a sensation of coolness – *un escalofrío* – might be more common. I would argue that the sense of heat is highlighted by the use of tense. The preterite 'tragó [...] caliente' suggests that the subject of the line (witness to the speaker's kidnap) swallowed a foodstuff that was too hot to consume. Attempting to suppress the terror that they felt, the witness internalised the knowledge of a crime. The poet depicts this act as severely damaging to the person's body. Partnoy shifts, in the next line, to the present tense to depict how the inability to speak out continues to cause pain.

Developing a poetic representation of the body, Partnoy begins with the action of swallowing, then names parts of the body connected with speech and nourishment. Fear metaphorically burns and is made concrete as a poisonous aliment. The last words of the poem, 'las verdades' appear to mark a departure from the physical experience of the body to the abstract. Partnoy refers to the witness' knowledge of dictatorial wrongdoing. However, there is no split between body and mind, 'las verdades' are depicted as part of the body. The plural serves the dual purpose of alluding to layers of knowledge (perhaps the witness of multiple dictatorial crimes), while also making the noun sound like another organ, for example, 'las vísceras'. The corporeal proximity of the larynx and oesophagus is emphasised in the third line and mirrored by the structure of the fourth. Partnoy evokes the connection between the physical speech act and truth telling, the foundations of bearing witness.

Testimonio is repeatedly constructed in Partnoy's poetry through the placement of the poetic 'I' in unsympathetic situations where she is obliged to recount her experiences. Often lexical choices are an important indicator of setting, such as the juridical formulations used in 'Juicio'. Conversely, the informal situation of 'Respuesta' (*Volando*) is portrayed through use of the Argentine vernacular in the opening stanza:

¿...y vos?
COMO [sic] TE SALVASTE? (*Volando*, 28)

The person asking the question is linguistically coded as being from Argentina, like the poetic 'I', yet they do not share the same experiences of the 1976-1983 dictatorship. A version of Partnoy, the poetic voice has lived through human rights abuse, yet it is unlikely that a fellow survivor would pose the poem's opening questions. Knowing that the poetic voice's life was endangered, the questioner must be familiar with the political circumstances of the dictatorship. However, the questions are loaded.

The opening ellipsis denotes a gap in speech – a natural pause, or an uncomfortable one. Although the familiar *voseo* is used, the questioner is unsympathetic towards the poetic voice's situation as a survivor. Block capitals are used to visually jarring effect in the second line. They represent a forcefully articulated

utterance, while the absence of a question mark at the beginning of the line makes it seem more like a statement. This is the question to which the rest of the poem is an answer, focusing not on how the first stanza's questions are answered, but on how the poetic 'I'-survivor formulates her response. The unnamed questioner is set up as antagonist; their method of speaking to the poetic 'I' resembles an interrogation. To the first speaker in 'Respuesta', the poetic voice is already guilty (of the crime of having survived). The second person singular conjugation, 'te salvaste', suggests action on the part of the poetic 'I'. Consequently, there is an implication of betrayal of those who did not survive, or collusion with the military. The implied question is 'what did you do that meant you survived when others didn't?' Partnoy addresses the ongoing complications of negotiating how to talk about human rights violations with persons who do not share those traumatic experiences.

The first two stanzas are linked by showing different perspectives on the subject of survival. The gap between stanzas is made stark by the contrast between the almost shouted block capitals and the quietness of the poetic voice's introspective response. The stanzas are also united through repeated sibilance and velar plosives [k]:

Es casi
acusación.
Es lápida. (*Volando*, 28)

Partnoy creates a combination of hissing and hard sounds that suggest aural antagonism. 'Casi | acusación' refers to the implicit meaning of the question, while the structure of the stanza emphasises the term 'acusación', which occupies a single line.

The questioner seems to be implying that the poetic 'I' has committed a crime by surviving genocide. Such hostility has a threatening effect on the poetic 'I'. Not only does the question seem like an accusation, it is a metaphorical death sentence ('es lápida'). Even before hearing the poetic voice's 'respuesta', the questioner has already made up their mind about the speaker's guilt. By talking to the poetic 'I' in this way,

the interlocutor demonstrates a lack of regard for the complex emotions experienced by the survivor of a genocidal regime.

As someone who has survived, the poetic 'I' must repeatedly re-negotiate the aftermath of physical trauma and ongoing emotional trauma of her personal experience, as well as live with the knowledge that her friends did not survive. The term 'survivor's guilt' is perhaps not the most appropriate phrase. Partnoy herself calls it 'simplista [...] yo creo que tenemos que inventar otro tipo de sentimiento, que no es culpa lo que tenemos los sobrevivientes, es esa desesperación de estar *sin ellos*' (n.d.: 10:26). It is a trauma that cannot be 'resolved' and unwanted memories or images could be triggered unexpectedly. An unsympathetic approach to the survivor ignores the difficulties they may be facing, and Partnoy depicts the silencing effect such hostility has towards survivors of human rights abuse.

When the poetic 'I' first appears in the third stanza, it is to express a reluctance to speak: 'se me congelan | las ganas de contarte' (*Volando*, 28). Although unwilling to talk to the person who 'accuses' her of survival, Partnoy's poetic 'I' does speak to the reader. As in many of Partnoy's poems, the poetic voice aligns closely with the poet. Repeatedly in her work (literary, activist, official/legal testimonies), Partnoy emphasises the importance of talking about 'aquellos | que no fueron salvados' (*Volando*, 28).

In 'Respuesta', the speaker names 'ZulmaMaríaelenaBenjayBraco | MaryNestorGracielaRauleugenio' (*Volando*, 28), friends and *compañeros* of Partnoy who were also imprisoned at La Escuelita and who were murdered or disappeared by the military. Biographies of the persons named are included by Partnoy in the appendix to *The Little School*. They are: Zulma Aracelli [sic] Izurieta, María Elena Romero, Gustavo Marcelo Yoti [sic] ('Benja'), César Antonio Giordiano ('Braco'), Néstor Junquera, Graciela Alicia Romero de Metz and Raúl Eugenio Metz (1998: 123-128). 'Mary' is likely to be María Eugenia González de Junquera, wife of Néstor Junquera, whose biography is also included in *The Little School* (Partnoy 1998: 128).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Several of these *compañeros* are named by Partnoy in 'Los molinos de la memoria' (*Volando*), which I discuss later in this chapter (p.145). The correct spelling of Zulma's name is Zulma Aracelli Izurieta; Gustavo's is Gustavo Marcelo Yotti (H.I.J.O.S. Bahía Blanca n.d.).

The names are fused together, some capitalisation is missing (in the names María Elena and Raúl Eugenio) and diacritics are omitted (Néstor and Raúl Eugenio). Such visual representation suggests the increased pace at which the speaker is talking. She wants the poem's unsympathetic questioner to grasp the traumatic personal, social and emotional ramifications of genocide. Such is her urgency – and the connection between Partnoy and the poetic 'I' so close – that the poet's use of language appears to be affected and the names come out as one. However, the seemingly unpolished transcription of names is juxtaposed with controlled poetic form. These two lines are hendecasyllables, as is the line 'proyectedeliberacionacional'. Partnoy aurally and visually connects the lines through metrics and the fusion of words: the last line similarly lacks diacritics, capitalisation and the words 'liberación nacional' are joined with a single letter 'n'. Moreover, there is a connection in meaning between the lines.

To a reader familiar with the political history of Argentina, Partnoy's 'proyectedeliberacionacional' speaks to the Peronist anti-imperialist movement for national liberation (Copello 2020). Partnoy was an activist with the Juventud Universitaria Peronista, so it is likely she is familiar with the rhetoric relating to the 'Movimiento de Liberación Nacional', which stressed the involvement of universities, expecting that they would 'formar intelectuales con una visión estratégica del desarrollo del país y de su programa revolucionario de liberación' (Recalde and Recalde 2007: 127).⁶⁷ The political hope for a left-wing national and social revolution in Argentina 'tiene un desenlace trágico en marzo del año 1976', following the coup and onset of the dictatorship (Recalde and Recalde 2007: 15).

When Partnoy writes 'se me congelan | las ganas de contarte', she is depicting her speaker's utter reluctance to share intimate details of her *compañeros* and their political ideals. The interlocutor appears so unfeeling that the poetic 'I' is unwilling to attempt to bridge the gap in understanding. Moreover, the freedom implied by Partnoy's 'proyectedeliberacionacional' is diametrically opposed to the violence caused by dictatorship; its euphemistic 'official' title – El Proceso de Reorganización

⁶⁷ For further information about the connection between the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional and universities, see Recalde and Recalde (2007) and Reta (2009).

Nacional – is echoed by Partnoy’s phrasing. Like Partnoy, her *compañeros* were imprisoned and disappeared for their opposition to the dictatorship. If the ‘proyecto’ had been successful, rather than El Proceso, the poetic ‘I’ would have no need to think about her *compañeros’* murders and disappearance.

The two groupings of four names is significant. In *The Little School*, Partnoy writes of Vasca ‘(Zulma “Vasca” Aracelli [sic] Izurieta)’ and Braco ‘(César Antonio “Braco” Giordano)’ that:

On April 12, 1977, after more than four months in detention they were made to bathe and put on their own clothing; the guards gave Vasca back her bracelets and told them they would be taken to jail. I was in the same room as Vasca and María Elena Romero (who was also taken that night). The nurse came later and changed my room assignment. In my new room, I found Braco and Benja (companions of Vasca and María Elena, respectively). I listened as they were injected with anaesthesia – the guards joked about it and I could hear the deep rhythmic breathing of those who were asleep. The guards wrapped them in blankets and took them away. The next day, April 13, 1977, the two couples appeared in *La Nueva Provincia*, the daily newspaper of Bahía Blanca, as having been killed in a ‘confrontation’ with military forces in a house in General Cerri near Bahía Blanca. (1998: 124-125)

María Eugenia González de Junquera, Néstor Junquera, Graciela Alicia Romero de Metz and Raúl Eugenio Metz remain disappeared (Partnoy 1998: 123-129). Both couples are also the parents of two children, one of whom is still missing.⁶⁸ Although

⁶⁸ ‘Graciela was five months pregnant at the time’ of her arrest on ‘December 16, 1976 in Cutral Co (Neuquén) along with her husband Raul [sic] Eugenio Metz [...] on April 17 [1977] she had a son [...]. On April 23 she was removed from the Little School and I never heard of her again. She is on Amnesty International’s list of disappeared people. Her son, according to the guards, was given to one of the interrogators.’ (Partnoy 1998:123-124). Adriana Metz, Graciela and Raúl Eugenio’s daughter born before the dictatorship, is still looking for her missing brother (n. auth. 2017a).

none of this information is apparent in 'Respuesta', Partnoy's use of language and form alludes to the anguish felt by the speaker. Genocide has shaped the way she talks about friends and *compañeros*, the enormity of which her interlocutor appears unable or unwilling to comprehend.

The fourth stanza of 'Respuesta' answers the question at the beginning of the poem by inverting its structure. Where the opening question is formulated to suggest the poetic 'I' was active in ensuring her survival, Partnoy counters this:

Yo
no me salvé
me salvaron [...]. (*Volando*, 28)

It is worth noting at this point that the text of 'Respuesta' appears over two pages in *Volando*. Owing to the layout of the bilingual edition, the reader does not encounter the final four stanzas (28 lines) until the page is turned. Thus, at first glance, 'Respuesta' seems to be a 17-line poem that ends without a full-stop. Such a conclusion to a poem is not unprecedented in Partnoy's oeuvre, as I discuss in Chapter Four (p.203) 'Balance' is also published in *Volando* and deliberately ends mid-sentence.⁶⁹ Although the poem does not end here, these lines are certainly a rejection of the suggestion at the outset of 'Respuesta'. The appearance of the first person singular pronoun on a single line draws attention to the poetic 'I', then emphasises that she did not (and could not) do anything to safeguard her life. Instead, it was the action of many others, as Partnoy details as the poem continues overleaf in *Volando*.

The fourth stanza leads to the fifth by enjambment and, upon turning the page in *Volando*, the reader encounters a concatenation of twenty lines. Partnoy lists actions, names, ideas and evokes the multitude of happenings that led to the poetic voice's survival:

los pies caminadores
de mis padres,

⁶⁹ Personal email correspondence with Alicia Partnoy (19 June 2015).

los pies que daban vuelta
a la Pirámide,
las manos
que escribieron una carta,
la “sol
i dar
i dad”
de la Cecilia
y el cachetazo a tiempo
de la suerte,
el dedo de algún dios
desprevenido,
la decisión
de un tribunal de asesinos
que como
dice siempre
don Emilio
estará registrada en microfichas [...]. (*Volando*, 30)

The repetition of ‘los pies’ at the beginning of the stanza creates an image of multiple feet and this synecdochically represents many protestors.

‘Mis padres’ can be read as referring to Raquel and Salomón Partnoy, the poet’s parents ‘who desperately searched for her while trying to cope with the unbearable pain of her disappearance’ (*Venganza*, 13). Partnoy’s mother describes herself ‘como loca en las calles buscándola’ and her father refers to their efforts as ‘una odisea de búsqueda’ (n. auth. 2012). However, the absence of specific names here could be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the many parents who campaigned for the release of their children.

‘Los pies que daban vuelta | a la Pirámide’ is a reference to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.⁷⁰ Partnoy states in an (unreferenced) endnote to the poem: ‘Pirámide (de Mayo): Monumento en Buenos Aires. Desde 1977 las Madres de Plaza de Mayo han marchado todos los jueves alrededor del mismo’ (*Volando*, 80). The endnote is included to inform Partnoy’s readers who are unfamiliar with the Madres’ protest, or who do not immediately understand Partnoy’s allusion. Although Plaza de Mayo is in Buenos Aires, I think it is significant that Partnoy does not name any specific locations. Her choice to do so may seem counterintuitive to testimonial writing, where the detailing of space is important. Partnoy is from Bahía Blanca and was initially imprisoned there, yet she gives a much broader sense of place in ‘Respuesta’. This is significant in the representation of collective action and, with the allusion to Amnesty International’s famous letter-writing campaigns – ‘las manos | que escribieron una carta’ – Partnoy extends the protest on an international scale.

The notion of collective action stretching beyond geographical borders is emphasised by reference to Chilean poet Cecilia Vicuña’s ‘sol-i-dar-i-dad’. Vicuña ‘has been in exile since the early 1970s, after the military coup against elected president Salvador Allende’ (Vicuña n.d.). Partnoy explains Vicuña’s ‘sol-i-dar-i-dad’ in a paratextual note to ‘Respuesta’.⁷¹

Owing to the line breaks, which stress the division of syllables, the word ‘sol’ stands out, highlighting its connotations of light and hope. Furthermore, by mentioning the writer by her first name only, ‘la Cecilia’, Partnoy evokes a sense of familiarity and friendship created by a common cause. As the stanza moves into its second half, however, Partnoy emphasises ‘la suerte’. The poetic ‘I’ played no conscious part in securing her survival; once in detention, it was pure chance that affected much of her situation. Partnoy extends the element of chance in the next

⁷⁰ When Partnoy returned to Argentina for the first time with her daughter Ruth in 1984, they marched with Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Partnoy discovered that Las Madres had memorised her *testimonio* (*The Little School/La Escuelita*) ‘porque siempre estaban buscando dónde habían estado sus hijos [...] y yo tenía este testimonio muy extenso sobre La Escuelita de Bahía Blanca’ (n.d.: 07:50).

⁷¹ Partnoy’s endnote explains that ‘Cecilia (Vicuña) escribe sobre las ‘palabramas, una de ellas es “sol-i-dar-i-dad: dar y dad sol.’ (*Volando*, 80).

lines, 'el dedo de algún dios | desprevenido', by referring to classical mythology and the idea that the lives of humans were changed by the whims of the gods.⁷²

Certain actions by the military did lead to the survival of the poetic 'I', yet Partnoy first alludes to this towards the end of the fifth stanza. The circumstances that allowed the poetic voice to survive are complex and the poet first wants to emphasise the power of activism and the importance of solidarity. When Partnoy does refer to the military, it is a condemnation. She refers to:

la decisión
de un tribunal de asesinos
que como
dice siempre
don Emilio
estará registrada en microfichas

y escondida en alguna caja
fuerte
que se resiste
a todas las Pandoras. (*Volando*, 30)

Partnoy names 'un tribunal de asesinos', denouncing the military as murderers and emphasising their exploitation of the law.

'Don Emilio' is, as explained in an unreferenced endnote by Partnoy, 'Emilio (Mignone), a cuya memoria dedico este poema fue padre de una desaparecida argentina y valiente abogado que luchó por los derechos humanos' (*Volando*, 80). In 2007, the annual Emilio F. Mignone International Human Rights Prize was established (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto n.d.). Partnoy pays homage to the work and knowledge of Emilio Mignone, while criticising the opaque actions of the military. She suggests that military records must exist

⁷² Partnoy makes a similar allusion to classical mythology in 'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país', which I discuss in Chapter 5 (pp.266).

somewhere: the reference to 'microfichas' suggests the laborious work of looking through historical records on microfiche.

Partnoy deepens the sense of deliberately hidden information by another reference to classical mythology in the poem, the story of Pandora's Box. The line break separating the metaphorical 'caja | fuerte' creates an optical connection between 'caja' and 'Pandora', the last words of the stanza's first and fourth lines, further emphasised by assonance. Moreover, the appearance of 'fuerte' as a single-word line stresses the difficulty of finding the 'official' recorded evidence that incriminates the perpetrators of dictatorial oppression and genocide. Partnoy upends the Pandora myth. Here it is not Pandora who is unable to resist opening the box, thus releasing all the evil into the world. Rather, it is the box 'que se resiste | a todas las Pandoras' (*Volando*, 30). 'Las Pandoras' represent those working against impunity and the personified 'caja | fuerte' is a symbol for the actions taken by the military to avoid incrimination. Furthermore, Partnoy's image illustrates the impossibility of understanding the military's rationale, which refers back to the poem's opening questions.

It is in the seventh and eighth stanzas of the poem that the voice shifts from (introspectively) addressing the reader to speaking to her interlocutor. Partnoy writes:

Y ¿por qué me salvé?
Ahora andá y preguntales
a ellos, los milicos.

Ellos sí saben. (*Volando*, 30)

For the first time in 'Respuesta', the poetic 'I' mirrors the questioner's phrasing and uses 'salvarse' in the first person preterite. By this point in the poem, it is patent that the survival of the poetic 'I' was owing to the actions of many other people. Consequently, the poem's opening questions seem absurd. Mirroring the first stanza's *voseo*, the speaker uses the imperative, as if talking dismissively to someone who has asked a foolish question. The poetic 'I' directs her questioner to those responsible for dictatorial atrocities.

Partnoy's employment of caesura in the penultimate line draws further attention to those who she accuses. The third person plural pronoun, repeated in the final line, stresses the absence of first person responsibility. After the comma, the poetic 'I' specifies those who are guilty, using the pejorative term 'los milicos'. The final line is a single stanza, underlining the source of knowledge behind the 'reasoning' for dictatorial abuses. 'Respuesta' addresses the ongoing difficulties faced by survivors when speaking to others about their experiences.

Where 'Respuesta' discusses an informal interaction experienced by the poetic 'I', Partnoy places her speaker in a formalised setting in 'Testimonio'. The meta-testimonial nature of the poem explores the complexities of the testimonial act, both in terms of vocalisation and the gaps and fractures that feature in the text. Partnoy's depiction of the survivor encourages the reader to reflect on issues of testimonial agency and audience expectation.

In 'Testimonio', a first-person speaker attempts to share, with an audience of multiple people, a version of the events she has lived through. The spoken form of testifying is alluded to from the outset of the poem, where 'el micrófono' forms the first line (*Venganza*, 96). The microphone is personified by Partnoy – 'me hace una reverencia' (*Venganza*, 96) – and the almost religious image suggests a sanctification of the words to be uttered by the poetic 'I'. The heightened anticipation of her listeners is implied: the speaker's audience have pre-formed expectations about what they will hear. However, the poetic voice makes no utterance as yet and Partnoy slows the pace of the text by focussing on the speaker's actions:

Yo a mi vez me le acerco
abro los ojos
abro
el libro
abro
la boca.
Eso sí, abro bastante la boca
y ahí les cuento. (*Venganza*, 96)

Partnoy's focus on the mouth, the centre of speech, highlights the orality associated with *testimonio*. However, anaphoric use of 'abro' indicates that the poetic 'I' has put herself in an exposed and vulnerable position by agreeing to share her private thoughts and experiences.

Lillian Manzor-Coats describes former *desaparecidos*, who have since reappeared, as 'physically and psychologically fragmented subjects' and the speaker of 'Testimonio' is one such fragmented subject (1990: 157). Reiteration and the division of the verb from the noun stylistically represent the fracture of the speaker's body from the self, a typographical manifestation of trauma. The notion of intentional speech contrasts with the sounds caused by torture, alluded to later in the stanza with the involuntary opening of the mouth implied in the production of 'gritos' (*Venganza*, 96).

Partnoy lingers over the speaker's preparations to vocalise, but her speech is not the first that is reported in the poem. Rather, Partnoy creates a vocal power dynamic that favours the third-person speakers of the audience when she reveals what they say:

Dicen
que hablo muy suave
que casi les murmuro
que no oyen[.] (*Venganza*, 96)

At first, this appears to be an expression of concern for the poetic 'I'. It seems that the volume at which she speaks is too low for the audience to hear. Nevertheless, the separation of 'dicen' from the anaphorically introduced subordinate clauses makes them appear as a list of criticisms of the poetic voice.

Strejilevich asserts that 'testimony, as every product in our culture, is often seen as a commodity that must provide practical uses. Society wants to use witnesses' accounts as evidence, and testimonies are condemned [if] they do not match evidence collected by other means' (2006b: 703). It is apparent that this is the case when Partnoy identifies what the audience does not hear: 'los gritos perforantes'

(*Venganza*, 96). The audience criticise the speaker's account because it does not fulfil their expectations and voyeuristic wish to learn the intimate details of torture.

Exhibiting a desire to learn the specifics of torture, it is evident that the audience have not experienced gross violations of their human rights. They are in a position of relative psychological safety, but they do not consider the well-being of the poetic 'I'-survivor. The act of discussing her experiences is potentially dangerous for her mental health:

Yo abro
el recuerdo
como un melón podrido. (*Venganza*, 96)

The simile used here makes reference to the speaker's experience of dictatorial violence. The repetition of the verb 'abro' stresses the vulnerability of the poetic 'I', while homeoteleuton links the previous representation of the poetic voice's preparations to speak with those connoted by 'recuerdo' and 'podrido'. The use of memory is essential in *testimonio* and Partnoy employs an unsettling image to allude to the psychological dangers faced by the *testimoniante*. The spherical form of the fruit suggests the shape of the speaker's head and, thus, the rotten melon metaphorically represents the speaker's mind. Outwardly, the poetic voice resembles anyone else, but when her inner thoughts and memories are divulged, the harm caused to her psychological welfare is apparent.

The second stanza opens with a further critical onslaught from the audience. By repeating the verb 'dicen', Partnoy emphasises the voice of the poem's unidentified third persons (the audience). In making their complaints, they deny the poetic 'I' a chance to speak, to give 'testimonio'. Safe in their lack of first-hand knowledge of torture, they demand to be thrilled and horrified, while showing no compassion for the speaker. Partnoy uses minimisation and irony to undermine their objections, writing:

Dicen
que no consigo

descubrir con rigor las inclemencias
de la picana. (*Venganza*, 96)

The poetic voice does not fulfil the narrative expectations of her listeners, who accuse her of a lack of 'rigor'. Using the term 'inclemencias' to describe the agony inflicted by 'la picana', Partnoy exploits understatement to highlight the absurdity of the audience's criticism.

As if partially aware of the lack of consideration they show to the poetic 'I', in expecting to hear about her deeply personal and traumatic experiences, the audience project on to the speaker their desire to 'descubrir'. The poetic 'I', however, has already discovered the realities of that torture technique and Partnoy's use of black humour stresses the difficulties inherent to *testimonio*. Partnoy explains that, 'I don't describe [torture] in a way that *adds* something to the reports that already exist on it' (1997a: 155). As Sklodowska has argued an exact reproduction is impossible (1985: 28), and hostility can arise from those who have preconceived notions about what they will hear.

The audience of 'Testimonio' nonetheless claim that their interest is in the pursuit of fact:

Dicen que en estas cosas
no debe quedar ningún espacio
librado
a la imaginación o a la duda. (*Venganza*, 96)

Most noticeable in this section is the adjective 'librado', highlighted as a one-word line. In the context of the speaker's experiences, it alludes to the survivor who has been released from illegal imprisonment and is now at liberty to speak, or to remain silent. At the same time, the word forms part of the audience's demand for the revelation of all the details of the speaker's case. They maintain that nothing ought to be left to 'la imaginación o la duda' and while this could appear as an emotionally distanced desire to learn the truth, it instead reflects the audience's disappointment at the lack of sensationalism in the account they hear. They ignore the vulnerable state

of the survivor and do not leave room for the speaker to tell her story on her own terms.

Strejilevich writes that a 'truthful way of giving testimony should allow for disruptive memories, discontinuities, blanks, silences and ambiguities' (2006b: 704). Her argument corresponds with the way in which Partnoy's poetic voice speaks in 'Testimonio'. She does not indulge the audience and responds to their multiple complaints in the following way:

Saco
el informe de Amnistía
y hablo por esa tinta. (*Venganza*, 96)

The audience refuse to engage with what the speaker tells them, so she shelters behind the written word and a voice of accepted authority, that of Amnesty International. Partnoy stated in an interview with Diana Taylor that 'I leave the writing about torture for my work with Amnesty International' (1997b: 160). The organisation has a sufficiently high profile that the shortened version of its name, 'Amnistía', is enough for its recognition.

Amnesty International has a reputation for disseminating reliable, factual information. In 'Testimonio', the speaker uses the organisation's connotations as a means of legitimising her account to unsympathetic listeners. The report is used to refute the criticisms of the audience and the poetic 'I' takes control of the situation through the curt imperative: 'Digo: "Lean."' (*Venganza*, 96). Amnesty's report contains the explicit detail that they wish to find out. However, the instruction can be seen as an encouragement to engage with literature: the imperative is also addressed to Partnoy's readers.

The colon underlines the contrast between two modes of communication – oral and written – expressed in the line. In 'Testimonio', the sole instance of direct speech stresses the assumption of agency on the part of the poetic voice, while it changes the direction of the poem from an emphasis on orality to the written word. Partnoy is making a comment on the medium for transmitting *testimonio*. The centrality of speech to the act of testifying is acknowledged, but Partnoy is also

advocating the power of written, and in this case poetic, testimony. In her article 'On Being Shorter: How Our Testimonial Texts Defy the Academy', Partnoy writes that testimonial poetry is 'nothing further from the truth of the witness as we know it in academia and the courts of law' (2005a: 181), and yet it is still a 'truth'. Partnoy encourages the reader of 'Testimonio' to learn through engaging with her poetry.

In the poem's penultimate line, it becomes apparent that the speaker is herself a poet – 'digo mis versos' (*Venganza*, 98), which promotes a reading of the text in a new light. Having placated the audience by producing an officially sanctioned document, the speaker now utters the words that she chooses to share. An antagonistic audience have anticipated a specific kind of narrative and are reluctant to engage with an alternative rendering of a first-person account.

Partnoy's writing does not centre on the victimisation of the survivor of abuse, but rather asserts 'the need to stress [...] resistance and strategies of survival' (Panjabi 1997: 155). The testifying poetic voice struggles against preconceived ideas of how she should speak. In refusing to gratify the audience's demands for graphic detail, the speaker protects her own health. The last line of the poem reads 'Resistí. Voy entera.' (*Venganza*, 98). Partnoy's mention of resistance simultaneously refers to the poetic 'I'-survivor's struggle against dictatorial abuses and functions as a signal of her opposition to what the audience were insistent she do. Rejecting their demands, the poetic 'I' leaves behind the notion of the self as 'fragmented subject'. 'Entera', she maintains the notion of bodily integrity and asserts that she has safeguarded her psychological well-being.

Through her depiction of the act of testifying in the poem 'Testimonio', Partnoy directs the reader's attention away from received notions of testimonial fact and highlights the ongoing experience of the survivor. The fragmentation in the poem's structure, as well as the predominant absence of speech on the part of the poetic 'I', indicates the difficulty of communicating the experience of state terror. Portraying the audience as antagonistic, Partnoy stresses the complex nature of testifying. She emphasises that those who engage with *testimonio* – especially people who have not experienced dictatorship – must understand and accept that it is impossible to fully comprehend the position of the survivor. Therefore, the agency of the *testimoniante* must not be undermined: it is through what she is able to share that

we can go some way to learning about the realities and far-reaching consequences of dictatorship.

3.3 'La muerte, mi vecina, | me golpeó la puerta un mediodía': Testimonial Language and Metaphor in 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' (*Volando*), 'Los molinos de la memoria' (*Volando*) and 'Cuatro postales' (*Venganza*)

Partnoy's approach to writing about human rights violations explores both the limitations of language and the expressive possibilities of poetry. This section analyses the interaction between language, metaphor and *testimonio*. In 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario', Partnoy considers linguistic destruction and reconstruction, as her speaker considers the function of language in relation to torture. 'Los molinos de la memoria' combines prose poetry and free verse, blending memory and metaphor to testimonial ends. Partnoy's 'Cuatro postales' is a rendering of a series of interactions between the poetic voice and the figure of death, illustrating dictatorial violence and the speaker's acts of resistance. The three poems are progressively figurative and I will use them to reflect on the significance and function of metaphor in poetic *testimonio*.

Partnoy's choice to emphasise testimonial resistance in her poems means that she rarely writes graphic descriptions of violence. Consequently, 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' (*Volando*) is unusual in its subject matter. A linguistic approach to the discussion of torture is taken by Partnoy, exploring vocabulary and the poetic voice's fraught relationship with her mother tongue. The language in 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' is fractured and the reader encounters disorienting flashes of imagery and fragmented words and phrases. I will explore how the construction and de(con)struction of language in the poem constitutes *testimonio*.

Many of the phrases used in 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' come from a 'lista extraída de *Forced Out: The Agony of the Refugee in Our Time* por Carole Kismaris y William Shawcross (Random House, 1989)', as Partnoy informs her reader in an endnote (*Volando*, 80). However, there is no indication of the endnote's existence on

the pages where the poem is published. In the endnote it is not clear to which section of *Forced Out* Partnoy refers, nor what she means by 'lista extraída' since the entire body of the poem, excepting the second stanza, appears in list form. Upon further investigation, what Partnoy refers to is the section in *Forced Out* on torture, which includes a list of the names of torture techniques with accompanying definitions. It is graphic and distressing to read.⁷³

I wonder if the harrowing nature of the information is perhaps why Partnoy limits how much of the list she shares with her reader, both in terms of giving no definitions in the poem and in the lack of specificity regarding the source text. The information exists, but only if you go looking for it. As Partnoy states in several interviews (Taylor 1997b, Panjabi 1997a), factual information on torture is horrific to read. Consequently, I believe her approach to poetic *testimonio* is one that seeks to protect the reader, while encouraging them to engage with troubling material.

Partnoy's poetry collections are all published as bilingual editions in the USA and she seeks to educate her reader. The dual languages of Partnoy's experience in the USA are replicated in the title of 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario'. The bilingual title alludes to the speaker's Spanish mother tongue and the English language of her country of exile. The poetic 'I' is a political refugee who has been forced into exile as a result of human rights violations in her home country.

What is extracted from the list in *Forced Out* can be identified in 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' where the line includes a colon. That is, in the following lines:

severe and prolonged...:

amputation of...:

picana eléctrica:

[...]

wet submarine...:

potro:

[...]

burns:

⁷³ I have included this information in Appendix E and urge any reader to approach it with caution.

la bandera...:

[...]

parrots perch:

sexual torture:

téléphono:

[...]

apollo:...

diagnosis of...:

falanga:

[...]

black slave:

cachots noirs:

[...]

el quirófano:

[...]

le petit déjeuner...:

le déjeuner:...

le rodeo:...

cajones:...

[...]

plantón: (Volando, 34-38)

These terms are interspersed through the poem, combined with questions, utterances, a statement and an exclamation. Partnoy creates a disconcerting, disturbing vocabulary list. The reader encounters violent terms: some are self-explanatory and others are confusing. Partnoy's blend of English, Spanish and French indicates that torture is not confined to one language or culture. It is a widespread abuse and Partnoy, through *testimonio* and her use of language, mounts a poetic resistance.

The opening two lines – 'severe and prolonged...: | amputation of...:' (*Volando*, 34) – are medical in tone. They present a seemingly scientific approach, which can be

read in dialogue with the emphasis placed on the so-called non-fictional element of *testimonio*. Nevertheless, these phrases cannot be interpreted in the detached manner in which they might be presented in a medical textbook.

Specific terminology is used, such as '*picana eléctrica*' in the third line. Partnoy's initial use of italics may initially seem to indicate a change between languages (English and Spanish), but as the poem continues, this pattern does not follow: the use of italics occurs seemingly at random. Wronsky's English-language translation accompanies the original in *Volando*. Her translation italicises lines, which sometimes match Partnoy's original poem, and sometimes do not. Such a typographical approach could seem arbitrary, but I interpret it as a deliberate choice to represent the uncertainty experienced by detainees during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. Prisoners' lives were constantly at risk and they could be – and were – tortured at any moment.

Owing to the poem's title, 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario', Partnoy's reader knows that she refers to deliberate harm inflicted on the body, but there is no elaboration on details. Perhaps this could be seen as counteracting the normative expectations of *testimonio*, which anticipate a specific denunciation. I contend, however, that what is expressed through the punctuation in these lines also represents a form of *testimonio*. Partnoy makes use of testimonial 'blanks, silences and ambiguities' (Strejilevich 2006b: 704).

In the punctuation of the first lines, Partnoy creates a sense of fragmentation that will be developed in the poem. The phrases constituting these lines are unfinished and the ellipses and colons strengthen the notion that something is left unsaid. Partnoy explains, in an interview with Kavita Panjabi, that 'I don't know how to write about torture' (1997a: 155). This assertion can be thought of in terms of Sklodowska's claim that it is impossible to identically recreate the past experience or present psychological state of the survivor of atrocity (1985: 28).

Partnoy does not attempt to recreate such experiences. Instead, she explores language and the survivor's relationship with their mother tongue. Her poetic voice asks:

¿qué se siente

cuando
el idioma de uno
es el único
adecuado
para nombrar
wet submarine ...:
potro: (Volando, 34)

Short line-lengths maintain the sense of fragmentation in the poem and the use of English and Spanish is continued. Both Partnoy's English-speaking and Spanish-speaking readers are involved in the distress of her poetic 'I', whose mother tongue has been appropriated for the vocabulary of violence.

The part-rhetorical question is echoed through the text and becomes increasingly fragmentary: '¿qué | se siente?' (*Volando*, 34); 'qué | sienten?' (*Volando*, 34); '¿qué...?' (*Volando*, 36); '¿qué? | ... | ...' (*Volando*, 38). By repeating these questions, the poet stresses the impossibility of rationalising the experience of torture. However, the poetic voice does respond with some form of an answer in the lines: 'no vergüenza | no culpa' (*Volando*, 34). The utterances contain no verbs and may be read as an extension of poetic fragmentation or the poetic voice's reduced ability to speak.

Yet the lines also display a resistance to violence and a rejection of the sense of humiliation, degradation and culpability that torture is intended to effect. Partnoy writes:

Many people from the holocaust seem to have experienced survivor's guilt. I don't believe that every survivor experiences it. I am aware that I am not guilty for what happened. I know I did all I could to change things. If I was defeated, it was not because I was passive or because I lacked courage or because I didn't try. There was little room to fight back, but it could be done. Guilt does not fit into this picture. (1994: 106)

The denial of shame and guilt is later inverted, when Partnoy demonstrates a poetic and sensory-emotional response to torture: 'sí dolor | [...] | sí miedo' (*Volando*, 36). Again, the omission of verbs reinforces linguistic fragmentation in the poem, while placing emphasis on the nouns. The speaker's physical and emotional distress is represented in bursts.

Partnoy's introduction of prose reported speech is juxtaposed with the poetic and linguistic fragments thus far present in the poem. The reader has encountered a concatenation of utterances made by the poetic voice and now is offered a complete sentence: 'Dice el Mingo que es como si miles de terminaciones de cables eléctricos | te tironearan de la carne' (*Volando*, 36). 'El Mingo' is the nickname for Antonio Leiva, Partnoy's husband.⁷⁴ The use of reported speech alludes to a conversation that has taken place between a poeticised Partnoy and Leiva. As well as being an indication of the close relationship between the two, Partnoy allows the reader a glimpse of the private interaction between her poetic figures.

The reference to speech points to *testimonio*, where verbalisation is an integral part of the denunciation. Moreover, the use of metaphorical language distinguishes this testimonial fragment as literary.⁷⁵ The object of this sentence is unspecified, but the mention of 'cables eléctricos' would suggest that it is the 'picana eléctrica'. This image of brutality is intensified by the reference to 'miles' and the mention of flesh stresses the sense of bodily pain. The reflexive pronoun used does not refer to 'el Mingo', but rather to the second person singular, which can be interpreted in two ways. Through use of the second person, 'el Mingo' may be trying to psychologically distance himself from the memory of his experiences. However, in the poetic context of 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario', the second person singular may be interpreted as the reader who is addressed by the poetic 'I'. Thus, the reader becomes involved in the *testimonio*, not necessarily as someone who fully

⁷⁴ 'El Mingo' / Antonio Leiva is a recurrent figure in Partnoy's poetry, which I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 4 (see p.195) and my analyses of 'Balance' (pp.200-205) and 'En Rocha y la vía' (pp.205-210).

⁷⁵ In Chapter 1 (p.41), I discuss Scarry's 'language of agency' in reference to the metaphorical expression of pain. Scarry highlights the recurrence of the "'as if" structure' in verbalisations of pain (1985: 15), which can be observed in the second stanza of 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario'.

understands the experience of torture (depending on the reader's personal background), but as someone who is linguistically implicated in this construction. Consequently, it is made more difficult for the reader to distance themselves from the discussion of torture and pain.

A break between stanzas divides the reported speech of 'el Mingo' and the opinions of another figure. Before direct speech appears, signalled by quotation marks, Partnoy constructs an image of the poem's new speaker:

una mujer con los labios pintados
de azul
le explica
al público
"el dolor físico no solamente
se resiste a ser verbalizado
sino que
destruye el lenguaje
inmediatamente lo
revierte
al estado previo al lenguaje
a los sonidos y gritos
que profiere el ser humano
antes de aprender
la lengua" [...]. (*Volando*, 36)

Partnoy creates a jarring image of this figure's makeup when she describes the lipstick as blue. Such a lip-colour suggests the physical experience of cold and perhaps this is metaphorical for the emotionally detached manner in which the woman approaches her subject matter. She is depicted as speaking to an audience, which puts her in the role of 'expert', in contrast to the familiar portrayal of 'el Mingo'. Nonetheless, 'el Mingo' is also an expert because of his personal experience.

The direct speech that appears is Partnoy's Spanish translation of an oft-cited passage from Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*.⁷⁶ Scarry's argument that pain destroys language can be observed in 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' in the fragmentary language and increasing use of ellipses, which may be read as representing the 'intimate, subjective, deep dimension of horror' (Strejilevich 2006b: 701). Amidst the references to the terminology of torture, there does seem to be a deterioration of language in the poem. However, this is reversed in the last two lines.

The last utterance made by the poetic 'I' in 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' is a plea for mercy. Partnoy splits 'piedad' into two standalone syllables. The division highlights the speaker's fractured voice, at the same time as demonstrating the evolution of the poet and the *testimoniante*. The imperative exclamation '¡dad!' is directed at a second person plural and, by imploring them to be merciful, the testimonial voice identifies the torturers as perpetrators. As in Partnoy's other work, the military are divested of their identities and this is an act of poetic resistance. 'Piedad' becomes a splintered term, representing the absence of mercy shown by the torturers.

Partnoy's division of the word demonstrates poetic skill and, thus, the figure of the poetic 'I' is aligned with the poet. The linguistic manipulation is another intertextual reference to Vicuña's 'sol-i-dar-i-dad', first introduced in *Volando* in the poem 'Respuesta'. 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' is positioned later in the collection, so Partnoy's reader is likely to have already encountered Vicuña's linguistic concept. Partnoy's intertextual dialogue with other writers, recurrent in her poetry, demonstrates the literary nature of her work. Furthermore, the testimonial impact of Partnoy's poetry is strengthened by her choice to allude to writers such as Vicuña, whose work also combats repression and dictatorship.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ 'Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned' (Scarry 1985: 4).

