

Delaware Review of Latin American Studies

Vol. 13 No. 1 July 31, 2012

Personal and National Memory of Dictatorship in *La buena educación* by Liria Evangelista

Jeanie Murphy*

Hispanic Languages, Literatures and Cultures

Goucher College

jeanie.murphy@goucher.edu

Abstract: All cultural production, literature in particular, has the potential to create spaces in which the past can be re-envisioned and re-examined. In post-dictatorship Argentina there continues to be a great amount of diversity and dynamism with regard to writing on the nation's last experience with military rule. In *La buena educación*, Liria Evangelista makes use of a compelling and complicated web of memories in order to explore the psychological impact of growing up under an authoritarian regime. The feelings of fear and impotence that mark the experiences of the young protagonist become the foundation of her search for self-identity.

Keywords: Argentina, fiction, history, identity, memory, post-dictatorship

The defeat of Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas War¹ thirty years ago coupled with the nation's growing economic crisis and increasingly more outspoken challenges on both a national and international level to the human rights record of the regime are arguably the central factors that led to the end of military rule in that country. Thus, the year 1983, with the presidential elections that placed Raúl Alfonsín² in the Casa Rosada, marks the moment of political transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in Argentina. Nevertheless, as sociologist Elizabeth Jelin has observed, "democratization processes that follow military dictatorships are neither simple nor easy" (xvi). In fact, the restoration of formal democratic operations after a period of authoritarian rule is only the initial step for a nation that may well be facing such challenges as economic recession, significant political rivalries and continued social injustice. Inevitably, debates also surface over how to take action with regard to the long-term impact of state repression on the citizenry. Linked to political, legal and ethical arguments about how to memorialize victims and punish perpetrators of systematized violence is the question of how to understand and render accounts of the past. In addition to giving meaning to the memories that emerge after dictatorship in order to honor those who suffered human rights violations under the regime, there is a need as well to resist the danger of collective amnesia in the future.

Under the sometimes precarious circumstances of the re-democratization process and given the fact that the memories that come to light are multiple and heterogeneous, it stands to reason that the expression and representation of the past would be similarly varied. Hugo Vezzetti, for example, has often argued that a careful analysis of post-dictatorship Argentina requires a pluralistic perspective that would include socio-political action as well as contributions from national culture. In his article "Variaciones sobre la memoria social", Vezzetti recognizes the critical role that artistic production plays in the exploration of this history of state repression³. As the author explains,

La investigación histórica y la elaboración estética constituyen dos vertientes de la lucha contra el olvido que deberían ser puestas en juego cuando se juzga el estado de la "memoria social": el pasado ominoso requiere, para convertirse en una experiencia operante y transmisible, de imágenes y relatos, tanto como de interpretaciones racionales y conceptualizaciones (13).

The creative process here is considered to be part of a more complete portrayal of the memories of dictatorship; it is fundamental to the struggle against forgetting. In order to maintain and share the memories of past experiences, as well as to recognize the co-existence of diverging memories and to be able to examine and interpret these differences, artistic expression is just as necessary as those works that come from a more strictly historical investigation perspective.

Luis Martín-Estudillo and Roberto Ampuero have come to similar conclusions in their study of post-authoritarian cultures. As the authors argue, cultural production, before and after the end of dictatorial rule, must be examined as

both an initiating and continuing force in the restoration of a democratic system (xi). Noting Auerbach's concept of *Retardierung*, the authors also point to the fact that literature, perhaps more so than other art forms, "allows for the possibility to explore history in depth by slowing down events and focusing on crucial aspects through aesthetic and intellectual lenses" (xii). This is to say, writers play a crucial role in the analysis of a nation's past and the possibility of that nation to move forward. It is, therefore, possible for literature to participate in the ongoing work of creating a stable democracy with open dialogue about the past.