⁷⁷ For more of Partnoy's use of intertextuality, see my analyses of her references to Gabriel Celaya (pp.146-147 of this chapter), Miguel Hernández in 'Nana sin la cebolla' (Chapter 4, pp.174-175), Jorge Luis Borges (Chapter 5, p.268), Rosario Castellanos in 'Preposiciones' (Chapter 5, pp.215-216) and José Agustín Goytisolo and Paco Ibáñez in 'Palabras por Silvia' (Chapter 5, pp.247-248).

Testimonio is a form deeply concerned with the communication about and denunciation of human rights abuse. Partnoy's approach to this style of writing illustrates her commitment both to the condemnation of atrocity and the exploration of literary form. Her exploration of poetic technique and *testimonio* is apparent in 'Los molinos de la memoria' (*Venganza*), which combines prose poetry, metrical verse, standard-seeming testimony and metaphor.

The title of 'Los molinos' emphasises memory from the outset. Partnoy's use of the plural 'molinos' contrasts with the single windmill featured in the poem and the titular multiplication is repeated in the antepenultimate line. Partnoy converts the actual windmill situated at La Escuelita into an ever-revolving symbol of memory.⁷⁸ The poem is divided into two sections, split over two pages. Partnoy writes the first in three stanzas of prose poetry, which initially appears like a contextual introduction. The second part of the poem comprises two stanzas of metrical verse.

'Los molinos' opens with two testimonial clauses, where Partnoy names the 'campo de concentración La Escuelita de Bahía Blanca, donde estuve desaparecida durante la dictadura militar allá por el setenta y siete' (*Volando*, 68). The conventional format of *testimonio* is evoked where a name (poetic 'I'), place ('La Escuelita de Bahía Blanca') and time (1977) are provided, but some of the details given are vague. From knowledge of previous poems in *Volando*, the reader is aware that the poetic 'I' is aligned with Partnoy, yet no name is given here. Instead, Partnoy poeticises the figure of the *testimoniante*.

The information provided is a form of testimonial scene-setting that denounces the dictatorship, disappearances perpetrated by the military and the use of concentration camps. Memory frames the symbol of the windmill: the 'molino roto' is located 'frente al campo de concentración' (*Volando*, 68). The situation of the windmill is significant, as is the positioning of the preposition 'frente' as the first word of 'Los molinos'. The windmill is a symbol of resistance, while its broken state represents the immobility of the prisoners at La Escuelita.

⁷⁸ The site of La Escuelita was later destroyed to cover up what had happened there. With the help of Partnoy's *testimonio*, a team of archaeologists was able to create a reconstruction of the site for the human rights trials in Bahía Blanca (Partnoy n.d.: 4:08).

The poem's second sentence explains how the windmill came to be broken – 'Los milicos lo habían atado con alambre' (*Volando*, 68) – and the poetic 'I' names those responsible for preventing its normal function. Partnoy's use of the term 'milicos' is pejorative and their actions, tying up a windmill with wire, seem absurd. 'Alambre' refers to wire, yet the illustration by Raquel Partnoy accompanying the poem depicts barbed wire, 'alambre de púas' (2005a: 71).⁷⁹ This seems unnecessarily violent, yet Partnoy explains why the soldiers took such action: 'A los conscriptos del Comando del V Cuerpo de Ejército les tocaba hacer guardia "imaginaria" allí y eso les aterrizzaba. Resulta que en las noches sin viento el molino se desataba y echaba a girar solito' (*Volando*, 68).

Naming the 'Comando del V Cuerpo de Ejército', Partnoy's poetic *testimoniante* identifies the military body responsible for La Escuelita. The poetic voice both denounces and undermines the military. 'Hacer guardia "imaginaria"' refers to the practice of soldiers standing on guard outside the concentration camp. However, Partnoy juxtaposes the show of military might with the conjugation of 'aterrizzar' to depict guards who are vulnerable and fearful. She illustrates the military's weakness instead of representing the terror imposed on the Argentine population during the dictatorship.

Fear of a windmill seems illogical, but Partnoy introduces a supernatural element to the poem as an explanation for this anxiety.⁸⁰ While the windmill's personified action seems inexplicable, no malevolent force is depicted. Partnoy's use of the term 'solito' extends the sense of the uncanny, while the diminutive is reminiscent of 'Arte poética' (*Venganza* and *Volando*). The diminutive suffix makes the windmill seem unthreatening, yet it has the power to reduce 'los milicos' to a vulnerable state.

⁷⁹ To the left of the windmill, there is a banner that reads 'MEMORIA'. Eight blindfolded people are depicted, one of whom is visibly pregnant. These are presumably the eight persons named by Partnoy in the second stanza and the blindfolds refer to those that the prisoners were forced to wear at La Escuelita.

⁸⁰ I also discuss Partnoy's use of the supernatural in Chapter 4 in relation to 'Lo fatal' (p.184) and 'Razones' (p.185) as well as in Chapter 5 with 'Preposiciones' (p.219) and 'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país' (p.266).

The poetic voice explains how the windmill was able to move again: 'Cuenta la leyenda, que es siempre la verdad, que los espíritus de los desaparecidos movían la aspas' (*Volando*, 68). Partnoy makes reference to literary form and storytelling is highlighted by Partnoy's conjugation of 'contar' at the beginning of the sentence, instead of 'según'. She alludes to the oral tradition of retelling legends and her poetic 'I' is a writer (revealed in the third stanza) recounting 'la leyenda' and extending it in the poem.

Defining 'la leyenda' as 'siempre la verdad', Partnoy stresses the importance of literary form in truth-telling, as well as alluding to the idea of basic 'truths' or history being embedded in legends. Considering the *testimonio* studies debates on veracity discussed in Chapter 1, 'Los molinos' makes a point of establishing storytelling as truthful. Although the supernatural elements in the poem may make the reader sceptical, Partnoy wishes her reader to take this legend seriously. The *desaparecidos* referred to here are people who have been murdered; the presence of their spirits implies that they are no longer alive. However, through literary form – the legend and Partnoy's 'Los molinos' – the *desaparecidos* are empowered and are depicted in an act of resistance against the military.

As the poem moves into the second stanza, time alters, but the focus is on the same location: 'En 1998, veintidos [sic] años después de ser liberada, volví al sitio de La Escuelita' (*Volando*, 68). Reading the poetic 'I' as a version of Partnoy, it is significant to note that the dates mentioned in 'Los molinos' are approximate. When the poetic voice refers to being 'liberada', this means her removal from La Escuelita and not her ultimate release. Partnoy herself was moved from La Escuelita to Villa Floresta prison 'el 25 de abril de 1977' (A.M. Partnoy 1981c), which does not exactly tally with the 'veintidós años' of 'Los molinos'. However, the purpose of the poem is to incorporate *testimonio* into the literary. For precise details, Partnoy's official testimony for CONADEP can be consulted.

In *The Little School*, Partnoy notes that when she 'went back to Argentina in the summer of 1984 [...] the Little School had been leveled' (1998: 17). Although the buildings of La Escuelita no longer exist, it is significant that the windmill is still present in 'Los molinos'. It is a symbol of resistance in the poem, yet its function changes between the first and second stanzas. The poetic 'I' notes that, in 1998, she saw:

el molino pero los espíritus de mis amigos del alma, la Vasquita y la Corta, María Eugenia y Néstor, de mis compañeros María Elenita, Graciela (la embarazada que dió [sic] a luz en cautiverio), Benja, Braco ... sus espíritus no echaron a girar las aspas. (*Volando*, 68)

Partnoy's repetition of the noun 'espíritus' stresses the supernatural element in 'Los molinos de la memoria'. By naming the 'espíritus', Partnoy poeticises her personal experiences and the supernatural becomes (almost) tangible. The terms 'amigos del alma' and 'compañeros' emphasise the closeness of these relationships, forged before and during political detention.

Many of the names mentioned in 'Los molinos' also appear in 'Respuesta', which I discussed earlier in this chapter (p.120). Both poems are published in *Volando*; 'Respuesta' in the second section 'Derroteros de vida' and 'Los molinos' in the third, 'Diálogos para levantar vuelo'. The reader recognises the names when they appear in the later poem ('Los molinos'). Three unfamiliar names are María Eugenia – who I believe to be 'Mary' in 'Respuesta' – and 'la Vasquita y la Corta'. They are sisters Zulma Aracelli Izurieta ('la Vasquita') and Graciela Izurieta ('la Corta'). Zulma is also mentioned in 'Respuesta' and biographies of both are included in the appendix of *The Little School* (1998: 124-5; 128).⁸¹

An ellipsis follows the eight names. The pause made by the speaker can be read as a moment of poetic silence, reflecting on the loss of these people. The ellipsis may also indicate the physical distance between the speaker and her friends,

⁸¹ Graciela Izurieta is named in *The Little School*, but her nickname 'la Corta' is not. In 2015, 'en el marco del Día de la Memoria las aulas del CIU [Centro Inter Universitario de General Belgrano] fueron nombradas como "La Vasca, Zulma Izurieta" y "La Corta, María Graciela Izurieta", alumnas universitarias [...] que desaparecieron durante la dictadura militar mientras estudiaban en Bahía Blanca' (n. auth. 2015). In 2002, the government of Argentina established the 'Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia'. It takes place each year on 24 March 'en conmemoración de quienes resultaron víctimas del proceso iniciado en esa fecha de año 1976' (Ministerio de Educación n.d.).

especialmente ahora que sus espíritus parecen ausentes durante su regreso al lugar de La Escuelita. Sin embargo, Partnoy una vez más otorga agencia a 'los espíritus'. El campo de concentración ya no existe y los espíritus ya no sirven una función subversiva en ese espacio. 'En cambio,' explica el poeta 'yo', 'viajaron conmigo hasta mi casa de Los Angeles' (*Volando*, 68). Anteriormente, el propósito de los espíritus era perturbar al ejército en La Escuelita; ahora, es para impulsar la búsqueda de justicia del hablante. 'Los espíritus de los desaparecidos' ya no están ausentes y son bienvenidos al hogar del hablante. Es significativo que este espacio se describa como 'mi casa de Los Angeles' porque sugiere que el poeta ahora se siente establecido en un lugar que una vez fue su tierra de exilio.

La vida cotidiana del hablante en Los Angeles se expande en el tercer estrofo, donde se menciona su (no identificada) ocupación y su vocación poética se sitúan lado a lado. Partnoy escribe que:

Días después, cuando iba en bicicleta al trabajo me *pedalié* [sic] un poema. Cuando lo ví [sic] me dí [sic] cuenta de que tenía forma de revólver. Recordé entonces aquellos versos de Gabriel Zelaya [sic]: 'la poesía es un arma/cargada de futuro' [...]. (*Volando*, 68)

La conexión entre poesía y movimiento se basa en el movimiento espacial y temporal en el poema, así como en el movimiento del molino de viento mismo. Cuando fue preguntado en una entrevista sobre el neologismo 'pedalié', Partnoy explica:

mi mamá se acuerda que de chica yo iba a comprar siempre en el barrio, en la panadería, la verdulería – éramos los chicos los que íbamos a hacer las compras – y entonces me cuenta que yo volvía y le recitaba un poema que se me había ocurrido mientras iba a comprar la carne, el pan. Entonces yo creo que lo mío con la poesía tiene que ver con el movimiento. [...] Muchas veces, por ejemplo, me ducho con un poema; o si varios días me anda dando vuelta un verso, eventualmente lo pongo en un papel. (2007: 30)

In 'Los molinos', metapoetic transcription of the aforementioned poem is discussed, suggesting that it is a calligram: 'tenía forma de un revólver.' Nevertheless, the poem is not displayed in this way to the reader. Instead, Partnoy explores the poeticised moment through an intertextual reference, followed by two metrical stanzas.

Through the image of the revolver, Partnoy introduces lines written by Gabriel Celaya, an anti-Francoist Spanish poet who fought with the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War (Celaya 1988: 292), 'una figura clave, como un primer punto de referencia en el campo de la lucha de los intelectuales contra el franquismo' (Caballero Bonald 1988: 80). She refers to Celaya's renowned poem 'La poesía es un arma cargada de futuro', published in *Cantos iberos* (1955) and responds to Celaya's work by posing a rhetorical question, '¿Y si el arma, Zelaya [sic], | apuntara al futuro?' (*Volando*, 70).⁸² Rather than taking 'forma de revólver', one could argue that these last lines form the inverse shape. The typography illustrates movement into the future and the verb 'apuntar' denotes a specific aim – avoiding the repetition of past atrocities. In neither poem does the 'arma' incite violence and in 'Los molinos' poetry is proposed as a peaceful weapon to combat persecution.

The line from Celaya is an *alejandrino* – or a divided one, as Partnoy presents it. Similarly, both lines of the fourth stanza in 'Los molinos' are heptasyllables, combining to form another *alejandrino*. The metrical disruption may be understood as reflecting uncertainty about the future. It is also an indication of poetry's ability to unsettle a linear trajectory, suggesting traditional form need not be used, just as history need not be repeated.

As a series of questions concatenates in the fifth stanza, Partnoy returns to traditional metrics – a dodecasyllable, six *alejandrinos* and a tercet – before one final broken *alejandrino*. Conventional metre is used to refer to historical instances of injustice and impunity (the Holocaust and colonial slavery). Yet Partnoy's repeated use of the rhetorical question emphasises that there can be no sufficient answer to justify atrocity. In other contexts, metric regularity creates a steady poetic rhythm, but in 'Los molinos' the *alejandrinos* are used to write about genocide. Furthermore, the

⁸² Partnoy quotes from Celaya's poem in the epigraph to the vignette/short story 'Poetry' in *The Little School*: 'I curse the poetry | of those who do not take sides...' (1998: 101).

repeated questions – and lack of responses – form a poetic clamour, giving a sense of the poetic voice’s increasing distress. Inclusion of the first person plural in the initial line of the stanza involves the reader in this emotion: ‘¿Sobre qué muertos echaremos qué culpas | cuando se nos desteja la trama del silencio?’ (*Volando*, 70).

Partnoy’s use of the reflexive ‘destejarse’ echoes the phrase ‘el molino se desataba’ in the sixth line of the poem. Metaphorical untying and unravelling are both testimonial actions. The removal of the wire tying the windmill is caused by the existence of the *desaparecidos*’ spirits, not their absence. Similarly, the unravelling of ‘la trama del silencio’ represents a movement towards speaking out. Partnoy uses the double meaning of ‘trama’ to extend the metaphorical language and image of weft being unravelled, as well as alluding to the literary. The sense of ‘trama’ referring to plot suggests a complicity in the silence, in which the reader is involved. Partnoy alludes to the Argentine military’s deliberate actions to frighten people, so that they would not protest. The rhetorical question expresses the speaker’s exasperation that, if people do not speak out about human rights abuse in time, those responsible will eventually die and will not be held to account for their actions.

Repetition in the stanza of the determiners ‘qué’ and ‘cuáles’ stresses the absence of a satisfactory response to the speaker’s questions. Furthermore, the recurrence of velar plosives [k] sonically highlights the repetitive form of the questions. Partnoy contrasts the hard sounds with softer sibilance, which also builds in the stanza. The repeated sounds, particularly noticeable in the third and fourth lines, aurally augment the speaker’s demand for answers: ‘¿Cuáles serán las puertas para la cruz de sangre | y cuáles las solapas de estrellas amarillas?’ (*Volando*, 70).

Partnoy refers to the Passover and the Holocaust, dehumanising the people involved by referring solely to religious-historical symbols of Jewish identity; the first protecting Jewish people from genocide and the second condemning them to it.⁸³ I do not think Partnoy is making a specifically religious point. Rather, she demonstrates the dehumanisation that occurs when one group inflicts violence on another, which fits within her wider discussion of human rights violations.

⁸³ The genocide relating to the Passover is the tenth Plague of Egypt, the death of the first-born child, which features in the Torah and the Bible.

The poem's rhetorical questions proceed to a discussion of colonial slavery, which juxtaposes images of silence and speech: '¿De qué gargantas frías rapiñaremos voces | para que sean el eco de lo que dijo el amo?' (*Volando*, 70). Mention of 'gargantas' suggests the possibility of speech, yet this noun is qualified by the adjective 'frías', which indicates that speech is now impossible for those people. Still, Partnoy extends imagery of speech and 'el eco de lo que dijo el amo' is an allusion to *testimonio*, although it also implies repeating the version of events told by those in power, for fear of reprisal. Partnoy's repeated use of the first person conjugation involves the reader in the speaker's pursuit of justice. Although she writes about historic instances of human rights abuse and murder, Partnoy only uses the term 'muertos' once. It is a significant poetic choice because, thus, the only people Partnoy names as dead are perpetrators.

The poem's final rhetorical question returns to Argentina's recent history and the circumstances portrayed in the first stanza. Unlike the stanza's other questions, which are metrically and visually similar, this question fractures over several lines. While the layout of these lines is disrupted, Partnoy maintains the metre. The first line, '¿Qué perdón, qué "justicia humanamente posible"' (*Volando*, 70), constitutes an *alejandrino*, as well as the last lines:

con alambre
los molinos
de nuestra
memoria? (2004: 70)

The verb 'atarán' works as a conjunction between *alejandrinos*, forming a linguistic-poetic pun. Having centred the previous questions on the topic of blame, the speaker's attention is now directed towards justice and forgiveness. Following the rhetorical setup of previous questions, Partnoy uses these last lines to illustrate the power of memory. The physical windmill has become a metaphor for testimonial memory.

Partnoy's blending of literary technique and *testimonio* is expanded in 'Cuatro postales' (*Venganza*), where the speaker is pursued by death. The poem depicts a variety of dangerous and deadly settings, yet the poetic 'I' is defiant throughout.

Partnoy uses the postcard both as a metaphor and explores its literary form, in the sense that it gives a snapshot of a situation. Each stanza is one of the 'postales'. The first three combine metaphor with *testimonio* about the events and consequences of the dictatorship, while the last stanza is a statement of defiance and resistance.

The first line of 'Cuatro postales' – 'la muerte, mi vecina' (*Venganza*, 54) – is used anaphorically at the beginning of each stanza. Partnoy personifies death and this technique serves to create metaphorical testimony. Using the epithet 'vecina' to describe death, Partnoy creates an image of proximity, suggesting the extensive bereavements experienced by the poetic 'I' and the lengthy periods during which her life was in danger. Partnoy writes, in the 'Introduction', to *Venganza* that:

Every night she fears for the arrival of the jailers. They will inject her with an anesthetic [sic] and, once she is unconscious, kill her in a faked 'confrontation' with the Army. Or they will let her go, only to shoot her in the back. Or drop her from a helicopter into the Atlantic Ocean, a few miles from her hometown of Bahía Blanca. (*Venganza*, 11-12)

Although in 'Cuatro postales' the term 'vecina' suggests familiarity, the deaths Partnoy refers to are not owing to natural causes.

The friendly connotations of neighbourly intimacy are juxtaposed with death and made sinister:

La muerte, mi vecina,
lo convenció a mi hermano
de que tomara
unas vacaciones de la vida.
Y él, una mañana,
apagó la luz con el gatillo.
En donde está no hay postales
para mandar a los amigos... (*Venganza*, 54)

Partnoy's personification of death is a rendering of the military dictatorship and its consequences. In the first stanza of 'Cuatro postales', Partnoy writes about the suicide of her brother, Daniel.⁸⁴ At the time of his death, Partnoy was already in exile in the USA and the military authorities would not permit her to return to Argentina for Daniel's funeral (*Venganza*, 16). The use of metaphor and euphemism in 'Cuatro postales' is typical of Partnoy's employment of understatement. Daniel's death is shocking and traumatic, but no further violence is portrayed. Instead, there is a gentleness to the images Partnoy creates to depict the actions of 'my brother, my playmate, the illustrator of my childhood poems' (*Venganza*, 16).

The term 'vacaciones de la vida' is emphasised by alliteration and it is in reference to these 'vacaciones' that the poem gets its title. She uses euphemism to refer to her brother's death, which seems a softer way of discussing suicide and its consequences. Separating the subject and verb by placing 'una mañana' in apposition, Partnoy momentarily postpones the fatal action. She combines minimisation in the gentle, everyday action of switching off a light, with the violence connoted by 'el gatillo'.

The final lines of the first stanza again relate to the poem's title. Partnoy does not directly state the death of 'mi hermano' in the poem, yet she represents the effects of this loss through the impossibility of communication. Metaphorically representing social intercourse, an image of the friendly act of sending holiday postcards is briefly conjured, yet the purpose of this is to stress the loss of such innocent gestures. The ellipsis at the end of the first stanza suggests a shocked silence, a moment where the poetic voice can no longer talk about this loss, when words are no longer sufficient to convey grief felt by the poetic 'I'.

The uncomfortable silence is interrupted by a noisy, anthropomorphic portrayal of 'la muerte, mi vecina' in the second stanza. Stereotypical neighbourly actions are made threatening:

⁸⁴ Salomón Partnoy testified that 'mi hijo Daniel estaba bajo una crisis nerviosa y luego de algunos años que Alicia estaba en el extranjero como consecuencia de lo vivido el [sic] se suicida' (S. Partnoy 2012). In Chapter 4, I discuss at greater length Partnoy's poetic depiction of her relationship with her brother (pp.178-195).

La muerte, mi vecina,
me golpeó la puerta un mediodía;
venía a pedirme
“una tacita de arrepentimiento”
y una pizca
“sólo una pizca” de cobardía.
“Vuelva mañana” le dije.
Y esa noche me mudé. (*Venganza*, 54)

The poetic neighbour does not knock on the door, rather Partnoy uses the verb ‘golpear’, suggestive of violent force. Specifying the time as ‘mediodía’ is a significant snapshot in the timeline of Partnoy’s kidnap and disappearance, as I discussed in Chapter 2: ‘it was noon [...] when they arrested her’ (*Venganza*, 12). The ‘vecina’ comes to make requests under the guise of neighbourly behaviour. Partnoy’s use of the diminutive (‘tacita’) and minimisation (‘sólo’) plays on the connotations of a friendly neighbour. However, what would otherwise be unthreatening images are juxtaposed with death: ‘la muerte, mi vecina’. Instead of a cup of sugar and a pinch of salt, the neighbour asks for repentance and cowardice.

The rhyme between ‘mediodía’ and ‘cobardía’ connects the concepts of dictatorial violence with the expectation that the Argentine populace would be afraid, and that resistance to the dictatorship would stop as a result. Partnoy uses assonance in the first six lines of the stanza (vecina, mediodía, venía, tacita, pizca, cobardía), which creates a persistent, irritating noise associated with ‘la muerte, mi vecina’. However, this stops in the last two lines as the poetic voice appears. Her defiance in the face of threat is shown by imperative direct speech: “‘Vuelva mañana’ le dije’. The poetic voice then escapes the situation, ‘me mudé’. These lines are two of only four instances of first person singular conjugations in ‘Cuatro postales’. Here, the speaker is being portrayed as taking action and making the decision to move, rather than experiencing forced relocation. The poetic ‘I’ is depicted as in control and having the power to evade her threatening neighbour.

While the poetic voice manages to avoid an encounter with death in the second stanza, she is discovered in the third. Partnoy writes:

La muerte, mi vecina,
me descubrió una tarde
con los ojos vendados
cubierta de frazadas
que olían
a cuerpos sucios y aterrados.
No la ahuyentó el olor, estoy segura,
porque ese mismo día
llevó a ZulmaMaríaElenaBenjayBraco
que portaban idénticas frazadas.
La muerte calzaba botas militares. (*Venganza*, 54-56)

Again, Partnoy combines the personification of death with *testimonio* about La Escuelita. The absence of specificity about date or time, beyond 'una tarde', can be read as a representation of the temporal disorientation the prisoners may have experienced, particularly when blindfolded. It can also be understood as a means of conveying the suddenness with which prisoners might be killed as Partnoy illustrates in the last lines of the stanza. She does not name a location and, as I argued in my analysis of 'Juicio', this absence suggests the prisoners' lack of awareness of their geographical situation.

Their sense of disorientation is compounded by being forced to wear blindfolds and use blankets. Partnoy writes of La Escuelita that:

When the temperature fell below zero, we were covered with only dirty blankets; when the heat was unbearable, we were obligated to blanket even our heads. We were forced to remain silent and prone, often immobile or face down for many hours, our eyes blindfolded and wrists tightly bound. (Partnoy 1998: 14-15)

Partnoy rhymes the adjectives ‘vendados’ and ‘aterrados’, stressing the fear felt by the prisoners. Furthermore, the individual experience is combined with that of the collective: ‘vendados’ refers to the poetic voice’s blindfolded eyes, whilst ‘aterrados’ refers to multiple persons. Assonance connects the adjective ‘vendados’ with the noun ‘frazadas’ through their common stressed vowel, and links two terms that refer to objects (forcibly) covering the body.

The prevalent sense in the third stanza is the sense of smell, heightened by the deprivation of sight. Fear is represented as olfactory, juxtaposing the image of terrified prisoners with death’s lack of fear: ‘no la ahuyentó el olor, estoy segura’.⁸⁵ The use of caesura in this line indicates a poetic aside, reminding the reader both of the speaker’s presence in these inhumane conditions and of her witness to the removal of four *compañeros*. It is notable that the inclusion of the aside makes the line a dodecasyllable like the final line of the stanza, which provides a further, identifying description of ‘la muerte’.

Poetic imagery in the stanza is blended with poetic *testimonio* in the antepenultimate line. As in ‘Respuesta’, Partnoy names ‘ZulmaMaríaElena-BenjaBraco’. She writes that ‘portaban idénticas frazadas’ and creates a sense of unity between the prisoners, as well as solidarity with the poetic ‘I’ who survived. She, too, was covered in blankets and by portraying the prisoners as alike in appearance, Partnoy suggests it was mere chance who survived and who was murdered.

Previous portrayals of death in ‘Cuatro postales’ have been abstract, but the final line of the third stanza is unequivocal: ‘la muerte calzaba botas militares’. The stressed penultimate syllable in ‘frazadas’ and ‘calzaba’ connects two terms referring to bodily coverings, like ‘vendados’ and ‘frazadas’ earlier in the stanza. However, the last line’s depiction is a denunciation of the military, responsible for the murders of Zulma, María Elena, Benja and Braco. The blindfold prevents the speaker from identifying individual faces, but Partnoy leaves no doubt as to the perpetrators.

⁸⁵ Partnoy also describes fear as olfactory in ‘Arte poética’, where she uses the phrase ‘oliendo a miedo’. In ‘Cuatro postales’ she builds a powerful sensory-emotional image, which resonates with the reader, but not with the personified figure of death. Like the military guards at La Escuelita, death shows no compassion for the frightened prisoners, forced to live in unhygienic conditions.

Synecdochically represented by their boots, she denies the individuality of members of the military.

Where the first three stanzas of 'Cuatro postales' depict events that occurred during the military dictatorship, the final stanza changes temporal direction to speculate about the future. Partnoy writes:

La muerte, mi vecina,
harta ya de que la ande esquivando,
vendrá descalza un día
a llevarse mis huesos
a un país de lluvias sin futuro.
¡Ojalá que se ahogue en mis cenizas! (*Venganza*, 56)

Repeated stressed syllables in the second line emphasise the actions taken by the poetic 'I' to evade death. The phrase 'ande esquivando' recalls the idea of 'volando bajito': resistance through staying 'under the radar' of the powerful.

The personification of death is extended beyond the description of her actions to a portrayal of her emotional state. She is 'harta' and it is implied that her response to the speaker's avoidance is to develop underhand tactics: 'vendrá descalza un día'. That is to say, without noisy, identifying military boots. The poetic voice expects that death will approach silently and catch her unawares, yet she does not accept this without resistance. Partnoy's use of the future tense 'vendrá' implies the inevitability of death. The next line's phrasing – 'llevarse mis huesos' (and not 'llevarme a mí') – conveys the sense that death will still be unable to reach the speaker, only what remains of her body.

Even in the face of her own, inevitable death, the poetic 'I' remains resistant. It is not clear when 'un día' will be, but the broad possibility of when this moment might occur fits with the development of time through the poem. Partnoy's use of time in 'Cuatro postales' is notable for its progression ('mañana | mediodía | tarde | día'). Each part of the day is affected, as if 'la muerte mi vecina' is omnipresent in the speaker's life. The poetic 'I'-survivor must live with the knowledge of many unnatural deaths caused by the dictatorship. Consequently, the layout of the poem builds to its

defiant ending: 'mis cenizas' refer to crematory ash and the speaker's hope to extinguish 'la muerte' is emphasised by a final, sibilant hiss.

3.4 Conclusion

After Adorno's famous maxim, there exists the notion that poetry has no place in writing about atrocity, as if the aesthetic concerns of the form preclude it from tackling challenging and distressing subject matters. What Partnoy's writing demonstrates, conversely, is that her manipulation of form and technique augments the testimonial content of her poetry.

The metapoetic format of 'Arte poética' and 'Arte política' addresses Partnoy's approach to writing, as a poet and as a *testimoniante*. Both poems' titles suggest the idea of artistry and, similarly, their self-referential content highlights Partnoy's use of language and poetic technique. In 'Arte poética', she stresses the power of understatement as a method of resistance, while 'Arte política' illustrates the role of poetry in transmitting the testimonial voice and in denouncing human rights abuse.

Partnoy's poetic 'I' is repeatedly shown attempting to talk with others about her experiences of dictatorship. Yet, often, these audiences are unwilling or unable to listen. 'Juicio' exposes the difficulties of fighting impunity, eliciting the reader's empathy for the *testimoniante* whose pursuit of justice has been thwarted by a legal technicality. At the same time, Partnoy stresses the humanity of people frightened into silence by a regime of terror.

The setting of 'Respuesta' appears to be an informal encounter, but the hostility of the situation means the speaker is reluctant to share her personal story. Partnoy's rendering of these circumstances depicts the harmful impact of callous attitudes towards survivors, while the poem's focus on multiple forms of solidarity emphasises the need for empathy.

It is insensitivity, rather than cruelty, that is displayed by the audience of 'Testimonio'. The poetic 'I' is depicted in the testimonial act, facing a group of people who have preconceived ideas about what she ought to tell them. Partnoy writes about the effects of trauma on the survivor, both in the past and ongoing in the present. She

indicates the complexity of finding an approach to *testimonio*, while showing that such communication inevitably places the *testimoniante* under immense strain.

In order to testify, the survivor must find a means of expression that can convey the experience of human rights abuse. Partnoy's poetic exploration of language and metaphor speaks to the limitations and possibilities of linguistic communication, while acknowledging the distress and resilience of a speaker who has lived through state violence.

'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' depicts the physical and psychological trauma caused by torture. Partnoy shows its destructive force on a person's wellbeing and their relationship with language and communication. The distress felt by the poetic 'I' is palpable and Partnoy centres the perspective of the victim and the survivor. Resisting the dictatorial appropriation of language, Partnoy ultimately uses linguistic manipulation for the denunciatory purpose of *testimonio*.

In 'Los molinos de la memoria' Partnoy employs poetic form to testimonial effect. Combining sections of prose poetry and metrical verse, she blends metaphor with what initially appears to be conventional prose *testimonio*. Paying homage to her disappeared and murdered *compañeros* from La Escuelita, Partnoy emphasises the importance of memory and stresses the function of poetry as a tool of denunciation and resistance.

Grounded in events that personally affected Partnoy, the depiction of resistance in 'Cuatro postales' is built through metaphor. Alluding to the deaths of her brother and *compañeros*, as well as the ever-present threat to her speaker's life, Partnoy creates a poetic 'I' who repeatedly outmanoeuvres the figure of death. Metaphor is used to undermine and denounce the actions of the military authorities, at the same time as depicting a speaker who is committed to defying the dictatorship throughout her entire life.

In this chapter, I have analysed Partnoy's construction of the first person testimonial subject, as well as how she poetically renders the experience of dictatorial violence and its ongoing effect on the survivor. The next chapter will consider the repercussions that human rights abuse has on the family. I will explore how Partnoy depicts the family unit – its destruction and (re)construction – both during and in the aftermath of dictatorship.

Chapter 4

‘Caminar a tu lado | por un mundo mejor’:

The Poetic Construction of Family Relations

During and in the Aftermath of Dictatorship

Following ‘A mi hija’, the initial poem in the main body of *Venganza*, depictions of family are recurrent in Partnoy’s poetry. This chapter examines Partnoy’s rendering of the mother-daughter relationship, the connection between siblings and the bond between life partners. As I have established in previous chapters, the first person speaker is a version of Partnoy and the poetic exploration of interpersonal relations references members of her own family. Sometimes naming them in *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos*, sometimes using allusion, Partnoy writes about her eldest daughter, Ruth Sanabria; her brother, Daniel Partnoy; and her husband, Antonio Leiva.⁸⁶

From the moment Partnoy was kidnapped until the day of her exile from Argentina, she was forcibly separated from her daughter Ruth. I will analyse how poems written during Partnoy’s imprisonment depict a speaker attempting to maintain a parental relationship with her child. The poetic ‘I’ seeks gentle methods of communicating with her daughter and rejecting the confines of her prison cell. While Partnoy’s *testimonio* expresses the anguish of her speaker, the poems also emphasise resistance and work to nurture the same quality in the child, to whom the poems are addressed.

The Argentine military’s targeting of Partnoy, as an opponent of the regime, affected not only her nuclear family.⁸⁷ Her disappearance was traumatic for many more of her relatives, including her parents and brother.⁸⁸ Daniel Partnoy was unable

⁸⁶ Transcriptions of all poems analysed in Chapter 4 are included in Appendix C.

⁸⁷ Shortly after she was kidnapped at their home, Partnoy’s first husband, Carlos Sanabria, was arrested at his workplace. Partnoy and Sanabria were detained by the same military personnel and were taken together to la Escuelita. (A.M. Partnoy 1981c).

⁸⁸ In her article ‘Poetry as a Strategy for Resistance in the Holocaust and the Southern Cone Genocides’ (2005b), Partnoy writes about the effect of her imprisonment on her grandfather, Mauricio Partnoy, who escaped the Russian pogroms by fleeing to Argentina.

to bear the mental distress caused by state terror and he died by suicide. The poems that mention Partnoy's brother delve into the emotional pain created by dictatorship, portraying a grieving survivor, who tries to make sense of the loss of her sibling.

Partnoy makes evident the destructive effect of state violence has on family, yet she also demonstrates the resilience of survivors and their ability to construct family in the aftermath of dictatorship. She portrays the connection between poeticised versions of herself and Antonio Leiva as a loving relationship built on a common experience of exile and survival. Central to the survivors' experience of the world is their shared outrage and immense sadness at having lived through torture, the murder of *compañeros* and the loss of their home country.

4.1 'Si yo pudiera, niña': The Mother-Daughter Relationship in 'A mi hija' (*Venganza*), 'Visita' (*Venganza*) and 'Nana sin la cebolla' (*Fuegos*)

When Alicia Partnoy was kidnapped from her home on 12 January 1977, her eighteen month-old daughter, Ruth Irupé Sanabria, was left behind (n. auth. 2013). During her mother's imprisonment, Ruth was looked after by her maternal grandparents (Sanabria n.d.). After Partnoy's transfer to Buenos Aires' Villa Devoto prison, Ruth and her grandparents were permitted to visit (Sanabria 2013). The forced separation of Partnoy and Ruth constitutes a violation of Articles 16 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as Article 9 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸⁹ It is in this context that I will explore Partnoy's construction of the mother-daughter relationship in a close reading of the poems 'A mi hija' (*Venganza*), 'Visita' (*Venganza*) and 'Nana sin la cebolla' (*Fuegos*).

⁸⁹ Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts 'the right to marry and found a family' and that the family 'is entitled to protection by society and the State'; Article 25 declares that 'motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance' (United Nations n.d.). Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will' (UNICEF n.d.). For recent legal and medical scholarship on the traumatic effects of family separations, following the Trump administration's forcible separation of families at the US-Mexico border, see Todres and Villamizar Fink (2020) and Teicher (2018).

‘A mi hija (Cartas desde la cárcel)’ is the first poem in *Venganza*’s opening section, ‘I: Poemas de la cárcel 1977-1979’ (*Venganza*, n.p.). The poem’s subtitle refers to the method by which Partnoy attempted to send the poem: an informed reader will recognise the poem’s title from its mention in the paratextual ‘Introduction’ to *Venganza*. Written during her imprisonment, Partnoy enclosed the poem with a letter to her family. The poem was returned to her in prison, marked with a censor stamp (*Venganza*, 14).⁹⁰ In an interview with Jorge Boccanera, Partnoy asserts ‘ahora es un poema libre’ (2000: 56). Composed of three numbered sections, ‘A mi hija’ takes a broad approach to communication, touching on sonic, written and physical exchanges.

Partnoy opens with a conjugation that appears three times in the first stanza, the imperative *voseo*: ‘escuchá’ (*Venganza*, 22).⁹¹ The focus on the aural emphasises storytelling as a means of communication between a parent and a young child, while the importance of speaking and listening reflects the situation during prison visits. Partnoy explains that ‘Ruth couldn’t touch me [...] as we were separated by a glass window’ (Stover and Nightingale 1985: 51).

In ‘A mi hija’, Partnoy uses gentle imagery to create alternative, poetic means of communication:

Mi garganta se hace amiga del viento
para llegar hasta vos
corazón tierno, ojos nuevos. (*Venganza*, 22)

Rejecting the violence and uncertainty of the poetic voice’s circumstances while imprisoned, Partnoy’s first image in ‘A mi hija’ is of friendship.

⁹⁰ The censoring of Partnoy’s correspondence with Ruth is a violation of Article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: ‘no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence’ (UNICEF n.d.).

⁹¹ Partnoy and her daughter, Ruth Irupé Sanabria, jointly published *¡Escuchá!: cuentos y versitos para los más chiquitos* (2016), illustrated by Partnoy’s mother, Raquel Partnoy. The collection begins with a letter, retrospectively written by Sanabria in the voice of her childhood self. *¡Escuchá!* continues with material written during Partnoy’s imprisonment: letters, jokes and poems for Ruth, as well as a drawing Ruth made for her mother.

The speaker's throat and the wind are personified as the elements become the medium for communication between parent and child. Assonance in 'viento' and 'tierno' extends Partnoy's soft, tactile imagery, while uniting the speaker's voice with the symbolic depiction of her daughter. Mother and child are represented by parts of their anatomy. The throat symbolises the speaker-mother, while the heart and eyes stand for the child. 'Corazón' is a term of endearment and the reader is visually drawn to the eye-rhyme 'vos | nuevos'. Partnoy's phrasing emphasises the child's young age and suggests the sense of sight, contrasting with the stanza's focus on sound. The poetic voice and her daughter are not in each other's physical company and must find other ways to nurture their relationship.

Repetition stresses the aural as Partnoy writes:

Escuchá:

Poné tu oído en el hueco de un caracol
o en el parlante infame
y escuchá. (*Venganza*, 22)

Using the imperative, the poetic 'I' teaches her daughter new ways of listening. A common childhood activity is to listen for the sound of the sea inside a shell. The speaker creates a link between the noises in nature and interpersonal communication. Such a connection serves as an abstract means of maintaining contact, at the same time as encouraging the development of the child's imagination.

The half-rhyme in the phrase 'el hueco de un caracol' stresses the image, while the letter 'o' – repeated five times in the line – is a concrete representation of the shell's hole. Moreover, the prevalent vowel sounds in this line are soft, in comparison to the harder assonance in the next line's 'parlante infame'. For the first time in the body of the poem, the poetic 'I' mentions the physical reality of her situation in prison. The only way for mother and daughter to actually speak to each other is via the prison phone at visiting time. It appears that the poetic voice has postponed mention of the prison in favour of creating more pleasant communicative images for her daughter. Furthermore, Partnoy's use of sound reinforces the distinction between gentle, natural imagery and the 'parlante infame' as an unnatural means of communication.

The poetic postponement of references to the dictatorship is also present in the second stanza of 'A mi hija'. Again, Partnoy focuses on the natural world before her speaker alludes to the activity that led to her detention. Occurring twice in the stanza, the noun 'la razón' has a double meaning, like its English-language equivalent (reason). It could be read in terms of an explanation for the speaker's imprisonment. However, 'la razón' can also be interpreted as reason, in terms of what is right, as opposed to the genocidal approach of the dictatorship.

Partnoy's poetic voice explains:

La razón es tan simple
y tan sencilla
como la gota de agua
o la semilla
que te cabe en la palma de la mano.
La razón es bien simple: no podía
dejar de pelear por la alegría
de aquellos que son nuestros hermanos. (*Venganza*, 22)

The synonyms 'simple' and 'sencilla' suggests that the poetic 'I' took the best course of action, even though this ultimately led to her forcible separation from her daughter. The manner in which 'la razón' is explained focuses on small objects (a water droplet; a seed), which the child can easily comprehend and touch. Partnoy renders an abstract philosophical concept in a way that focuses on the child's perspective. Building on the natural imagery used in the first stanza, the half-rhyme of 'sencilla' with 'semilla' highlights the image of the seed and suggests its potential to flourish, metaphorically suggesting a hopeful future.

Partnoy repeats the stanza's first line almost exactly, changing the adverb 'tan' for the colloquial 'bien'. Where the first line used enjambment, now there is a colon. Consequently, the word 'no' is capitalised, stressing that the poetic 'I' was unwilling to cease her anti-dictatorship activism. As a student at Bahía Blanca's Universidad Nacional del Sur, Partnoy was involved with the Juventud Universitaria Peronista. In

the paratextual 'Introducción' to *La Escuelita*, Partnoy explains that after the coup in Argentina in March of 1976:

decidí participar más activamente. Esta decisión implicaba arriesgar la vida. Ruth, tenía nueve meses. La respuesta a mis propios temores fue la necesidad de trabajar por una sociedad mejor para el futuro de mi hija. Lo hice durante casi un año.

Clandestinamente, copiaba y distribuía información sobre la situación económica, las huelgas de los trabajadores y la represión.
(2006: 9)

Further emphasised in 'A mi hija' by the half-rhyme 'dejar de pelear', the speaker is in no doubt about her decision to pursue anti-dictatorship activism.

For the first time in 'A mi hija', the poetic 'I' is presented as a subject with agency, coinciding with the poem's testimonial portrayal of Partnoy. The rendering of her actions is adjusted so that the child might understand, while the assonance of 'podía' and 'alegría' emphasises the concept of happiness. Although the poetic 'I' is imprisoned, her voice transmits hopeful and optimistic imagery to the child. Moreover, homeoteleuton stresses the stanza's final line, 'de aquellos que son nuestros hermanos' and the second person plural possessive involves the child in the collective struggle for justice and freedom.

Partnoy changes focus from the aural in the poem's first section, to written communication in the second. Directly referencing the poem's subtitle '(Cartas desde la cárcel)', the speaker discusses the difficulty of writing:

Para escribirte a vos
caramelo de sol, chiquita mía,
tendría...
tendría que juntar tanta ternura... (*Venganza*, 22)

As in the poem's first section, the speaker directly addresses her daughter and uses endearing terms, which are repeated through the stanza. The possessive 'mía' stresses the strong bond the poetic 'I' feels with her daughter.

Assonance connects the image of the child and her mother's action, 'tendría'. Partnoy's use of the conditional mood suggests that the poetic 'I' struggles to talk about distressing feelings in the indicative. Ellipses allude to inexpressible emotional difficulties faced by the poetic 'I', reinforced by Partnoy's use of sound. Sibilance in the first two lines combines soft sounds with loving references to the child, whereas the following two lines contain repetition and a stuttering effect produced by repeated dental sounds: 'tendría que juntar tanta ternura'. The speaker's linguistic stumbles convey her emotional distress, though the adjective 'tanta' stresses the depth of feeling towards her daughter.

Referring to herself in third person, the poetic voice speaks to her daughter. Partnoy's grammatical change to the indicative mood functions as an assertion of the speaker's strength:

Y tu madre, mi amor,
tu madre es dura,
tiene de piedra el alma,
casi no llora nunca... (*Venganza*, 22)

Parenthetically including the daughter in this statement, Partnoy's caesura poetically unites mother and child in the same line, yet the comma marks their physical separation. The endearing 'mi amor' emphasises the gentle, loving mother-daughter relationship in contrast to the violence of their separation. Partnoy's increasing use of punctuation in the second section of 'A mi hija' creates poetic barriers at the end of each line. The spatial division of the poetic 'I' and her child is emphasised, unlike in the poem's first section where enjambment visually aids the images of free-flowing communication.

Repetition of 'tu madre' stresses the maternal relationship both to the speaker, isolated from her family, and to the addressed child whose mother is absent. The half-rhyme of 'ternura | dura' combines softness and strength, mirroring the qualities

needed to maintain a loving relationship in extreme circumstances. Partnoy's metaphor 'tiene de piedra el alma' places the descriptor first to dual effect. The bilabial plosive [p] sonically stresses the speaker's determination and resolve. A stone might connote the absence of emotion. However, the following line's adverb 'casi', combined with an ellipsis, indicates that there are times when the speaker is so overpowered by her emotions that she is unable to hide them.

Such occasions occur when the poetic 'I' writes to her daughter, 'caramelo de sol, | cristalito de luna' (*Venganza*, 22). The familiar terms of endearment convey the speaker's love for her daughter and the depiction of the poetic 'I' as writer creates a metatextual image. Not only do the speaker's circumstances mirror those of Partnoy, but the poem's title is 'A mi hija (Cartas desde la cárcel)'. The poetic voice conveys images of optimism and strength, yet the poem's second section leads the reader to imagine her weeping as she writes these lines. Sanabria explains that in her mother's letters 'estaba visible la marca de las lágrimas' (2013). It is significant that the last five lines of the stanza are composed of heptasyllables – an exertion of poetic control over uncertain and traumatic circumstances.

Partnoy's use of heptasyllables is maintained almost exclusively throughout the poem's third and final section. The metre might be read as mimicking the rhythm of waves, alluding to the stanza's nautical imagery:

Hoy suelto las amarras
que aprisionan mis sueños
y llego hasta tu orilla
doradita de sol. (*Venganza*, 24)

The poetic 'I', in the third section of 'A mi hija', does not attempt to communicate with her daughter orally or in writing, as in previous sections. Now she seeks physical proximity to the child and nautical imagery suggests the great journey that must be undertaken to achieve this goal.

Partnoy depicts the speaker's dreams – rather than the speaker herself – as imprisoned, and such metaphorical representation allows the speaker to effect an escape. Sibilance mimics the soft sounds used to lull a child to sleep, building a

dreamlike quality at the beginning of the stanza. Still, the poetic 'I' is depicted as active and mobile through two conjugations of the first person singular indicative ('suelto' and 'llego').

The speaker metaphorically shakes off the stasis of earlier stanzas, moving away from the darkness of dream toward the sun's bright light that accompanies her daughter. Placing the word 'niña' at the beginning of the line (and poetic sentence), Partnoy indicates that the speaker's direction of travel is clear:

Niña soy navegante
de un barco de ilusiones
con un único puerto:
tu carita y tu voz. (*Venganza*, 24)

Alliteration connects the mother and child and, for the first time in 'A mi hija', they are poetically united with no obstacles created by punctuation.

Unwavering from her destination, the poetic 'I' is portrayed travelling towards the child, then the next lines switch from the indicative to the infinitive:

Abrocharte el zapato,
desatarte la risa,
caminar a tu lado
por un mundo mejor. (*Venganza*, 24)

An incomplete sentence, this part of the stanza comprises a list of activities in which the speaker wishes to engage with her daughter. The emphatic actions at the beginning of the stanza have given way to alteration in time: the poetic voice's metaphorical freedom is not concrete. However, she continues to imagine and yearn for activities that they will undertake together. The antonyms 'abrochar' and 'desatar' linguistically connect the care-giving activity of buckling a shoe and the emotional bonding caused by a mother making her daughter burst out laughing. Both activities would be impossible in the prison setting, even at visiting time.

While the commas suggest a list, the punctuation is also a visual obstacle. Consequently, the next line's enjambment politicises the speaker's aspiration to walk beside her daughter. No punctuation separates the seemingly commonplace mother-child activity (walking together) from its purpose, stated in the next line: 'por un mundo mejor'. Partnoy alludes to a political protest march and implies that the poetic 'I' wishes to be active in her child's political education.

Thus far, 'A mi hija' has explored the means by which the poetic 'I' and her daughter could maintain a connection despite the distance between them – and how the poetic 'I' hopes to return to her daughter's side. However, it is not until the second half of the poem's final stanza that the speaker acknowledges her physical absence in the child's life:

Para esas tareas
sé que está haciendo falta
mi mano y mi ternura,
mi libertad y mi voz. (*Venganza*, 24).

The present continuous form alludes to the speaker's ongoing absence from her daughter's company.

Echoing the earlier reference to the child – 'tu carita y tu voz' – Partnoy now uses the first person singular possessive. The hand is a symbol of physical connection and communication, part of a tender mother-child relationship. 'Libertad' signifies freedom of movement away from the prison's confines and it suggests freedom of speech. In the familial, private sphere, 'mi voz' refers to oral communication between mother and daughter, which has been rendered almost non-existent by the speaker's imprisonment. At the same time, 'mi voz' can be read as meaning Partnoy's voice as a poet (articulated by the publication of *Venganza*) and her testimonial voice. *Testimonio's* purpose is, after all, to advocate for 'un mundo mejor' by articulating and disseminating the experiences of survivors of human rights abuse. Partnoy's *testimonio* in 'A mi hija' illustrates the injustice of her own family's forced separation. The speaker's relationship with her daughter has been irrevocably altered by the dictatorship, but she seeks to re-establish their bond.

Inverting the stanza's earlier lines, and illustrating what the poetic 'I' could achieve with voice and hand, Partnoy writes:

Desatarte la risa,
abrocharte el zapato,
destruir las murallas
que nos tapan el sol... (*Venganza*, 24)

The lines focus first on mother-child bonding activities, then on activism. Partnoy emphasises the poetic voice's profound sense of motherhood and wish to re-establish the relationship with her daughter, which has been damaged by forced separation. The mention of walls blocking out the sun can be read both literally and figuratively. The imprisoned poetic 'I' is surrounded by prison walls which separate her from family and the freedom to go outdoors. At the same time, the sun is a metaphor for hope and freedom, obstructed by oppression and injustice. Furthermore, Partnoy's inclusion of the ellipsis after the word 'sol' suggests hopeful possibility that could come from destruction of literal and figurative walls. Contrary to the anguished ellipses in the second section of 'A mi hija', this form of punctuation is used to optimistic effect.

Now the speaker's focus is on how to achieve her goals, 'esas tareas', rather than on what is missing in the daughter's life and proximity. Partnoy writes, in the last poetic sentence of 'A mi hija':

es que estoy preparando
mi palabra y mi vida,
mi puño y mi
canción. (*Venganza*, 24)

Again, the present continuous form implies ongoing activity and preparative measures for a life outside the prison.

The specific mention of 'mi vida' refers to the speaker's continued survival (and foreshadows Partnoy's dedication, as a poet and academic, to proliferating the

testimonial voice), while the fist – shorthand for *puño en alta* – is a recognisable bodily symbol of resistance, iconic from left-wing political protest and anti-dictatorship defiance. Indented for visual effect, the final line's 'canción' could be read as an allusion to political protest song, especially in light of this last stanza's regular heptasyllabic lines. However, in combination with 'mi palabra', I interpret the song as a meta-poetic reference to poetry. 'A mi hija' is the first poem of *Venganza*, Partnoy's debut poetry collection. Its publication carries to their conclusion some of the preparatory activities undertaken by the poem's still-imprisoned speaker.

Directly following 'A mi hija' in the first section of *Venganza*, the title of 'Visita' suggests a visit received in prison. Instead, Partnoy depicts a family that has been forcibly separated. She presents a detained poetic 'I', who imagines being with her child, outside the confines of the jail. The poem begins in the third person:

Mamá rompe los viernes
cerrojos y candados
para darte una ronda
de minutos contados. (*Venganza*, 26)

The speaker identifies primarily as a mother and rejects the status of prisoner that has been imposed upon her.

Kaminsky writes, in her analysis of *The Little School*, that 'far from reinforcing the notion of the captive woman as passive [...] Partnoy emphasises the will to strength and the refusal to succumb among the imprisoned' (1993: 57). Similarly, in 'Visita', the speaker is not primarily defined by the circumstances of her imprisonment: the principal verb associated with 'Mamá' is 'romper'. She is placed in an active role, poetically freeing herself from captivity, rather than being depicted as the archetypal submissive detainee.

The objects that the mother breaks, 'cerrojos y candados', synecdochically represent the prison. While Partnoy illustrates the speaker's metaphorical destruction, alliteration and homeoteleuton visually and aurally stress the words, reinforcing the notion of impenetrability. The speaker wishes to escape her current situation in order to spend time with her child, from whom she has been forcibly

parted. Naming a day of the week, 'los viernes', Partnoy suggests the establishment of a routine, an element of building parent-child bonds. Moreover, the phrase 'darte una ronda' suggests the speaker's wish to provide her daughter with loving and care-giving touch. In this first segment of the poem, the physical distance between the two is unspecified.

Stressed by the *rima consonante* with 'candados', the mother-child separation is illustrated by 'minutos contados'. The speaker's distress at every moment that she is apart from her child is conveyed semantically and through sound. There are no elisions in the poem's fourth line – 'de minutos contados' – and the concatenation of enunciated syllables sounds like the ticking of a clock. Partnoy's repetition of the phrase 'minutos contados' throughout 'Visita' works to reinforce the slow passage of time for each of the separated family members.

The format of the poem's single stanza could be read as a means of maintaining the family unit, yet the textual content and punctuation signal the fracture of this group. A full stop at the end of the fourth line is the first allusion to physical division. Full stops split the poem into distinct sections and one creates a visual break between the lines about 'Mamá' and 'Papá'. They are divided from each other as well as from their child.

The second poetic sentence echoes the first by depicting the other parental figure:

Papá, desde bien lejos,
— su día amurallado —,
sueña con tu piel tibia
y tus minutos contados. (*Venganza*, 26)

Partnoy explicitly mentions the father's geographical remoteness.⁹² His isolation is further emphasised by punctuation. Dual parentheses separate the noun ('Papá')

⁹² Partnoy and her then-husband Carlos Sanabria were first imprisoned in La Escuelita (Bahía Blanca), then were taken to Villa Floresta (Bahía Blanca). On 22nd August 1977, Sanabria was taken to Rawson (Chubut Province); in October 1977, Partnoy was taken to Villa Devoto in Buenos Aires (Martínez 2012).

from the verb ('sueña') and dashes visually represent the prison walls. The father's desire to be close to his daughter is expressed through a tactile description of her skin juxtaposed with the conjugation of 'soñar'.

Dream is the illusory, and only, means for the parent and child to be freely together. Partnoy introduces the poem's addressee (the child) via the second person singular possessive. The absence of physical contact with her parents is implied and the phrase 'y tus minutos contados' presents the situation from the child's viewpoint. She, too, is acutely conscious of the extended time spent away from her parents, stressed by homeoteleuton connecting 'lejos' and 'contados' and the line's lengthened, octosyllabic form, in a poem primarily composed of heptasyllables.

The verbal mood shifts from the indicative to the subjunctive with the first appearance of the poetic 'I'. The speaker's sense of impotence is increasingly apparent as Partnoy writes:

Si yo pudiera, niña,
explicarte el por qué
de todos los cerrojos,
de todos los candados,
de todos los barrotes,
de las altas murallas
de todos pero todos
los minutos contados... (*Venganza*, 26)

The poetic 'I' directly addresses her daughter and refers to the implied question – why?, but Partnoy leaves the grammatical sentence unfinished. Eventually trailing off in an ellipsis, the speaker cannot find a suitable explanation for the forced separation the family is enduring.

Rawson is some 735km from Bahía Blanca and 1,370km from Buenos Aires. It seems that it was a common 'tactic' by the military to make it as difficult as possible for families to visit their imprisoned relatives.

Anaphora demonstrates the multiple barriers that impede their reunification. The presence of commas indicates the listing of these obstacles and the nouns ('cerrojos', 'candados', 'barrotes', 'murallas') create the sense of increasing fortification. Partnoy's colloquially emphatic use of 'pero' is representative of the language used by mother and child when they are speaking to each other. However, this moment of linguistic familiarity is overshadowed by the repetitive insistence of 'todos' and recurring 'minutos contados'. Homeoteleuton, in the form of multiple '-os' endings, creates a sonic and visual sense of the inescapability of the speaker's situation. Still, Partnoy's poetic voice repeatedly repudiates her spatial confines.

Partnoy opens the poem with an illustration of the poetic 'I' breaking free from captivity. Now the speaker desires superhuman powers so she can be with her daughter:

Niña si yo pudiera
devorar el espacio
para hacer una ronda
lejos de tanta cárcel...
ronda libre
y mis manos
sin minutos contados... (*Venganza*, 26)

The poem's earlier subjunctive line is echoed and inverted. Placing 'niña' at the start of the line, Partnoy indicates that the child is at the forefront of the poetic voice's mind. The absence of caesura places the speaker and her daughter in greater poetic proximity, yet 'Visita' is structured in such a way that 'Mamá' and 'Papá' are located far from their child.

The verb 'devorar' evokes the speaker's intense desire to be with her daughter. Twice Partnoy mentions a 'ronda', repeated from the poem's third line and reiterating the idea that the poetic 'I' aspires to be able to participate in games with her daughter. Such a commonplace activity has been prohibited by her imprisonment and, in this context, 'ronda' has a double meaning: it can also refer to a prison guard's patrol. The phrase 'tanta cárcel...' alludes to the insurmountable obstacle separating mother and

child, while the ellipsis suggests that words cannot sufficiently convey the ramifications of their division.

It is a 'ronda libre' to which the poetic 'I' aspires, emphasising freedom, away from the constraints of the previous line. As a sign of this liberty, the sole mention of the poetic voice's body occurs in the final two lines of the poem, where the speaker imagines 'mis manos | sin minutos contados...'. By focusing on the hand, Partnoy suggests a sense of touch and physical contact between mother and daughter, which is impeded by their separation. Alliteration and sibilance emphasise the final image, compounded by the homeoteleuton that is recurrent in 'Visita'.

The juxtaposition of hands and time connotes the use of fingers to learn how to count. Although this evokes childhood, it is the speaker's hands that Partnoy refers to: both mother and daughter are affected by the 'minutos contados'. The final ellipsis suggests an elongation of the 'minutos contados', but the poetic 'I' speaks with the hope that a time will come when the two are no longer apart. Composed almost entirely of heptasyllables, Partnoy's metrical structuring of 'Visita' mirrors the confinement of prison. Yet these constraints are broken for a moment in the antepenultimate and penultimate lines, when the poetic 'I' imagines the freedom of being physically reunited with her child.

Partnoy's exploration of style in her poetry is also seen through references to literary form. The poem 'Nana sin la cebolla' names a traditional poetic form: the lullaby. Dated 'Cárcel de Villa Devoto, 1978', Partnoy notes that the poem is written 'con Miguel Hernández' (*Fuegos*, 40). Partnoy states that her 'biggest influence is the poets of the Spanish Civil War' and names Miguel Hernández as one of these writers (Partnoy 2015: 15:46). The title, too, acknowledges Hernández's influence on the poem. Written during his imprisonment in the Spanish Civil War, Hernández's 'Nanas de la cebolla' was composed in response to the discovery that his wife and son had no food but bread and onions (Ferris 2002: 421-422).

Although the poems differ in content, there is a metric similarity. Hernández's twelve seven-line stanzas in 'Nanas de la cebolla' are composed of rhythmically regular five- and seven-syllable lines. 'Nana sin la cebolla' largely mimics this metre. Partnoy's use of the singular 'nana' appears to refer to the difference in length between the poems. Furthermore, the subject of 'Nana sin la cebolla' is the same

almost entirely throughout ('tu madre'). It is only in the closing lines that 'los pájaros' and 'vos' (the child) are grammatically active.

By contrast, almost every stanza of Hernández's 'Nanas de la cebolla' has a distinct subject, suggesting that the verses could be sung independently of each other. The musicality of both poems extends beyond the page. 'Nanas de la cebolla' was famously sung by the Catalan singer-songwriter Joan Manuel Serrat on his album *Miguel Hernández* (1973); Partnoy sings 'Nana sin la cebolla' in a radio interview (n.d.: 7:25).

Like in 'A mi hija', the speaker of 'Nana sin la cebolla' seeks to communicate with her daughter. Spatial constraints are overcome as the voice proclaims 'tu madre no está presa' (*Fuegos*, 40). Opening with a rejection of the speaker's imprisoned state, 'Nana sin la cebolla' emphasises her identity as a mother. However, in conjunction with the location and date of writing (Cárcel de Villa Devoto, 1978), Partnoy's depiction of the prison testifies to the separation of parent and child. The poetic voice continues:

tu madre tiene
pájaros en la sangre
no la detienen
las rejas, los barrotes
ni lo [sic] candados,
ni tu madre está presa
ni te ha dejado. (*Fuegos*, 40)

Avian imagery, which will be developed in the second stanza, creates the illusion of liberty.

Blood is encased in the body, but the metaphorical birds evoke the possibility of flight and freedom of movement. Partnoy bolsters this image with the statement 'no la detienen', a phrase which does not have a named subject until the following line. At first, the implied third person plural subject might be read as the military, depicted as powerless to stop the speaker. One reading of 'Nana sin la cebolla' could be that Partnoy undermines the military forces by omitting to mention them, despite

the setting of the Villa Devoto prison.⁹³ Instead, she personifies the building, constructing prison imagery through naming its ‘rejas’, ‘barrotes’ and ‘candados’, mirroring the word choice in ‘Visita’. Typically objects associated with enclosure, the poetic voice denies their power to detain her.

The anaphoric use of ‘ni’ stresses the speaker’s repeated rejection of forced imprisonment, while the comma after ‘candados’ separates the synecdochic portrayal of the prison from the stanza’s final lines. Partnoy echoes the poem’s opening line, then the mother and child relationship is directly mentioned for the first time in ‘Nana sin la cebolla’. The second person singular pronoun in the stanza’s last line is a direct mention of the poem’s addressee. Although the speaker repeatedly rejects her imprisonment and denies the division from her child, the half-rhyme ‘candados | dejado’ stresses the reason for their separation. The prison physically divides them.

Partnoy changes focus from the prison and uses the second stanza to extend the avian imagery evoked in the first. Her poetic ‘I’ is depicted through different birds:

Su tristeza es paloma,
su dolor golondrina,
sus días son gorriones
buscando tus esquinas. (*Fuegos*, 40)

Unlike the rest of the poem’s (split) dodecasyllables, the first four lines of the second stanza are all heptasyllables, forming two split *alejandrinos*. The dove and swallow suggest freedom and movement, yet they are juxtaposed with sadness and pain. Transforming these emotions through metaphor, Partnoy suggests a means by which the poetic ‘I’ can escape her reality.

Her association of feelings, caused by captivity, with birds allows the speaker to imagine their unhindered trajectory outside of the prison. Commas suggest listing in the first two lines, while the enjambment – ‘sus días son gorriones | buscando tus

⁹³ There is similarly no mention of the military or of any prison guards in ‘A mi hija’ and ‘Visita’, despite the poetic voice’s discussion of physical aspects of their setting.

esquinas’ – poetically connects the mother and child, although references to each of them are at opposite ends of the phrase.

‘Sus días’ refer to the lengthy time that poetic ‘I’ is imprisoned, while ‘tus esquinas’ suggest the street corners that form part of the child’s urban everyday. Referring to the speaker-mother in terms of time, Partnoy indicates her imprisoned status. The use of space, which creates an image of the child’s surroundings, emphasises their physical separation. The gerundial form of ‘buscar’ suggests that the child is ever-present in the speaker’s thoughts.

Partnoy’s phrasing at the start of the poem, ‘tu madre tiene | pájaros en la sangre’, is reminiscent of the colloquial phrase *tener pájaros en la cabeza*. The speaker’s declaration that she is not imprisoned may seem like an illusory daydream, particularly considering the poem’s date and location. However, Partnoy’s extended avian imagery in ‘Nana sin la cebolla’ demonstrates strength and resistance. The poetic ‘I’ again proclaims:

Tu madre no está presa
niña, tu madre
echa a volar los pájaros de su sangre;
[...]. (*Fuegos*, 40)

For the first time in ‘Nana sin la cebolla’, mother and child are united in one line, but the caesura creates a poetic barrier between them.

Echoing the poem’s third line, the speaker releases the metaphorical birds from her body. Enjambment makes this act seem even more free-flowing and the line ‘echa a volar los pájaros de su sangre’ is a dodecasyllable. Partnoy marks the speaker’s sole action with a metrical change. The split dodecasyllabic metre, created by recurring five- and seven-syllable lines in ‘Nana sin la cebolla’, has finally been united.

Not only are the speaker’s emotions depicted as multiple birds, but also her body has the power to generate the animals. Thus, her body has the metaphorical ability to transcend obstacles. As in ‘A mi hija’, there is one direction of travel:

si llegan hasta tu alma

y allí hacen nido...
que vos puedas gritarles:
¡ya ha amanecido! (*Fuegos*, 40)

The conditional does not throw doubt on the metaphorical birds' ability to travel, rather this formulation looks to nurture the child-addressee's imagination.

Partnoy's lullaby encourages the child's participation in small acts of resistance. The avian imagery, previously depicted in terms of the speaker's body, now refers to the child's spiritual construction. The birds are not religious symbols, rather they stand for inner strength. In the absence of physical connection, 'Nana sin la cebolla' suggests an abstract, metaphorical link between mother and child. Partnoy chooses a concrete point of reference that a child can comprehend – the birds – then renders the animals a symbol of resistance. The one reference in the poem to the child's voice is as a defiant shout, stressed by exclamation marks. Rhyming 'nido' with 'amanecido', Partnoy emphasises and extends the avian imagery.

The unnamed addressee of 'Nana sin la cebolla' is a child who is separated from her imprisoned mother. Partnoy's lullaby largely seeks to reassure the child that she has not been abandoned and the birds suggest a metaphorical way of maintaining contact. However, in the final lines, Partnoy's imagery is extended to offer the child agency. The speaker's daughter, young enough for a lullaby, could be rendered powerless by her circumstances, but the avian metaphor encourages her to assert herself. Partnoy's final four lines in 'Nana sin la cebolla' suggest that the child, too, can become a source of resistance, heralding the dawn and symbolic of hope for the future.

4.2 'Cuando llegó el momento | nos jugamos la vida': The Sibling Relationship in 'Epitafio' (*Venganza*), 'Lo fatal' (*Fuegos*), 'Razones' (*Venganza*) and 'Compañero de juegos' (*Venganza*)

This section explores how Partnoy portrays a sibling relationship in her poetry, namely the connection between the poetic 'I' and her brother. The first person speaker is a survivor of dictatorship, but her brother did not survive; mirroring the situation of

Partnoy and her brother Daniel. Their mother, Raquel Partnoy, explains that ‘Daniel, mi hijo, quien no pudo soportar la angustia padecida por nuestra familia durante esos largos y tremendos años, comenzó a sufrir de depresión y en 1983 se suicidó. Tenía 25 años.’ (R. Partnoy 2009).

I will analyse the poems ‘Epitafio’ (*Venganza*), ‘Lo fatal’ (*Fuegos*), ‘Razones’ (*Venganza*) and ‘Compañero de juegos’ (*Venganza*). The three poems from *Venganza* directly follow each other in the collection’s third section, ‘La muerte, mi vecina’, while ‘Lo fatal’ is the sole reference to the speaker’s deceased brother in *Fuegos*. At first glance, three of the poems I discuss may not appear to be *testimonio*, in the sense of being direct denunciations of crimes perpetrated by the 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship. However, Partnoy’s poetry depicts human rights abuse *and* its ramifications. She illustrates the traumatic effects state violence has on family and I think that this, too, ought to be understood as *testimonio*. Here, I will explore Partnoy’s use of literary form and technique to depict a grieving poetic voice and the ways in which this speaker seeks to maintain a link with her brother.

The title of Partnoy’s ‘Epitafio’ specifies a literary form that is composed for someone who is deceased, written as if intended to be inscribed directly onto the tomb or headstone. Such connotations are juxtaposed with the first line’s emphasis on freedom:

De todas las libertades
tal vez
elegiste la muerte. (*Venganza*, 60)

Semantically and spatially contrasted with ‘la muerte’, freedom can be read as a reference to the preservation of life. Partnoy’s use of the plural ‘libertades’, however, suggests the concept can be understood in many ways. She implies that a person’s understanding of freedom is connected with, and varies, according to their experience of physical and emotional distress. In ‘Epitafio’, Partnoy builds on the poem’s title and the reader’s eye is drawn to ‘la muerte’, which is directly below the first line’s ‘libertades’.

The poetic 'I' is trying to make sense of her brother's suicide. While the second person singular conjugation of 'elegir' emphasises the action as a deliberate one, the speaker is uncertain. With the interjection 'tal vez', Partnoy separates the stanza's imagery. Textual hesitation is created, expressing the poetic voice's doubt and postponing acknowledgement of the second person's action. Moreover, the poetic aside acts as a sonic link between the first and third lines. The predominant vowel sound in the first line is the open central vowel 'a', while in the third it is the open-mid near-front vowel 'e'. 'Tal vez' linguistically see-saws between the sound and the semantic content of the lines, emphasising the speaker's struggle to understand the decision made by her brother.

The poetic voice of 'Epitafio' addresses an absent second person. In the second stanza, the poem's subjects are united by the first person plural possessive. Partnoy writes:

Y las acuarelas de nuestra infancia
se van
deshaciendo en el humo. (*Venganza*, 60)

As literal watercolours, the 'acuarelas' echo Partnoy's description of her brother in the paratextual 'Introduction' to *Venganza*: 'the illustrator of my childhood poems' (*Venganza*, 16). At the same time, a figurative, colourful image of the speaker's youthful memories is constructed. Like its counterpart in the first stanza, the middle line of the second – 'se van' – is shorter than the stanza's other lines. It draws the eye in, as if the line were disappearing like the watercolours. The word 'humo' is located below 'nuestra infancia' and the colourful remembrance of childhood is obscured by a smoky monochrome. Partnoy echoes the phrase 'deshacerse como el humo' (to vanish into thin air). She suggests that the poetic voice's memories of youth are beginning to fade, or that her understanding of it as an innocent, simple time has been overshadowed.

As the subject changes between stanzas, Partnoy's use of tense alters too. The second person singular acts in the simple past ('elegiste'), the personified 'acuarelas' disappear in the present continuous, and the poetic 'I' appears, in the third stanza,

with the future tense conjugation. Partnoy writes of her speaker, 'Por los salitrales te buscaré | cuando el sol me deje mirar atrás.' (*Venganza*, 60). Geographic allusion is made to Partnoy's home town of Bahía Blanca with the reference to 'los salitrales'. She told me that they are salt marshes: 'extensiones de sal a la orilla del mar, Bahía se llama blanca porque hay muchas extensiones de sal muy cerca'.⁹⁴

The two lines have a different shape to the preceding stanzas and the fourth stanza is notably longer. Thus, the third stanza seems isolated within the poem, mirroring the solitary poetic 'I'. Use of the future tense might indicate an exiled speaker, who is unable to return to her home country. Partnoy states in *Venganza's* 'Introduction' that she was 'expelled from her country' (*Venganza*, 14) and that 'the military authorities would not allow me to attend [my brother's] funeral' (*Venganza*, 16).⁹⁵ With the future tense 'buscaré' the poetic 'I' may be speaking of her intentions when she is physically able to reach 'los salitrales'. Furthermore, the plural 'salitrales' suggests that the speaker will make multiple searches and that her attempts to connect with her brother will be ongoing.

The subjunctive 'cuando el sol me deje' implies that the sun, reflected on the surface of the salt marshes, is dazzling and that the speaker would need the sun to set in order for better vision and a chance at glimpsing her brother. The preposition 'atrás' carries a double meaning referring to both space and time. Partnoy depicts a poetic voice who looks over her shoulder or behind her for something that she is missing, someone who is also looking back in time, having lost the person with whom she shared her childhood.

Partnoy again uses the future tense in the final stanza of 'Epitafio'. She extends the depiction of the poetic 'I' as geographically remote:

Llegaré a tu tumba para dejarte

⁹⁴ Personal email correspondence with Alicia Partnoy (19 June 2015).

⁹⁵ As I have previously discussed, Partnoy's forced exile from Argentina is a violation of Article 9 ('no one shall be subjected to [...] exile') of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, the military's refusal to permit her return is a violation of Article 13, which asserts a person's right to leave and return to their country (United Nations n.d.).

un gajo de almendro
y un poema muerto
de angustia que vos
ya ilustraste con sangre. (*Venganza*, 60)

The poetic 'I' is shown as a mourner who has not yet been to the graveside. Use of the possessive in the phrase 'tu tumba' creates a stuttering effect. Partnoy suggests hesitation or fraught emotion on the speaker's part as she addresses the poem's deceased second person and mentions the physical existence of a grave.

The poetic 'I' intends to leave a tribute to her brother. Partnoy's use of the personal pronoun in 'dejarte', rather than 'dejar', denotes the speaker's continued attempt to communicate with her brother. Furthermore, assonance in 'dejarte | un gajo' emphasises the poetic voice's action. She will leave 'un gajo de almendro | y un poema muerto' and assonance and homeoteleuton (in the form of the repeated -o) sonically unite the object. 'Un gajo' may refer to a branch or a cutting, the latter of which is usually made for propagation and it must be attached to another plant in order to survive. Partnoy does not describe such an attachment and it seems that the cutting may symbolise the unfulfilled potential of the poem's second person subject.

By implication, the poetic 'I' can be read as a poet and 'un poema muerto' is a metatextual reference to 'Epitafio', narrowing the gap between poetic voice and Partnoy the poet. Enjambment allows for a dual reading of the 'poema'. In the antepenultimate line it is described as dead, yet, this very adjective, in combination with the next line, allows for personification as the poem is revealed to be 'muerto | de angustia'. 'Epitafio' embodies the emotional distress that the poetic 'I' does not directly communicate. Still, the combination of the noun 'angustia' and the pronoun 'vos' in the same line highlights the connection between extreme emotion and the death of the second person subject.

The 'o' in 'vos' visually connects with the homeoteleuton of 'almendro' and 'muerto', which are positioned directly above the pronoun. Although there is no phonetic link to 'vos', Partnoy's poetic alignment of these words draws the reader's eye to their semantic connection. The recurrence of sibilance is also notable. Sonically, the Argentine vernacular aspirated 'st' unites 'angustia' with 'ilustraste', while the

alveolar fricative 's' connects 'vos' with 'sangre'. Partnoy links the second person pronoun with blood, symbolising his death and alluding to the violent manner in which he died.

Associating the noun 'angustia' with the verb 'ilustraste', Partnoy connects the speaker's emotion with the action that has caused her to feel such distress. However, Partnoy's depiction in 'Epitafio' of her brother's suicide is metaphorical. Echoing the second stanza's 'acquarelas de nuestra infancia' and her description of Daniel in *Venganza's* paratextual 'Introduction' (*Venganza*, 16), Partnoy maintains the portrayal of the brother as illustrator of her speaker's poems. Except, in this instance, the metaphoric illustration has occurred before the poem has been written and indeed the 'illustration' is what generates the poem.

The multiple searches suggested by the future tense formulation in 'Epitafio' are again implied in 'Lo fatal', published in *Fuegos*. Partnoy writes:

Esa música que no se parece a nada
en todos los agujeros de la tarde
¿es mi hermano? (*Fuegos*, 22)

To scholars of Latin American poetry, the poem's title may suggest an intertextual reference to Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío's 'Lo fatal'. Beyond their shared title, there is a connection between the poems' subject matter. Partnoy's illustrates a solitary poetic 'I', alert to the possibility of communication with her absent brother.⁹⁶ Darío's 'Lo fatal' is existential and includes the lines: 'pues no hay dolor más grande que el dolor de ser vivo, | ni mayor pesadumbre que la vida consciente' (2008: 23).

Considered in light of Partnoy's personal circumstances, Darío's discussion of existential difficulties seem to speak both to the situation of the brother, who died by suicide, and to the position of the poetic 'I', who lives with the grief of having lost her

⁹⁶ The paratext of *Fuegos* provides some information about Partnoy, but readers of this collection alone are unlikely to be aware of Partnoy's brother and the context of his death. However, as a scholar of Partnoy, I am considering the poem as part of her oeuvre and in light of the paratextual information already discussed in this thesis.

sibling. Nevertheless, the perspective of each poem is distinct. Darío's 'poetic voice expresses the individual's sense of being lost and helpless in the world' (Predmore 1971: 435) and focuses purely on the self, while Partnoy's speaker is outward-looking. It seems that Partnoy may be trying to steer her readers away from the solipsism of the canon and adjust the focus to empathy and the political intent of *testimonio*.⁹⁷

In terms of Partnoy's 'Lo fatal' and its context, it is pertinent to consider multiple definitions of the term 'fatal'.⁹⁸ Firstly, it suggests a determinist reading – 'inevitable' or 'pertenciente o relativo al hado' – implying that the lives of the speaker and her brother were prewritten. His death was unavoidable and she is fated to continually search for him: 'por los salitrales te buscaré', as Partnoy writes in 'Epitafio'. The sense of the brother's death being outwith his control is explored at greater length in the poem 'Razones', which I will discuss next in this section. Secondly, 'lo fatal' may refer to an emotional state or to an absence of wellbeing – 'desgraciado, infeliz'. This definition alludes to the uneasy psychological state of the poetic 'I' after her brother's death, a concept further explored by Partnoy in 'Compañero de juegos', the final poem I will analyse in this section. Lastly, the adjective 'fatal' is a synonym for 'malo': a brief, understated reference to the lamentable situation of both the poetic 'I' and her brother.

The speaker of 'Lo fatal' attempts to perceive her brother and, as in 'Epitafio', his suggested location is almost imperceptible. Whereas the sense of sight predominates in 'Epitafio', Partnoy stresses sound in 'Lo fatal'. Her poetic 'I' hears an unusual form of music 'que no se parece a nada | en todos los agujeros de la tarde'. The sound's location is abstract and appears almost supernatural: the 'agujeros' suggest that the music comes from another realm and has slipped into the speaker's surroundings.

Perhaps the deceased brother is making an attempt to communicate with the poetic voice. 'Los agujeros' might be thought of as fissures representing the speaker's fractured reality in the aftermath of her brother's death. The poem's final line – '¿es

⁹⁷ See also Partnoy's 'Romance de la prisionera', published alongside the anonymous 14th Century 'Romance del prisionero' (*Volando*, 12).

⁹⁸ All definitions I discuss are from the Real Academia Española.

mi hermano?’ – seems rhetorical, as if the poetic ‘I’ is addressing herself, wondering if she has found a means of contact with her brother. However, in the publication of the poem, Partnoy involves the reader in the speaker’s search. With its unearthly music, intangible space and absent loved one, ‘Lo fatal’ is unsettling and the reader is left with a momentary snapshot of the poetic voice’s anguished inner life.

Partnoy’s introduction of the supernatural creates disquiet in her poems. In ‘Razones’ (*Venganza*), the wind is personified as a hostile force: ‘El viento del salitral | agrió el vino de tus sueños’ (*Venganza*, 62). She does not refer to a generalised wind, rather its direction is from the salt marsh. Salt would literally make wine sour and Partnoy expands upon that by creating a metaphorical image. ‘El vino de tus sueños’ gives pleasurable connotations of wine as well as suggesting the improvement of wine with age. The dreams suggest hope and a sense of possibility; the understanding that there *will be* a future.

Partnoy uses the second person singular and ‘mi hermano’ is not mentioned until the penultimate line. However, ‘Razones’ builds on previous poems in this section of *Venganza* and information in the paratextual ‘Introduction’. It is apparent who the object of this poem is and what action the poetic voice is trying to rationalise: the speaker’s brother and his suicide. Enjambment is used throughout the first sentence of ‘Razones’, giving a sense of actions that flow into each other. Partnoy’s use of enjambment may be read as a poetic rendering of the wind: the lines are unobstructed by visual indicators of the poet’s hand. Contrastingly, punctuation in the last sentence of ‘Razones’ suggests an imposition of poetic control, which I will discuss later in conjunction with Partnoy’s creation of a rhyme scheme in the lines.

The first depiction of the wind’s action in ‘Razones’ is unpleasant, but in the next lines the wind is portrayed as malevolent: ‘te sacudió los andamios | de construir el futuro’ (*Venganza*, 62). The verb ‘sacudir’ is used to portray the movement caused by the wind. It is not a gentle motion. Rather it is a deliberate, violent action directed at ‘mi hermano’, who is depicted by the pronoun ‘te’. Partnoy places ‘los andamios’ and ‘el futuro’ in vertically adjacent positions, stressing their connection. However, the line break illustrates the forcible detachment of supportive scaffolding from the second person’s conception of the future.

As the poem continues, mounting pressure is placed on the second person. The repeated pronoun 'te' indicates that the personified wind's actions have a specific target. Partnoy's structuring of 'Razones' mirrors the increasing anthropomorphised malice of these acts. Beginning with unpleasant souring of wine, the wind then destabilises the second person's physical safety and continues by placing a gun in his hands. Sonically emphasising the nouns through homeoteleuton ('sueños | andamios | dedos'), Partnoy moves from the broad, intangible concept of dream, through the concrete structure of scaffolding, to the small, tactile mention of the fingers. The wind's actions have a narrowing focus and are depicted as a physical assault on the second person's body and life.