In an analogous acknowledgement of the significance of literature with regard to the formation of historical perspective and, thus, the rebuilding of democracy, Adrián Melo and Marcel Raffin, in *Obsesiones y fantasmas de la Argentina*, explore certain recurring themes in Argentine letters. The authors make the case that literary production has long played a vital role in parsing, explaining and helping to understand the nation's history, particularly the devastation of political violence. Their assertion is that "reality" cannot be repeated nor accurately recounted and, therefore, can only be examined through reinvention and re-creation. The boundary between reality and fiction becomes blurred but, in the process, difficult topics can be presented and analyzed. In this way, literary production can be the initiator of a newly envisioned history and literature can be "fuente y agente de la historia . . . [puede] recoge[r] parte de la memoria colectiva [y] también ayuda[r] a construirla" (100-101). As a result, significant socio-historic events and images become inscribed in the national culture and tradition.

There are numerous examples from the last thirty years of literary production in Argentina that speak to the assertions of these critics and it would be far beyond the scope of this study to include them all. Nevertheless, it is necessary to signal the many and diverse ways in which writers have expressed in their work their reaction to and interpretation of the repression, censorship and other traumas related to the period of the military regime. Soon after the fall of the dictatorship, for example, *Luna caliente* (1984) by Mempo Giardinelli appeared. A fast-paced, "hard-boiled" piece of crime fiction set in the late years of the dictatorship, the text explores the disruption of normative values that results when societies fall under regimes of systematized violence. Miguel Bonasso's *Recuerdo de la muerte* (1984) takes a radically different approach by fictionalizing the true story of Jaime Dri's detention, torture and eventual escape from a clandestine prison. Other literature from the first years after dictatorship include Héctor Tizon's *La casa y el viento* (1984), *La memoria extraviada* (1985) by Aníbal Cedrón and Martín Caparrós' *No velas a tus muertos* (1986) in which the author brings together a number of sources and discursive styles in order to recreate the frightening social atmosphere of the years of the Proceso.

Beatriz Sarlo has asserted that by the 1990s and into the new century Argentine literature no longer needed to defy the culture of silence that had characterized the period immediately following the military dictatorship. According to Sarlo, social and political changes, such as increased media coverage and the creation of memorials and other spaces in which to preserve memory, have freed literature from being the main form of resistance against oblivion.

En los ochenta faltaba discurso social. Hoy se difunde en todos los géneros imaginables. Por lo tanto la ficción no llena un vacío sobre el que ahora se vuelcan otros discursos y ya no puede sentir el imperativo de ser la primera (y la única), cuando los desaparecidos son temas de los *hits* de la telenovela, de la historia profesional, del periodismo o de decenas de exhibiciones de fotografías y objetos de la memoria . . . El lugar de la literatura ha pasado a ser otro. (2)

In spite of this very accurate observation on the part of Sarlo, it must also be noted that the re-creation and examination of historical memory in Argentina through literature has endured. Although they no longer need to fill a void of silence, writers in Argentina continue to revisit and question the past and, in this way, become part of the ongoing effort to maintain democracy. As Ana Forcinito has stated, "[m]emory as a social practice in the Argentine post-dictatorship continues to be open to new meanings, new questions, new recollections. . ." (78). Literature can and does play a role in the ongoing "social practice" of evaluating of the nation's past.

Historia argentina (1991), a collection of interrelated short stories by Rodrigo Fresán, with its alternatively cruel and absurd depiction of Argentine society under military dictatorship, demonstrates this continued need to portray painful aspects of the nation's past. Ricardo Piglia's 1992 novel, *La ciudad ausente*, creates an eerie Buenos Aires in which memories are appropriated and distorted or destroyed in order to hold on to political power. Tununa Mercado published *En estado de memoria*, a fictionalized memoir about exile and learning to understand one's memories through writing, in 1990. Elsa Osorio's *A veinte años luz* (1998) also examines the role of memory after dictatorship, in this case to help determine the truth and recover the identity of the children of the disappeared. In 2003, María Teresa Andruetto published *La mujer en cuestión*, a novel dealing very specifically with memories of the dictatorship and the fragmented and often contradictory ways in which one remembers the past. In *Casa de los conejos* (2008), Laura Alcoba, who has lived in France since she was ten years old, explores the issue of her own repressed memories of childhood in Argentina in the early 1970s and the need to narrate.