In 'Razones', Partnoy does not name the suicide as such. Instead, the actions leading up to it are depicted metaphorically: 'después te enredó los dedos | contra el filo de un gatillo' (*Venganza*, 62). The preposition works to highlight that the suicide was not an isolated event, rather it happened as part of a concatenation of events. The verb 'enredar' suggests that he was trapped and unable to avert the succession of events. Partnoy's use of the term 'filo' has a double meaning. In standard Spanish, 'filo' means 'blade' and the assonance of 'filo | gatillo' reinforces the portrayal of weaponry in the line. However, the term also has a meaning in *lunfardo*. According to Conde's *Diccionario etimológico del lunfardo*, one definition of 'filo' is 'ladrón que engatusa a su víctima' (2004: 158). Moreover, the term comes from the verb 'filar': 'embaucar, engatusar a través de una historia fingida que avive el interés –y con él, la distracción– de la víctima de la probable estafa' (Conde 2004: 158). Partnoy builds on her portrayal of the wind's malevolence by connoting the activities of a trickster and she suggests that the second person subject of 'Razones' was tricked into killing himself.⁹⁹

The notion of deception is repeated in the next line, which begins the poem's second sentence. Partnoy writes:

⁹⁹ Partnoy's depiction of the wind's manipulation of 'mi hermano' bears comparison with 'Cuatro postales', where the personified figure of death 'lo convenció a mi hermano | de que tomara | unas vacaciones de vida' (see Chapter 3, p.150).

Fué [sic] una mentira de plomo,
fué [sic] una avalancha de sal,
fué [sic] el viento, mi hermano, el viento,
infierno del salitral. (*Venganza*, 62)

‘Una mentira’ mirrors the *lunfardo* connotations of ‘el filo’. The grieving poetic voice identifies the wind as responsible for her brother’s death; the trickster who deceived him. Partnoy’s mention of ‘plomo’ metonymically represents a bullet. Combined with ‘un gatillo’, she connotes the means by which Daniel died: ‘I received a call from home saying that my brother [...] had just shot himself in the head’ (*Venganza*, 16). The figurative manner in which the brother’s death is described extends the portrayal of the grieving poetic ‘I’. In contrast with Partnoy’s paratextual ‘Introduction’, the speaker of ‘Razones’ does not, or cannot, utter the bare facts of her brother’s suicide. She seeks a means of rationalising what happened.

The direction of the wind (from the salt marsh) is significant in Partnoy’s portrayal of another natural phenomenon: the avalanche. An occurrence that is potentially fatal to humans and unstoppable once in motion, the avalanche of ‘Razones’ is not a mass of snow, but salt. The avalanche’s enormous force, affecting all in its path, symbolises the inability of the poem’s second person to escape the chain of events precipitating his suicide. Furthermore, ‘una avalancha de sal’ mirrors the third line, where the wind ‘te sacudió los andamios’. Seemingly stable foundations are moved by powerful forces, thus literally destabilising the material underfoot and figuratively destroying the existential norms of the second person’s life.

The first line’s naming of the wind as culpable is twice repeated in the poem’s penultimate line – ‘fué el viento, mi hermano, el viento’ (*Venganza*, 62). Parenthetical inclusion of ‘mi hermano’ determines the sibling relationship between the poetic ‘I’ and second person. The address in this line comes across as if the poetic voice is speaking to a child who has been frightened by a noise caused by the wind. The penultimate line’s repetition of ‘el viento’ can be interpreted as a soothing mechanism as the poetic ‘I’ tries to communicate with, and reassure, her brother. It may also be read as a form of self-soothing for the grieving poetic voice.

No reference is made to any afterlife for the brother. Instead, Partnoy depicts the earthly salt marsh as a hellish ‘infierno de salitral’. The final line of ‘Razones’ mirrors the poem’s first line and the nouns ‘viento’ and ‘infierno’ are linked by assonance, a connection also made between the final and penultimate lines. Furthermore, Partnoy creates the rhyme ‘sal | salitral’, reiterating the poem’s portrayal of the salt marsh as the source of malevolence.

There is no allusion made to the Argentine dictatorship in ‘Razones’, although in *Venganza*’s ‘Introduction’ Partnoy describes as ‘hostage to the military regime [...] her younger brother, who tried to entertain, distract the little girl [his niece, Ruth Irupé Sanabria] while hiding the rage, impotence, the deep fear that would soon trigger the mental illness that led to his suicide.’ (*Venganza*, 13). What Partnoy illustrates is a grieving poetic voice who seeks to understand and rationalise her brother’s suicide. The poetic ‘I’ directly addresses the second person singular of ‘Razones’ as Partnoy renders another way in which her speaker attempts to communicate with her brother.

Unlike the metric irregularity of ‘Epitafio’ and ‘Lo fatal’, ‘Razones’ maintains an octosyllabic metre scheme, with a single exception. The speaker tries to make sense of the circumstances surrounding her brother’s suicide and Partnoy creates imagery of trickery, malevolence and unstable foundations juxtaposed with metric control. Poetic form creates the regularity and rational structure, while the sole heptasyllabic line – ‘de construir el futuro’ – acknowledges the brother’s loss of future, for which the speaker can find no poetic justification.

Regularity of metre remains a constant in the poem that directly follows ‘Razones’ in *Venganza*: ‘Compañero de juegos’. It begins with a vision of the speaker’s childhood and Partnoy opens with a first person plural conjugation, which initially shows the poetic ‘I’ and her playmate as united:

Jugamos con las sombras
por detrás de las puertas,
jugamos con la escarcha,
con las ramas desnudas.
Jugamos con las piedras,
con las cosas perdidas

en el patio de casa. (*Venganza*, 64)

At the poem's outset, the verb 'jugamos' is ambiguous. It is unclear if the poetic voice is speaking in the present or past tense and, consequently, the temporal setting of 'Compañero de juegos' is initially uncertain.

The poetic 'I' could be the adult voice, to which the reader has been accustomed in *Venganza* or the voice might be that of a child speaking in the present tense. Partnoy involves the reader in a seemingly contemporaneous moment of play, but by the second stanza it becomes apparent that the poetic 'I' has been speaking in the simple past. Partnoy's employment of the simple past 'jugamos', rather than the imperfect 'jugábamos', makes her depiction of childhood seem like a single moment and not a series of occasions when the *compañeros de juegos* played together. The games mentioned are simple and innocent: toys are unexceptional objects, found in the childhood home. Partnoy's setting of several stanzas in winter appears bleak by the end of 'Compañero de juegos', but the description of frost and bare branches does not have negative connotations in the first stanza. They are mere playthings in the children's surroundings.

The seasonal setting of 'Compañero de juegos' takes on an extra significance when compared with the paratextual information given in *Venganza*. Partnoy was kidnapped in the summer, on 12 January 1977 (A.M. Partnoy 1981c). She describes the day as 'hot' (*Venganza*, 13) and perhaps the wintry opening scene of 'Compañero de juegos' functions as an idyllic counterpoint. Homeoteleuton is repeated through the first stanza, in the form of feminine plural endings, excepting the singular 'escarcha' and 'casa'. These nouns are emphasised by assonance and are visually notable in the stanza for their different ending. The impermanence of frost (which will eventually melt) seems to contrast with solidity of the home as a foundation of childhood. However, as Partnoy illustrates in 'Razones', the poem directly preceding 'Compañero de juegos' in *Venganza*, seemingly stable foundations can quickly become unsteady.

The repetition of the verb 'jugamos' in the poem's first stanza builds up imagery of play, but the term is used to differing effect in the second stanza. Partnoy writes: 'Cuando llegó el momento | nos jugamos la vida.' (*Venganza*, 64). The

unambiguous preterite conjugation, 'llegó', clarifies that Partnoy's conjugations of the verb 'jugar' have also been in the preterite. Furthermore, the safety of childish games is juxtaposed with the danger of 'jugarse la vida'.

Assonance in the first line of the second stanza – 'Cuando llegó el momento' – contrasts with the predominant vowel ('a') in the first stanza, emphasising the arrival of 'el momento'. The word choice implies a specific, singular period of time, yet the actions of the poetic siblings are not necessarily concurrent. Rather, 'el momento' is a temporal expression representing the point during the dictatorship when life-altering decisions were made by the poetic 'I' and her 'compañero de juegos'. Their respective actions are not mentioned, but instead implied by the outcome as depicted in the next stanza.

Partnoy extends the imagery of play in 'Compañero de juegos' by formulating the third stanza according to the win/lose binary of a game:

Yo me gané una celda
y me gané el destierro,
y unos cuantos suspiros
ante el deber cumplido. (*Venganza*, 64)

The poetic 'I' appears to have 'won' *el juego de la vida* (i.e. she is still alive), but Partnoy's depiction of the 'winnings' indicate human rights violations and emotional turmoil.

It is in the third stanza that the testimonial voice appears. References to Partnoy's imprisonment and forced exile are created by the nouns 'una celda' and 'el destierro', while the verb 'ganarse' is heavily ironic. The last words of the third and fourth lines ('suspiros | cumplido') are sonically connected by assonance and the emotion conveyed by the sighs is linked to the action implied by 'el deber'. One definition of that noun relates to a moral obligation, which can be read as a testimonial allusion to Partnoy's anti-dictatorship activism. Nonetheless, in the context of 'Compañero de juegos' and its illustration of the speaker and her brother's youth, the noun 'deber' also connotes the childhood activity of homework. The contrast between

performing one's moral duty and the routine completion of a homework exercise speaks to Partnoy's characteristic use of understatement.

In terms of the latter interpretation of 'el deber', 'unos cuantos suspiros' might indicate the expression of relief or contentment at the successful accomplishment of a task. Both the qualifier 'unos cuantos' and the sighs imply that the speaker's emotion is trivial, yet this minimises the trauma and psychological difficulties faced by the survivor of human rights abuse. An exhalation of breath might suggest a brief expression of disappointment, or perhaps exasperation.

The seemingly fleeting nature of the sighs in 'Compañero de juegos' only gives the reader the slightest glimpse into the emotional state of the poetic 'I'. Perhaps understatement is a means of alluding to the inability of words to convey the intensity of emotion experienced by the speaker. Still, in the context of 'Compañero de juegos' the poetic 'I' is a survivor and her brother is dead: the emotional and psychological difficulties she faces are indicators of the fact that she is still alive.

In recounting the course of their lives, the poetic 'I' minimises her experience in comparison to her brother's. She has not reached the same extremity as he did:

Vos perdiste sonrisas,
perdiste la inocencia
y ganaste la paz
debajo de la tierra
[...]. (*Venganza*, 64)

Partnoy's positioning of 'vos' at the beginning of the third stanza's fifth line mirrors the placement of 'yo' that begins the stanza.

The prominent inclusion of the pronouns highlights the difference in circumstances between the poetic 'I' and the poem's second person, similar to the separation of 'Mamá', 'Papá' and 'Niña' in the poem 'Visita' (discussed in Chapter 4, p.171). Initially, it seems that the first person speaker has 'won' *el juego de la vida* and the second person *compañero* has 'lost'. However, the 'vos' has lost gained something that the poetic 'I' cannot have – 'ganaste la paz'. The childhood playmates continue to be at odds with each other.

Where the use of 'ganarse' was used to auto-ironic effect at the beginning of the third stanza, the poetic voice speaks in earnest about the present circumstances of her childhood companion. The repeated conjugation 'perdiste' is juxtaposed with the positive connotations of 'sonrisas' and 'la inocencia'. An absence of smiles implies unhappiness and indicates the seriousness of the second person's situation. Innocence connotes childhood and a lack of knowledge about injustice and cruelty, which has a particular resonance in the context of dictatorship.

Although only the poem's second person subject is portrayed as losing innocence, the poetic 'I' has too, suggested earlier in the stanza by allusion to her imprisonment and the naming of 'el destierro'. Arguably, the reader also experiences a loss. As the structure of 'Compañero de juegos' illustrates its subjects' life paths, the poem also guides the reader through a loss of innocence. Beginning with the gentleness of childhood play, Partnoy shows her reader the life-threatening violence of dictatorship, its deadly consequences and the unavoidable ramifications for those who survive.

Partnoy juxtaposes the sadness and regret implied by the second person's losses with the gaining or achievement of peace. However, the positive connotations of 'la paz' are contrasted with the stark reality of his death: the peace that he has found is 'debajo de la tierra'. The two subjects of 'Compañero de juegos' are again depicted in opposition to each other. Partnoy's phrasing alludes to the second person's burial; his peaceful location in 'la tierra' contrasts with the speaker's exile – 'el destierro'.

Literally *des-terrada*, the poetic 'I' is depicted as uprooted and emotionally distressed, while the second person has achieved a state of peace and is located in the very earth from which the speaker has been forcibly removed. Their physical separation is at opposite extremes and its psychological impact on the poetic 'I' can perhaps be inferred from Partnoy's use of enjambment between the poem's third and fourth stanzas.

The lower-case opening of the fourth stanza has the effect of making the speaker seem subdued, connecting her present-day emotions with the loss of her brother in the past. Partnoy writes that:

hoy las sombras no juegan
y la escarcha se extiende
sobre ramas desnudas
piedras del cementerio
[...]. (*Venganza*, 64)

Unlike the first stanza, Partnoy's use of tense is unambiguous. Her poetic 'I' speaks in the present tense about her current situation, in the aftermath of her childhood playmate's death.

Where, in the poem's first line, shadows are used as objects of play, their reappearance in the fourth stanza is in static opposition. It is a contrast also reinforced by the chiasmic structure of the two lines when taken together: 'jugamos [...] sombras | sombras [...] juegan'. The shadows' depiction as inactive signals a shift in perspective from the child's view of the world to the adult's. Moreover, Partnoy's use of anthropomorphism emphasises the speaker's isolation: her 'compañero de juegos' is gone and the personified shadows will not play with her.

Enjambment, further to connecting the third and fourth stanzas, is used throughout the latter stanza. The absence of punctuation, marking the pauses at the end of each line, functions to elongate the images. Partnoy's first stanza portrays the frost and bare branches as separate entities. In the fourth, the frost's reach is illustrated by the verb 'extenderse' and through enjambment, allowing the reader to imagine the frost stretching out along branches and over gravestones.

Frost is no longer something to play with and it covers objects that are not toys anymore nor have joyful, childish associations. The later depiction of frost in the poem may be read as metaphorical for the speaker's emotions, numbed by grief. Winter is now portrayed as desolate and is made further unsettling by the transition between Partnoy's description of the natural world and that of the human construction of a graveyard. The unassuming objects from the first stanza have taken on bleak connotations. Ordinary stones, played with by the poetic 'I' and her companion, have become gravestones. Not only does this allude to the grave of the poem's second person, but it reinforces the physical separation of the *compañeros de juegos*. In his

location 'debajo de la tierra', the second person has found peace, while the poetic 'I' remains alive, in a state of anguish, and alone.

Partnoy emphasises the speaker's solitude in the next line, where the first person singular conjugation is used: 'pregunto dónde fueron | esas cosas perdidas' (*Venganza*, 64). Verb form is used in 'Compañero de juegos' to depict increasing isolation. The first person plural indicates the playmates' joint activities in the first two stanzas. Both 'yo' and 'vos' are present in the third stanza, but they are separated by structure and singular conjugations. In the fourth and fifth stanzas, the same singular verb form represents the poetic 'I' as a lone figure.

Assonance connects the phrase 'no jugan' at the beginning of the fourth stanza, with 'dónde fueron' in its penultimate line. The negative form, indicating the lack of activity, is echoed by the absence of playthings as the speaker wonders about their location. Partnoy's differing use of determiners, 'las cosas perdidas' in the first stanza and 'esas cosas perdidas' in the fourth, implies the poetic voice's distance from the objects to which she refers. The physical toys from the first stanza are long gone, but in the course of 'Compañero de juegos' more has been lost than the innocuous items of childhood. During her imprisonment, the poetic 'I' was deprived of liberty and, in forced exile, her right to remain in her home country was denied. The second person lost 'las sonrisas', 'la inocencia' and ultimately his life.

Partnoy's allusions to the speaker's isolation are made explicit in the poem's final stanza: 'Yo me he quedado sola | jugando la vida...' (*Venganza*, 64). The structure of 'Compañero de juegos' illustrates the loss of the poetic voice's companion and the destruction of their bond, developed since childhood. Partnoy's repeated use of the verb 'jugar' extends the connotations of play within in the poem, while the phrasing echoes the ninth line, 'nos jugamos la vida'. Now, the poetic 'I' is alone and the gerundial form ('jugando') suggests an extending length of time as the speaker alludes to her present and future solitude.

The ellipsis can be read as a visual representation of limitless time. It may also be a sigh expressed by the poetic 'I', one of her 'unos cuantos suspiros'. Furthermore, the last line of 'Compañero de juegos' is the only hexasyllable in a poem that maintains metric regularity through repeated heptasyllables. Like in 'Razones', the maintenance of regular metre seems to be a way of maintaining poetic control over distressing

subject matter, while the exhalation of breath replacing the final syllable is an understated, unvoiced acknowledgement of the poetic voice's distress.

4.3 'Este hombre al que llamo compañero | es un madero': The Relationship between Life Partners in 'Mi madero y yo' (*Venganza*), 'Balance' (*Volando*) and 'En Rocha y la vía' (*Volando*)

Partnoy's exploration of the family extends to an illustration of the relationship between the speaker and her romantic partner. In an analysis of 'Mi madero y yo' (*Venganza*), 'Balance' (*Volando*) and 'En Rocha y la vía' (*Volando*), I will explore how Partnoy portrays this relationship and its construction in the aftermath of dictatorship. Named in 'En Rocha y la vía' as Antonio Leiva, and in 'Balance' by his nickname 'El Mingo', the speaker's partner is a poeticised Antonio Leiva, Partnoy's second husband. He is also a survivor of imprisonment and torture during the dictatorship in Argentina, and was exiled in 1979 (Leiva 2010). Partnoy poeticises her relationship with Leiva and offers the reader glimpses of how two survivors create and maintain a family unit.

'Mi madero y yo' – the first poem in *Venganza's* second section ('El amor y otros lugares') – explores exile and the construction of family through the extended metaphor of the shipwreck. The 'madero' is a figurative representation of the speaker's life partner, the *compañero* mentioned in the opening line. From the very title, the poetic 'I' is united with the life-saving 'madero'. Although she has experienced a (metaphorical) shipwreck, the speaker is always portrayed as buoyed:

Este hombre al que llamo compañero
es un trozo de mi barca,
es un madero
[...]. (*Venganza*, 34)

The rhyme of 'compañero | madero' emphasises the role played by the speaker's partner and reinforces the depiction of him in the conceit of the shipwreck. Although he is depicted as a life-saving piece of timber, the personification of the 'madero'

implies that the *compañero*, too, is a survivor. The second line's comma is a visual representation of the splintered wood suggested by 'un trozo de mi barca'. Much of the boat may have sunk, but the 'madero' remains afloat.

Partnoy's positioning of 'es un madero' on a single line illustrates the *compañero's* strength. The image precedes a depiction of the speaker's dependence on the object:

que me salva de hundirme
hasta los huesos
en el mar implacable del exilio. (*Venganza*, 34)

Unvoiced alliteration emphasises the portrayal of risk to the speaker's body, alluding to the psychological difficulties posed by exile. A metaphor for exile, the image of the sea suggests exiles' geographical isolation from their home country and community. Personified as 'implacable', the state of exile further indicates an imperilled situation.

The exiled person, whose life was endangered in their native country, must face the emotional aftermath in an unknown place, where they have no connections. Partnoy's depiction of exile as a removal from dry land can be read as a rendering of 'des-tierra', a motif occurring several times in her poetry. She uses the metaphor of the shipwreck to depict the poetic 'I', whose exile has divided her from the land and who is described in the second stanza as 'Náufraga de mi tierra' (*Venganza*, 34).

From her current position in exile, the second stanza opens with the speaker reflecting on beliefs she formerly held. The tense has shifted from the first stanza's present tense to the second stanza's imperfect:

Y yo que no creía en los naufragios,
en las absurdas historias
de las quillas
destrozadas contra costas inmutables,
en los trozos de barco
a la deriva
y en el sobreviviente que – infaltable –

abrazado a un madero
salvaba alma y pellejo... (*Venganza*, 34)

Beginning with the conjunction 'y', Partnoy mimics spoken language and suggests that the speaker is part-way through another sentence or thought. The poetic 'I' is depicted as naïve, someone who thought of shipwrecks as entirely fictional. Partnoy's positioning of shipwrecks in a storytelling context suggests dramatic flair, far from the dangerous reality of actual shipwrecks. Furthermore, the adjective 'absurdas' both implies the younger speaker's perspective on these tales and signals the seemingly unlikely turn of events in her adult life.

Through the shortness of the second stanza's third line, Partnoy draws the reader's eye in and makes visible what should be invisible. The keel of a boat is unseen unless it emerges from the water, deliberately heaved out at port or up-ended during a shipwreck. No sooner does the reader have the image of inverted hulls in their mind, but the structures are 'destrozadas contra costas inmutables'. Partnoy's use of personification to describe the coasts builds on her anthropomorphic representation of the nautical landscape. The half-rhyme connecting 'el mar implacable' and the 'costas inmutables' suggests that the seascape is deliberately hostile.

The inclusion of the noun 'sobreviviente' in the stanza's seventh line is notable for its charged meaning in the context of Partnoy's poetry. Sonically connected through half-rhyme, '- infaltable -' is vertically linked with the 'costas inmutables' which occasioned the shipwreck. Furthermore, the line stands out because of its punctuation. The parenthetical inclusion of 'infaltable' is an ironic aside, yet on a second reading it evokes pathos. While the speaker depicts her past self as mocking the conventions of a shipwreck story, in the present she finds herself as the protagonist of one. The dashes seem to buoy the word and visually represent pieces of timber.

Partnoy's use of an ellipsis in the stanza's ninth line suggests that the speaker has only included a sample of shipwreck stories and that she could continue elaborating. In contrast, the following line's colon suggests one specific situation. A juxtaposition is created between the fictional shipwreck stories, where the objects are literal, and the situation of the speaker's exile. Partnoy depicts the exiled poetic 'I' through metaphor:

Ahora mirame:
Náufraga de mi tierra,
entre tus brazos,
quiero salvarme entera
hasta la costa. (*Venganza*, 34)

The temporal adverb 'ahora' differentiates the poetic voice's present circumstances from the naivety of her former beliefs. Using the *voseo*, she addresses her *compañero* (indicated by the second person possessive two lines below). However, the imperative could also be read as exhorting the reader to engage with the portrayal of the speaker in her exilic state.

Exploiting grammatical form, Partnoy's capitalisation of 'Náufraga' is a nod to the preceding colon. Her positioning of the epithet at the beginning of the line creates further emphasis and the term is elevated in importance by the capitalisation, as if 'Náufraga' has become the speaker's name. A contrast is evoked between the temporary state of the shipwreck survivor, 'el sobreviviente [...] | abrazado a un madero' – who will presumably be safe upon return to dry land – and the ongoing state of the 'Náufraga', for whom it is unsafe to return to 'mi tierra'. The commas in the stanza's fourth-last and antepenultimate lines suggest the fracturing of the poetic voice's connection with her homeland. Mimicking the action through form, the line is embraced by the commas and the phrase 'Náufraga de mi tierra | quiero salvarme entera'. Contrasting with the fragmentation caused by the commas, Partnoy's use of enjambment in the penultimate line of the stanza works as a poetic extension of the adjective 'entera'. No punctuation prevents the poetic 'I' from reaching the coast.

The realisation of the speaker's desire to reach land is not portrayed. Instead, Partnoy uses the third stanza to explore what happens:

Después de los naufragios
siempre quedan
en la playa
pedazos de madera

y en tierra firme
los sobrevivientes. (*Venganza*, 34-36)

Temporal shifts in the first two stanzas of 'Mi madero y yo' are indicated by changes in tense, yet in the third stanza it is the opening preposition that indicates an afterwards, or an *aftermath*. The speaker is a survivor of state violence and Partnoy uses the metaphor of the shipwreck as a symbol for this extreme event: the third stanza opens with the speaker recounting what happens – 'siempre' – after a shipwreck. 'Pedazos de madera' are depicted as driftwood on the beach, a liminal space between land and sea, while the survivors have reached *terra firma*. The pieces of timber were means to an end: once safe on dry land, conventional shipwreck survivors have no further need for the wood.

The speaker in 'Mi madero y yo', however, has a different relationship with her 'madero'. Now that she is safely on land:

Yo quisiera, mi amor,
que mi madero
fuera pilar de mi casa
[...]. (*Venganza*, 36)

The parenthetical inclusion of 'mi amor' suggests that the poetic 'I' is speaking directly to her *compañero*, although she switches between second and third person singular as she addresses and talks about him in 'Mi madero y yo'. Such changes in register allow glimpses of the speaker's intimate relationship with her partner, while maintaining the poem's metaphorical effect. The double-meaning of the noun 'pilar' combines literal and figurative language to extend Partnoy's metaphorical construction, emphasised by the rhyme in 'quisiera | fuera'. She connotes the use of wood in housebuilding, suggesting that the poetic 'madero' could form an essential structural part of the speaker's home. At the same time, the figurative sense of 'pilar' refers to the central role that the poetic 'I' desires her *compañero* to play in the household.

Partnoy's use of the possessive phrase 'mi casa' implies that the shipwrecked poetic 'I' has not merely reached dry land, but is setting up home. She has not just survived; she is thriving. The house is a symbol of stability and safety: the solidity of the ground underfoot is emphasised by repetition of the phrase 'en tierra firme'. Although the speaker has reached safety on dry land, this location is not the ultimate goal. With an adjectival change, Partnoy shows the speaker imagining a life beyond exile:

o en tierra libre:
en mi patria
y con mi gente. (*Venganza*, 36)

The colon in the antepenultimate line indicates that a definition of 'tierra libre' will follow. Although the speaker has been provided with safety in her land of exile, it is not her home.

The term 'patria' – as opposed to 'país' – implies the poetic voice's emotional connection with her country of origin, stressed by the possessive 'mi'. Repeated in the next line, Partnoy uses the possessive to indicate that the speaker aligns herself with the community from which she is exiled: her 'gente' are within the boundaries of the 'patria'. The indentation of the poem's final line creates a visual emphasis and suggests an intake of breath, as if the poetic 'I' struggles to mention this. It is a rare hint of the speaker's distress in 'Mi madero y yo'. While the first two stanzas metaphorically represent the endangerment of her life, it is in the final line's gasp, in the absence of speech, that the speaker's emotional state is revealed.

The ramifications of human rights abuse affect both the speaker and the construction of her family. In the poem 'Balance', Partnoy conflates the commonplace domestic activity of doing household accounts with a reckoning of the effects of dictatorship. The poem is dedicated '*al Mingo (padre de Eva Victoria y Anahí Paz)*' (*Volando*, 46, italics in the original).

Partnoy invites the reader into the speaker's and into her own private sphere. In the act of taking stock of the household, the poetic voice begins:

De la victoria nos queda solamente
el nombre embanderado
de nuestra hija (*Volando*, 46)

Playing on the double meaning of 'victoria', Partnoy also uses the first person plural pronoun (in the first line) and possessive (in the third). So doing, she creates an image of the family unit and brings the reader into the speaker's and El Mingo's domestic sphere.

The phrase 'nos queda solamente' extends the concept of the titular 'balance', as if the poetic 'I' were making an inventory of remaining items in a cupboard. At the outset of the poem, the adverb 'solamente' suggests meagreness, that – in the aftermath of dictatorship – there is little left in the way of victory. However, Partnoy's use of the adjective 'embanderado' serves to extend and elevate the portrayal of 'el nombre [...] | de nuestra hija'.

She plays on the association between victory and the banners waved in triumphant proclamation; the prominent position of 'victoria' in the poem's first line could be read as such a pronouncement. Furthermore, the verb 'embanderar' has a second meaning for speakers of Argentine Spanish: 'adherirse manifiestamente a un partido o a una idea'.¹⁰⁰ Both speaker and Antonio Leiva are survivors of human rights abuse during the dictatorship and the term 'embanderar' signals their commitment to political ideals. The inclusion of 'victoria' as part of their daughter's name could be read solely as a declaration of survival, but the poetic 'I' situates her familial circumstances in the broader context of dictatorship.

Many of the speaker's *compañeros* did not survive. It is in the aftermath of their deaths that the poetic 'I' has built her family. Her daughter's name was:

escrito bajo la sombra amarga
de aquellos compañeros
que no llegaron siquiera a la derrota
con la sangre en el cuerpo. (*Volando*, 46)

¹⁰⁰ Real Academia Española.

Partnoy's use of the past participle of 'escribir' is metapoetic, suggesting both the moment when Eva Victoria's name was written at the registering of her birth, and the inclusion of the noun 'victoria' in the poem.

Optimistic implications of the name are counterposed with the synaesthetic 'sombra amarga', blending the gloomy metaphorical significance of shadow with connotations of bitterness. The shadow cannot be a literal one because the *compañeros*, to whom the speaker refers, are no longer alive. Instead, it is a symbol of memory. The bitterness is experienced by the poetic 'I' and El Mingo, an understated allusion to their emotional response to the disappearance and murder of fellow citizens.

Beyond the solidary connotations of the term 'compañeros', Partnoy indicates a unity in political purpose. In contrast to 'el nombre embanderado | de nuestra hija', 'la derrota' refers to political defeat and the long-standing impunity of many Argentine perpetrators of human rights abuse. Where 'la victoria' features prominently in the poem's first line, Partnoy postpones the inclusion of 'la derrota' to the end of its line, as if the poetic 'I' is reluctant to name defeat. Moreover, Partnoy does not directly depict the speaker's *compañeros* as dead. She represents life through the phrase 'con la sangre en el cuerpo', yet her portrayal of 'aquellos compañeros' relates to the absence of an action, not to lifelessness: 'no llegaron siquiera a la derrota'. The adverb 'siquiera' is emphatic. Partnoy does not glorify death in the struggle for political ideals, rather she implies that the witnessing of defeat (however undesirable) would be preferable because that would mean 'aquellos compañeros' were still alive.

Juxtaposed with the portrayal of the *compañeros'* death, Partnoy introduces the concept of peace in the following poetic sentence. It creates a jarring contrast that works to extend the overarching metaphor in 'Balance'. The speaker is making an inventory and there is little left in the way of peace:

Y de la paz, amor, sólo no [sic] queda
el nombre entre palomas
de nuestra hija
[...]. (*Volando*, 46)

Directly addressing 'El Mingo', the poetic voice uses the endearment 'amor'. Its parenthetical inclusion is visually remarkable as the only instance of caesura in 'Balance'.

Situated in the centre of the line, at the poem's mid-point, Partnoy positions love at the core of her portrayal of the family unit. In the face of scarcity ('victoria', 'paz') and absence ('aquellos compañeros', 'justicia'), 'amor' is unquantified and therefore abundant. Suggesting a connection between the abstract concepts of 'paz' and 'amor', Partnoy's collocation of the nouns emphasises the portrayal of family in 'Balance'. Each occurrence of the daughters' names is accompanied by a representation of their parents. (Eva) 'victoria' is located next to the personal pronoun 'nos' and (Anahí) 'paz' is positioned next to the speaker's appellation of her father, 'amor'. Similarly, in the repeated phrase 'nuestra hija', Partnoy stresses the family as a unit.

The conceit of the 'Balance' is again evoked by the phrase 'sólo no [sic] queda', and inversion of the first line's 'nos queda solamente'. 'La derrota' has not brought about the cessation of conflict; the lack of peace tacitly implies the emotional and psychological distress experienced in the aftermath of dictatorship. However, as with 'la victoria', the speaker and El Mingo have responded to the absence of peace by embodying the concept through the naming of their daughter. Peaceful imagery is extended and elevated as the speaker describes the child's name as 'entre palomas', connoting the movement of flight and the Christian symbolism of the dove as messenger of peace.

Partnoy's gentle imagery is set against the depiction of a violent dream. The poetic 'I' asserts that the only peaceful things she and El Mingo have left are their daughter's name:

y la memoria del sueño de la bala
al centro de la frente
del asesino. (*Volando*, 46)

At first, the representation of the dream as a form of peace seems discordant: a person's death is implied. It is important, though, to note that no action is depicted.

Furthermore, the speaker is doubly distanced from the bullet: both temporally (it is a memory) and physically (it was a dream). This form of peace is a momentary one, reached only in the somnolent imagination.

The line breaks create snapshots of imagery, while the length of each line shortens as the speaker becomes increasingly specific. 'La memoria del sueño de la bala' suggests a hazy, dreamlike recollection. Half-rhyme then emphasises a specific bodily location, the 'centro de la frente', as if the particular section of the forehead were a bullseye. Significantly, though, the bullet is on a separate line and at no point does Partnoy show the death of 'el asesino'. Using the term 'asesino', she makes it clear that 'aquellos compañeros' were murdered. Partnoy creates a dehumanising portrayal of the military through the absence of a direct depiction of the 'asesino'.

Partnoy describes the poem's final line – 'De la justicia' (*Volando*, 46) – as 'un deseo trunco'.¹⁰¹ The speaker trails off as she adds justice to her balance sheet: its absence is symbolised by the incomplete sentence. Significantly, the poem is accompanied by Raquel Partnoy's illustration, located underneath the English-language translation on the page opposite the Spanish-language original (R. Partnoy 2005: 47). The illustration depicts a female embodiment of justice. She is blindfolded, with dark, wavy hair streaming back. In one arm, she holds a crowd of frightened-looking people and, in her other hand, she holds a set of scales. Balanced on one side of the scales is the word 'EQUIDAD'; 'HUMANISMO' is written on the other. Raquel Partnoy's rendering of personified Justice resembles her daughter, Alicia Partnoy.¹⁰²

While artistic representations of Justice typically portray her wearing a blindfold as a symbol of impartiality, the blindfolded Partnoyesque figure carries other connotations. During her imprisonment at La Escuelita concentration camp, Partnoy was forced to wear a blindfold (A.M. Partnoy 1981a). The situating of the illustration alongside 'Balance' adds to the reader's understanding of the text. It suggests that the last line's enjambment does not signal resignation on the part of the poetic 'I'. Rather, she is merely taking a pause in her ongoing pursuit of justice.

¹⁰¹ Personal email correspondence with Alicia Partnoy, 19 June 2015.

¹⁰² Several of Raquel Partnoy's illustrations show a woman that resembles Alicia Partnoy, as seen in *The Little School* (1986; 1998), *Venganza de la manzana* and *Volando bajito*.

As Raquel Partnoy's illustration offers another layer of interpretation to the poem, arguably the metrical composition of 'Balance' serves a similar function. Amidst irregular and varied line lengths, Partnoy uses five heptasyllables, which I think suggests a contrapuntal reading of the poem. The heptasyllabic lines read:

el nombre embanderado

[...]

de aquellos compañeros

[...]

con la sangre en el cuerpo

[...]

el nombre entre palomas

[...]

al centro de la frente

[...]. (*Volando*, 46)

In a first reading of the poem, the only names mentioned are those of the speaker's and El Mingo's two daughters. Even with the singular 'el nombre', the contrapuntal reading implies a multiplicity of names.

'Aquellos compañeros' are depicted as alive and their names are elevated, 'embanderado' and 'entre palomas'. Partnoy at once suggests defiance – a bold proclamation of the names of the dead and *desaparecidos* in an ongoing struggle for justice – and softness, where the *compañeros* are poetically associated with peace. The phrase 'al centro de la frente', which is originally linked with a violent image in the poem, now signifies the prominent position of 'aquellos compañeros' in the speaker's mind.

The centrality of the *compañeros* in the survivor's everyday is further depicted by Partnoy in 'En Rocha y la vía', the poem directly following 'Balance' in *Volando*. 'En Rocha' explores the speaker's suggestion of a future relocation to Buenos Aires. After the publication of *Volando*, Partnoy was asked in an interview if she would consider returning to Argentina. Partnoy responded:

Con la reinstitución [sic] de la democracia en las elecciones de 1983, yo quería volver. Pero hicimos elecciones en casa y perdí: ni mi marido ni mi hija quisieron regresar. A veces me digo que tal vez podría volver de viejita, ¿no? Sería lindo jubilarse allá. (interviewed by Ghiggia 2007: 34)¹⁰³

‘En Rocha’ is an exploration of what such a move might be like and the poem portrays the exile’s complex relationship with her country of origin.

Partnoy’s speaker begins by evoking a hypothetical future:

Cuando todo se acabe,
Antonio Leiva,
nos venimos a vivir
a Buenos Aires
[...]. (*Volando*, 48)

The opening subjunctive clause is ambiguous in meaning. ‘En Rocha’ directly follows ‘Balance’ in *Volando*. As such, the first line ‘cuando todo se acabe’ follows on from the absence of justice at the end of ‘Balance’: the idea that any resolution could be achieved seems improbable. Both the speaker and Antonio Leiva are exiles, located in ‘el mar implacable del exilio’ (‘Mi madero y yo’, *Venganza*, 34, emphasis mine). It seems that the poetic ‘I’ in ‘En Rocha’ speaks of an imaginary future, once everything is ‘over’, but as the poem continues it becomes apparent that emotional closure is not what she seeks.

Included as a dedicatee in ‘Balance’, Antonio Leiva is directly addressed as the speaker’s conversational partner in ‘En Rocha’. The parenthetical inclusion of his name, combined with its occupation of a single line, emphasises the importance of this person to the poetic ‘I’. Continuing in the first person plural, Partnoy emphasises their

¹⁰³ ‘Mi hija’ refers to Ruth Irupé Sanabria; Partnoy’s other daughters (Eva Victoria Leiva Partnoy and Anahí Paz Leiva Partnoy) were born in the 1990s. It is my understanding that ‘mi marido’ refers to Partnoy’s second husband, Antonio Leiva.

suggested future action through alliteration and assonance: ‘nos venimos a vivir’. With the verb ‘venirse’, Partnoy spatially locates her speaker in Buenos Aires. The city is positioned as a geographical centre towards which future movement is directed, further implied by the inclusion of the preposition in the line ‘a Buenos Aires’. Moreover, the indented line is the first of five in ‘En Rocha’.

The indentations create visual distortion and I read them as a structural means to mimic movement: perhaps a passenger swaying with the movement of a bus (mentioned later in the poem) or a person being jostled on busy urban streets. The bustle of the city is implied through the quantity of its inhabitants and objects: ‘porque está lleno de la gente | y de las cosas’ (*Volando*, 48). The speaker advocates a relocation to Buenos Aires because its residents and commodities are ones ‘que ya nunca jamás encontraremos’ (*Volando*, 48). Although this may suggest the experience of people living abroad, it also marks the first appearance of *testimonio* in ‘En Rocha’. The poetic ‘I’ and Antonio Leiva are exiles. Their removal from Argentina was forced. Furthermore, they experienced a double separation: geographically split from the citizens of their home country and physically divided from *compañeros* who were murdered or disappeared. The triple adverbial phrase ‘ya nunca jamás’ stresses the impossibility of a future reunion.¹⁰⁴

So far, the conversational voice discussing a future relocation is barely distinct from the testimonial poetic ‘I’, but in the next section the *testimoniante* is brought to the forefront:

y todo queda a la vuelta
de la esquina
como tu rabia y la mía
[...]. (*Volando*, 48)

¹⁰⁴ Partnoy’s phrasing echoes the title of *Nunca Más* (CONADEP 1984a). The purpose of the research carried out by CONADEP and the publication of *Nunca Más* was to make a record of human rights abuse from the 1976-1983 dictatorship, in the hope that such atrocities would never again occur. With the phrase ‘ya nunca jamás’, Partnoy is making the point that there is no ‘again’ for the *compañeros* who were murdered.

The anaphoric conjunction 'y' occurs four times in the poem, signalling the enumeration of things to be found in Buenos Aires. While Partnoy's indented lines work to evoke the movement and hubbub of the city, they also suggest different interpretations of the poem. The reader garners a different sense when reading every line than when focusing solely on the lines flush with the left-hand margin.

Partnoy's use of the line break 'a la vuelta | de la esquina' offers several readings. Semantically, the entire phrase implies spatial proximity. It suggests that the speaker believes everything in Buenos Aires to be convenient, which aligns with her rationale for a future move to the city. Partnoy emphasises this concept through structure: the indented line suggests motion as the speaker moves to see what is around the corner. Taken alone, nonetheless, the phrase 'a la vuelta' signifies a different action. It can be understood as referring to the speaker's and Antonio Leiva's future return from exile to Argentina. Equally, the movement denoted by 'a la vuelta' could be read as a contracted 'al dar la vuelta'. The unspecific 'todo' can be read in several ways, but ultimately it is not everyday commodities that the speaker refers to. It is 'tu rabia y la mía'.

Anger is reified, stressing its strength and omnipresence as Partnoy makes the speaker's testimonial voice explicit. Furthermore, the subjects of the poem have, thus far, been grammatically portrayed through first person plural verb forms ('nos venimos', 'encontraremos'). Now, in reference to their 'rabia', Partnoy uses the second person singular possessive adjective and the first person singular possessive pronoun. Plural verb forms indicate Antonio Leiva's and the poetic voice's status as a couple; the singular possessives imply individual emotion and the personal experience of each survivor. As Partnoy illustrates at greater length in 'Mi madero y yo', the poetic 'I' and Antonio Leiva's relationship has been forged in the aftermath of dictatorship. A shared experience of emotion is an element that unites them.

In the context of Partnoy's poetry, the reader can infer that the anger relates to the violence experienced by the speaker and Antonio Leiva and that which was inflicted on their *compañeros*. Yet this emotion is not the only reminder of the events of the dictatorship as the speaker also identifies:

y la derrota
viaja como cualquiera en el sesenta
y no se baja nunca.
No se baja. (*Volando*, 48)

Partnoy's repetition of the anaphoric conjunction 'y' adds to the listing of things to be found in Buenos Aires. For the speaker and Antonio Leiva, survivors of human rights abuse, the outcome of their involvement in Argentina's political history is unavoidable. Their activism did not halt genocide. Like the final line of 'Mi madero y yo', Partnoy's indentation of 'y la derrota' suggests an intake of breath and implies the speaker's emotional distress as she contemplates the enormity of defeat.

Partnoy personifies 'la derrota' as an ever-present rider on the bus and the indented line mimics the sway of people seated on a moving bus. At the same time, the line reads almost as an understated aside as if the speaker does not wish to give precedence to the concept of defeat. The conjugation of 'viajar' in the antepenultimate line is singular, which suggests the verb refers solely to 'la derrota'. Bearing in mind Partnoy's structuring of the poem, however, a reading of the lines flush with the margin suggests 'tu rabia y la mía' as one of the bus passengers.

Neither anger nor defeat are alighting from the bus. A sense of permanent travel is reinforced by the rhyme of 'viaja' and the repeated formulation 'no se baja'. Partnoy's earlier use of the phrase 'nunca jamás' is echoed by the penultimate line's 'nunca'. Whereas the former implies impossibility, the latter denotes refusal. The speaker and Antonio Leiva cannot meet again with their *compañeros* murdered by the military, but they can refuse to forget. Partnoy stresses this notion through vertical alignment. Directly underneath the penultimate line's 'nunca' is the verb 'baja' – 'nunca baja'. Furthermore, Partnoy's use of homeoteleuton in the second half of the poem ('queda | vuelta | esquina | rabia | mía | derrota | viaja | cualquiera | sesenta | baja | nunca | baja') gives the sonic effect of perpetuity.

'El sesenta' refers to the number 60 bus, which takes one of the principal routes in Buenos Aires. Its centrality suggests the omnipresence of complex emotion, while the continuous motion symbolises the impossibility of resolution for the speaker and Antonio Leiva. Consequently, the conclusion of 'En Rocha' stands in opposition to

its beginning. The poetic 'I' begins with a seemingly optimistic discussion of circumstances that will allow for a future move to Buenos Aires. Partnoy's opening clause is in the subjunctive – 'cuando todo se acabe' – but the adverb 'cuando' implies that there will be an end point. Yet as the testimonial voice becomes more insistent, it is apparent by the poem's conclusion that no resolution can be achieved. For survivors of a genocidal dictatorship, *no se acabará nunca*.

4.4 Conclusion

Partnoy's poems about family testify to the effect of state violence on foundational inter-personal relations. Exploring the poetic voice's relationships with her daughter, brother and life partner, Partnoy presents the trauma and grief caused by dictatorship. Although the ordinary stability of these relationships has been fractured, the speaker is repeatedly shown attempting to establish connections and means of communication with her family members.

The poems written during Partnoy's imprisonment depict a mother trying to maintain a bond with her daughter. Gentle imagery in 'A mi hija' shows the speaker suggesting alternate methods of staying in touch with her child, contradicting the communicative restrictions imposed by the prison setting. Through a direct address, the poetic 'I' seeks to instil political awareness – and a sense of resistance – in her child, while acknowledging the reality of their separation.

The title of 'Visita' alludes to a prison visit, but the poem's content shows a speaker defying her physical circumstances to be at her daughter's side. Similarly, the poem brings together the family unit, despite the distances imposed between both parents and their child. The poetic 'I' is emotionally distressed by her situation, but Partnoy maintains poetic control through the exploitation of form.

Metric regularity is also a feature of 'Nana sin la cebolla' as Partnoy makes intertextual reference to Spanish Civil War poet Miguel Hernández. In her lullaby, Partnoy builds gentle lines of communication between mother and child, countering the violence of the situation forced upon them. Natural imagery is used as a form of resistance as Partnoy, again, creates a poetic rejection of carceral confinement.

In the poems depicting the speaker's sibling relationship, Partnoy shows an increasingly isolated poetic 'I'. Unlike the disavowal of her imprisonment, there can be no denying of the circumstances following her brother's death. The speaker's emotional distress is illustrated through metaphor and understatement. Personification of external malevolent forces is used to indicate how little control the poetic 'I' and her brother have over their circumstances.

Their shared childhood is portrayed as a momentary idyll before the course of their lives is inexorably altered. Partnoy's structuring of 'Epitafio', 'Razones' and 'Compañero de juegos' means that the reader experiences the progression of events at the same time as the poems' protagonists. In 'Lo fatal', the reader shares the speaker's disorientation and desire to grasp at meaning.

Sound complements the semantic content of the poems and Partnoy depicts a sibling relationship shattered by the effects of dictatorship. Having had his security threatened and concept of the future destroyed, the brother died by suicide. His sister is left a solitary figure, condemned to an earthly existence, trying to find a means of communicating with her absent brother.

In her poems about the speaker's relationship with her life partner, Partnoy emphasises the re-establishment of family after dictatorship. While she does allude to the isolation imposed on the poetic 'I' by her exile, Partnoy stresses the resilience of the survivor. Representing exile through the metaphor of the shipwreck, 'Mi madero y yo' shows the forging of a relationship following extreme events. It is in the wake of personal and political devastation that the poetic voice and her lover create a home together.

Both Partnoy's speaker and her poeticised Antonio Leiva are survivors. Their experience of dictatorship informs their relationship with each other, as well as the couple's understanding of the world. Through the discussion of their daughters' names, 'Balance' illustrates the interweaving of their political beliefs with the creation of family. Partnoy connects the intimate domestic sphere with the survivors' grief at the loss of their *compañeros* and the destruction of political ideals.

The fraught nature of the possibility of return from exile is portrayed in 'En Rocha y la vía'. Suggesting a future return to Argentina, Partnoy blends images of quotidian city life with allusions to the aftermath of dictatorship. She alludes to the

trauma of survivors who have been indefinitely separated from their home country and forever separated from their *compañeros*. United as loving partners, the relationship between the speaker and Antonio Leiva has been founded in the context of their shared experience of a genocidal regime.

Partnoy's poems about family condemn the widespread ramifications of dictatorship. Making some direct references to the events of the military dictatorship, she focuses on the emotional impact of human rights abuse. Depicting the centrality of that experience in her speaker's life and family relations, I would argue that Partnoy is broadening the boundaries of *testimonio*. In Chapter 5, I will demonstrate how she furthers the scope of *testimonio* through the representation of testimonial communities.

Chapter 5

‘Nos quedamos | levantando la voz’:

The Construction of the Testimonial Collective

The relationship between the individual and collective experience is repeatedly emphasised in *testimonio* studies. What I intend to demonstrate in this final chapter is how Partnoy puts the telling of the collective story into practice in *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos*, in terms of the Argentine situation and beyond. I will consider how Partnoy combines distinct geographical and temporal situations to build a poetic community of *testimoniantes*.¹⁰⁵

Throughout her oeuvre, Partnoy emphasises the shared acts of striving for political ideals and resisting state violence. Using both singular and plural testimonial voices, she creates the sense of a collective in her poetry. Further to alluding to *desaparecidos* and people murdered by dictatorial powers, Partnoy makes named reference to victims of genocide. Yet some responses to *testimonio* suggest that its producers ought not to speak about or ‘on behalf of’ the dead and missing. In *Fuegos*, Partnoy addresses the ethics of *testimonio* by confronting the thorny issue of speaking ‘for’ dictatorship victims.

While the majority of Partnoy’s poems relate to the events and aftermath of the 1976-1983 Argentine dictatorship, this chapter also considers how she writes about human rights violations in other countries. I will explore her approaches to writing about dictatorship in Haiti, the effects of repression and the civil war in El Salvador, and the ramifications of femicide in Mexico. Partnoy’s depiction of individual experiences, spanning various countries and historical-political settings, creates a multiplicity of voices that are united through their resistance to human rights abuse.

To bring the chapter to a close, I will analyse Partnoy’s use of a group of speakers to illustrate how dictatorship causes damage to an entire nation. Using choral and individual voices, Partnoy evokes the events and aftermath of dictatorship. I will discuss her use of metaphor and its significance in creating poetic and testimonial

¹⁰⁵ Transcriptions of all poems analysed in Chapter 5 are included in Appendix D.

renderings of trauma. Direct and oblique references to Argentina situate Partnoy's poetic *testimonio* in terms of her own experiences. Yet the fleeting nature of these allusions, amidst a palpable emphasis on emotional impact of dictatorship, serve to give the poetry a global outlook as Partnoy depicts the collective as well as the personal experience of state terror.

5.1 'Gritamos desde que se los llevarán': *Testimonio* and Speaking About the Victims of Dictatorship

The poem 'Preposiciones' (*Fuegos*) confronts the issue of the ethics of *testimonio*, specifically the matter of talking about people who did not survive. Through an exploration of the meanings and subtleties of a variety of prepositions, Partnoy addresses the issue of survivors being unsympathetically accused of speaking 'for' those who are no longer alive.¹⁰⁶ Like 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador', 'Preposiciones' has a poetic voice that predominantly speaks in the first person plural. Aside from a brief appearance of the poetic 'I' in the second stanza, Partnoy centres the collective testimonial voice. The poem's atemporality and lack of specific locations mean that 'Preposiciones' can be understood in light of Partnoy's personal circumstances, as well as being read in relation to a wide community of testifiers. Partnoy demonstrates the motivations for producing *testimonio*, as well as the relationship between *testimoniante*s and the victims of dictatorship.

'Preposiciones' starts with an ellipsis as the stanza opens mid-sentence. Partnoy gives the illusion of an unspoken preceding clause, reinforced by the initial conjunction. The poem begins:

... porque la farsa de que hablamos *por* ellos
molió ya en su metate

¹⁰⁶ In Chapter 1, I discuss the Stoll polemic in relation to Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* (pp.19-21) and Sarlo's controversial approach to *testimonio* (pp.27-31), as well as Partnoy's response to academic work of this kind (p.24-27).

de claridad rosario

castellanos... (*Fuegos*, 18, italics in the original)

The speaker's tone is sarcastic and impatient, illustrated by the use of 'la farsa' in the first line and 'ya' in the second. Partnoy's mention of farce is a literary allusion that stresses the notion of performance, yet her speaker perceives no comedy. The term is used to ridicule the critical perspectives on *testimonio* that create an 'us versus them' binary between *testimoniantes* and their murdered or disappeared *compañeros*.

Partnoy rejects such a binary and instead creates a tacit opposition between *testimoniantes* and those who are unsympathetic to them. Furthermore, the alliterative metaphorical phrase 'molió ya en su metate' implies that the issue (of speaking 'for' the dead) has already been addressed. Partnoy writes that 'we can only "speak without" those who have not survived. The Mexican author and intellectual Rosario Castellanos can lead us in that quest' (2006a: 1668). In 'Preposiciones', the qualifier 'de claridad', alliterated with the next line's 'castellanos', aligns the speaker's sympathies with the Mexican writer. Furthermore, Partnoy's separation of Castellanos' name over two lines suggests a first-name familiarity and sense of intimacy between the two writers.

In her article '*Cuando vienen matando: On Prepositional Shifts and the Struggle of Testimonial Subjects for Agency*' (2006a: 1668), Partnoy refers to Castellanos' 1972 poem 'El retorno' (1996: 305-306). The poem opens, 'Piso la tierra de Anáhuac que es | la tierra de mis muertos.' (Castellanos 1996: 305). Castellanos considers the passage of time and the relationship between the living and the dead. Partnoy (2006a: 1668) cites the following stanzas:

Así pues, no me piden
que yo viva con ellos
que mire el mundo que no ven, que lleve
adelante un destino que no alcanzó cumplirse.

Si necesito justificaciones
para estar, para hacer

y, sobre todo, para no borrar
(que sería lo lógico siguiendo las premisas)
Habrá que conseguirlas de otro modo. (Castellanos 1996: 305)

Castellanos emphasises the need for the living to make their way through the world, independently of the dead. The tone of 'El retorno' is melancholic, while Partnoy's 'Preposiciones' contains expressions of grief and anger. Both poems are written from the perspective that the living will be 'siempre sin ellos' (*Fuegos*, 20). Consequently, the speaker of 'Preposiciones' voices frustration at being criticised for '[hablar] *por* ellos', when such an act is impossible.

Partnoy's use of ellipses to open and close the first stanza suggest that the lines are part of a larger conversation and ongoing thought process about the ethics of *testimonio*. The second stanza also starts with an ellipsis, seemingly mid-way through a sentence. Having addressed the preposition 'por', Partnoy now considers 'para'. The unspoken assertion that presumably precedes the first stanza ('we shouldn't let "por" stop us from talking about them') is stated more openly in the second. Partnoy writes:

...tampoco nos llenemos la conciencia de *para*
porque ¿hacia dónde tender ramas de olivo
si ellos ya no están? (*Fuegos*, 18, italics in the original)

Where '*por*' refers to *hablar por alguien* (speaking on someone's behalf), '*para*' suggests intention (speaking because of the victims). There is also a directional nuance to '*para*', emphasised in the rhetorical '¿hacia dónde [...]?', which works to reinforce the absence of 'ellos'.

The speaker's tone has softened in the second stanza, reflecting a slight change in address. In 'Preposiciones', Partnoy's poetic voice primarily speaks to the in-group of *testimoniantes*, yet the first stanza is a frustrated response to what the speaker sees as unacceptable attitudes from the out-group (unsympathetic testimonial audiences). The second stanza highlights an imperative spoken directly to the testimonial collective: 'tampoco nos llenemos'. Perhaps the rhetorical question that

follows contains a tinge of irony, but it strongly conveys a sense of pervading sadness that ‘ellos ya no están’. The olive branch, Biblical symbol of peace and reconciliation, cannot be offered to the dead: there is no ‘para’. Significantly, neither is there any sense of an olive branch being extended to critics of *testimonio* that Partnoy perceives as hostile.

Beyond the italicised ‘por’ and ‘para’, other prepositions are initially unobtrusive. From the second stanza’s fifth line, prepositions are stressed through their placement at the beginning of lines. As Partnoy introduces the new prepositions, the line ‘Ante ellos, no sé.’ (*Fuegos*, 18) stands out, both for its caesura and as the poem’s first complete sentence. Partnoy momentarily suggests the possibility of being physically in front of ‘ellos’, but the divide between the living poetic ‘I’ and the dead *compañeros* is marked by the comma. Significantly, it is the only instance in ‘Preposiciones’ where the poetic ‘I’ appears, and not the first person collective voice. Partnoy signals that this moment of personal uncertainty is separate from her portrayal of *testimoniantes*’ unity against antagonistic critics.

Moving from a hypothetical situation to the present moment, Partnoy writes: ‘Ante su memoria, | vale’ (*Fuegos*, 18). She places an emphasis on remembering dictatorship victims and suggests that *testimoniantes* are striving to honour the memory of those who did not survive. The vowel rhyme of ‘ante | vale’ stresses the verb, further emphasised by its being the only one-word line in the stanza. Partnoy implies that what the survivors say ultimately has to suffice because it is the only option – other than not talking about their *compañeros* at all.

Having highlighted the physical absence of ‘ellos’, Partnoy refers to the objects that are so often used to represent victims of dictatorship: photographs. She uses sibilance to emphasise the lines, writing: ‘Cabe sus fotos | a sus no siempre tumbas.’ (*Fuegos*, 18). The closest the survivors can get to their *compañeros* is through proximity to their photographic images, or at the graveside. However, many do not have designated graves. Partnoy (2019d) explains that ‘When they disappear people, it’s strange because you never think the disappeared are dead. There is no mourning. We cannot have a burial’. With the phrase ‘no siempre’, Partnoy alludes to the *desaparecidos* and the ongoing anguish for the survivors and relatives who still do not have information about their missing loved ones.

Partnoy describes how *testimoniantes* communicate in the absence of 'ellos'.

She writes:

Impotencia de fuego
en la garganta:
con eso hablamos,
con ellos quizás también. (*Fuegos*, 18)

A lack of force is juxtaposed with the power symbolised by fire. Partnoy uses the preposition 'en' to stress the location of the throat, anatomically fundamental to speech. The image of fire travelling through the gullet represents strength of emotion, both anger and anguish. However, the fire is not powerful enough: its outcome is 'impotencia'.

Partnoy conveys the sense that testimonial speech feels inadequate. Although she emphasises representations of speech with punctuation – a colon after 'garganta' and a comma after 'hablamos' – it is also visually disruptive and suggests a faltering mode of communication. For all *testimonio's* pursuit of justice and its work to compel audiences to action, it does not feel powerful enough to the testimonial collective. *Testimonio* cannot undo the effects of dictatorship and it cannot bring the dead and missing back.

Still, Partnoy emphasises the portrayal of unity. Through anaphoric repetition of the preposition 'con', combined with the vowel rhyme 'eso | ellos', she presents the idea of survivors speaking in conjunction with the victims. Partnoy suggests that the *testimoniantes'* voices could be understood as including the dictatorship victims. However, the addition of 'quizás' shows hesitancy and is an acknowledgement that the dead have no agency over what is said about them. *Testimoniantes* are aware of the complex situation in which they find themselves. It is not possible to directly represent the voices of the dead, yet through speaking about their *compañeros*, *testimoniantes* are doing their utmost to ensure that the victims are remembered.

Having presented a rendering of testimonial speech, Partnoy introduces the possibility of communication with the dead. She writes:

Pero sólo los elegidos
por el amor que fué [sic]
oyen rozar sobre su piel susurros
de respuesta. (*Fuegos*, 18)

The enjambment of these lines is juxtaposed with the visual barriers created by punctuation in the preceding lines. Testimonial speech appears stilted, but Partnoy represents supernatural communication as unimpeded.

Using the terms ‘los elegidos’ and ‘amor’, Partnoy privileges the emotional connection between survivors and those who were murdered. By placing the preposition ‘por’ at the beginning of the stanza’s antepenultimate line, Partnoy emphasises the preposition’s function in the creation of unity between *testimoniantes* and the dead. This stands in stark contrast to the oppositional binary implied in the poem’s opening line (‘de que hablamos *por* ellos’).

A poetic susurrus is created through repeated sibilance in the last four lines, where Partnoy uses synaesthetic imagery (‘oyen rozar [...] susurros’). She simultaneously evokes the sound made by a whisper and the sensation of air moving against the skin. The tactile whispers form a gentle response to the fiery anguish of the *testimoniantes’* speech, suggesting the notion of loving, comforting touch.

The intimacy and softness evoked is brief, as Partnoy returns to the outraged testimonial voice in the third stanza. She depicts a persistent defiance:

Gritamos desde que se los llevaran,
so pena de degüello,
tras las rejas,
mordazas y mortajas desatando
bajo la pata militar, gritamos. (*Fuegos*, 18-20)

The verb ‘gritamos’ bookends the stanza and can be read as both preterite and present tense. Partnoy’s temporal ambiguity creates a sense of continuous testimonial speech (‘desde que se los llevaran’), as well as a feeling of immediacy. There is also a contrast in the communicative volume between the previous stanza’s

gentle whispers and the third stanza's testimonial shouts. The relative neutrality of 'hablar' – used in the first two stanzas – has become a forceful protest with the verb 'gritar'.

Partnoy depicts the dangerous circumstances under which *testimoniante*s speak out. Commas at the end of the stanza's first three lines highlight the enumeration of threats to the *testimoniante*s' lives, as well as visually representing obstacles to freedom of speech. The term 'pena' suggests a legal sentence, alluding to official mechanisms of persecution under dictatorship. Partnoy's word choice evokes an even greater sense of brutality than 'pena de muerte'. Moreover, the repeated, alliterative syllable in 'de degüello' creates a stutter.

The hesitance in speech is a sonic acknowledgement of fear: to produce *testimonio* is to risk the possibility of brutal repercussions. Partnoy has first-hand experience of this both in Argentina and in the United States. As shown in documentary video footage (Becker 2015), Partnoy was harassed and violently attacked for her attempt to testify in Washington, D.C. during a pro-Junta demonstration in 1982, at the time of the Falklands/Malvinas War.¹⁰⁷

Partnoy juxtaposes the vulnerability of the *testimoniante*s with their insistence on speaking out, even while imprisoned. The homeoteleuton in 'tras las rejas' creates a visual-aural sense of the uniform bars of a prison cell. However, Partnoy depicts a vocal collective, defiant against enforced confinement. Resistance against repression is metaphorically portrayed through the loosening of tied pieces of cloth – gags and shrouds – in the stanza's fourth line. The gag symbolises prevention of speech and the shroud represents death, yet Partnoy portrays the objects as unable to stop the power of collective testimony, reinforced by her use of sound. In the line 'mordazas y mortajas desatando', 'o-a-a' vowel rhyme is reversed to become 'a-a-o', mimicking the untying of knots.

The only instance of enjambment in the third stanza is between the penultimate and final lines. It allows for the meaning of the lines to be interpreted in several ways. When read together, the gags and shrouds are 'desatando | bajo la pata militar'. Partnoy implies a subtle act of resistance, as outlined in the poem 'Arte

¹⁰⁷ The video footage is distressing and should be approached with caution.

poética’, which I discussed in Chapter 3 (pp.103-104). At the same time, overt resistance is portrayed: ‘bajo la pata militar, gritamos’. Caesura catches the reader’s eye and separates testimonial speech from dictatorial violence. The military is dehumanised with the animalistic ‘pata’, yet the threat to the *testimoniantes* is clear. Partnoy’s use of the preposition ‘bajo’ highlights the power imbalance. Furthermore, alliteration stresses the connection between symbols of oppression – ‘mordazas y mortajas’ – and the next line’s adjective ‘militar’. Partnoy emphasises military culpability for human rights abuse, while ensuring that survivors have the final word in the stanza: ‘gritamos’.

The first person plural voice is also present in the fourth stanza, but the collective seems to have broadened beyond the in-group of *testimoniantes*. Partnoy implies a global ‘nosotros’, whose understanding of history and human rights is dependent on the information communicated through *testimonio*. She writes:

¿Acaso no entendemos todavía
que *por* es imposible?
Que si *por* fuera,
no nos daríamos aún por enterados
de la brutalidad de ese despojo. (*Fuegos*, 20)

The tone of the question is sarcastic and impatient, shown by the inclusion of ‘todavía’. Partnoy’s use of the first person (‘entendemos’), rather than the third (‘entienden’), appears to be a persuasive rhetorical device. The first person plural voice may also suggest an auto-interrogation of the academic community, to which Partnoy belongs, as well as *testimonio* critics such as Stoll and Sarlo. At any rate, the plural voice has expanded to address a group that privileges grammatical minutiae over the voices of survivors.

Italics highlight the first two instances of ‘*por*’ in the stanza and also seem to indicate the contraction of longer phrases. The second line implies that ‘[hablar] *por* [ellos] es imposible’, refuting the ‘farsa’ of the poem’s opening line. Partnoy’s second italicised ‘*por*’ suggests instead the idea of ‘por no “hablar por ellos”’. That is to say that if *testimoniantes* were to refrain from speaking about their absent *compañeros*,

the extent of dictatorial violence would be unknown. *Testimoniantes* are motivated to speak about their own circumstances – and about the dead and the missing – in an attempt to achieve some kind of justice.

Partnoy emphasises that this struggle takes place in circumstances where an immense loss is felt. The recurrence of an ellipsis at the beginning of the fifth stanza indicates a linguistic omission, grammatically highlighting the ever-absent third person plural. She writes:

...porque sin ellos,
porque siempre sin ellos
nos quedamos
levantando la voz
[...]. (*Fuegos*, 20)

Repetition, combined with the emphatic ‘siempre’, reinforces the permanence of loss and grief in the aftermath of dictatorship. Partnoy’s positioning of ‘nos quedamos’ on a single line evokes a sense of isolation: the first person collective has been forcibly, irrevocably parted from ‘ellos’.

Despite the semantic emphasis on the physical separation of victims and survivors, Partnoy’s use of homeoteleuton sonically unites them (‘ellos | ellos | nos quedamos | la voz’). Similarly, the adverb ‘siempre’ signals unchanging separation, but it also indicates a lifelong commitment on the part of the *testimoniantes*: ‘nos quedamos | levantando la voz’.

The manner in which the *testimoniantes* communicate is spatially situated:

contra la marejada
entre las piedras rotas
y los cimientos de la ciudad
en que, entonces sí, por ellos y con ellos
adolecíamos de ansias de abrazarnos
[...]. (*Fuegos*, 20)

The evocation of rough seas recalls Partnoy's metaphor of the shipwrecked, exiled poetic 'I'-survivor of 'Mi madero y yo' (see pp.195-200). The dangerous seas allude to the riskiness of denouncing injustice, as well as the vulnerable situation of the *testimoniantes*.

Partnoy juxtaposes the expansiveness of the natural world with small, interstitial spaces in the urban sphere. She gives the sense of *testimonio* being broadly transmitted, from the most open seascape to the narrowest crevices. Evoking the city through mention of its broken stones and foundations, Partnoy suggests the crumbling masonry of a ruined city. As a symbol for civilisation, the city reflects a society destroyed by dictatorship.

The city can also be read as a synecdochic location of human rights abuse.¹⁰⁸ Partnoy describes:

[...] la ciudad
en que, entonces sí, por ellos y con ellos
adolecíamos de ansias de abrazarnos
[...]. (*Fuegos*, 20)

Reinforced by the penultimate line's preposition ('en'), as well as alliteration, the city is emphasised as a space shared with 'ellos'. The adverb 'entonces' switches the stanza's timeframe to a moment in the past, when 'ellos' were still alive.

Partnoy's emphatic 'sí' stresses the second occurrence of the phrase 'por ellos' in the poem, now from the *testimoniantes'* perspective. She evokes a time when 'nosotros' and 'ellos' were forcibly separated, through disappearance or imprisonment. During her time as a *desaparecida* at La Escuelita, Partnoy testifies that 'we were forced to remain silent and prone, often immobile or face down for many hours, our eyes blindfolded and our wrists tightly bound' (1998: 15). Even when

¹⁰⁸ The city was also the literal site for many concentration camps, including 'ESMA' (Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada) in Buenos Aires and 'El Pozo' in Rosario (Hidalgo 2012: 191). For further details of the locations of *centros clandestinos de detención*, see *Nunca Más* (CONADEP 1984c).

imprisoned together, *compañeros* may have had no opportunity to share comforting or reassuring touch with each other.

The stanza's final, alliterative, line combines the idea of physical pain ('adolecíamos'), mental anguish ('ansias') and the desire for gentle touch ('abrazarnos'). With the preceding phrase 'por ellos y con ellos', Partnoy suggests the tactile desire to share physical comfort. It evokes both the desire of embrace with fellow detainees, who later became victims of the dictatorship, as well as the desire for comforting embrace amongst those who survived. The last line of the fifth stanza does suggest different meanings, though, depending on how it is read. Seen solely as part of the fifth stanza, the wish to embrace is only within the group of *testimoniantes* and their *compañeros* ('abrazarnos'). However, there is no punctuation at the end of the stanza: enjambment means that the line flows into the final stanza.

Partnoy builds on the tactile imagery she has established and simultaneously creates a metaphorical object of embrace. She writes that 'adolecíamos de ansias de abrazarnos':

a esa especie
de tierno animal desconocido
al que por falta de mejor nombre
habíamos bautizado
Liberación. (*Fuegos*, 20)

Zoomorphism is used to portray the concept of freedom as a stray animal. Described as both 'tierno' and 'desconocido', Partnoy emphasises the desire for freedom to be something tangible, whilst acknowledging the absence of liberty under dictatorship.

The collective act of naming demonstrates a united purpose, while the pluperfect tense indicates a moment in the past, before the separation of the survivors and victims of dictatorship. At first, Partnoy evokes the seemingly unimportant naming of a stray animal, but the last line's capitalised 'Liberación' denotes an abstract object of desire, as well as a strong sense of purpose. The *testimoniantes'* pursuit of liberty has been both 'con ellos' (acting with their *compañeros*) and 'por ellos' (to honour their memory). In the final stanza, Partnoy's

poetic voice is no longer struggling against unsympathetic listeners to *testimonio*. Instead, through the metaphorical act of naming, the *testimoniantes* and dictatorship victims speak with a shared voice and purpose.

5.2 'Yo denuncié | denuncié | denuncié': Robert Duval and Dictatorship in Haiti

'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' (*Venganza*) relates its eponymous subject's experience of human rights violations during the Jean-Claude Duvalier dictatorship. Jean-Claude ('Baby Doc') Duvalier's dictatorship in Haiti (1971-1986) followed on from that of his father, François ('Papa Doc') Duvalier (1957-71). The Duvalier regimes 'saw the murder or disappearance of tens of thousands of Haitians, as well as the country's slide into the worse poverty in the Western hemisphere' (Gilsinan 2014).

Robert Duval was born in Haiti and 'at the height of Duvalierist terror in 1964', his family moved to Puerto Rico, where Duval would spend most of his youth (Abbott 2011: 188). After studying abroad at Nichols College (Boston, USA) and Concordia University (Montreal, Canada), Duval returned to his native country in 1975, where he 'opened Haiti's first tire retread operation' (Abbott 2011: 188). It was at this factory where, on 20 April 1976, Duval was arrested:

on charges of trying to overthrow the government. For one day he was interrogated at Dessalines Barracks, where he learned that there had been a shooting incident in the Carrefour slum and they suspected him of involvement in it. [...] Then, without charging, trying, or sentencing him, they moved him to the National Penitentiary [Fort Dimanche] to wait for whatever might happen next. (Abbott 2011: 188)

'Criticising the back-to-back [Duvalier] dictatorships' made Duval a target (Reinl 2011). Duval asserts, 'They just decided to kill me. That is why they sent me to Fort Dimanche' (quoted in Reinl 2011). Fort Dimanche was 'the infamous military barracks where

thousands of political prisoners were held during the Duvaliers' twenty-nine year rule' (Hooper 1995: 166).

Abbott notes that 'when Duval entered the fort, he was a strapping 180 pounds and in pristine condition after a lifetime of soccer and hiking' (2011: 189). Duval had been 'a national soccer champion in college' (Crossnan 2014) and, on his return to Haiti, played 'for the number one team in the nation, the Violette Athletic Club' (Cameron 2013). When he was released from Fort Dimanche, Robert Duval 'was in the final stages before death. He could no longer stand up. The young, athletic man had shrivelled to a ninety-pound skeleton' (Abbott 2011: 199); 'starved and tortured for 17 months, Duval was on the brink of death when Amnesty International and President Jimmy Carter secured his release in 1977' (n. auth. 2014b).

Duval has been a prominent human rights activist since his release from imprisonment. In 1986, he established the *Ligue des anciens prisonniers politiques haïtiens* (n. auth. 2011b), which 'freed 1500 prisoners detained without due process' (n. auth. 2014b). Duval was also 'a lead witness' when Jean-Claude Duvalier was taken to trial. The dictator had been 'forced from power in 1986, following anti-government demonstrations, and he and his family fled into a lavish exile in France' (Crossnan 2014). However, after Duvalier's return to Haiti in 2011, 'a group of victims filed charges in a Haitian national court against Duvalier for crimes against humanity' (Crossnan 2014).

In 2012, 'Investigative Magistrate Carves Jean said the statute of limitations had run out on the human rights charges', and that 'Jean-Claude Duvalier should face trial for corruption, but not the more serious charges of human rights violations committed during his rule' (Isidor 2012). 'A Haitian court ruled in February [2014] that Duvalier could be charged with crimes against humanity under international law, and that he could also be held responsible for abuses committed by the army and paramilitary forces under his rule' (n. auth. 2014a). Jean-Claude Duvalier died on 4 October 2014 without having gone to trial (Gilsinan 2014).

Duval's experience of the dictatorship is poetically rendered in Partnoy's 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití'. The poem is divided into four numbered sections, where a poeticised Duval discusses witnessing multiple deaths, the prisoners'

living conditions, and collective and individual resistance. Although time and place are unspecified, the informed reader can infer that the site is Fort Dimanche.

‘Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití’ is composed largely of italics, interspersed with unitalicised text. Partnoy’s use of typography signals to the reader that the poem is being presented from a dual perspective. The italicised text represents the voice of Duval, while the six unitalicised segments are spoken by Partnoy’s customary testimonial poetic ‘I’. ‘Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití’ is the first poem in *Venganza* to have a main speaker that is definitively not a poeticised version of Partnoy.¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, the inclusion of the familiar poetic ‘I’ guides the reader in their engagement with a new person’s *testimonio* and works to centre a different poetic voice. Partnoy plays with the theatricality of *testimonio* through the unitalicised asides. The interjections momentarily separate the reader from the main narrative of Duval’s account. Consequently, the reader is compelled to critically engage with the poetic *testimonio* and the manner in which it is being presented.

Partnoy opens the poem by gesturing towards the conventions of *testimonio*. Her use of ellipses and italics suggest verbatim speech as the named first-person speaker (Duval) identifies a human rights atrocity (the death of 180 people). Partnoy writes:

... *en esa piecita*
(Robert Duval cuenta)
ciento ochenta
vi morir enfrente mío. (Venganza, 86)

Naming a location is also central to *testimonio* and, in terms of place, ‘*esa piecita*’ juxtaposes vagueness and specificity. Beyond the titular mention of Haiti, the absence of a named site evokes the spatial disorientation caused by imprisonment. However, Duval does refer to a particular room and the diminutive ‘-ita’ denotes smallness and

¹⁰⁹ Three poems in *Venganza* have a distinct poetic ‘I’, all of which I analyse in this chapter: ‘Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití’, ‘Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador’ and ‘Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador’.

evokes the confinement of a prison cell.¹¹⁰ Partnoy's use of the suffix also suggests colloquial speech and a sense of familiarity between Duval and his audience. Almost as soon as he has started speaking, though, Duval's voice is interrupted.

Partnoy's poetic aside serves as a means of introduction, where her familiar poetic 'I' names Duval. In *testimonio*, it is important that the reader has a sense of being able to trust the *testimoniante*. Duval is appearing for the first time and Partnoy's habitual speaker guides *Venganza's* reader to engage with his account. The interpolation of the two poetic voices creates a double sense of witnessing: Duval testifies about his experiences and Partnoy's poetic 'I' witnesses his *testimonio*. Simply by engaging with the poem, the reader is drawn into a third layer of witnessing. Yet the role played by the reader is made more complex through Partnoy's use of the aside, which distances the reader from Duval and his account. Partnoy heightens the reader's awareness of the poem as testimonial construct and encourages the reader's participation in the solidarity pact (see discussion of Partnoy's 'solidarity pact' in Chapter 1, pp.26-27).

The third and fourth lines of the first stanza return to the testimonial voice of Duval. He speaks in the first person singular and names an atrocity: the death of 180 people. Gesturing to the statistical recording of human rights violations, Partnoy emphasises the inclusion of a number with half rhymes: 'cuenta | ciento ochenta | enfrente'. Similarly, Duval's witnessing of the 180 deaths is poetically reinforced through homeoteleuton: 'piecita | cuenta | ciento ochenta' and Partnoy's use of the preposition 'enfrente', emphasising the physicality of Duval and his historical presence in 'esa piecita'.

Partnoy divides the first section of 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' into two stanzas, separating Duval's speech from the introduction of a poetic audience. A moment of silence is represented by the blank space on the page, as the audience processes the information provided by Duval. Partnoy uses a half-rhyme to

¹¹⁰ At Fort Dimanche, 'cells that measured approximately 3 meters by 3 meters held up to 33 prisoners each, allowing each prisoner a space of only 30 centimeters. Prisoners sometimes had to sleep in shifts, or in rows like sardines' (Human Rights Watch 2011: 10).

linguistically connect the audience with Duval's testimony: 'doscientos cincuenta | escuchamos.' (*Venganza*, 86).

Where Partnoy's poetic 'I' often forms part of a plural testimonial voice, in 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití', this speaker is placed in a collective listening role. The poetic audience is composed of 250 people and it is significant that a higher number of people are listening to Duval's testimony than the 180 whose deaths he witnessed. Partnoy seems to be making a comment on the wide scope of *testimonio*. It has the potential to transmit individual accounts to a large number of people, thus acting against the erasure intended by mass human rights violations and genocide.

Having temporarily moved away from Duval's *testimonio* at the end of the poem's first section, Partnoy returns to his poetic voice for the entirety of the second section. It is composed of a single 18-line stanza, which demonstrates increasing fragmentation as Duval continues with his account. Partnoy directs the reader's attention back to Duval as she repeats the poem's opening line. She writes:

*... en esa piecita
a veces treinta
o cuarenta
según
los que habían mandado a morir
aquel día ... (Venganza, 86)*

Partnoy uses ellipses to dual effect. As punctuation, the ellipsis appears twice as a representation of orality and, perhaps, an intake or exhalation of breath as Duval discusses events that are distressing.

The sense of emotional difficulty for Duval is emphasised through the stuttering effect of homeoteleuton in the first three lines: 'piecita | treinta | cuarenta'. Partnoy also uses a linguistic ellipsis, in the form of an omitted verb, which leaves the reader uncertain of Duval's meaning. It is unclear whether the numbers he refers to are used as an explanation of the cramped conditions inside '*esa piecita*' or if Duval is giving further information about his witnessing of mass murder. She leaves the reader's understanding of these lines open to interpretation.

Considering that the preceding line spoken by Duval states '*vi morir enfrente mío*', the lines could be read:

...en esa piecita
[vi morir]
a veces treinta
o cuarenta
[...].

At the same time, however, Partnoy uses the poem's second section to have Duval's voice elaborate on living conditions in prison. It seems likely that the first lines of the stanza do the same, referencing a confined space, packed with prisoners: 'thirty to forty men shared each cell, sleeping in shifts at night on little bug-infested straw mats, always fighting for air in the steaming, unventilated fortress' (Abbott 2011: 187). Accordingly, the lines could be read:

...en esa piecita
[estábamos]
a veces treinta
o cuarenta
según
los que habían mandado a morir
aquel día ...

Through her use of linguistic ellipsis, Partnoy disorientates her reader and poetically approximates the uncertainty experienced by Duval and his fellow prisoners.

The positioning of the adverb '*según*' on a single line emphasises the term's mortal significance. Survival was dependent on chance, and on the whim of the prison authorities. Partnoy dehumanises those in power through the third person plural conjugation of '*haber mandado*'. Furthermore, the assonance connecting '*habían mandado*' and '*aquel día*' highlights the sense that the prisoners' chances of survival could change at any moment. Duval has testified that he would see "two people,

three people, dead a day” while locked inside Fort Dimanche [...]. They got sick and died” (quoted in Reinl 2011). Partnoy’s alliteration in the phrase ‘*mandado a morir*’ stresses the deliberateness of the deaths. The verb ‘mandar’ suggests a military order and that the imprisonment of people in the inhumane conditions of Fort Dimanche was a calculated move. Through her use of these poetic techniques, Partnoy squarely places the blame on the dictatorial powers.

The prisoners at Fort Dimanche were kept in appalling conditions, which are outlined in *Haiti’s Rendezvous with History: The Case of Jean-Claude Duvalier* (Human Rights Watch: 2011). The report notes that:

prisoners received very little food, with one prisoner [Robert Duval] estimating the ration constituted little more than 300 calories a day. [...] Sanitation was poor, and communicable diseases easily passed among prisoners, who often shared the same plate and drinking glass; approximately 18 glasses served a population of 195 prisoners. (Human Rights Watch 2011: 10-11)

A poeticised version of this information is communicated in ‘Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití’. The second section conveys the process by which food was received and consumed in the prison. Partnoy’s fragmentation of the poetic sentences creates a jagged layout, suggesting an unsteadiness in the speaker’s voice and breath as he testifies. As the number of shorter lines increases towards the end of the stanza, the reader’s eye tumbles down the page as if the lines are mimicking the falling food and water.