A fairly recent novel, *La buena educación* (2009) by first-time novelist, Liria Evangelista, continues this examination of the importance of memory and narration after national tragedy. The text offers a literary interpretation of Argentina's Proceso de Reorganización Nacional that serves to bear witness to the psychological impact that institutionalized campaigns of terror have on the citizens not directly associated with the state apparatus nor movements of resistance. Specifically, the text explores the role of memory, both individual and social, in the process of creating one's sense of self and how an individual's experience of coming of age under military dictatorship can influence the formation of identity.

La buena educación opens with Laura, the young protagonist, and her father, Antonio Borrelli, on the patio of the family home, burning a small collection of books and putting a few others aside to be buried. As Laura follows the flight of the ashes up and away from the fire, she is struck by the notion that she is witnessing the destruction of her own personal world; she feels an essential part of her own being is also disappearing in the blaze. As helicopters patrol overhead, Laura remembers how her mother, Beba, pleaded with Antonio, in the interest of protecting their adolescent daughter, to eliminate all tangible traces of his political sympathies. The memory of Beba's appeals, however, brings nothing but shame and disgust to Laura as she considers her mother's concerns to be cowardly and shortsighted. She instinctively sides with her father, a working-class Italian immigrant, as he mourns the loss of his treasured texts. She remembers with fondness the nights she spent with him at the kitchen table listening to *Radio Habana* as they read *Novedades de la Unión Soviética* and other Party literature. The shared texts created a bond between father and daughter that continues to influence Laura long after her father is no longer a part of her daily life.

This initial scene highlights two of the main themes of *La buena educación*. The first is the role of literature and reading in the protagonist's life and, thus, her intellectual development. Books are the constant companions of Laura and she is a voracious reader. Nevertheless, the purpose of these books is not quite so fixed. They alternately serve as guides for her political formation, an escape from the dysfunction of her family life, an academic challenge, an opportunity to connect with others and a declaration of independence.

In addition to signaling the connection that Laura feels to the written word, the narration of the book burning also points to the importance of memory in the novel, particularly with regard to the construction of one's own identity. As Paul Antze and Michael Lambek have observed in their text, *Tense Past*, "any invocation of memory is part of an identity discourse"(xxi). In other words, as Antze and Lambek explain, the act of remembering is an attempt to mediate one's life experiences and to put them into meaningful terms. Remembering is the basis for one's sense of self or self-understanding. In this way, memory of the past also plays a fundamental role in the present and offers a sense of continuity and permanence of selfhood. For Laura, the destruction of the small but cherished family library becomes a memory that will live with her for many years and come to constitute an essential part of her being. With each subsequent moment of loss or suffering, she will remember the scene on the back patio and replay the sense of anguish and powerlessness she felt as she offered "una despedida final a ese universo" (10) being consumed by the flames or relegated to a plastic bag for interment.

La buena educación, to a large extent, revolves around the process of remembering and reconstructing the past. The novel is built primarily on the partial remains of memories; there are flashes of conversations, visions of particular events and the reminiscence of shared moments that have marked the life of Laura. Although Laura does grow and mature--she leaves her sheltered immigrant neighborhood for the university; she becomes deeply attached to her first lover, Esteban, and then must leave the unhealthy relationship; she gains confidence in her own independence and intellectual abilities--the story does not follow a simple, chronological order, nor does it detail the daily existence of Laura. Rather, there is a frequent replay of certain key moments in the life of the protagonist and voices from the past, such as those of her parents, family friends and even authors she has read, return to repeat their words to her, as if haunting her and compelling her to come to terms with those earlier years in order to better understand herself and the sociopolitical context of her youth. Thus, the form of the narrative is analogous to its content. Just as memory, with many non-linear twists, continually folds upon itself and complicates our concept of chronology, so, too, does Laura's story. Furthermore, it is this varied and at times conflicting series of voices speaking to the protagonist that reveals the complex process of constructing self-identity and the inescapable influences of the past on one's own subjectivity. Laura must make sense of her personal experiences on her own yet she cannot deny the ascendancy of others in that story. The intrusion of these voices suggests the central role of community in the creation of an individual's sense of being.

The plurality of perspectives that results from the dialogical nature of the novel also impedes the formation of one single, monolithic voice within the text. This heteroglossia can be interpreted as a challenge to an intransigent system of absolute truths, such as one imposed under dictatorial regimes. As Mikhail Bakhtin has demonstrated, when characters' voices are subordinated to that of one central narrator, the unifying effect creates a closed text in

which the narrative voice is the authority. The introduction of various voices, however, makes that apparent authority of the unified text impossible and, by extension, calls into question any imposition of categorical pronouncements. In this way, the voices that interrupt the narration of Laura's story can be understood as a form of narrative resistance to the time period being related and we begin to see the struggle of Laura against the limitations of that society.

As voices from Laura's past come back to her, she is not always certain about how they fit into her still changing sense of self. She recalls, for example, the admiring comments of her father and his companions when she would sing the songs of Republican Spain or listen to their conversations about the glories of Communism in the Soviet Union. She was happy to be their "buena pionera de la revolución" and the adored "gauchita, pibita"(44). Yet, as a university student, when these words come back to her, she feels both shame for the provincial outlook of her upbringing and guilt for her desire to abandon it. Though not without some difficulty, she joyously and assiduously applies herself to her Greek, Latin and literature courses at the same time that she still closely identifies with her childhood. However, the more she devotes herself to esoteric topics, the more she realizes her rejection of the world of her working-class family. Everyone would be proud of "la piba de don Antonio, la que soñaba revoluciones" (78) but she begins to doubt if she will ever again be able to relate to the people of her past and she is embarrassed by what they represent. She feels blameworthy yet she has a desire to break free from the constraints of that other place and time. Similarly, her sense of invulnerability as a young person is often presented in sharp contrast to the dangerous realities of the society in which she lives. Not fully understanding the changes that have occurred in her city but aware that she must be careful, she enjoys the time she spends with classmates after school in bars and cafés. The memory of the voice of her mother, Beba, interrupts the apparent calm and reveals the threats that do exist.

. . . se sentó a tomar café en el bar con sus compañeros, como hacían siempre después de clase, para fumar, tomar ginebra y hablar de las pocas cosas que se podían hablar en voz alta (tengo miedo de que no vuelvas a casa, tirada en un basural, así que calladita, nena) . . . (89)

Although the cursory acknowledgment that there are "pocas cosas [de] que se podían hablar" also belies a perfectly tranquil university scene, it is the intervention of Beba's concerns that truly serves to question the presumed safety of innocent youth. As Donna Guy has shown in her study of the Argentine military's intolerance of young people, the authoritarian regime made young adulthood a particularly precarious time. Guy affirms that, given the high percentage of young victims, the Dirty War was not only an ideological conflict but also "a war against youth" (16). Beba's fears underscore this menacing atmosphere. As a result, the supposed truths that shaped Laura's younger years, such as the belief that she would always be a proud member of a close-knit group or that university studies would open her up to new possibilities, not new dangers, are challenged by her recollections of the past, the intrusion of voices from that past and her reaction to them.

The various voices that interrupt the flow of the narration also add to a sense of fragmentation in the novel. The sometimes disconnected nature of the text serves to comment on how the social subject and society as a whole have changed after years of dictatorship and the extremes of its repression. The gaps in the story and the disintegration of a coherent narration suggest the feeling of loss experienced during and following the military regime. As Elaine Scarry has elaborated in *The Body in Pain*, the experience of torture and pain affects the victim in such a way that his or her "world, self and voice are lost or nearly lost . . ." (35). The intensity of the suffering causes a break down of reality; there is no longer any means by which to apprehend and communicate the familiar and the normal. In this way, the world is "unmade" for those subjected to torture and they are at a loss for the language that can adequately express their physical and psychological torment. Liria Evangelista takes Scarry's assertions one step further in both her fiction and non-fiction. Moving beyond a focus on the individual subject, she explains in her monograph, *Voices of the Survivors*, that the seven years of military rule in Argentina affected the entire population in such a way that all of society was "unmade". According to Evangelista, this "collective unmaking" (xix) of the nation was brought about as political and social dreams were violently destroyed and life became unrecognizable. The utopian visions and revolutionary hopes of a generation were lost with the most unimaginable cruelty and the effects were felt even by those not directly involved with the political struggle. A text such as *La buena educación* that now relates that period with fragmented and often repetitive language and stories reflects the ruins of those aspirations and ambitions and attempts to make sense of a time when all meaning was lost. The result is that a feeling of wholeness continues to be illusory and this is noticed in the way in which the life and memories of Laura are presented.