The poetic voice of Duval recounts:

*un bowl nos daban
con comida
caliente la volcábamos en el piso
el mismo
con agua.
Había que tomarla*

allí mismo
porque
el mismo
bowl para la otra celda
y la otra
todas. (Venganza, 86)

Partnoy's use of the English term 'bowl' is unusual. Although she switches between Spanish and English in a number of poems in both *Volando* and *Fuegos*, 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' is the only poem in *Venganza* in which Partnoy uses an English-language term. Perhaps it is a remnant from an original, oral account in English. Duval is fluent in English and has testified outside of Haiti, where he has 'addressed the United Nations and the US Congress' (n. auth. 2016).

The grammatical composition of the line '*un bowl nos daban*' is notable. The singular bowl, emphasised by its position at the beginning of the line, symbolises the scarcity experienced by Duval and his fellow prisoners. Partnoy follows the singular noun with a first person plural object and a third person subject, creating a dichotomy between the collective 'nosotros' (the prisoners) and the 'ellos' (the guards). The technique of depicting the guards solely through third person conjugations is employed twice in 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití' ('*habían mandado*' and '*daban*' in the second section's fifth and seventh lines, respectively). This dehumanisation stands in stark contrast to the demonstration of collective solidarity shown by the prisoners.

Alliteration and repeated syllables stress the action taken with the bowl's contents: 'con comida | caliente la volcabamos en el piso'. To the uninformed reader, this action might be misconstrued as one of rebellion, akin to hunger-striking. However, Duval testified that, at midday, the prisoners would be given 'some grits [maize porridge]', which had to be thrown on the floor to eat 'because it was so hot' (quoted in Reinl 2011), and owing to the little crockery that was available (Human Rights Watch 2011: 11). Partnoy uses anastrophe to emphasise the food's temperature, while the imperfect tense suggests the routine nature of the action described.

The 'treinta | o cuarenta' persons mentioned at the beginning of the stanza become a unit. Owing to the scarcity of crockery, the same bowl had to serve for Duval's cell and:

la otra celda
y la otra
todas. (*Venganza*, 86)

Accordingly, each person had to respond in the same manner – pouring the bowl's contents on the floor – in order that everyone would receive a small amount of food and water.

Partnoy's repetition of 'mismo' throughout the stanza emphasises the regularity of the actions described. Furthermore, the half-rhyme of 'piso | mismo' aurally reinforces the connection between the food and water, and the floor. Despite the guards' attempts to debase the prisoners by providing food under such inhumane and unsanitary conditions, Partnoy's construction of the stanza emphasises solidarity amongst the prisoners and the shared humanity of their actions.

Having immersed the reader in Duval's uninterrupted *testimonio* in the poem's second section, Partnoy reintroduces the theatrical aside at the beginning of the third section. The stanza begins overleaf from the first two parts of the poem and Partnoy's typical poetic 'I' speaks a brief aside ('dice:'). The familiar speaker functions to remind the reader of the multiple layers of witnessing that are occurring through the construction of the poem.

The act of resistance, '*enfrentar el sistema*', is emphasised through the semantics of the phrase and through sound. Partnoy's choice to use a verb with repeated syllables sonically reinforces the sense of determination behind the action. 'El sistema' can be understood on multiple levels. It may refer to the living conditions endured by the prisoners, as described in the poem's previous stanza, or it may refer to the Jean-Claude Duvalier regime, which caused the imprisonment and torture of Duval and his fellow prisoners at Fort Dimanche.

The collective identity of the prisoners, continued from the poem's second section, is centred through Partnoy's use of the personal pronoun 'nos' and first person plural conjugations. The voice of Duval states:

nos costó
diez muertos
en cada manifestación.
Invertimos sangre. (Venganza, 88)

As the action is collective, so is the loss. The adjective 'cada' indicates that multiple protests took place. Each protest was a calculated risk: the prisoners knew that some amongst them would almost certainly die, yet their desire for resistance, and sense of group identity, was stronger. Recurring homeoteleuton (*nos costó | muertos o | invertimos*) creates a sense of sonic insistence, mirroring the determination of the protestors. The other sound that is persistent in the stanza is sibilance, connecting Duval's testimony with the word spoken by Partnoy's poetic 'I': 'dice'.

Partnoy references the fundamentals of oral *testimonio* through the inclusion of her familiar poetic voice, whose only verbs in the poem denote speaking and listening ('contar'; 'escuchar'; 'decir'). The poetic 'I' appears again in the seventh line of the third section:

dice:
todavía no vimos
la tumba colectiva.
Estamos por verla. (Venganza, 88)

Partnoy visually divides the stanza by using the aside, meaning that the protesting collective is poetically separated from the mass grave. It seems that the appearance of Partnoy's familiar speaker marks a change in the address of Duval's *testimonio*. In the first part of the stanza, his poetic voice testifies about action taken by him and his fellow prisoners. In the second, the testimonial audience is grammatically included in his speech.

Partnoy's first person plural conjugation of the verb 'ver' suggests that Duval is testifying *in situ*. It implies that he is giving a guided tour of Fort Dimanche or perhaps presenting his *testimonio* in an auditorium, with the use of slides as a visual aid. In any event, the poetic audience has yet to see the '*tumba colectiva*'. In a poem that is otherwise metrically irregular, the format of these three lines is significant. They are composed of two heptasyllables and a hexasyllable. The missing syllable in the last line gives a sense of anticipation.

It seems likely that Duval's 'doscientos cincuenta' listeners, through engaging with his *testimonio*, become part of the collective 'nosotros'. However, the subjects of the verbs '*vimos*' and '*estamos*' are ambiguous. The rhyme '*invertimos* | *vimos*' strengthens the connecting between the two segments of Duval's *testimonio*. Consequently, the last three lines can also be read from an historical present, giving a sense of immediacy to Duval's words.

Abbott writes that:

Each morning the previous day's bodies were buried in shallow graves at the back of the fort [...] at least fifty thousand men and women who died at Fort Dimanche [...] were buried in the shadow of its infamous walls. (2011: 187)

Partnoy uses bilabial plosives throughout the third section's last three lines ('*todavía no vimos* | *la tumba colectiva*. | *Estamos por verla.* '). She creates an insistent beat that, further to the anticipation in the lines, creates a sense of inevitability about the '*tumba colectiva*'. Duval and his fellow prisoners knew that their continued resistance meant risking their lives.

The fourth and final stanza of the poem moves back to the singular perspective of Duval and the action he took as an individual. Partnoy writes:

dice:

yo denuncié

denuncié

denuncié. (*Venganza*, 88)

'Denunciar' implies a different kind of action to that of the previous stanza. The verb suggests Duval's work as a human rights activist, after his release from prison. It is a different form of resistance, which involves both official denunciations and the struggle against cultural and historical forgetting. Repetition reinforces the sense of Duval's persistence and simultaneously indicates that his formal complaints went ignored. *Venganza* was published in 1992, when Jean-Claude Duvalier was exiled in France: the poem's final stanza alludes to dictatorial impunity.

Partnoy's familiar poetic 'I' speaks one last time as she recounts:

Entonces dice:

hay que reflexionar profundamente

sobre la conducta

represiva. (Venganza, 88)

The inclusion of the adverb 'entonces' denotes both time and consequence. Partnoy indicates that Duval's last three lines in the poem were spoken immediately after the previous three lines of *testimonio*. Furthermore, the philosophical statement is directly related to the impunity implied by the repeated (and presumably unheeded) denunciations made by Duval. The poem's antepenultimate line stands out, in comparison to the stanza's other lines, for its length and the rare occurrence, in Duval's speech, of an adverb: 'profundamente'. Using both semantics and the visual effect of a longer line, Partnoy suggests the depth of thought on Duval's part, as he continues to reflect on his experiences and the aftermath of dictatorship. The phrase '*sobre la conducta | represiva*' is split over two lines. Partnoy places a stress on the poem's final word, emphasising the harm caused by dictatorial repression.

5.3 'Aburridos de tanta masacre': Sonia, Lucía Ramírez and Civil War in El Salvador

In her Salvadoran poems, 'Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador' (*Venganza*) and 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador' (*Venganza*), Partnoy outlines the effects of state violence in the Central American country. Unlike the protagonist of *Venganza's* preceding poem, 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití', neither Sonia nor Lucía Ramírez are readily identifiable. It appears that this may be a way to present testimonies, while preserving the relative anonymity of the *testimoniantes*. To speak openly about human rights abuse means to risk the potential of violent repercussions, even in the aftermath of a dictatorship.

Venganza was published in 1992, the same year as the Salvadoran 'civil war' ended on January 16, 1992, with a peace accord brokered by the United Nations' (Silber and Viterna 2009: 330). The UN:

created a Truth Commission to investigate human rights abuses. Its final report, *From Madness to Hope*, found that the Salvadoran state, through its systematic institutionalization of violence, was the overwhelming agent of terror during the 12-year war. In the end, the civil war claimed the lives of approximately 75,000 people, displaced 1 million and "disappeared" an additional 7,000. (Silber and Viterna 2009: 330)

According to Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty International's Americas director, 'those responsible for crimes committed during the armed conflict [in El Salvador] are still allowed to escape justice and enjoy impunity' (Amnesty International 2020). In September 2020, 'at Spain's highest criminal court, the Audiencia Nacional', the former Salvadoran army officer Inocente Orlando Montano was convicted of the murder of five Spanish Jesuits (Jones 2020). He was also found responsible for the murder of three Salvadoran citizens, but 'could not be convicted of their killings as [he] had been only extradited from the US to stand trial over the deaths of the five Spaniards' (Jones 2020).

It seems likely that both poems relate to the civil war, especially since Ramírez mentions the disappearance of a prominent trade unionist (Marta Lidia Guzmán), which occurred in 1989. Still, it is important to note that El Salvador has ‘a long history of economic inequality, political authoritarianism, and violent class conflict’ (Silber and Viterna: 2009: 329). Perhaps the seeming atemporality of Partnoy’s rendering of the *testimonios* speaks to a broader understanding of systemic state violence in El Salvador.

‘Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador’ directly follows ‘Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití’ in *Venganza*. Partnoy’s shift from the details of Duval’s case to the ambiguous Sonia situates the poem’s subject as a kind of everywoman. The limited specifics work to expand the scope of the poem, giving Sonia’s individual *testimonio* the sense of belonging to a wider collective.

The poem’s main body is composed of italics, a technique familiar to the reader from Partnoy’s presentation of Robert Duval’s *testimonio*. Again, the speaker is aligned with the eponymous Sonia, maintaining the distance from Partnoy’s typical poetic ‘I’, who does not feature in the poem. The voice of Sonia begins:

1 desaparecida
2 asesinados
5 encarceladas
10 exiliados
de los 20
que estudiábamos allí. (Venganza, 90)

Partnoy’s italics suggest a verbatim quotation and her use of digits speaks to the statistical element of *testimonio*. Ninety percent of Sonia’s group (18 out of 20 students) is reported to have been directly affected.

This could broadly be interpreted as representing the large number of Salvadoran civilians that were harmed by state violence. Nevertheless, it is important to note that students as a group were specifically attacked. LaFeber explains that students:

who moved to the countryside to help organize campesinos became special targets. When they marched to protest government spending of more than three million dollars on the Miss Universe spectacle in 1975, the army fired into the marchers, killing and wounding as many as fifty people; several dozen others were arrested and simply disappeared. (1984: 245)

Student activists were in a dangerous situation in the years leading up to and during the civil war. By December 1989, 'student leaders had disappeared' in San Salvador and 'raids and arrests had been carried out against most activists' (bend 1990: 1). A Salvadoran refugee, testifying under the pseudonym 'Rosa H.', stated that 'the police see an enemy in every student, and especially the well known are at risk' (1990: 2).

How Sonia was personally affected is ambiguous. The twenty students, beyond constituting a mixed-gender group, are not further identified. However, the singular feminine '*desaparecida*', as well as the mention of imprisonment and exile, recalls Partnoy's own experiences. As the reader knows from the prefatorial 'Introduction' to *Venganza*, Partnoy was a student when she was kidnapped in 1977, before being imprisoned then forced into exile. The poet emphasises a shared experience of human rights violations that transcends geographical borders. A sense of solidarity is implied between Partnoy and Sonia, as well as between Sonia and her fellow students.

Partnoy moves from the multisyllabic rendering of multiple experiences to the singular perspective of the eponymous Sonia:

Yo
no estaba organizada.
Todavía. (*Venganza*, 90)

Partnoy uses visual disruption to signal a change in focus: the monosyllabic pronoun stands out – a short line between two markedly longer lines. Sonia's personal viewpoint is further emphasised by anaphoric 'o'-assonance in the poem's final three lines ('*Yo | no | To-').*

The briefness of the antepenultimate line suggests a pause or moment of unease, reflecting Sonia's difficulty in speaking about her own traumatic experiences. At the same time, the hesitancy seems to mirror Sonia's political unpreparedness when she was a student. Perhaps she had not fully comprehended the extent to which she and her fellow classmates were at risk; perhaps she was not yet ready to resist.

Partnoy stresses the notion of deliberate political organising through 'a'-assonance in the poem's penultimate line (*'estaba organizada'*). She creates a visual and sonic contrast between horizontal and vertical assonance ('a' and 'o' respectively). Consequently, the idea of planned opposition to state violence is juxtaposed with Sonia's lack of preparation for such action when she was a student.

Echoing the vowel structure between *'organizada'* and *'todavía'*, Partnoy gestures towards a poetic future. While the only tense used in the poem is the imperfect, and the last line omits a verb altogether, the adverb *'todavía'* gives a sense of what is to come. It implies a period of activism between the events of the first six lines of the poem, and the time when Sonia is testifying. Talking about the human rights violations that occurred is an act of defiance. 'Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador' expands upon this by giving a sense of the evolution of Sonia the activist.

As the reader progresses through *Venganza*, they become familiar with Partnoy's use of italics in the poems told from perspectives that are not directly her own. However, she re-adjusts the mode of presentation in 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador'. Italics are combined with text that is centred on the page and the sense of a plural, choral voice is present from the poem's outset. Partnoy writes:

Nosotros
los damnificados
los desplazados
los marginados
miles
y miles.
(*Venganza*, 92)

The voice of Ramírez begins in the first person plural and this collective voice predominates in the poem.

Partnoy's use of adjectives demonstrates that the people she describes are marginalised and oppressed. However, the anaphoric repetition of the article 'los', combined with a plural pronoun and the mention of '*miles | y miles*', suggests a shared identity. Homeoteleuton, in the form of '-os' endings, is recurrent throughout the poem and creates a chanting effect. Repetition of '*miles*' reinforces the notion of a plural voice. Through the enumeration of more and more people, Partnoy gives the sense of a growing collective, yet this is juxtaposed with the fragmented layout of the poem.

Fractured sentences – often without verbs – stylistically represent a group of people whose physical and geographical cohesion has been shattered. Ramírez states that they are:

Lejos
de que nos dejen
organizar.
Lejos.
(*Venganza*, 92)

The adverb '*lejos*' echoes the sense of the poem's third line, where Partnoy mentions '*los desplazados*'. She evokes images of people forced from their homes by the civil war, as well as those in exile, who have had to flee their homeland. '*Lejos*' implies these spatial distances, while also suggesting political disenfranchisement.

Partnoy's choice to use a phrase with the subjunctive emphasises the uncertainty and instability of the situation experienced by the poem's collective. The conjugation of the verb '*dejar*' raises the idea of permission, suggesting that political organising was not legally recognised. Vilas writes that in 1980s El Salvador:

intense legal and extralegal repression, combined with government economic policy, weighed heavily on the trade union movement [...]. Not only were labor organizations proscribed, the right to strike revoked, and public demonstrations of collective protest prohibited, but union leaders and organizers were kidnapped, disappeared, imprisoned and murdered. (1995: 154-155)

'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador' demonstrates the situation of a population whose lives are governed by state violence. Their immediate, personal safety is threatened and attempts to collectively organise are suppressed. Partnoy's repetition of the adverb 'lejos', as a single-word sentence, emphasises the speaker's frustration at the political state of affairs in her home country.

The lack of verbs suggests a difficulty in articulating traumatic events in grammatically normative sentences. Ramírez testifies about:

*Capturas de muchos
compañeros.
Marta Lidia Guzmán
desaparecida.
El cuatro de julio.
(Venganza, 92)*

It is notable that Partnoy uses the noun '*capturas*' and not its synonym '*detenciones*'. So doing, she emphasises the notion of resistance and delegitimises the arrests. The positioning of '*compañeros*', as a single-word line, stresses the idea of solidarity and community. It is already evident to the reader that many people were arrested and the addition of the term '*compañeros*' turns the many into a unified political group.

The only named person in the main body of the poem appears in the following line: '*Marta Lidia Guzmán*'. Significantly, Partnoy places the term '*desaparecida*' on a separate line, marking the distinction between Guzmán as an individual and as a victim of state violence. Guzmán, a trade unionist who was 'secretary of the Unión Nacional de Damnificados de El Salvador (UNADES), the National Union of Earthquake Victims

of El Salvador “disappeared” on leaving the UNADES offices on 3 June [1989]’ (Amnesty International 1989: 3).¹¹¹ Smith-Nonini writes that Guzmán ‘is believed to have been captured and killed by the National Police [...] after a series of police threats and arrests of activists in the organization [UNADES]’ (2010: n.p.)

The inclusion of a date on the following line initially reads as if Ramírez is noting the temporal specifics of Guzmán’s disappearance. The date given, though, is ‘*el cuatro de julio*’. Both Amnesty International (1989: 3; 5) and Smith-Nonini (2012) note that Guzmán disappeared in June. It seems possible that somewhere in the testimonial process that the noun ‘junio’ was misheard as ‘julio’.

While the vast majority of Partnoy’s readers are unlikely to be familiar with the specifics of Guzmán’s case, *Venganza* was published in the USA and an American audience will recognise that 4 July is US Independence Day. Perhaps Partnoy is suggesting a darkly ironic coincidence: the disappearance of a Salvadoran citizen on a day when many (non-indigenous) Americans celebrate liberty. The inclusion of the date ‘*el cuatro de julio*’ hints at an oblique comment on US foreign policy and its support of the Salvadoran government and military in the 1980-1992 civil war.

During the civil war, ‘El Salvador became the second largest per capita recipient of US military aid in the world. Death squads acted with impunity’ (Livingstone 2009: 87). Death squads were:

clandestine groups of men [who] targeted anyone they considered ‘subversive’. They made public examples of their victims by displaying their tortured or dismembered bodies. [...] Most of the death squads operated directly from within the military. The Reagan administration was well aware that the Salvadoran state was colluding with death squads because its own embassy had been sending reports saying just that. Instead of taking action against the Salvadoran military, the Reagan administration decided as one of its

¹¹¹ A ‘massive earthquake (7.5 on the Richter Scale) [...] hit San Salvador on October 10, 1986, causing 1,500 deaths, 10,000 injured, 200,000 destitute, and an estimated \$2 billion in damage’ (Montgomery 1995: 202).

first acts [...] to fire the US ambassador to El Salvador, Robert White, who had become a vocal critic of the regime. (Livingstone 2009: 88-91)

Between 1980 and 1990, El Salvador received \$3.9 billion in military and developmental aid from the United States, more than \$1 billion of which was for the military (Cuenca 1992: 27-30). Partnoy alludes to the United States' complicity in the state terrorism of the Salvadoran civil war, ranging from its effect on the almost unfathomable '*miles | y miles*' to the specific, individual disappearance of Guzmán.¹¹²

The lines after Partnoy discusses Guzmán's disappearance, however, seem grammatically disjointed. The speaker states:

*Incluyendo
pues
mi persona
capturados.
(Venganza, 92)*

It appears that these four lines, like the section about Guzmán, can also be read as following on from '*capturas de muchos | compañeros*'. The poetic voice is again presented as part of a collective. Yet, by interpolating the lines about Guzmán, Partnoy depicts a testifying speaker who is hesitant to talk about herself. At the same time as struggling to discuss trauma, Ramírez minimises her personal experience in favour of naming a *compañera* who is still missing. According to Smith-Nonini (2012), Guzmán's body has never been found.

Ramírez's reluctance in talking about herself is reinforced through Partnoy's use of language and grammar. The conjunction 'pues' appears as a filler word, an articulated pause, as Ramírez testifies about a traumatic personal experience. Notably, as the sole instance of the first person singular in the poem, Ramírez does not say 'yo'.

¹¹² An in-depth analysis of US foreign policy, in relation to El Salvador, can be found in LeoGrande (1998).

Instead, she talks about ‘mi persona’, which suggests the violent physicality of her arrest, as well as a sense of dissociation as a psychological response to trauma.

The fragmentary composition of the poem is juxtaposed with the grammatical fluidity of the following two lines. Partnoy writes in prose:

*Esta es la respuesta que el gobierno nos ha dado en lugar de la
ayuda internacional que nos habían enviado solidariamente
[...]. (Venganza, 92)*

Compared to the distressed language in the rest of the poem, the rendering of the governmental response seems emotionless. Moreover, the violence enacted by the state on the Salvadoran people demonstrates utter disregard for the wellbeing of the country’s citizens.

While Partnoy writes of ‘*la respuesta*’, any question or demand is implicit. It is apparent that ‘*los damnificados | los desplazados | los marginados*’ are in need of help, yet the support – and safety – they require is unforthcoming. Montgomery writes that, following the 1986 earthquake:

Aid poured in from thirty-one countries. According to US officials, however, large quantities of canvas and corrugated zinc roofing flown to El Salvador on C-5A transports were unaccounted for; heavy equipment vanished from warehouses; and a significant portion of \$20 million given to the nationalised banks for housing-reconstruction loans to earthquake victims ended up with the hands of PDC [Partido Demócrata Cristiano] members, bank employees and favored customers. (1995: 202)

Partnoy signals a marked contrast between the solidarity of the international community and the Salvadoran government’s lack of compassion for the country’s most vulnerable people.

The construction of the two prose lines might lead the reader to expect them to end with a colon, followed by a quotation from a government official. However, no

verbal statement is given. The violent '*respuesta*' has been detailed in the preceding lines. Partnoy chooses to silence the state powers and instead centre:

nosotros
los
damnificados.
(*Venganza*, 92)

By repeating the poem's first two lines – now split over three – Partnoy continues to emphasise that the collective has been immensely harmed by the state. Strength and resilience are evoked through the shared identity, yet the final poetic sentence has a more muted tone.

Beginning in the lower case, Partnoy writes that the Salvadoran people are '*aburridos* | *de tanta masacre*' (*Venganza*, 92). The reprise of '-os' endings in the poem's final lines reinforces the collective voice ('*nosotros* | *los* | *damnificados*. | *aburridos*'), but falters with the extreme violence articulated in the final line. In living memory, massacres in El Salvador include: the 1932 *Matanza* of 16,000-40,000 *campesinos* (Anderson 1971: 131-136); the murder of at least 37 student protestors in San Salvador in 1975 (Montgomery 1995: 67); and the 1981 massacre of 926 people in El Mozote (LeoGrande 1998: 155).

Vilas writes that:

state terrorism in its most brutal incarnations, already widespread in 1979 [...] became completely unrestrained' in the early 1980s. More than 8,000 extrajudicial executions for political reasons of civilian non-combatants were recorded in 1980, and the figure grew to more than 13,000 in 1981. (Vilas 1995: 85)

By the end of the civil war in 1992, 'approximately 75,000 people' had died (Silber and Viterna 2009: 330). Using understatement with the adjective '*aburridos*', Partnoy hints at the psychological exhaustion experienced by the victims of state terror. Ramírez's

testimonio speaks to the unending personal and collective anguish caused by mass human rights abuse.

5.4 'Escuche aquí y ahora': Silvia Arce, Evangelina Arce and Disappearance in Mexico

The title of 'Palabras por Silvia' (*Volando*) makes reference to 'Palabras para Julia', a poem by José Agustín Goytisolo, popularised by the singer Paco Ibáñez.¹¹³ Goytisolo's poem addresses his daughter, Julia (n. auth. 2018), but Ibáñez's version re-orders the stanzas and omits certain lines, giving the text 'un sesgo más universal' (Riva 2014: 219). Ibáñez's musical rendering of the poem 'se ha convertido en un himno de resistencia para las generaciones que han padecido alguna dictadura, en [España] durante los mítines antifranquistas o en cárceles y centros de tortura de Chile, Argentina y Uruguay' (n. auth. 2018).¹¹⁴

Partnoy does not make further textual reference to 'Palabras para Julia' beyond the title and there is a notable grammatical difference compared with 'Palabras *por* Silvia' (my emphasis). Where 'Palabras para Julia' was originally written for Goytisolo's daughter Julia, 'Palabras por Silvia' is written *because of* Silvia Arce, a Mexican *desaparecida*: 'El día 11 de marzo de 1998 Silvia Arce, de 29 años, desapareció en Ciudad Juárez' (Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos n.d.).¹¹⁵ Although the title of 'Palabras por Silvia' is its only apparent intertextual allusion, readers familiar with 'Palabras para Julia' may recall the verse:

Pero tú siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti, pensando en ti,

¹¹³ Personal email correspondence with Alicia Partnoy, 17 January 2020.

¹¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of the significance of 'Palabras para Julia' in Latin American music and politics, see Riva (2014).

¹¹⁵ Silvia Arce is still missing and on 6 January 2020, her name was included on a list of missing women from Ciudad Juárez (Urbina 2020).

como ahora pienso. (Ibáñez n.d.)

Partnoy's poem memorialises the life of Silvia Arce, while denouncing impunity and inaction in the face of mass human rights violations.

Silvia is 'una de las miles de víctimas del feminicidio en América Latina' (AVEditor 2017: n.p.).¹¹⁶ *Feminicidio* or feminicide:

is a political term. Conceptually, it encompasses more than femicide because it holds responsible not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny. Impunity, silence, and indifference each play a role in feminicide. [...] Feminicide leads us back to the structures of power and implicates the state as a responsible party, whether by commission, toleration or omission.' (Sanford 2008: 112-113)

Cryder writes that 'Mexico has gained international attention for its alarming rates of homicide, particularly of young women' (2018).¹¹⁷ In Ciudad Juárez, 'crimes against women have constantly increased more than in any other city in the country': 'between 1993 and 2011, approximately 1300 women were murdered' (Bissonnette 2018). 'Despite alarming numbers of feminicides, no legal or police entity in Mexico seriously investigates these murders or truly tries to put an end to them. The authorities and attorneys are completely absent from investigations' (Bissonnette 2018).¹¹⁸

In the case of Silvia Arce, 'como en la mayoría de los casos de desaparición, ha sido [su madre, Evangelina Arce] quien ha hecho la investigación exhaustiva que le

¹¹⁶ For a broad study of feminicide in Latin America, see *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas* (eds. Fregoso and Bejarano 2010), which contains *testimonio* about Silvia Arce's disappearance by her mother (Arce 2010).

¹¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, see Cryder (2018).

¹¹⁸ On 9 March 2020, the first major women's strike took place across Mexico to protest impunity and government inaction on feminicide (Averbuch 2020). The 'día sin mujeres' took place following an 80,000-strong women's march in Mexico City on 8 March 2020, International Women's Day (Rodríguez 2020).

corresponde a las autoridades' (Martínez 2016). Following Silvia's disappearance, Evangelina Arce:

compareció el 14 de marzo de 1998 ante la Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de Chihuahua a presentar la denuncia correspondiente. Ante las omisiones e irregularidades en las investigaciones para dar con el paradero de Silvia Arce, por parte de la Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de Chihuahua, el 30 de diciembre de 2003, la CMDPHD [entre otros] presentamos una petición ante la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, por las violaciones a los derechos humanos cometidas en perjuicio de Silvia Arce y su familia. (Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos n.d.)

Evangelina Arce has conducted decades of activism against human rights violations in Ciudad Juárez. Although Partnoy's 'Palabras por Silvia' mentions the disappearance of Silvia – and demands justice for her, the poem more explicitly discusses the experiences of Evangelina.

Partnoy and Evangelina first met in May 2003 at the Sexto Encuentro de Poetas in Ciudad Juárez, where Partnoy was a participant. While the group of poets were performing their work in the Plaza de Armas, 'Evangelina se acercó y pidió leer su poesía' (Partnoy 2017: 3). So impressed by Evangelina's work was Partnoy that 'le pedí permiso para copiar un poema y compartirlo' (2017: 5). Partnoy and Evangelina have since collaborated and published a bilingual collection of Evangelina's poetry *Para mi hija Silvia/For My Daughter Silvia* (2017), translated by Partnoy's students at Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA).

Partnoy's initial engagement with Evangelina is depicted in 'Palabras por Silvia', but what takes precedence in the poem is the poetic voice's response to how the two women are treated by a journalist. Unlike the poems about Robert Duval, Sonia and Lucía Ramírez, the speaker of 'Palabras por Silvia' is Partnoy's typical poetic 'I', a poeticised version of the writer herself.

During the Encuentro de Poetas, a reporter approached Partnoy, ‘a known figure by then’ (Howard 2016): “‘Usted es la argentina que estuvo desaparecida [...]. A mí me interesa mucho la historia de su país, de los desaparecidos. Me gustaría hacerle una nota de tapa para mi diario. Si viene conmigo a la redacción, le entrevisto”” (Partnoy 2017: 5). Partnoy agreed to the interview, asking first ‘si me espera un momento a que termine de copiar este poema de Evangelina Arce [...]. Mientras tanto sería importante que hablara con ella. Su hija desapareció aquí’ (2017: 5). The journalist with ‘aquella voz engañadoramente solidaria dio media vuelta y – sin siquiera saludar a Evangelina – se perdió entre la gente’ (Partnoy 2017: 5).

Partnoy explains ‘cuando cuento este episodio hay quienes lo explican subrayando el miedo que paraliza a Ciudad Juárez’ (2017: 5). Amnesty International has documented that ‘those who have been most vociferous in speaking out against [femicide] have been subjected to intimidation and harassment’, as well as noting that ‘the state has also frequently attempted to publicly discredit individuals and organizations fighting for justice and truth’ (2003: 10). Nevertheless, it seems absurd for a journalist to demonstrate apparent solidarity in his desire to discuss Partnoy’s experience of being *desaparecida* in Argentina, while simultaneously avoiding talking about the *desaparecidas* of his own country. The manner in which Partnoy depicts the encounter with the journalist in the prose introduction to Arce’s *Para mi hija Silvia*, quoted above, is distinct to her poetic rendering in ‘Palabras por Silvia’. Partnoy’s poetic ‘I’ is less obliging and her tone ironic as she responds to the journalist. In ‘Palabras por Silvia’, the figures of Evangelina and Silvia are privileged and Partnoy does not afford the journalist the agency of walking away.

Partnoy begins ‘Palabras por Silvia’ with a description of the journalist, defining him with objects and non-identifying parts of the body, which work to dehumanising effect. She writes:

Ese señor de libretita en mano,
ese señor de credencial al cuello,
ese señor que quiere hablar conmigo [...]. (*Volando*, 60).

The man is nameless and Partnoy does not specify his profession. The diminutive ‘libretita’ suggests a pejorative tone, undermining the intentions of ‘ese señor’. Partnoy implies

that the reporter's notebook serves little purpose when human rights violations go unreported in the city where they occurred. Furthermore, the alliterative 'credencial al cuello' extends the sense of mockery. It is an object used for journalistic identification, yet in 'Palabras por Silvia', Partnoy shows a reporter avoiding his professional responsibilities.

The reporter's persistent attempts to interview the poetic 'I' are depicted. Anaphoric repetition ('ese señor') creates a visual-aural sense of insistence, reinforced by metrical regularity: the first three lines of the poem are hendecasyllables. Commas draw the reader's attention to the reporter's 'mano' and 'cuello', while also representing a stylistic barrier between the physicality of 'ese señor' and the poetic 'I'. Partnoy's speaker has no interest in discussing her personal experiences with the journalist. As a visitor to Ciudad Juárez, the speaker's concern is for Evangelina's story. In 'Palabras por Silvia', Partnoy outlines the poetic voice's bafflement and increasing frustration as the reporter repeatedly ignores Evangelina.

The reporter's disinterest in Evangelina is emphasised by repetition: 'y no ve a Evangelina | no la ve' (*Volando*, 60). Following the first three lines' hendecasyllables, the fourth and fifth lines compose a broken hendecasyllable. Partnoy suggests a faltering of the poetic voice as the speaker realises that the journalist does not care about Evangelina. Furthermore, the structure of the lines is exploited to reflect the apparent invisibility of Evangelina to 'ese señor'. Partnoy uses a personal pronoun instead of the name in the fifth line, making it seem — temporarily — as if Evangelina has vanished from the page.

Partnoy decentres the perspective of the reporter by focusing on Evangelina's physicality and creating an empathic portrayal of the distress experienced by the mother of a *desaparecida*. Evangelina is 'parada' (*Volando*, 60): rendered immobile by the overwhelming experience of grief. The adjective stands out against the rest of the line's sibilance and assonance: 'sobre lo seco de su duelo' (*Volando*, 60). Sonic repetition seems to mirror the stationary position of Evangelina's body, while vowel rhyme ('seco' | 'duelo') stresses the connection between the pain and shock she is experiencing. Silvia Arce, Evangelina's daughter, had been *desaparecida* for five years at the date of Partnoy's writing the poem ('1 de junio de 2003' (*Volando*, 62)), but the rawness of grief is unabated.

Evangelina's static physicality is not merely due to the bodily experience of anguish; she also remains motionless in front of the reporter because she knows that he has no interest in her case. Her conflicted state is demonstrated through oxymoron: she is

‘parada [...] con la incertidumbre de quien lo sabe todo’ (*Volando*, 60), a phrase that works to dual effect. On the one hand, Evangelina’s uncertainty comes from a lack of information regarding her daughter’s whereabouts. On the other hand, it is likely that Evangelina hesitates to assert herself in front of the journalist because of repeated experiences of being ignored by officials to whom she has denounced Silvia’s disappearance (Arce 2014: 92).

Partnoy’s use of homeoteleuton (‘duelo | todo’) connects Evangelina’s knowledge with her experience of pain and grief. ‘Lo sabe todo’ because she is ‘madre de desaparecida’ (*Volando*, 60). Assonance creates a stuttering effect, suggesting the distress caused by the disappearance of a child. Evangelina’s role as a mother has been radically altered by the absence of her daughter, ‘que ayer nomás aquí | aquí fincaba’ (*Volando*, 60). The figurative ‘ayer’ alludes to the suddenness with which Silvia disappeared and Partnoy interrupts alliterative time and place with the adverb ‘nomás’. A visual-aural division is created between the location of the poem’s action, and the time when Silvia physically shared that space. Partnoy’s repetition of ‘aquí’ stresses Evangelina’s struggle to comprehend the disappearance of her daughter.

The absence of Silvia Arce is juxtaposed with the sudden obtrusion of the reporter. Following a compassionate portrayal of Evangelina’s anguished state, his reappearance feels jarring. In his unremitting pursuit of a desired interview subject, the reporter has failed to notice the urgency of Evangelina’s situation. Using a conjunction at the beginning of the line to emphasise the dissonance of his response, Partnoy writes: ‘y ese señor | quiere que yo le cuente de bahía’ (*Volando*, 60). The verb ‘querer’ — also used in the poem’s third line — emphasises the demanding nature of the reporter’s approach. He shows no empathy for Evangelina and little for the poetic ‘I’. Although the speaker’s physical safety appears not to be immediately endangered, the reporter does not show concern for the psychological impact his questions may have.

Partnoy uses lower case letters to minimise the importance of ‘bahía | blanca’ in the context of the poem, while a line break divides the name of her home town. The shortened ‘bahía’ is a colloquial term for the city, which Partnoy uses to encourage a sense of familiarity between the poetic ‘I’ and reader.¹¹⁹ She seeks to align the reader’s

¹¹⁹ Partnoy refers to the city as ‘Bahía’ during a radio interview (n.d. 7:24).

sympathies with the speaker and Evangelina, further alienating the unsympathetic figure of the reporter.

In separating the city's name, Partnoy plays on the double meaning of 'blanca'. The adjective refers to the toponymic 'bahía' as well as being used to describe the 'blanca ciudad al centro de otros vientos' (*Volando*, 60). Alliteration ('ciudad | centro') and half-rhyme ('centro | vientos') emphasise the notion of Bahía Blanca as an unidentified city that is geographically and temporally distant. By insisting on talking about Bahía Blanca, the reporter demonstrates that he does not feel compelled to investigate events in Ciudad Juárez, the city in which he is working. The speaker's experience of human rights abuse in Argentina are in the past, whereas 'ese señor' has the potential to do something about the disappearance of Silvia Arce.

In contrast to the speaker's historical experiences in Bahía Blanca, Partnoy gives a sense of immediacy to the poetic present in Ciudad Juárez: 'esta mañana de sábado' (*Volando*, 60). The stanza's penultimate line, combined with Partnoy's choice of line break, momentarily alludes to the routine act of spending time in the town square on a weekend morning. However, the final line upends any sense of normality and stresses how desperate Evangelina feels. The action of 'Palabras por Silvia' takes place in 'la plaza | de armas tomar evangelina arce' (*Volando*, 60).

After naming the location, Partnoy uses inverted syntax to metaphorically represent Evangelina's state of desperation. During Mexico's colonial period, the Plaza de Armas was the location of a town's armoury. Each citizen had access to the arsenal and was expected to 'tomar armas' to defend the area (Domínguez 2015). Partnoy suggests that Evangelina has been so ignored, in her repeated attempts to denounce her daughter's disappearance, that she is ready to take any means necessary to get people to listen to her. The figurative implications of the use of force denote Evangelina's immense levels of frustration. However, the use of lower case letters for her name, which had been capitalised towards the beginning of the stanza, evokes the sense of her increasing invisibility to the reporter.

Partnoy writes that 'Nadie es profeta en su tierra evangelina' (*Volando*, 60), using a Biblical allusion to elevate Evangelina's experience.¹²⁰ Using a single-line stanza, Partnoy

¹²⁰ 'No prophet is accepted in his own country' (Luke 4. 24), King James Bible Online.

emphasises the lack of respect being afforded to Evangelina. The absence of a comma stresses the bond between Evangelina and 'su tierra', while the combination of her name with a Biblical reference suggests that Partnoy is playing on the similarity between 'evangelina' and 'evangelio'. While 'evangelio' literally denotes to the Gospel, the term's colloquial meaning refers to '[una] verdad indiscutible'.¹²¹ Evangelina seeks the truth about what has happened to her daughter, but she is being deliberately ignored.

Opting to have her speaker directly address Evangelina in the line, Partnoy seems to be making knowing reference to her own literary reception in Argentina at the time of *Volando's* publication in 2005. By that point, Partnoy had already published two of her own books in the USA, *The Little School* (1986) and *Venganza* (1992), as well as having edited the collection *You Can't Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile* (1988b). The first Spanish-language version of *La Escuelita* would not be released in Argentina until 2006, twenty years after its original publication in English.¹²²

Partnoy's poetic 'I' consistently demonstrates a sense of solidarity with Evangelina, which increases in response to the (in)actions of the reporter. At the beginning of the third stanza, the speaker directly addresses the journalist. Using a comma to visually separate the reporter from the poetic 'I' and Evangelina, Partnoy writes: 'Señor, ahora estoy muy ocupada' (*Volando*, 60). The form of address used by the speaker affords the reporter the polite acknowledgement that he does not give to Evangelina. Although the poetic 'I' is restrained in the stanza's opening line, formality quickly gives way to frustration. To the reader, the speaker's exasperation is apparent, but none is voiced directly to the reporter. Instead, Partnoy shows her negotiating a fraught situation. The poetic 'I' does not want to speak with the reporter, but she is shown being diplomatic with him in the hope that he will eventually listen to Evangelina.

¹²¹ Real Academia Española.

¹²² At the time of writing, neither *Volando* nor *Fuegos* have been published in Argentina. Partnoy's latest poetry collection, *Eclos lógicos y otros poemas* (2019b), was published in El Salvador. The children's book *¡Escuchá!* was published in Argentina (Partnoy and Sanabria 2016): 'mi octavo libro y es el primero que se publica antes en castellano y en Argentina que en [Estados Unidos]. Es el que señala el desexilio de mi obra creativa' (Partnoy 2016).

The tact demonstrated by the speaker towards the reporter heightens the distinction between his insensitivity and the extremity of Evangelina's emotional distress. Partnoy writes:

y Evangalina sabe que ella no existe
y está plantada allí sobre su grito
y ese señor no escucha a Evangalina
como tampoco escuchan muchos de ellos. (*Volando*, 60)

The manner in which Evangelina has been treated has had a detrimental effect on her self-esteem. Partnoy uses the anaphoric 'y' to emphasise the building anguish and erasure experienced by Evangelina. At the same time, 'e'-assonance reinforces the sense of invisibility that has been imposed on her by both the reporter and 'muchos de ellos'. Alliterative assonance visually and aurally stresses Evangelina's name, while Partnoy dehumanises the journalists and the authorities who have chosen to ignore Evangelina.