Although, as has been stated, the historical context of the novel is that of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, the political situation of the country is never openly mentioned nor discussed. In effect, *La buena educación* is a novel about Argentina's last military regime that never recognizes the regime in those terms. Rather, the

atmosphere is constructed around silence. This, of course, alludes to the silence imposed on the citizenry by the dictatorship. Just as Beba's insistence that Laura remain "calladita" reflects the need to protect oneself, so too, the overall tone of the novel creates a climate of unease in which certain words or ideas cannot be expressed. There is no open talk of dictatorship. Instead, the need to burn or hide certain books on a warm afternoon in late March establishes a clear association with the beginning of military rule in Argentina. Similarly, the nightmare that torments Laura, of "un río que arrastraba cadáveres azules", at the same time that the country "celebraba un mundial de fútbol" (61) is an indication of both the time period and the horrific tactics employed by the repressive regime.

The multiple references to activities and attitudes associated with the Argentine Proceso also underscore the fact that Laura's memories and identity are tied to the events outside her immediate experience in spite of the fear to acknowledge these happenings. This is the story of one young person; however, her story is inextricably linked to her social and political surroundings. Her personal memories are embedded in the social framework of the time and place in which she lives. Theories on memory have argued just this point asserting that individual recollections always have a connection to the social context. It is impossible to separate one's memories from the sociopolitical context that is likewise being recalled. Understanding personal recollection as part of a larger setting also implies that the individual mnemonic process works in dialogue with that of others and as a consequence helps shape a sense of collective memory⁴.

The tension between Laura's parents that was evident the day of the book burning eventually leads to their separation. Laura's relationship with Beba becomes more strained as she feels little pity for her mother's struggle with loneliness. When Laura becomes involved with Esteban she quickly decides to abandon her mother and move in with her lover. Although Laura believes this rebellion will allow her more control over her own life and destiny, it soon becomes evident that this will not be the case. As she rejects the expectations and limitations placed on her by Beba, she becomes more emotionally dependent on Esteban. The fact that this relationship will actually leave her feeling more trapped and insecure is highlighted by yet another reminder of the time period in which the story is taking place. One afternoon, as Esteban begins to kiss Laura and caress her, he forcefully pushes her against a window and asks her to describe what she sees on the street below. The violence of his actions seems to have a counterpart in the activities in the street:

La empujó de cara a la ventana y se le paró atrás. La abrazó y la obligó a mirar más allá del cristal . . . Decime qué ves . . . le preguntó lamiéndole el cuello. No veo nada hubiera querido decirle . . . Gente con verduras, el portero barriendo la vereda . . . Pasa un patrullero. Un Falcón lo sigue a toda velocidad y doblan en la esquina con un chirrido . . . La empujó todavía más contra la ventana. El marco se le clavó abajo de las tetas y no la dejaba respirar. (127)

The scene suggests a parallel between the violence in the apartment and the upcoming violence in the street. Additionally, Esteban's aggression in pushing Laura against the semi-public space of the window, making it difficult for her to breathe, coupled with the view from above of an operation of the paramilitary forces, implies an obscuring of the separation between the public and the private. With just a piece of glass to separate the hostile acts, the distinction between the two social spheres becomes blurred. Moreover, the mention of the Ford Falcon⁵, the vehicle forever connected in the Argentine subconscious to clandestine police activity, serves as a reminder of the tactics of the military regime: the intrusion of police into private homes and the conversion of private spaces into sites of detention. It is significant to note that Laura will eventually come to see herself as a prisoner of Esteban and will realize the need to liberate herself from the overbearing constraints he imposes on her. Esteban's behavior also reveals the connection between the potential for violence in a political context with that same potential in personal relationships. It is a reminder of the cycle of violence studied by social scientists such as Guillermo O'Donnell and Antonius Robben⁶ who have noted how institutionalized violence damages the daily lives of the population. Systematic, organized regimes of terror not only cause strangers to be suspicious of one another; they can also have a distorting effect on interpersonal relationships among family and friends.

The importance of this encounter with Esteban is also to note that, once again, Laura's experience and, therefore, her identity, are in part created by her social surroundings. In the supposed safety of the couple's apartment, Laura is made to feel insecure by her lover's actions as well as the outside scene he forces her to watch.

Although she is too young at the time of the military coup to become fully involved in the politics of resistance, Laura is nonetheless deeply traumatized by the events in her country. She is just thirteen or fourteen years old when she helps her father with the backyard bonfire that will leave such a significant imprint on her memories and sense of self. She likewise suffers from sadistic fantasies about hurting her parents and violent nightmares that, as Esteban confirms for her, are more than dream-time replays of scenes from her favorite Russian novels.

Laura le contó su sueño. Su príncipe, la espada y la sangre. Los muertos en la batalla, el olor a mierda, el río y los cadáveres a la deriva como flores podridas . . . No fue un sueño, lo tuyo no fue un sueño. Yo los vi, Laura . . . Cuando hacía la colimba. Los vi, llegaban a la playa y el agua los iba empujando . . . Escuchame, escuchame vos a mí, ahora, Laura . . . Lamían la playa y se quedaban mirando el cielo con los ojos abiertos . . . [pero] Los ojos no estaban abiertos, Laura, estaban arrancados . . . (131)

The fact that Laura's dreams reflect not her own lived experience but rather the larger sociopolitical reality further links her story to that of the country's. As Antonius Robben has noted, the years of political violence in Argentina created a social trauma that touched every citizen. Given that "the psychic, physical, social, political and cultural became affected [by the state repression and] . . . traumatiz[ed] Argentine society as a whole . . ." (344), it is reasonable to read Laura's horrific visions as the outcome of living under an authoritarian regime. Additionally, Laura's nightmares, filled with death and despair, can also be read in a Freudian context as a traumatic experience being managed in an indirect manner. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud emphasizes the damage trauma can do to the human psyche and the need to revisit that trauma in order to understand it and overcome its destructive impact. In this way, the dreams of Laura are a means by which she can confront the social tragedy and attempt to grasp its full significance. We are also reminded here of Freud's interpretation of history as one long story of violence imposed on the human psyche. Through her dreams and fantasies, there emerges in Laura's story a vision of the interconnectedness among all human beings based on the universal experience of trauma.

Laura's dreams, in addition to revealing a fundamental link between the protagonist and her society, also suggest a sense of guilt for her complicity with the repressive project of the state. When Laura and her father burn the books of their cherished library, they are, in effect, participating in their own silencing, acquiescing to the authoritarian designs of the military government. Years later, as a university student, Laura feels frustrated by the limits placed on her by the dictatorial regime but also by her inability to challenge those limits. As she often recalls the day of the bonfire, she has the sensation that she is now as silent as the books.

Aquí no se puede y no se debe. Laura sabía que su padre iba a entenderla, ¿cómo no entenderla, si el fuego se había llevado los libros, si todo lo que había sido su vida quedó cerrado en una bolsa? ¿Podriéndose? ¿Agusanándose? El fuego te llevó a vos también, viejo. Y yo aquí calladita. Todos calladitos. Obedientes al silencio. Mudos a pesar de las palabras. (92)

In addition to Laura's need to overcome her own complicity with the culture of silence, it is also interesting to signal the connection that Laura makes between the destruction of the family library and death. The scene of the book burning in the back patio, forever fixed in her memory, is vividly described in terms of carnage and death, as if it were a battlefield after the combat.

[sólo quedaba] ese olor inmundito . . ., olor a carroña, a cadáver descompuesto que los buitres . . . podían oler, se estarían relamiendo con el hedor de tanta muerte junta, preparándose para lanzarse en picada sobre ese mundo calcinado (11).