In 'Palabras por Silvia', Partnoy makes this response to Evangelina seem absurd and unfeeling. Echoing the first stanza's 'parada sobre lo seco de su duelo', the line 'y está plantada allí sobre su grito' emphasises Evangelina's immense distress. The shout is not literal. Instead, it is a figurative indication of Evangelina's agency: 'Décadas antes de que el mundo despertara a la brutal realidad del feminicidio, ya estaba Evangelina Arce levantando su voz contra la impunidad que lo perpetúa' (Partnoy 2017: 3). Although Evangelina's 'grito' goes unheard by the journalist in 'Palabras por Silvia', Partnoy aligns Evangelina's situation with the wider testimonial struggle and fight against impunity. Like Robert Duval — 'yo denuncié | denuncié | denuncié' (*Venganza*, 88) — and the poetic voice of 'Preposiciones' — 'gritamos desde que se los llevarán' (*Fuegos*, 18) — Evangelina is portrayed vocalising her outrage that her daughter is *desparecida*.

The final two lines of the third stanza form a new poetic sentence. By starting with the conjunction 'y', Partnoy draws a comparison between Evangelina's enforced invisibility and the fact that Silvia remains missing. However, the manner in which Silvia is first described in the poem: 'Y Silvia Arce es aquí y ahora, | es Juárez y es mordaza.' (*Volando*, 60). Rather than describing Silvia as disappeared, Partnoy creates an image of her in the present. Where alliterative assonance was previously used to depict Evangelina

being ignored, Partnoy now uses alliterative assonance to demand that attention is paid to Silvia. The figurative 'aquí y ahora' asserts the importance of taking immediate action in response to Silvia's disappearance. While she remains *desaparecida*, efforts to find her ought to be at the forefront of journalists' and activists' minds.

Silvia's disappearance is like that of thousands of other women from Ciudad Juárez and, in 'Palabras por Silvia', she becomes a synecdochic representation of the city. A comma highlights the line break dividing Silvia from her hometown of Ciudad Juárez, yet Partnoy structures the lines to vertically connect 'Silvia Arce' and 'Juárez'. Sibilance connects the two names and it also links Silvia to the metaphorical representation of her silenced voice: 'es mordaza'. An allusion to the violent physicality of her disappearance, the gag also represents the silencing effect of the journalist's inaction. Reinforced by the full stop, the 'mordaza' prevents further speech in the stanza, even on the part of the poetic 'I'.

When the poetic voice next speaks, it is to address the reporter again. Partnoy writes: 'Yo sé, señor, se torna una rutina, | ya no es noticia siempre la misma muerta.' (*Volando*, 60) Juxtaposed with the polite form of address, the poetic 'I' demonstrates ironic pseudo-concern for the man's complaint — unvoiced in the poem — that the 'routine' nature of femicide makes it difficult to produce 'new' journalistic copy. Partnoy's use of sibilance creates a building hiss in the stanza, as if the poetic 'I' is speaking her seething frustration through gritted teeth. Furthermore, the fusing of words in the second line represents increasing frustration as the speaker struggles to reconcile the reporter's nonchalant perspective with the fact of mass human rights violations.

The poetic 'I' tries again to appeal to the reporter's sense of compassion. Partnoy writes:

Pero señor de libretita en mano,
pero señor de credencial al cuello,
haga el favor y mientras yo termino
de copiar los versos que tarjó esta madre
sobre las hojas de su cuaderno ocre,
haga el favor de oír [sic] a Evangelina
pedir justicia. (*Volando*, 62)

Partnoy repeats the first two lines of 'Palabras por Silvia', changing the demonstrative adjective 'ese' to the conjunction 'pero'. By addressing the journalist in this manner, naming the tools of his trade, the speaker attempts to signal the irony of his inaction. Use of the imperative, rather than the indicative, demonstrates the speaker's frustration in the phrase 'haga el favor'. Partnoy implies the speaker's annoyance at having to request that the journalist fulfil his professional obligations, yet the inclusion of 'el favor' highlights the poetic voice's attempts to discreetly convince the reporter that he should speak to Evangelina.

Meanwhile, the poetic 'I' is shown to be establishing a literary connection with Evangelina, a metatextual representation of Partnoy's relationship with Evangelina Arce. The speaker recognises the strength of emotion with which Evangelina has written, represented by the verb 'tarjar': 'Pensé en tarjar como escribir con fuerza, como grabando, es un eco de "tajo" o cortadura'.¹²³ Mimicking Partnoy's own actions, the poetic 'I' is shown to value Evangelina's creative output, regarding it as important enough to make a copy of: 'Le pedí permiso para copiar un poema y compartirlo. [...] Recuerdo que copiaba los versos de "Calles"' (Partnoy 2017: 5). Evangelina Arce's 'Calles' is the poem that directly follows 'Palabras por Silvia' in *Volando* (2005: 64-66).

Partnoy's naming first of 'esta madre', then 'Evangelina', stresses that Evangelina's activism is tied to her role as a mother, following the disappearance of her daughter Silvia. Similarly, Evangelina's literary work has been created in response to the human rights violations she and her family have experienced:

Evangelina comenzó a escribir poesía en el 2003, después de que los esbirros cómplices de los asesinatos de mujeres trataran de matarla a golpes por buscar a su hija Silvia. [...] No sólo sobrevivió la golpiza que precediera su poesía, sino que en su juventud, embarazada de Silvia, había sido secuestrada y llevada al desierto así como tantas mujeres que hoy buscamos y lloramos. Luego de horas de tormento [...] la joven Evangelina había sido milagrosamente liberada por su

¹²³ Personal email correspondence with Alicia Partnoy, 17 January 2020.

secuestrador. [...] Ha sumado a su dolor inconmensurable y a su lucha, el asesinato de su nieto Ángel, hijo de Silvia. El joven fue ultimado en el 2006 [...], dos días antes de testificar en el caso de su madre. (Partnoy 2017: 9)¹²⁴

In 'Palabras por Silvia', Partnoy elevates her rendering of Evangelina's poetry, encouraging the reader to picture 'las hojas de su cuaderno ocre', covered in writing. Conversely, the depiction of the journalist's 'libretita en mano' points to its empty purpose — his hand keeps the pages shut.

The speaker once again urges the reporter to take action: 'haga el favor de oír [sic] a Evangelina | pedir justicia'. Partnoy's line break works to emphasise the need for the journalist to pay attention to Evangelina, and to acknowledge her humanity, as well as heeding her call for justice. The word 'justicia' appears five times in Arce's 'Calles' — 'pedir | justicia'; 'justicia es lo que queremos'; 'gritamos justicia'; 'pidiendo protección y justicia'; 'que la vengan entregar justicia' (2005: 64-66). Partnoy's inclusion of the noun as the final word of 'Palabras por Silvia' is the prelude to Evangelina's clamour for justice that will be expressed in the following pages of *Volando*.

The speaker has so far taken a variety of tactful approaches in her attempts to get the journalist to pay attention to Evangelina, but that changes in the final stanza. Now the imperative is used: 'Escuche aquí y ahora' (*Volando*, 62) and repetition of the third stanza's 'aquí y ahora' stresses the urgency of the demand. Partnoy uses 'a'-alliteration to connect the necessity of an immediate response with the potential consequences of inaction: 'aquí y ahora | antes de que los huesos de su hija | nos lo demanden.' (*Volando*, 62).

Alliteration also works to emphasise the image of 'los huesos de su hija'. When Partnoy wrote 'Palabras por Silvia', Silvia's whereabouts were unknown. Like the *desaparecidos* in Argentina, Silvia is spoken about in a kind of suspended present. With the prepositional phrase 'antes de que' and the subjunctive 'demanden', grammar

¹²⁴ Villalpando (2013) writes that 'el 30 de abril de 2003 tres hombres agredieron a Evangelina, luego de recibir telefonemas en los cuales le exigían que dejara de investigar'. Evangelina Arce's poem 'Calles' is dated 30 April 2003 (2005: 66).

indicates the unresolved situation of the *desaparecida*. However, Partnoy's anatomical reference tacitly implies the unlikelihood of Silvia being found alive. A first person plural subject is introduced for the first time in the poem's final line as homeoteleuton connects 'los huesos' and 'nos'. Combined with personification of the bones, Partnoy emphasises the collective responsibility for responding to Silvia's disappearance. Her poetic voice urges the reporter to take action before it is too late.

Partnoy asks, in the preface to Evangelina Arce's *Para mi hija Silvia*:

¿Qué valor inconmensurable necesita entonces esa madre para no callar, no claudicar y enfrentar al sistema de injusticia? ¿Cuál era mi función como testigo de la invisibilidad de Evangelina Arce y, en ella, de las madres de las desaparecidas mexicanas? (2017: 5)

She writes that her response was to photocopy Evangelina's 'cuaderno y mis alumnos, en su mayoría mujeres latinas, algunas de ellas DACAmentadas, o inmigrantes "soñadoras", transcribieron y tradujeron los poemas. [...] Mi objetivo ha sido que estos poemas y la realidad del feminicidio calaran profundo en la conciencia de mis estudiantes y de mis colegas más cercanos' (Partnoy 2017: 5-9).¹²⁵ Partnoy's work in collaborative solidarity resulted in the creation of *Para mi hija* (2017), facilitating the dissemination of Evangelina's *testimonio* to a wider audience. However, Partnoy's solidarity with Evangelina had already been demonstrated in print with the publication of *Volando*.

Unlike the journalist with whom she met, Partnoy's poetic reaction to the events of 'Palabras por Silvia' appears to be contemporaneous. Partnoy and Evangelina Arce first met in May 2003. 'Palabras por Silvia' is dated '1 de junio de 2003', which was a Sunday, suggesting that the poem was written shortly after 'esta mañana de sábado en la plaza'.

¹²⁵ So-called 'Dreamers' 'are some 800,000 undocumented immigrants who came to the US as children. [...] Most Dreamers arrived in the US from Mexico and other parts of Central and South America.' (n. auth. 2017b). The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation 'created by former US President Barack Obama in 2012 [...] protects Dreamers from deportation, granting them a two-year period of amnesty that can be extended with a work permit and social security number' (n. auth. 2017b). The US Supreme Court is currently reviewing the legality of the Trump administration's 'decision to end DACA in 2017' (Holpuch 2019).

Responding to Evangelina's situation and the disappearance of Silvia, Partnoy demonstrates a sense of urgency that is central to *testimonio*.

5.5 'Mi bandera hecha harapos': The Destruction of a Nation Through Dictatorship

'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país' (*Venganza*) builds on the literary allusions of its title by taking the dramatic format of alternating speakers: the chorus, '*La voz de la madre*' and '*La voz de un hombre*'. Although the titular 'país' is never defined, there are coded references to Argentina and allusions to Partnoy's personal history. Grounding the choral *testimonio* in information with which the reader is already familiar from *Venganza*'s prefatorial 'Introduction' – specifically about her kidnap during broad daylight – Partnoy transmits the idea that her experiences were not unique. Instead, she stresses the shared trauma of dictatorship and creates a collective *testimonio*. Depicting the experience of dictatorship from multiple perspectives, Partnoy explores violence, grief and political activism. She illustrates how state terror can destroy the relationship between a nation and its citizens.

The sense of multivocal *testimonio* is evoked from the outset of 'Tragedia', which begins with a stanza spoken by the chorus. Using the first person singular for the choral voice, Partnoy suggests the shared experience, combining the central testimonial concepts of the individual and the collective. Furthermore, the first line's imperative – 'No me hablen de las puertas del infierno' (*Venganza*, 74) – implies an audience, a vital component in the transmission of *testimonio*. The audience can be understood both as the readers of 'Tragedia' and, more broadly, people who engage with the work of *testimoniante*s.

Partnoy's use of the negative imperative ('no me hablen') works to dual effect. On the one hand, it is a rhetorical device that emphasises the experiential difference between the testifying chorus and the audience. On the other hand, the negative imperative suggests a countering of hostile testimonial audiences, which devalue the *testimoniante*'s knowledge and experience. Partnoy asserts the position of the testifier-as-expert and stresses the first-person perspective through the 'no | yo' rhyme at the beginning of the first and second lines.

At the threshold between life and death, 'las puertas del infierno' refer to the mortal danger caused to a person by torture. Partnoy also suggests the liminal position of people imprisoned in a concentration camp. The brutality inflicted upon *desaparecidos* is intentional and real, yet the 'outside' world is unaware that the person exists. So long as genocidal regimes deny the existence of disappeared persons, it is impossible for their family and *compañeros* to obtain proof of their imprisonment.

Both in religious and metaphorical terms, hell connotes a place of immense suffering. In her CONADEP testimony, Partnoy refers to life under the Argentine military dictatorship as 'ese infierno' (1981d). Similarly, *Nunca Más* describes the regime's use of violence as 'la tecnología del infierno' (CONADEP 1984c). The report asserts that at the entrance to Argentina's concentration camps 'podía haber inscriptas las mismas palabras que Dante leyó en los portales del infierno: «Abandonad toda esperanza, los que entráis»' (CONADEP 1984c). The use of metaphor in 'official' as well as poetic *testimonio* suggests the necessity of figurative language in communicating the experience of trauma.¹²⁶

Juxtaposing connotations of life and death, Partnoy uses caesura to separate the site of torment – 'las puertas del infierno' – from mention of the poetic voice's life: 'Yo estuve allí, pero antes fue la vida' (*Venganza*, 74). Although the preterite 'fue' implies that the speaker is dead, foreshadowing the final stanza's allusion to the speaker's afterlife, Partnoy places an emphasis on the life and activism of the choral poetic 'I'.

The manner in which Partnoy stresses her subject's agency is significant. *Nunca Más* has been criticised for the way in which it details the victims of the 1976-1983 dictatorship. Emilio Crenzel writes that *Nunca Más* 'locates the disappeared as innocent victims who were not involved with guerrilla groups and politics' (2011: 1067), effectively removing political agency from the people who were murdered and disappeared during the dictatorship.¹²⁷ Partnoy's emphasis on activism in the choral section of 'Tragedia' highlights the collective effort to oppose the genocidal dictatorship, specifically by including a representative voice of its victims.

¹²⁶ See my discussion of Scarry on metaphorical language and pain (Chapter 1, p.41).

¹²⁷ See also Crenzel (2008; 2010).

Having the chorus speak in a singular poetic voice, Partnoy suggests the multiplicity of personal decisions and political conviction that lead to mass action. As the first stanza progresses, the speaker's increasing involvement is shown. Partnoy writes:

Marchaba mi esperanza por las calles,
giraba el nuevo día en mi reloj,
en mi garganta el grito que transforma,
en mis manos la semilla o la cruz. (*Venganza*, 74)

Anastrophe emphasises the action of protest marches, while the personification of hope alludes to activists' aspirations for political change. Partnoy connects the physical nature of participating in a demonstration with the emotional significance for the protestor.

Recurrent possessives ('mi | mis') alliterate with the verb 'marchaba'. Partnoy's conjugation of 'marchar' implies the movement of legs and the body during a protest and the sense of action builds with allusions to the speaker's body. 'Mi reloj' evokes the speaker's arm, while the metaphor of the wristwatch combines the literal changing of time with the marking of a new political era for the poetic 'I'.

Alliterative velar plosives ('g') – 'en mi garganta el grito' – create a gurgling noise, emphasising the throat as the site of vocal production. Significantly, the poetic voice does not speak but shouts. Partnoy refers literally to the shouts and chants of protestors, while figuratively suggesting that the poetic 'I' is persistent in denouncing injustice. The verb 'transforma' has no subject, yet suggests the revolutionary power of the voice. Partnoy's speaker has recognised the power of activism and its potential to change a society.

Such a transformation may not always be positive: the line 'en mis manos la semilla o la cruz' demonstrates opposing possibilities. Where the seed represents an optimistic future and the dissemination of resistance, the cross is a Biblical symbol of martyrdom. Partnoy implies that the speaker's 'grito' will either spread the message

of resistance and effect positive change – or the act of speaking out could lead to the poetic voice’s own death.

The consequences of the speaker’s activism are demonstrated by an alteration in tense. The change from the imperfect (‘marchaba | giraba’) to the preterite (‘supo’ | ‘vinieron’) signals a sudden change when the poetic voice is arrested. Partnoy writes:

Supo mi sol estallar también de ira
ante lo injusto. Peligroso mi sol.
Vinieron a arrestarme, era la noche
de mi nación, la noche de su historia. (*Venganza*, 74)

Sonically echoing the previous line’s ‘la semilla o la cruz’, the alliteration and sibilance of ‘Supo mi sol estallar’ also creates the sense that the poetic voice is spitting with rage. Partnoy projects the speaker’s emotions onto the natural world through personification of the sun. The apocalyptic image of the exploding sun – combined with alliteration of ‘ira | injusto’ – suggests that the universe is also reacting with outrage.

Partnoy’s use of caesura stresses the concepts of both injustice and danger. Anastrophe, combined with capitalisation and the omission of a verb, highlights the notion of threat – ‘Peligroso mi sol.’ Building on the preceding metaphorical image of solar violence, Partnoy’s mention of the sun takes on a literal significance: ‘El día 12 de enero de 1977 al mediodía, soy detenida por personal del ejercito uniformado, en mi domicilio de Canadá 240, Dto 2, Bahía Blanca’ (A.M. Partnoy 1981c). In the prefatorial ‘Introduction’ to *Venganza*, she writes that ‘daylight was never a deterrence for the thousands of kidnappings [sic] and murders conducted by the military since the coup of March 1976’ (*Venganza*, 12).

A line break juxtaposes literal daytime (‘mi sol’) with metaphorical night (‘la noche’) at the end of two successive lines. Furthermore, Partnoy uses the connotations of darkness to combine personal trauma with the suffering of an entire people: ‘era la noche | de mi nación’. The use of possessives in the first person (‘mi sol | mi nación’) and in the third person (‘su historia’) reinforces the connection between individual and collective experiences. Although the specifics of the speaker’s

arrest mirror Partnoy's personal history, the chorus in 'Tragedia' could be telling the story of any person who was disappeared. Similarly, although the non-specific use of 'mi nación' and 'mi país' in the poem can be read as Argentina, Partnoy offers the potential for her 'Tragedia' to be relevant to any country that has experienced dictatorship.

Partnoy represents those responsible for the speaker's arrest through third person conjugations only, a form of dehumanisation common in her poetry. She focuses on the actions of 'ellos': 'No entendieron razones ni buscaron | más que horadarme la carne y la conciencia' (*Venganza*, 74). The line break, combined with Partnoy's use of grammar, creates a double meaning. To begin with, the reader may intuit the omission of a pronoun – 'No entendieron razones ni [las] buscaron'. Partnoy implies that neither did 'ellos' listen to criticisms of the dictatorship, nor did they seek to act reasonably towards its opponents. Then, the line break expands the portrayal of inhumane behaviour: 'No [...] buscaron | más que horadarme la carne y la conciencia'.

The violent imagery connoted by 'horadar' prefigures the reference to 'tierra de la tortura', which follows two lines later. Partnoy rarely includes metaphorical or graphic descriptions of torture in her poetry. The corporeal brutality shocks the reader, as in the poem 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' where Partnoy writes 'dice el Mingo que es como si miles de terminaciones de cables eléctricos | te tironearan de la carne' (*Volando*, 36).¹²⁸ Furthermore, the alliteration of 'la carne y la conciencia' reinforces the connection between the speaker's body and mind, and the fact that both are hurt at the same time. Visual repetition of the letter 'c' is combined with aural repetition: the hard sound of two velar plosives ('carne | con-') and the sibilance of two alveolar fricatives ('-ciencia'). Partnoy sonically creates the sense of repeated, unwanted thoughts, signalling the psychological damage caused by torture.

With the subsequent repetition of the poem's first line, Partnoy switches focus from the actions of 'ellos' back to those of 'ustedes': 'No me hablen de las puertas del infierno, | yo estuve allí, tierra de la tortura' (*Venganza*, 74). Addressing an unknown audience, and also the readers of 'Tragedia', Partnoy indicates that hurt is not only

¹²⁸ See my analysis of 'Torture Machine: Vocabulario' (Chapter 3, p.139).

caused by torturers. It can also be created by those who have no direct experience insisting on discussing distressing matters with survivors of trauma.

Partnoy's semantic content is reinforced through her use of sound. Homeoteleuton emphasises the speaker's physical presence at the site of torture by connecting 'infierno' and 'yo', while assonance accentuates the psychological experience ('conciencia | infierno'). Partnoy repeats the poem's opening line and echoes the second, changing only the words after the comma. Where the poem's second line reads 'pero antes fue la vida', the line now reads 'tierra de la tortura'. Partnoy further emphasises the link between the lines with the slant rhyme 'pero | tierra'. Alliteration stresses the use of 'tierra', a reference to the 'país' of the poem's title: the speaker's home country is depicted as the locus of torment.

Partnoy expands upon the fraught relationship between the poetic voice and the nation through the metaphor of the flag. She writes:

Me envolví en mi bandera y tuve frío.
Me envolví en mi bandera
de ideales. (*Venganza*, 74)

Partnoy depicts a speaker seeking tactile comfort through contact between the skin and a fabric. However, the flag provides neither comfort nor warmth. The introduction of temperature, 'frío', contrasts with connotations of hell as a place of extreme heat. Coldness metaphorically connotes isolation, abandonment and perhaps also a lack of safety.

Repetition suggests a recurring movement of the arms as the poetic 'I' again wraps the flag around their body, indicating an ongoing search for comfort. Partnoy's use of the line break – 'mi bandera | de ideales' – divides the importance of the speaker's political beliefs from the pain that has been caused by their experience of state terror. Partnoy also suggests that, when there is no support to be found in a person's community of origin, the only remaining solace is in the conviction of their political ideals. Those ideals are what becomes their identity, rather than their nationality.

The first stanza of 'Tragedia' is almost exclusively composed of hendecasyllables: the chorus predominantly speaks in this metre. However, the last two lines of the opening stanza are a heptasyllable and a four-syllable line, making up a broken hendecasyllable. The fractured metrical composition mirrors the shattering of the speaker's relationship with a dictatorial nation, as well as the rupture between the poetic voice's political aims and those of the dictatorial regime.

Partnoy's change in metre also signals the change of poetic voice in 'Tragedia'. The next section, composed of three heptasyllabic quatrains, is spoken by '*La voz de la madre*'. She begins:

Yo conjuré a las piedras
en nombre de mi hijo.
La [sic] piedras se partieron
pero no lo encontré. (*Venganza*, 74)

Unlike the plural chorus, which speaks in the first-person singular, '*La voz de la madre*' is a lone voice. It is only when her voice reappears in the poem, in the seventh stanza, that *la madre* becomes part of a collective. For now, she is an isolated figure, struggling against invisible forces as she attempts to locate her disappeared son.

La madre is initially shown divining with runes and, when they prove to be unhelpful, she invokes the supernatural. Partnoy writes:

Yo conjuré al silencio
en nombre de mi hijo,
y se pobló de quejas
pero él no me habló. (*Venganza*, 74)

La madre is engaging in what seems to be a form of witchcraft, trying to conjure up voices from thin air. The attempt to communicate with her son is unsuccessful, but the 'quejas' that arise suggests the double meaning of 'el silencio'. Not only does silence refer to absence of sound; under dictatorial rule, silence signifies a deliberate

withholding of information. In response to her own concerns, *la madre* uncovers the grievances of many others who share her circumstances.

Partnoy criticises the Argentine military's refusal to acknowledge the existence of *desaparecidos* or provide family and friends with information about their missing loved ones.¹²⁹ In each of the three quatrains spoken by *la madre*, anaphora stresses her repeated actions as well as her motivation, extreme concern for the life of her child. Partnoy depicts *la madre's* increasing desperation, while the literary context of her poem alludes to Greek tragedy, where humans are at the mercy of the Gods' whims. Yet in 'Tragedia', there appears to be no superhuman power capable of preventing genocide.

Although the action of the third stanza moves to a space where humans have control, the only response to the pleas of *la madre* is violence. Partnoy writes:

Yo conjuré a los hombres
en nombre de mi hijo.
Los hombres se alinearon
para su ejecución. (*Venganza*, 76)

The contrast between the actions of *la madre* and the military are stressed through the gendered depiction of 'los hombres'. Referring to them as men, rather than 'soldados' or 'milicos', Partnoy emphasises their personhood. They are human beings lining up to kill a fellow human. Yet Partnoy does not depict the moment of the son's murder.

She cuts back to the chorus, which reappears to articulate a moment of extreme anguish. She depicts a poetic voice discussing what happened under torture: '... Y no nombré más nombres que mi nombre. | O tal vez les conté de mis amigos ...' (*Venganza*, 76). The illusion of orality is emphasised by ellipses and the conjunction

¹²⁹ My analysis of 'Respuesta' includes the discussion of the activism of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Partnoy's parents' repeated efforts to demand information about their daughter's whereabouts (Chapter 3, p.124).

'y', as if the line begins mid-sentence. Alliteration creates a stammering effect, reflecting the speaker's psychological distress.

Partnoy alludes to the use of torture to elicit a forced 'confession' or naming of other anti-dictatorship activists. However, she uses the stanza to focus on the perspective of the person who has experienced torture, rather than on the act itself. While the contradictory content of the two lines may suggest the uncertainty of memory, what prevails is the sense of a multi-vocal chorus. The poetic 'I' of Partnoy's chorus is a singular-collective voice that does not privilege one experience over another.

There is no judgement of any person's actions while being tortured: 'Quién sabe si en las trampas de la muerte | quise cambiar entrega por alivio' (*Venganza*, 76). It is impossible to know how anyone might react under extreme physical and psychological duress and Partnoy's rhetorical 'quién sabe' guides her reader's empathy. Significantly, Partnoy does not use question marks and their absence dissuades any unsympathetic questioning of the speaker's position.

The poetic 'I' of Partnoy's chorus does not fit into a binary categorization. In what reads as an intertextual allusion to the title of Borges' 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' (1990): 'No me sentía ni traidor ni héroe, | fuí [sic] solamente un desaparecido' (*Venganza*, 76).¹³⁰ The adverb 'solamente' simultaneously works to minimise the extremity of the speaker's experiences and suggest how typical these events were for *desaparecidos*. In 'Tragedia', Partnoy provides the reader with a progressively stronger understanding what was experienced by people who were disappeared, while also indicating that complete comprehension is not possible.

The opening line is repeated: 'No me hablen de las puertas del infierno. | Mi bandera hecha harapos, tuve frío ...' (*Venganza*, 76). Highlighted by alliteration, the tattered flag symbolically represents the destruction of hope and ideals, as well as

¹³⁰ 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' was originally published in 1944 in the journal *Sur*. Borges edited the story and it was then re-published, also in 1944, in *Ficciones* (Cajero Vázquez 2019: 707). There is no overlap in content between Partnoy's poem and Borges' short story. However, as with other intertextual references in her work, I read this allusion as an indication of Partnoy situating herself in relation to Spanish-language literature and, in this case, the Argentine literary canon.

contributing to build the sense of physicality in the lines. Partnoy's speaker feels the cold while attempting to use shredded fabric for warmth; cold also figuratively conveys the fragile emotional state of a grieving poetic 'I'.

Partnoy has, until now, predominantly used the preterite tense in 'Tragedia' as her speakers reflect on their experiences under dictatorship from a post-dictatorial present. There is, however, a temporal shift in the poem's fourth section, spoken by 'un hombre':

Vengo de donde
muchos no vuelven.
Sobreviviente. (*Venganza*, 76)

The present tense emphasises the man's status as a survivor. So does visual and aural alliteration, as bilabial plosives ('b' and 'v') echo throughout the stanza. Furthermore, the first occurrence of the noun 'sobreviviente' is capitalised, stressing the importance of having survived a genocidal dictatorship.

The survivor's understanding of his own situation is portrayed through a meta-testimonial moment in the stanza:

Abro mi boca
y habla su voz
sobreviviente. (*Venganza*, 76)

The juxtaposition of first person and third person possessives might be read as a psychological dissociation, where the speaker is disconnected from his own voice. Perhaps Partnoy suggests a sense of disbelief at having lived through traumatic events. Yet, at the same time, the possessive 'su' can be read as referring to the third person 'muchos', mentioned in the stanza's second line.

Partnoy stresses the circumstances that, for each person who has lived to testify, many did not survive. The driving force for her *testimonio* has largely been to talk about *compañeros* who were murdered, and those who remain unaccounted for: 'mis poemas intentan generar la presencia de los desaparecidos' (Partnoy 1997c:

n.p.).¹³¹ In 'Tragedia', *la voz de un hombre* represents the role of the survivor as one who speaks about the people who did not survive. Partnoy writes:

Yo llevo en ristre
su estandarte
sobreviviente. (*Venganza*, 76)

The military 'estandarte' symbolises the political cause shared between the speaker and his *compañeros*. Partnoy's word choice is significant: unlike the tattered 'bandera' mentioned earlier in the poem, the 'estandarte' is intact. The fractured relationship between the poem's multiple speakers and their country is juxtaposed with their shared political beliefs and activism.

Significantly, 'su estandarte' is the only 4-syllable line in a stanza of 5-syllable lines. Partnoy uses metre to show that the banner of political ideals is no longer flying. However, she semantically shows the poetic 'I' having 'su estandarte' at the ready. Emphasised by the homeoteleuton connecting 'estandarte' and 'sobreviviente', the speaker is prepared to broadcast the names and beliefs of the *compañeros* who did not survive.

At the same time as emphasising the speaker's agency and political commitment to *testimonio*, Partnoy is clear about the psychological toll of trauma. She writes:

Y a veces lloro
de rabia y miedo
sobreviviendo. (*Venganza*, 76)

The connotations of the antepenultimate line's 'lloro' contrasts with the stanza's preceding verb, 'llevo'. Partnoy suggests that the speaker feels pride in relation to his

¹³¹ See my discussion of this topic in relation to 'Escenas perdidas de la película "Los funerales de nuestra generación"' (Chapter 2, p.98), 'Respuesta' (Chapter 3, p.120), 'Los molinos de la memoria' (Chapter 3, p.144-146), 'Cuatro postales' (Chapter 3, p.153-154), 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador' (Chapter 5, 236) and 'Palabras por Silvia' (Chapter 5, p.246).

compañeros, and a strong sense of political connection and community. Yet as a survivor, he experiences grief caused by the loss of friends, the personal experience of torture and the shattering of aspirations and ideals.

Partnoy illustrates the physical manifestation of emotions through crying. *La voz de un hombre* feels both ‘rabia y miedo’. His anger implies a sense of extreme injustice felt because of the trauma forced upon him and his *compañeros* in the past, as well as at the perpetrators’ impunity in the present moment.¹³² Building on Partnoy’s depiction of anger as a corporeal experience, her mention of fear indicates a keen sense of danger within the body. Whether through torture and imprisonment, or through the enforced uncertainty and lack of control in such situations, the survivor’s body has been an unsafe location.

Although the speaker has returned ‘de donde | muchos no vuelven’, his sense of safety is not guaranteed. Both body and mind were put at risk in the past. In the present, he may experience intrusive, unwanted recollections and physical complications as a survivor of torture. Furthermore, the fear felt by *la voz de un hombre* may relate to the future, too, and concerns that his body might not continue to physically or psychologically withstand the aftermath of trauma. With the gerund indicating the speaker’s progression towards the future, Partnoy’s half-rhyme ‘miedo | sobreviviendo’ highlights the interconnected experiences of fear and survival. The depiction of *un hombre*, who is afraid and who cries, reinforces the sense that he is a person who expresses emotions, unlike the men who line up to kill *la madre*’s son, refusing to acknowledge their shared humanity.

At this point in ‘Tragedia’, Partnoy cuts back to *la voz de la madre*, illustrating how she persisted after the disappearance of her son. Partnoy begins mid-sentence, depicting the mother’s political response to her grief:

... Y me cubrí las canas
con un pañuelo blanco.

¹³² The sense of impunity is particularly relevant in the context of *Venganza*’s publication in 1992. The amnesty laws in Argentina (1986 Ley de Punto Final; 1987 Ley de Obediencia Debida) were not ruled unconstitutional until 2005.

Y me fuí [sic] con las madres
de todos, a marchar. (*Venganza*, 78)

Alliteration stresses the first action, while Partnoy's juxtaposes the effects of dictatorship on *la madre* with her reaction to trauma. 'Las canas' suggest the loss of hair pigment through stress, but she does not attempt to replace its colour. Instead, *la madre* covers her white hairs with 'el pañuelo blanco', renowned symbol of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Partnoy evokes individual and collective action as the singular speaker, *la madre*, joins 'las madres | de todos'. Their protest echoes the march evoked in the poem's third line. Las Madres have become a powerful political collective, mirroring their children, who as a group have been disappeared.

Partnoy expands upon the connection between maternal anguish and activism in the final four lines of the stanza. She writes:

Mi dolor era un zonda
viento, que purifica
arrasando a los tibios.
[Fue] un arma mi dolor. (*Venganza*, 78)¹³³

Emotional suffering is metaphorically represented by the 'zonda', a wind 'que suele producirse en las regiones ubicadas al pie de la Cordillera de Los Andes desde la provincia de Neuquén hasta la de Jujuy. Se caracteriza por ser un viento fuerte, muy seco y de elevada temperatura' (Ministerio de Seguridad: n.d.). Using assonance for emphasis ('dolor | zonda'), Partnoy depicts the speaker's anguish as a force of nature.

The term 'zonda' is likely to have greater significance for readers familiar with Argentina's climate, though Partnoy elaborates on the wind's poetic significance in the next lines. Caesura visually highlights the wind and its purificatory nature. Partnoy builds on the metaphorical illustration of the speaker's anguish and how it is channelled to counter apathy, represented by 'los tibios'. The final line's metaphor

¹³³ The original text reads 'Fuí un arma mi dolor'. In personal email correspondence on 30 October 2020, Partnoy confirmed this is a typographic error and the verb should be 'fue'.

indicates the speaker's strong identification with both her emotional pain and the activism to which such grief has propelled her.

Returning to the voice of the chorus in the poem's final stanza, Partnoy combines violent imagery with a depiction of *testimonio* and the pursuit of justice. For the first time in the poem, the titular 'país' is mentioned: 'Yo anduve el país de los cadalsos, | de mano en mano y con mi sangre a cuestras;' (*Venganza*, 78). Partnoy portrays a frightening landscape, defining the speaker's country as the site of gallows, a symbol of genocide.

Where the choral poetic 'I' was previously shown as static at 'las puertas del infierno', Partnoy now depicts the speaker's movement through a hellish space. The verb 'andar' contrasts with the first stanza's politicised 'marchar': now the poetic 'I' is shown alone, cut off from political community. Omission of a verb in the second line emphasises the disembodied portrayal of hands. Partnoy creates a sense of disorientation, suggesting that the bleeding, suffering speaker is being passed from torturer to torturer.

While illustrating the traumatic nature of human rights violations, Partnoy also uses the final stanza to connect these experiences with *testimonio*. The semicolon at the end of the second line signals a change between preterite and present tenses. Partnoy places a visual barrier between the speaker's present and the traumatic past, while highlighting the link between the experience of dictatorial violence and the ongoing fight against impunity. Partnoy writes:

y ahora que mi historia se dibuja
de boca en boca y callan los culpables,
mis huesos van reclamando justicia
de puerta en puerta
y aunque ya sea tarde. (*Venganza*, 78)

It is in the antepenultimate line that the reader learns, conclusively, that the choral speaker has not survived. All that is left are 'mis huesos'. Yet even in death, the poetic 'I' is depicted as being involved in the pursuit of justice.

Using half-rhyme for emphasis ('ahora | historia'), Partnoy makes a meta-testimonial reference. Alluding both to the existence of this *testimonio* and the moment at which the reader is engaging with 'Tragedia', she emphasises the relaying of information to an audience, essential to the testimonial form. Alliteration stresses orality, as the dissemination of *testimonio* is juxtaposed with the silence of those responsible for atrocity ('callan los culpables').

The final lines of 'Tragedia' echo the final lines of 'Palabras por Silvia'. In the latter, the poetic 'I' pleads for attention to be paid 'antes de que los huesos de [Silvia] | nos lo demanden' (*Volando*, 62). At the time of *Volando*'s publication in 2005, Silvia Arce's whereabouts were still unknown. However, in *Venganza*, the poetic 'I' of 'Tragedia' has already died.

Even though the dictatorship caused immense loss of life and 'ya sea tarde', Partnoy demonstrates that *testimonio* – and its pursuit of justice – is still essential. Repetitive phrasing ('de mano en mano | de boca en boca | de puerta en puerta') illustrates the speaker's trajectory from victim of abuse, to subject of *testimonio*, to posthumous involvement in seeking justice. Juxtaposing the nouns 'huesos' and 'puerta', Partnoy suggests the knocking on multiple doors: a metaphor for determined efforts made to attain legal recognition and redress. Moreover, Partnoy signals that the experiences of dictatorship victims are fundamental to the *testimonio* produced by survivors.

5.6 Conclusion

Partnoy's poems create a chorus of testimonial denunciation and resistance. Where distinct versions of the poetic 'I' serve to highlight the humanity of each person experiencing human rights abuse, Partnoy's plural speakers testify to widespread trauma. Both singular and plural first person voices are used to illustrate a commitment to fighting oppression. As Partnoy demonstrates – for example, how an isolated mother becomes part of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo – the strength of each individual action is multiplied when it forms a component of group activism.

The efforts of the collective testimonial voice are emphasised in 'Preposiciones'. Using grammatical nuances, Partnoy portrays the present and past relationship between *testimoniantes* and their dead and missing *compañeros*. She demonstrates the need for *testimonio*, while reflecting on its insufficiency to express the extent of the grief and anger felt by survivors. The opening premise of the poem, a challenge to 'la farsa de que hablamos *por ellos*', is addressed as 'Preposiciones' progresses. By privileging testimonial voices, however, Partnoy emphasises the perspective of the survivor. Her collective poetic voice is united in the struggle against attempts to limit speech, whether that be by dictatorial forces or *testimonio* critics who do not act in solidarity with *testimoniantes*.

Partnoy stresses the concept of shared purpose and political ideals throughout her work. It is this sense of unity that comes to the fore in her poems explicitly about countries other than Argentina. Seeking to communicate the experience of a political prisoner in dictatorial Haiti, Partnoy's construction of 'Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haiti' encourages the reader to engage with different perspectives and multiple layers of witnessing. The poem's final lines – '*hay que reflexionar profundamente | sobre la conducta | represiva*' – encapsulate the complex intellectual process, with which the reader is ethically compelled to engage.

The poems 'Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador' and 'Testimonio de Lucía Ramírez de El Salvador' stress that the *testimoniantes'* experiences are part of the wider effect state violence has on a group of citizens. Partnoy uses poetic technique, including grammar, sound and structure to reinforce individual and multiple perspectives. She explores conventional testimonial approaches (first person speakers, the use of names and statistics), while expanding the literary and communicative possibilities of *testimonio*. By intertwining personal and shared experiences of human rights abuse, Partnoy creates a collective denunciation of the Salvadoran state.

In 'Palabras por Silvia', which approaches the issue of the mass disappearance and murder of women in Mexico, Partnoy focuses on an individual encounter in Ciudad Juárez. Attempting to understand the experience and ramifications of femicide is immensely distressing. Partnoy has spoken about the difficulty of engaging with human rights reports, such as that of Amnesty International (2007: 32).

Similarly, news reports on femicide often describe in lurid detail the sexual violence and torture inflicted on the victims.

Partnoy explains that:

the perpetrators of [human rights] crimes want the people to see victims and survivors as non-human [...]. The only way to get away with this violence is to consider the person you are destroying as non-human. All we can rescue of our humanity is in our art. (quoted in Mullin 2019)

Through her compassionate poetic portrayal of Evangelina Arce's experience, Partnoy creates a means by which the reader can approach a difficult human rights topic, without being so distressed that they have to look away. The structuring of 'Palabras por Silvia' encourages the reader to be critical about the journalist's unsympathetic response. Furthermore, the reader is guided to empathise with Evangelina and, consequently, with the many mothers of *desaparecidas* in Ciudad Juárez and in Mexico.

The profound effects that mass human rights violations have on a nation is demonstrated in 'Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país'. Partnoy depicts the shared trauma experienced by the citizens of a dictatorial nation, focusing on the distinct perspectives of a victim of state terror, a survivor and the mother of a *desaparecido*. While illustrating suffering and distress, Partnoy also explores her speakers' involvement in political activism. Stressing their agency, and individual modes of resistance, Partnoy demonstrates the multiple forms of fighting oppression. Although each speaker in 'Tragedia' takes the form of a singular poetic 'I', Partnoy emphasises the testimonial voice as conduit for the demand for justice from the survivors, victims and witnesses of dictatorship. When a *testimoniante* speaks, their voice contains a collective clamour for justice.