Significantly, Laura's dreams often contain much of the same deathlike imagery and, in one instance, just before waking, she realizes that "no había otro lugar que los muertos y el río. Habría que vivir entre cadáveres. Ella y su viejo y su vieja, y todos. Entre cadáveres"(53). In this dream, she and her parents must resign themselves to an existence filled with death just as they did when the carcasses of mutilated books were scattered behind their house. The act of eliminating their beloved books is linked to the violence of the state.

The brief closing chapter of the novel gives the work a circular structure. In the final pages, Laura, now a middle-aged woman, sits on a park bench and puts on her reading glasses so as to better see the page on which she is going to compose her thoughts. She writes: "el día que quemaron los libros, Laura todavía no había leído a Borges . . ." (181). These very same words with which the novel opens serve to close the story as well. The phrase, of course, indicates that the author of the pages has been Laura. At the same time, this recollection underscores the role that memory and the re-creation of history play in the novel. The fragmented story of Laura has been written by the protagonist herself in an attempt to recapture, order and better understand the past. As Susan Brison has affirmed, acts of memory are an opportunity to remake the self; remembering is an empowering activity in which one can gain control of the past and, in the process, become an agent in one's own life. Memory stabilizes subjects. In spite of its non-linear nature, remembering offers a sense of continuity and coherence to an individual's concept of the past. Additionally, the fact that Laura takes up the pen and commits herself to the act of writing suggests an attempt to undo or reverse the destructive act of burning books as well as a rejection of the imposed silence under which she has lived for many years. Although the material result of her writing--the novel we read--

still reflects the atmosphere of silence that dominated her youth, Laura is taking a stance against it. The frustration and helplessness she felt as a young student can finally be overcome through the creation of the written word and participation in an examination of the past.

The Argentine “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” is fundamental to the context of Liria Evangelista’s novel *La buena educación*. The societal trauma caused by the political repression of the 1970s and early 80s cannot be overlooked. Key moments in the young protagonist’s life point to the violence and fear that had overtaken the country at the time. The act of remembering on the part of Laura, her attempt to order the events and voices of her past, within this context of military dictatorship, is the first step in her process of gaining a greater knowledge of herself and the times in which she came of age. The writing of her memories can be seen as a form of resistance against past silence as well as the creation of a site of interaction between her past and her present. As she explores the significance of that past, a clearer concept of her own identity begins to emerge. Yet we must be aware that memory is not only an individual event but also a cultural and social phenomenon. The memory act that brings past and present together on a personal level, when shared, has the potential to create a shift in the outlook of the larger society as well and thus bring with it a hope for change in the future. As Laura recalls her life and the politics that shaped her experience, she is able to see herself for the first time “con tenura” (180). The implication is that as the text moves beyond the individual self-examination, the social tragedies of the past may also be explored in order to promote national healing. As with other novels of the post-dictatorship, *La buena educación* is thus able to contribute to the Argentine project of re-democratization. We are reminded again of the crucial role literature can play in understanding history and fomenting change. Literature that rejects an attitude of forgetfulness toward the past can be instrumental in exploring the wounds of the past and indicating a way to heal in the future. The diversity of literary approaches in exploring the experience of military rule in Argentina demonstrates the need for an honest and multi-faceted examination of the past in order for the entire nation to continue to move forward.