Conclusion

Poetry has been largely overlooked in *testimonio* studies thus far. While early scholarship was hesitant to understand the mode of writing in terms of literature, there have been more recent studies of testimonial fiction. Still, it seems almost as if poetry has been considered 'too literary' to also have the potential for powerful denunciations of state violence and human rights abuse. However, as my thesis has illustrated, there is indeed room for poetry under the umbrella of *testimonio* and Partnoy's work is a prime example.

Chapter 1 outlines the varied attempts at defining and categorising testimonial literature, following early scholarship in the field by Beverley and Sklodowska. Some resistance to *testimonio* has arisen in academic spheres because the form's first-hand account of oppression compels the reader to put their faith in the testifier. Debates such as the Stoll-Menchú controversy, as well as Sarlo's hierarchical approach to dictatorship writing, have questioned the trustworthiness of *testimoniante*s and the importance of their accounts. Yet, as Partnoy's poetic and scholarly work stresses, the practice of solidarity is fundamental to engaging with *testimonio*.

Testimonial writing denounces state violence and works to urge readers' action against future atrocity. The *testimoniante* must find a way of relating their experience of immense trauma to an audience that, as Forcinito emphasises, is unlikely to share the testifier's direct knowledge of human rights abuse. The purpose of figurative language in communicating suffering is highlighted by Scarry, while Forché draws attention to the expressive potential of linguistic fracture in the aftermath of extremity. I contend that both metaphor and textual lacunae play significant roles in *testimonio*.

Chapter 2 discusses the function of the paratext in testimonial writing. With Genette's theory of the paratext as a foundation, I argue that information provided in the paratext is essential to interpreting *testimonio* as such. Allographic paratexts convey biographical information about Partnoy and relevant context about the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina. These paratexts also accentuate the literary nature of Partnoy's work, situating her collections in terms of Red Hen's and Settlement House's focus on publishing poetry, as well as including laudatory comments by other writers.

Authorial paratexts in *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos* serve a particular testimonial purpose. Dedications afford the reader a glimpse of Partnoy's intimate relationships, while offering metaphorical connections with the main text of the collections. *Venganza's* prose preface gives an account of Partnoy's experiences in relation to the dictatorship, before the reader encounters the poem 'Datos biográficos'. Partnoy's prefatorial poems, 'Datos biográficos' and *Fuegos*' 'Disclaimer *intraducible*', take the reader yet closer to the *testimonio* of the collections, while poetically confirming that Partnoy's speaker is discussing events that really happened.

Chapter 3 considers Partnoy's approach to testimonial poetry, initially through the lens of her literary manifestos 'Arte poética' and 'Arte política'. She demonstrates the power of subtle resistance and the necessity of speaking out about injustice. Situating her experiences in the global and historical context of crimes against humanity, Partnoy demonstrates the importance of poetic responses to human rights abuse.

Partnoy's depictions of the act of testifying illustrate obstacles faced by *testimoniante*s. The poetic 'I' is shown in a variety of hostile scenes, where unreasonable demands are made: her integrity is questioned in both a legal environment and an informal setting. A further attempt to share *testimonio* portrays the speaker struggling to communicate with a group of people who show no compassion for her vulnerable state. Focusing on the experience of talking to unsympathetic audiences, Partnoy emphasises the psychological toll that communicating about trauma takes on the survivor.

Language is a fundamental component of communication and Partnoy shows the destructive effect that torture has on a person's relationship with language. She portrays the distress of the poetic 'I', whose connection with her mother tongue has been shattered. However, it is through poetry that Partnoy asserts an artistic reclamation of language. Figurative language is used to articulate specific moments of pain, as well as the experience of ongoing trauma, during and in the aftermath of dictatorship. Partnoy's combination of metaphor with the conventional language of *testimonio* reinforces poetry's unique role in denouncing and combatting injustice.

Chapter 4 analyses poems that explore the harm dictatorial violence effected on family relationships. The poetic voice's disappearance, imprisonment and torture

at the hands of the military did not solely affect her as an individual, but caused severe ramifications for the people closest to her. Partnoy depicts the fracture and destruction of interpersonal relations, as well as attempts to build connections following state terror.

During the speaker's imprisonment, she is parted from her daughter and Partnoy shows the efforts made to maintain their bond. The poetic 'I' encourages her daughter's imagination by suggesting ways that they might maintain their connection – a gentle counterpoint to the violence of their separation. Further evidence of the speaker's parental guidance can be seen in the sharing of her political convictions with the child, teaching her about the importance of resisting injustice. Partnoy's structured use of metre in the prison poems contrasts with the poetic voice's emotional distress, a rhythmic reflection of the speaker's attempts to maintain a sense of control over her circumstances.

The poems about the relationship between the poetic 'I' and her brother likewise show her trying to rationalise a traumatic situation. Partnoy retraces the course of the siblings' lives from childhood to the poetic present as the speaker assesses the course of events that led to her life in exile and his suicide. The reader grasps an increasing sense of the poetic voice's isolation and grief, while Partnoy's use of metaphor evokes the machinations of menacing forces. Her rendering of the effect of state terror on the siblings' relationship underlines that it was impossible for them to prevent its devastating consequences for their lives.

Partnoy's poems about the poetic 'I' and her life partner centre the construction of family in the aftermath of dictatorship. She depicts two exiled survivors, whose lives have been shaped by state violence. Their bond is based on shared experiences and political values, which in turn influences the naming of their daughters and decisions regarding where to live. Partnoy is unequivocal about the damaging effect of dictatorship on the speaker and Antonio Leiva, yet she stresses their resilience and loving relationship.

Chapter 5 examines Partnoy's development of a collective denunciation of state violence. Central to *testimonio* is the notion that the individual's account speaks to the suffering experienced by a group of people. The use of first person singular and

first person plural voices in Partnoy's poems builds a sense of a testimonial community that is committed to fighting injustice and impunity.

Partnoy confronts the ethics of speaking 'for' missing and dead *compañeros*, thereby emphasising the significance of the survivor's point of view. Rejecting dictatorial attempts to silence citizens, as well as the hostile attitudes of some *testimonio* critics, Partnoy maintains the need for collective testimonial efforts. However, she also alludes to *testimonio*'s inability to fully communicate the intensity of emotion felt by survivors – or rectify the harm that has been caused.

The view of state terror presented in Partnoy's work extends beyond the particulars of the 1976-1983 dictatorship in Argentina and several poems imply a sense of universality through non-specific references to nation. Furthermore, the extension of solidarity across geographical borders and political contexts is explicit in her poems about Haiti, El Salvador and Mexico. In writing about cases other than her own, Partnoy emphasises the humanity of people across Latin America, who have suffered under state violence.

Through the depiction of named testifiers, her typical poetic 'I' and the multitude of *testimoniante*s conveyed by the first person plural voice, Partnoy creates a poetic community that is dedicated to resisting human rights abuse. Her portrayal of many individual acts of defiance – whether during dictatorship, from a position of exile or in the aftermath – combines to evoke a powerful collective. Consequently, Partnoy implies that *testimonio* does not solely contain the voice of one person, rather it raises a collective denunciation of impunity and a demand to be heard.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present close reading analyses of thematic aspects of Partnoy's poetry. Through this methodological approach, I also identify recurrent motifs and techniques across *Venganza*, *Volando* and *Fuegos* that are emblematic of Partnoy's *testimonio*. Her confrontation of dictatorial violence is paired with an emphasis on the resistance and resilience of its victims and survivors, stressing the humanity of people living under oppressive regimes.

Throughout her poetry, Partnoy divests the dictatorial authorities of an identity. Her repeated use of dehumanisation works to upend the military's attempts to revoke the personhood of the citizens they persecuted. Similarly, the limitations imposed on Partnoy's imprisoned speaker are rejected by means of the imagination,

as well as the textual absence of prison guards. The poetic 'I', conscious of the limitations of her surroundings, envisages situations where she transcends the boundaries of the prison.

Partnoy's prison poems, composed at the time of her incarceration, depict a poetic voice attempting to maintain a sense of self when she is confined in an unsafe environment. In the poems about exile, there is no longer an immediate threat to the speaker's body, but there is a severe effect on her mental wellbeing. Partnoy portrays exile as a physical separation from the earth, rendering the trauma of being forcibly removed from a nation and losing a lifelong connection to language, culture and community.

A further, irrevocable, division is the one between dictatorship survivors and the people who were murdered or disappeared. Partnoy asserts that 'mis poemas intentan generar la presencia de los desaparecidos' (1997c: n.p.), which can be seen through the naming of *compañeros* from La Escuelita across multiple poems, as well as in the poetic voice's attempts to make connections with the dead. Aspects of supernatural communication recur in Partnoy's poetry as a means of maintaining a link with persons who are no longer alive. Placing an emphasis on intimate connections, Partnoy defies the destructive effect of state terror on interpersonal relationships.

For all the extremity of violence caused by dictatorial oppression, the use of understatement is characteristic of Partnoy's poetry. The speaker's experiences are often minimised, particularly in comparison to those of others: she is conscious of her position as someone who survived, while many *compañeros* are missing or dead. At the same time, the downplaying of the speaker's feelings suggests a survival mechanism, both during and in the aftermath of the dictatorship, as well as the difficulty in talking about trauma. The poetic voice's distress is acknowledged, yet minimally so. Partnoy thereby implies that to address the full intensity of emotion would be overwhelming to the *testimoniante*.

Partnoy's use of understatement requires the reader to engage their imagination to understand how the speaker might be feeling. The connection that Partnoy seeks to establish with the reader can similarly be observed, albeit through tonally different means, in poetic asides. Indicating a *testimoniante* that is hyper-

aware of her circumstances, Partnoy highlights moments of absurdity and, so doing, stresses the humanity of a person trying to survive an otherwise bleak situation. Arch comments also work to meta-textual effect, emphasising the poems as literary objects.

Intertextual references recur throughout Partnoy's collections, though named or allusive references to other writers. Her poems respond to the work of different poets – whether metrically, linguistically or philosophically – as part of a poetic and intellectual exchange. Through intertextuality, Partnoy establishes that her work is in dialogue with the Spanish-language literary canon, as well as placing her poetic *testimonio* amidst a community of writers resisting oppression.

The concept of poems as 'empathy machines' (Robinson 2020) is borne out across Partnoy's collections. As she notes, reports produced by human rights organisations are too harrowing to read in depth (Partnoy 2007: 32) and so her poetic confrontation of dictatorial violence is paired with an emphasis on the resistance and resilience of its victims and survivors. Partnoy's choice to privilege emotion stresses the humanity of people living under oppressive regimes. Her poems compel the reader to think deeply and engage with the *testimoniante's* perspective, a process that simultaneously encourages the practice of empathy and increases the likelihood of future action to oppose injustice.

The research presented in this thesis is the first extended study of Partnoy's poetry, and her collections remain rich with potential for analysis. Similarly, my study of testimonial poetry is one of the earliest of its kind. I hope that future scholarship, in both literary studies and human rights studies, will expand on the understandings of poetic *testimonio* that are detailed in my work.

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Appendix A: Poems Analysed in Chapter 2

Datos biográficos¹³⁴

Me sacaron la tierra
de debajo
— a eso llaman destierro —
o sea que, de pronto,
me faltó el suelo
y me sobró distancia.

Pero un día,
antes de aquello,
me habían arrancado
la libertad de cuajo,
y entonces,
cuando me faltaba el aire
y me sobraban rejas,
me sentía
un poco mejor que antes,
que cuando me quitaron
a mi hija de los brazos:
en ese entonces
me faltaba todo — el futuro —
(podría decir que me sobró la vida).

Y sin embargo
todavía me acordaba
del día que los milicos
metieron a mi patria entre barrotes,

¹³⁴ Partnoy (1992: 18).

ese día me sobró la fuerza
y me faltó el miedo.

Allí empezó la cosa.

Disclaimer *intraducible*¹³⁵

My life
is based
on a real story.

Mi vida
se basa
en una historia real.

¹³⁵ Partnoy (2014: n. pag.).

Appendix B: Poems Analysed in Chapter 3

Arte poética¹³⁶

Eso que vuela bajito
es mi poesía.
Rastreadora de olores
dentro del pasto.
Yo no busco la altura.
Vértigo el vuelo.
Embisto la distancia
volando bajo.
Allí está la palabra,
olvidadita,
fresca con las raíces
u oliendo a miedo.
Tornasoleándose algo
como la carne
cadáver que transita
a la semilla.

¹³⁶ Partnoy (1992: 68 and 2005b: 4).

Arte política¹³⁷

Un verso desnudo de todo malabar
y adorno
para que nadie diga
que después de Auschwitz,
que después de la Conquista,
que después de tantas
diminutas ESMAs,
de tantas pequeñitas Sabras y Shatilas
de Ruanda y Kosovo

de todas las Faluyas bombardeadas

para que nadie diga
que nada que decir
nos queda
que nada ya nos parte en seco
el cerebro la lengua
y alguna otra víscera
que se da el lujo
de palpar los duelos.

¹³⁷ Partnoy (2014: 42).

Juicio¹³⁸

Aquí

mis muertos tienen
que probar que sus muertes se debieron
a “circunstancias extremas y aberrantes.”

A mí se me ha exigido una evidencia
de que no fué [sic] mi voluntad la de esfumarme
entre enero y abril, hace diez años.

Cómo consigo pruebas convincentes
de aquel que se tragó el miedo caliente
y le arden la laringe y el esófago
la punta de la lengua y las verdades?

Bahía Blanca, Semana Santa de 1987

¹³⁸ Partnoy (1992: 84).

Respuesta¹³⁹

¿...y vos?

COMO [sic] TE SALVASTE?

Es casi

acusación.

Es lápida.

Se me congelan

las ganas de contarte

lo de aquellos

que no fueron salvados,

lo de

ZulmaMaríaelenaBenjayBraco

MaryNestorGracielaRauleugenio

y el

proyectedeliberacionacional.

Yo

no me salvé.

Me salvaron

los pies caminadores

de mis padres,

los pies que daban vuelta

a la Pirámide,

las manos

que escribieron una carta,

la "sol

¹³⁹ Partnoy (2005b: 28-30).

i dar
i dad”
de la Cecilia
y el cachetazo a tiempo
de la suerte,
el dedo de algún dios
desprevenido,
la decisión
de un tribunal de asesinos
que como
dice siempre
don Emilio
estará registrada en microfichas

y escondida en alguna caja
fuerte
que se resiste
a todas las Pandoras.

Y ¿por qué me salvé?
Ahora andá y preguntales
a ellos, los milicos.

Ellos sí saben.

Testimonio¹⁴⁰

El micrófono
me hace una reverencia
de cables enroscados.
Yo a mi vez me le acerco
abro los ojos,
abro
el libro
abro
la boca.
Eso sí, abro bastante la boca
y ahí les cuento.
Dicen
que hablo muy suave
que casi les murmuro
que no oyen
los gritos perforantes.
Yo abro
el recuerdo
como un melón podrido.

Dicen
que no consigo
describir con rigor las inclemencias
de la picana.
Dicen que en estas cosas
no debe quedar ningún espacio
librado
a la imaginación o a la duda.

¹⁴⁰ Partnoy (1992: 96-98).

Saco
el informe de Amnistía
y hablo por esa tinta.
Digo: "Lean."
Yo a mi vez me enrosco
en la reverencia cómplice
del micrófono
Enarbolo la acción como receta,
la información como antídoto infalible
y, una vez desatado cada nudo,
digo mis versos.
Resistí. Voy entera.

severe and prolonged...:

amputation of...:

picana eléctrica:

¿qué se siente

cuando

el idioma de uno

es el único

adecuado

para nombrar

wet submarine...:

potro:

no vergüenza

no culpa

burns:

la bandera...:

¿qué

se siente?

parrots perch:

sexual torture:

téléphono:

rápido

a corregir

no hay

ph

en

español

pero...

apollo:...

¹⁴¹ Partnoy (2005b: 34-38).

diagnosis of...:

falanga:

portugués

ellos

qué

sienten?

black slave:

cachots noirs:

o

¿qué...?

el quirófano:

sí dolor

los franceses

sí miedo.

Dice el Mingo que es como si miles de terminaciones de cables eléctricos te tironearan de la carne.

Una mujer con los labios pintados

de azul

le explica

al público

“el dolor físico no solamente

se resiste a ser verbalizado

sino que

destruye el lenguaje,

inmediatamente lo

revierte

al estado previo al lenguaje

a los sonidos y gritos

que profiere el ser humano

antes de aprender

la lengua”

le petit déjeuner...:

le déjeuner:...

le rodeo:...

cajones:...

¿qué?

...

...

...

plantón:

...

pie

¡dad!

Los molinos de la memoria¹⁴²

Frente al campo de concentración La Escuelita de Bahía Blanca, donde estuve desaparecida durante la dictadura militar allá por el setenta y siete, había un molino roto. Los milicos lo habían atado con alambre. A los conscriptos del Comando del V Cuerpo de Ejército les tocaba hacer guardia “imaginaria” allí y eso los aterrorizaba. Resulta que en las noches sin viento el molino se desataba y echaba a girar solito. Cuenta la leyenda, que es siempre la verdad, que los espíritus de los desaparecidos movían las aspas.

En 1998, veintidos [sic] años después de ser liberada, volví al sitio de La Escuelita. Ví [sic] el molino pero los espíritus de mis amigos del alma, la Vasquita y la Corta, María Eugenia y Néstor, de mis compañeros María Elenita, Graciela (la embarazada que dió [sic] a luz en cautiverio), Benja, Braco ... sus espíritus no echaron a girar las aspas. En cambio, viajaron conmigo hasta mi casa de Los Angeles.

Días después, cuando iba en bicicleta al trabajo me *pedalié* [sic] un poema. Cuando lo ví [sic] sobre la página me dí [sic] cuenta de que tenía forma de revólver. Recordé entonces aquellos versos de Gabriel Zelaya [sic]: “la poesía es un arma/ cargada de futuro” y entonces me pregunté:

¿...y si el arma, Zelaya [sic],
apuntara al futuro?

¿Sobre qué muertos echaremos qué culpas
cuando se nos desteja la trama del silencio?
¿Cuáles serán las puertas para la cruz de sangre
y cuáles las solapas de estrellas amarillas?
¿De qué gargantas frías rapiñaremos voces

¹⁴² Partnoy (2005b: 68-70).

para que sean el eco de lo que dijo el amo?
¿Qué perdón, qué “justicia humanamente posible”
atarán
con alambre
los molinos
de nuestra
memoria?

Cuatro postales¹⁴³

I.

La muerte, mi vecina,
lo convenció a mi hermano
de que tomara
unas vacaciones de la vida.
Y él, una mañana,
apagó la luz con el gatillo.
En donde está no hay postales
para mandar a los amigos...

II.

La muerte, mi vecina,
me golpeó la puerta un mediodía;
venía a pedirme
“una tacita de arrepentimiento”
y una pizca
“sólo una pizca” de cobardía.
“Vuelva mañana” le dije.
Y esa noche me mudé.

III.

La muerte, mi vecina,
me descubrió una tarde
con los ojos vendados
cubierta de frazadas

¹⁴³ Partnoy (1992: 54-56).

que olían
a cuerpos sucios y aterrados.

No la ahuyentó el olor, estoy segura,
porque ese mismo día
llevó a ZulmaMaríaElenaBenjayBraco
que portaban idénticas frazadas.
La muerte calzaba botas militares.

IV.

La muerte, mi vecina,
harta ya de que la ande esquivando,
vendrá descalza un día
a llevarse mis huesos
a un país de lluvias sin futuro.
¡Ojalá que se ahogue en mis cenizas!

Appendix C: Poems Analysed in Chapter 4

A mi hija¹⁴⁴

(Cartas desde la cárcel)

I.

Escuchá:

Mi garganta se hace amiga del viento
para llegar hasta vos
corazón tierno, ojos nuevos.

Escuchá:

Poné tu oído en el hueco de un caracol
o en el parlante infame
y escuchá.

La razón es tan simple
y tan sencilla
como la gota de agua
o la semilla
que te cabe en la palma de la mano.
La razón es bien simple:
No podía
dejar de pelear por la alegría
de aquellos que son nuestros hermanos.

II.

Para escribirte a vos
caramelo de sol, chiquita mía,
tendría...
tendría que juntar tanta ternura...

¹⁴⁴ Partnoy (1992: 22-24).

Y tu madre, mi amor,
tu madre es dura,
tiene de piedra el alma,
casi no llora nunca...
salvo para escribirte,
caramelo de sol,
cristalito de luna.

III.

Hoy suelto las amarras
que aprisionan mis sueños
y llego hasta tu orilla
doradita de sol.

Niña soy navegante
de un barco de ilusiones
con un único puerto:
tu carita y tu voz.

Abrocharte el zapato,
desatarte la risa,
caminar a tu lado
por un mundo mejor.

Para esas tareas
sé que está haciendo falta
mi mano y mi ternura,
mi libertad y mi voz.

Desatarte la risa,
abrocharte el zapato,
destruir las murallas
que nos tapan el sol...

Para esas tareas
es que estoy preparando
mi palabra y mi vida,

mi puño y mi
canción.

Visita¹⁴⁵

Mamá rompe los viernes
cerrojos y candados
para darte una ronda
de minutos contados.
Papá, desde bien lejos,
— su día amurallado —,
sueña con tu piel tibia
y tus minutos contados.
Si yo pudiera, niña,
explicarte el por qué
de todos los cerrojos,
de todos los candados,
de todos los barrotes,
de las altas murallas,
de todos pero todos
los minutos contados...
Niña si yo pudiera
devorar el espacio
para hacer una ronda
lejos de tanta cárcel...
ronda libre
y mis manos
sin minutos contados...

Nana sin la cebolla¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Partnoy (1992: 26).

¹⁴⁶ Partnoy (2014: 40).

con Miguel Hernández

Tu madre no está presa
tu madre tiene
pájaros en la sangre
no la detienen
las rejas, los barrotes
ni lo [sic] candados,
ni tu madre está presa
ni te ha dejado.

Su tristeza es paloma,
su dolor golondrina,
sus días son gorriones
buscando tus esquinas.
Tu madre no está presa
niña, tu madre
echa a volar los pájaros de su sangre;
si llegan hasta tu alma
y allí hacen nido...
que vos puedas gritarles:
¡ya ha amanecido!

Cárcel de Villa Devoto, 1978

Epitafio¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Partnoy (1992: 60).

De todas las libertades
tal vez
elegiste la muerte.

Y las acuarelas de nuestra infancia
se van
deshaciendo en el humo.

Por los salitrales te buscaré
cuando el sol me deje mirar atrás.

Llegaré a tu tumba para dejarte
un gajo de almendro
y un poema muerto
de angustia que vos
ya ilustraste con sangre.

Lo fatal¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Partnoy (2014: 22)

Esa música que no se parece a nada
en todos los agujeros de la tarde
¿es mi hermano?

Razones¹⁴⁹

El viento del salitral

¹⁴⁹ Partnoy (1992: 62).

agrió el vino de tus sueños
te sacudió los andamios
de construir el futuro
después te enredó los dedos
contra el filo de un gatillo.
Fué [sic] una mentira de plomo,
fué [sic] una avalancha de sal,
fué [sic] el viento, mi hermano, el viento,
infierno del salitral.

Compañero de juegos¹⁵⁰

Jugamos con las sombras

¹⁵⁰ Partnoy (1992: 64).

por detrás de las puertas,
jugamos con la escarcha,
con las ramas desnudas.
Jugamos con las piedras,
con las cosas perdidas
en el patio de casa.

Cuando llegó el momento
nos jugamos la vida.

Yo me gané una celda
y me gané el destierro,
y unos cuantos suspiros
ante el deber cumplido.
Vos perdiste sonrisas,
perdiste la inocencia
y ganaste la paz
debajo de la tierra

hoy las sombras no juegan
y la escarcha se extiende
sobre ramas desnudas
piedras del cementerio
pregunto dónde fueron
esas cosas perdidas.

Yo me he quedado sola
jugando la vida...

Mi madero y yo¹⁵¹

I.

Este hombre al que llamo compañero
es un trozo de mi barca,

¹⁵¹ Partnoy (1992: 34-36).

es un madero
que me salva de hundirme
hasta los huesos
en el mar implacable del exilio.

II.

Y yo que no creía en los naufragios,
en las absurdas historias
de las quillas
destrozadas contra costas inmutables,
en los trozos de barco
a la deriva
y en el sobreviviente que – infaltable –
abrazado a un madero
salvaba alma y pellejo...
Ahora mirame:
Náufraga de mi tierra,
entre tus brazos,
quiero salvarme entera
hasta la costa.

III.

Después de los naufragios
siempre quedan
en la playa
pedazos de madera
y en tierra firme
los sobrevivientes.
Yo quisiera, mi amor,
que mi madero
fuera pilar de mi casa
en tierra firme

o en tierra libre:
en mi patria
y con mi gente.

Balance¹⁵²

*al Mingo (padre de Eva Victoria
y Anahí Paz)*

De la victoria nos queda solamente

¹⁵² Partnoy (2005b: 46).

el nombre embanderado
de nuestra hija
escrito bajo la sombra amarga
de aquellos compañeros
que no llegaron siquiera a la derrota
con la sangre en el cuerpo.
Y de la paz, amor, sólo no [sic] queda
el nombre entre palomas
de nuestra hija
y la memoria del sueño de la bala
al centro de la frente
del asesino.
De la justicia

En Rocha y la vía¹⁵³

Cuando todo se acabe,
Antonio Leiva,
nos venimos a vivir
a Buenos Aires

¹⁵³ Partnoy (2005b: 48).

porque está lleno de la gente
y de las cosas
que ya nunca jamás encontraremos
y todo queda a la vuelta
de la esquina
como tu rabia y la mía
y la derrota
viaja como cualquiera en el sesenta
y no se baja nunca.
No se baja.

Appendix D: Poems Analysed in Chapter 5

Preposiciones¹⁵⁴

...porque la farsa de que hablamos *por* ellos
molió ya en su metate
de claridad rosario
castellanos...

...tampoco nos llenemos la conciencia de *para*
porque ¿hacia dónde tender ramas de olivo
si ellos ya no están?
Ante ellos, no sé.
Ante su memoria,
vale.
Cabe sus fotos,
a sus no siempre tumbas.
Impotencia de fuego
en la garganta:
con eso hablamos,
con ellos quizás también.
Pero sólo los elegidos
por el amor que fué [sic]
oyen rozar sobre su piel susurros
de respuesta.

Gritamos desde que se los llevaran,
so pena de degüello,
tras las rejas,

¹⁵⁴ Partnoy (2014: 18-20).

mordazas y mortajas desatando
bajo la pata militar, gritamos.

¿Acaso no entendemos todavía
que *por* es imposible?
Que si *por* fuera,
no nos daríamos aún por enterados
de la brutalidad de ese despojo.

...porque sin ellos,
porque siempre sin ellos
nos quedamos
levantando la voz
contra la marejada
entre las piedras rotas
y los cimientos de la ciudad
en que, entonces sí, por ellos y con ellos
adolecíamos de ansias de abrazarnos

a esa especie
de tierno animal desconocido
al que por falta de mejor nombre
habíamos bautizado
Liberación.

El retorno¹⁵⁵

Piso la tierra de Anáhuac que es
la tierra de mis muertos.
Pues bien: como su nombre lo indica – y otros signos –
están muertos. No hablan.
Algunos, los recientes, con el mentón atado
todavía al último pañuelo.
Otros con la mandíbula intacta, calcio vuelto
a su existencia mineral que es muda.
Así pues, no me piden
que yo viva con ellos
que mire el mundo que no ven, que lleve
adelante un destino que no alcanzó a cumplirse.
Si necesito justificaciones
para estar, para hacer
y, sobre todo, para no borrar
(que sería lo lógico siguiendo las premisas)
habrá que conseguirlas de otro modo.
¿Con los vivientes, que me dan la espalda,
que no me ven pero que si me vieran
sería con el rechazo del que sabe
que, por la ley natural, a menos cuerpos
mayor espacio y aire y esperanza?
¿Con los que llegan ya con la granada lista
para hacerla explotar, entre sus manos?
¿Con los que ven en mí el estorbo, la ruina,
el esperpento
que hay que destruir para construir de nuevo?

¹⁵⁵ Castellanos (1996: 305).

No. La respuesta no han
de darla únicamente los humanos.

Quizá hacer una obra...

¿Obra? ¿Cambiar la faz de la naturaleza?

¿Añadir algún libro a las listas bibliográficas?

¿Hacer variar el rumbo de la historia?

Pero si éste es asunto – otra vez – de hombre
y del tiempo medido al modo de los hombres
y según los criterios

con los que ellos aceptan o rechazan.

¿Entonces, qué? ¿Dios? ¿Su mandato?

Es demasiado tarde para inventar ahora
o para regresar a la infancia dorada.

Acepta nada más los hechos: has venido
y es igual que tu hubieras quedado o que si nunca
tu [sic] hubieras ido. Igual. Para ti. Para todos.

Superflua aquí. Superflua allá. Superflua
exactamente igual a cada uno
de los que ves y de los que no ves.

Ninguno es necesario
ni aun para ti, que por definición
eres menesterosa.

Testimonio de Robert Duval de Haití¹⁵⁶

I.

... en esa piecita

(Robert Duval cuenta)

ciento ochenta

vi morir enfrente mío.

Doscientos cincuenta

escuchamos.

II.

... en esa piecita

a veces treinta

o cuarenta

según

los que habían mandado a morir

aquel día ...

un bowl nos daban

con comida

caliente la volcábamos en el piso

el mismo

con agua.

Había que tomarla

allí mismo

porque

el mismo

bowl para la otra celda

y la otra

todas.

¹⁵⁶ Partnoy (1992: 86-88).

III.

dice:

enfrentar el sistema

nos costó

diez muertos

en cada manifestación.

Invertimos sangre.

dice:

todavía no vimos

la tumba colectiva.

Estamos por verla.

IV.

dice:

yo denuncié

denuncié

denuncié.

Entonces dice:

hay que reflexionar profundamente

sobre la conducta

represiva.

Testimonio de Sonia de El Salvador¹⁵⁷

1 desaparecida

2 asesinados

5 encarceladas

10 exiliados

de los 20

que estudiábamos allí.

Yo

no estaba organizada.

Todavía.

¹⁵⁷ Partnoy (1992: 90).

*Nosotros
los damnificados
los desplazados
los marginados
miles
y miles.
Lejos
de que nos dejen
organizar.
Lejos.
Capturas de muchos
compañeros.
Marta Lidia Guzmán
desaparecida.
El cuatro de julio.
Incluyendo
pues
mi persona
capturados.*

*Esta es la respuesta que el gobierno nos ha dado en lugar de la
ayuda internacional que nos habían enviado solidariamente*

*a
nosotros
los
damnificados.
aburridos
de tanta masacre.*

¹⁵⁸ Partnoy (1992: 92).

Palabras por Silvia¹⁵⁹

Ese señor de libretita en mano,
ese señor de credencial al cuello,
ese señor que quiere hablar conmigo
y no ve a Evangelina
no la ve
parada sobre lo seco de su duelo
con la incertidumbre de quien lo sabe todo
porque es madre de desaparecida
que ayer nomás aquí
aquí fincaba
y ese señor
quiere que yo le cuente de bahía
blanca ciudad al centro de otros vientos
esta mañana de sábado en la plaza
de armas tomar evangelina arce.

Nadie es profeta en su tierra evangelina.

Señor, ahora estoy muy ocupada
y Evangelina sabe que ella no existe
y está plantada allí sobre su grito
y ese señor no escucha a Evangelina
como tampoco escuchan muchos de ellos.
Y Silvia Arce es aquí y ahora,
es Juárez y es mordaza.

Yo sé, señor, se torna una rutina,
ya no es noticia siempre las mismas muertas.

¹⁵⁹ Partnoy (2005b: 60-62).

Pero señor de libretita en mano,
pero señor de credencial al cuello,
haga el favor y mientras yo termino
de copiar los versos que tarjó esta madre
sobre las hojas de su cuaderno ocre,
haga el favor de oír [sic] a Evangelina
pedir justicia.

Escuche aquí y ahora
antes de que los huesos de su hija
nos lo demanden.

Ciudad Juárez, México. 1 de junio de 2003.

Calles¹⁶⁰

*Poema de Evangelina Arce,
madre de Silvia Arce*

Por las calles de Juárez
ya no se puede andar
porque no sabemos quién
anda atrás de nosotros
para podernos atacar.

Somos madres ofendidas
que a nuestras hijas
han arrebatado que no
sabemos adónde se las
llevaron.

Son gente de alto poder
como trabajan en el gobierno
se creen personas que todo
pueden [sic] hacer.

Secuestran jóvenes violan
y matan las tiran en el

desierto como un animal
como son federales no se
les puede castigar.

Yo sufrí un atentado

¹⁶⁰ Arce (2005b: 64-66).

por hablar y pedir
justicia por eso el gobierno
nos manda intimidar
pero miedo no les tenemos
justicia es lo que queremos y
se aclaren
todos los crímenes de
mujeres por eso es que
gritamos justicia.

Se hicieron denuncias y
desplegados por todo el
mundo y todos los estados
pidiendo protección y justicia
que el gobierno nos ha negado

yo no me puedo callar
a mi hija quiero encontrar
los federales que se la
llevaron que la vengán entregar justicia.

30 de abril de 2003

Palabras para Julia¹⁶¹

Tú no puedes volver atrás
porque la vida ya te empuja
como un aullido interminable.

Hija mía es mejor vivir
con la alegría de los hombres
que llorar ante el muro ciego.

Te sentirás acorralada
te sentirás perdida o sola
tal vez querrás no haber nacido.

Yo sé muy bien que te dirán
que la vida no tiene objeto
que es un asunto desgraciado.

Entonces siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti como ahora pienso.

Un hombre solo una mujer
así tomados de uno en uno
son como polvo no son nada.

Pero yo cuando te hablo a ti
cuando te escribo estas palabras
pienso también en otros hombres.

¹⁶¹ Goytisolo (2009: 353-354).

Tu destino está en los demás
tu futuro es tu propia vida
tu dignidad es la de todos.

Otros esperan que resistas
que les ayude tu alegría
tu canción entre sus canciones.

Entonces siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti como ahora pienso.

Nunca te entregues ni te apartes
junto al camino nunca digas
no puedo más y aquí me quedo.

La vida es bella tú verás
como a pesar de los pesares
tendrás amor tendrás amigos.

Por lo demás no hay elección
y este mundo tal como es
será todo tu patrimonio.

Perdóname no sé decirte
nada más pero tú comprende
que yo aún estoy en el camino.

Y siempre siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti como ahora pienso.

Palabras para Julia¹⁶²

Tú no puedes volver atrás
porque la vida ya te empuja
con un aullido interminable,
interminable...

Te sentirás acorralada
te sentirás perdida o sola
tal vez querrás no haber nacido,
no haber nacido...

Pero tú siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti, pensando en ti,
como ahora pienso...

La vida es bella ya verás,
como a pesar de los pesares,
tendrás amigos, tendrás amor,
tendrás amigos...

Un hombre solo, una mujer,
así tomados de uno en uno,
son como polvo, no son nada,
no son nada...

Entonces siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti, pensando en ti,

¹⁶² Ibañez (n.d.).

como ahora pienso...

Otros esperan que resistas,
que les ayude tu alegría
que les ayude tu canción
entre sus canciones...

Nunca te entregues ni te apartes
junto al camino nunca digas
no puedo más y aquí me quedo,
y aquí me quedo...

Entonces siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti, pensando en ti,
como ahora pienso...

La vida es bella ya verás
como a pesar de los pesares
tendrás amigos, tendrás amor,
tendrás amigos...

No sé decirte nada más
pero tu debes comprender
que yo aún estoy en el camino,
en el camino...

Pero tú siempre acuérdate
de lo que un día yo escribí
pensando en ti, pensando en ti,
como ahora pienso...

Tragedia para dos voces, un coro y un país¹⁶³

Coro

No me hablen de las puertas del infierno.
Yo estuve allí, pero antes fue la vida.
Marchaba mi esperanza por las calles,
giraba el nuevo día en mi reloj,
en mi garganta el grito que transforma,
en mis manos la semilla o la cruz.
Supo mi sol estallar también de ira
ante lo injusto. Peligroso mi sol.
Vinieron a arrestarme, era la noche
de mi nación, la noche de su historia.
No entendieron razones ni buscaron
más que horadarme la carne y la conciencia.
No me hablen de las puertas del infierno,
yo estuve allí, tierra de la tortura.
Me envolví en mi bandera y tuve frío.
Me envolví en mi bandera
de ideales.

La voz de la madre

Yo conjuré a las piedras
en nombre de mi hijo.
La [sic] piedras se partieron
pero no lo encontré.

Yo conjuré al silencio
en nombre de mi hijo,

¹⁶³ Partnoy (1992: 74-78).

y se pobló de quejas
pero él no me habló.

Yo conjuré a los hombres
en nombre de mi hijo.
Los hombres se alinearon
para su ejecución.

Coro

... Y no nombré más nombres que mi nombre.
O tal vez les conté de mis amigos ...
Quién sabe si en las trampas de la muerte
quise cambiar entrega por alivio.
No me sentía ni traidor ni héroe,
fui [sic] solamente un desaparecido.
No me hablen de las puertas del infierno.
Mi bandera hecha harapos, tuve frío ...

La voz de un hombre

Vengo de donde
muchos no vuelven.
Sobreviviente.
Abro mi boca
y habla su voz
sobreviviente.
Yo llevo en ristre
su estandarte
sobreviviente.
Y a veces lloro
de rabia y miedo
sobreviviendo.

La voz de la madre

... Y me cubrí las canas
con un pañuelo blanco.
Y me fuí [sic] con las madres
de todos, a marchar.
Mi dolor era un zonda
viento, que purifica
arrasando a los tibios.
[Fue] un arma mi dolor.

Coro

Yo anduve el país de los cadalsos,
de mano en mano y con mi sangre a cuestras;
y ahora que mi historia se dibuja
de boca en boca y callan los culpables,
mis huesos van reclamando justicia
de puerta en puerta
y aunque ya sea tarde.

Appendix E:

Transcription of List from Carole Kismaris and William Shawcross (eds.),
Forced Out: The Agony of the Refugee in Our Time (n.p.: Penguin, 1989), p.53.

severe and prolonged beating

amputation of digits, ears, nose

application of thumb screws or other compressive instruments

picana eléctrica: victim tied with wet strips of cloth to metal bed or bed spring and shocked by electrodes attached to wrists, ankles, or genitals

wet submarine: victim's head submerged in tank of water, often filled with vomit, blood, urine, or feces, and held down until near asphyxiation

dry submarine: victim's head covered with plastic bag, often filled with noxious substances, preventing him from breathing

potro: victim's ankles and wrists tied to modified bed frame or table and simultaneously stretched

burns of the skin: victim burned with cigarettes, fire, caustic substances, or electric current

la bandera: hooded victim hung by the wrists so he is unable to touch floor

parrots perch: victim suspended head down from horizontal pole placed under the knees with wrists bound to ankles

sexual torture: victim raped homosexually [sic] or, if female, by one or more men.

Foreign bodies inserted into vagina or anus and twisted to cause painful tearing of tissue.

telephono: forceful and repeated blows with cupped hands to the external part of the ear

apollo: victim's head covered with metal hood to amplify the screams

diagnosis of mental illness: victim labeled as schizophrenic, paranoid, or schizoid and committed to mental wards for "treatment"

planton: victim, often hooded and forced to stand in one position for hours or days, sometimes with outstretched hands or while holding weights

falanga: victim tied to a bench while soles of his feet beaten with a cane, stick, or other wooden tool

el caballete: victim, hooded and handcuffed, forced to straddle violently moving iron bar suspended in mid-air

black slave: electrical apparatus that inserts heated metal skewer into victim's anus

cachots noirs: cells totally devoid of light

el quirofano: victim forced to lie on table for extended period of time, with upper portion of body unsupported

le petit déjeuner: victim made to drink own urine

le déjeuner: victim beaten systematically on the shoulders

le rodeo: victim forced to run or crawl carrying heavy weight until exhausted

cajones: prolonged confinement in a box or other restricted space

bastani murghi: victim's nose and neck bound with tight cord, forcing head back and causing

intense pressure on bridge of nose

stones thrown at testicles

deprivation of food, water, sleep

excrement in food

pharmacologic manipulation: victim given sodium pentothal, haloperidol, or chlorpromazine to cause confusion, disorientation or tremors

insulin injections to cause seizures