Notes

- 1 In April 1982, in an attempt to inspire nationalist pride and divert the country’s attention away from growing criticism of the regime, the Argentine military invaded the British held Falkland Islands (known as the Malvinas in Argentina) in the south Atlantic. Although Argentina had long disputed the claim, the United Kingdom had exercised de facto control of the islands since the early 19th century. Misjudging the British desire to retain control of the islands, the Argentine forces surrendered after 74 days of combat.
- 2 Raúl Alfonsín (1927-2009) of the Radical Civic Union (UCR) party was the first democratically elected president in Argentina following the military dictatorship of 1976-1983. Alfonsín had been a member of the national Parliament before the military regime and he co-founded the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights in Argentina.
- 3 See also Vezzetti’s text *Pasado y presente: Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina*.
- 4 For further reading on the connection between individual memories and their social context, see Elizabeth Jelin’s *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting* and the text *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer.
- 5 Fernando Reati’s article “El Ford Falcon: Un icono del terror en el imaginario argentino de la posdictadura” offers a very comprehensive explanation of the fear inspired by this symbol of the dictatorship’s far-reaching repression and its repeated appearance in the cultural production of post-dictatorship Argentina.
- 6 Guillermo O’Donnell’s *¿Y a mí, qué me importa?* and Antonius Robben’s *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* explore the sociological and psychological effects of State repression in Argentina. O’Donnell’s *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* also serves as an excellent introduction to the political workings of the regime.

Works Cited

- Alcoba, Laura. *La casa de los conejos*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Edhasa, 2008.
- Andruetto, María Teresa. *La mujer en cuestión*. Córdoba, Argentina: Alción Editora, 2003.
- Antze, Paul and Michael Lambek, eds. *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.
- Bal, Mieke, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer, eds. *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999.
- Bonasso, Miguel. *Recuerdo de la muerte*. Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984.
- Brison, Susan. "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of Self." In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999. 39-54.
- Caparrós, Martín. *No velas a tus muertos*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1986.
- Cedrón, Anibal. *La memoria extraviada*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Cartago, 1985.
- Evangelista, Liria. *Voices of the Survivors: Testimony, Mourning and Memory in Post-Dictatorship Argentina, 1993-1995*. Trans. Renzo Llorente. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.
- . *La buena educación*. Buenos Aires: El fin de la noche, 2009.
- Forcinito, Ana. "Testimonial Narratives in the Argentine Post-Dictatorship." In *Post-Authoritarian Cultures: Spain and Latin America's Southern Cone*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2008. 77-98.
- Fresán, Rodrigo. *Historia argentina*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1991.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Collected Works*. Seattle: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010.
- Giardinelli, Mempo. *Luna caliente*. Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984.
- Guy, Donna. "The Shifting Meanings of Childhood and 'N.N.'." *Latin American Perspectives*. 35.15 (2008): 15-29.
- Jelin, Elizabeth. *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*. Trans. Judy Rein and Marcial Godoy-Anatívia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Martín-Estudillo, Luis and Roberto Ampuero, eds. *Post-Authoritarian Cultures: Spain and Latin America's Southern Cone*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2008.
- Melo, Adrian and Marcelo Raffin. *Obsesiones y fantasmas de la Argentina: El antisemitismo, Evita, los desaparecidos y Malvinas en la ficción literaria*. Buenos Aires: Del Puerto, 2005.
- Mercado, Tununa. *En estado de memoria*. Buenos Aires: Ada Korn Editora, 1990.
- Morris, Pam, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. *¿Y a mí, qué me importa? Notas sobre sociabilidad y política en Argentina y Brasil*. Buenos Aires: Estudios CEDES, 1984.
- . *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina 1966-1973 in Comparative Perspective*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1988.
- Osorio, Elsa. *A veinte años luz*. Barcelona: Alba Editorial, 1998.
- Piglia, Ricardo. *La ciudad ausente*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1992.
- Reati, Fernando. "El Ford Falcon: Un icono del terror en el imaginario argentino de la posdictadura." *Revista de estudios hispánicos*. 43.2 (May 2009): 385-407.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Robben, Antonius C.G.M. *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. Philadelphia: U Penn Press, 2005.

Sarlo, Beatriz. "Sujetos y tecnologías: La novela después de la historia." *Punto de Vista*. No. 86: 1-6.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Tizán, Héctor. *La casa y el viento*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Legasa, 1984.

Vezzetti, Hugo. *Pasado y presente: Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2003.

----. "Variaciones sobre la memoria social." *Revista de Crítica Cultural*. No. 17 (November 1998): 8-13.

***Acknowledgement:** I wish to express my appreciation to Goucher College and the Aitchison Faculty Development Grant for the material and moral support given to me while I researched and wrote this article.