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Dr. Susan Larson, Director of Graduate Studies

THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMATIC REALISM IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF
MARTÍN CAPARRÓS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Paul Alexander Roggendorff

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Susan E. Carvalho, Professor of Spanish

Lexington, Kentucky

2012

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMATIC REALISM IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF MARTÍN CAPARRÓS

The Spanish expression *haciendo memoria* is almost always translated as “remembering.” I chose the literal translation “making memory” because it more adequately describes the task of mourning that takes place when dealing with trauma. Psychology tells us that when a traumatic event occurs, only a non-narrative imprint of an event is recorded —seared— in the mind, and the narrative form must be created. Only then can it be mentally manipulated and even communicated and —in both a literal and a literary sense— made history.

The trauma explored in this study is centered on the dirty war in Argentina of the 1970’s and 1980’s. This period is usually framed as the excessively brutal and violent extermination of armed rebels by the last Argentine military dictatorship (March 1976 – December 1983). But this emplotment of history does not adequately explain the origins or the severity of the violence. In part, it is this narrative deficit which keeps the trauma fresh in the Argentine collective consciousness. There is an overwhelming wealth of information about this period; yet the traditional models for framing history do not seem to suit the data nor do they fully capture the ethos. They are like loose characters and events searching for a story in which to belong or a narrative to call home. Part of the mourning process is the creation of emplotments and narrative structures which can make sense —make memory— of the dirty war.

This dissertation focuses on the early narrative of Martín Caparrós, one of the narrative voices ‘making memory’ of this time period. In my dissertation I will explore his first three novels against the backdrop of Michael Rothberg’s study “Traumatic Realism”, which identifies three dimensions of the representation of traumatic history: a demand for documentation, a demand for reflection on the limits of representation, and a demand for engagement with the public sphere. I will disentangle Caparrós’ complex narrative techniques in order to uncover his early struggle with these three demands, as he attempts to create his own constellation of meaning.

KEYWORDS: Martín Caparrós, Traumatic Realism, No velas a tus muertos, Ansay ó los infortunios de la gloria, La noche anterior.

Paul Roggendorff

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May 6, 2012

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TO GEORGE AND BERTHA

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Chapter 1: Caparrós's Constellation of Meaning

The Spanish expression *haciendo memoria* is almost always translated as 'remembering.' I would prefer the literal translation 'making memory' in connection with this investigation because it more adequately describes the task of mourning that takes place when dealing with trauma. Psychology tells us that when a shocking event occurs, only a non-narrative imprint of an event is recorded—seared—in the mind, causing the initial trauma. These loose memories, devoid of a narrative frame which inscribes them in time and place, can easily re-present themselves involuntarily when triggered by a random sensory stimulus—a peculiar aroma, a loud sound, a specific image—making the person re-create, re-live and re-experience the trauma afresh. The way out of the cyclical re-creation of trauma is to create a narrative for it. Only then can it be mentally manipulated and even communicated and—in both a literal and a literary sense—made history.

The trauma explored in this study is centered on the dirty war in Argentina of the 1970's and 1980's. It is usually framed as the excessively brutal and violent extermination of armed rebels by the last Argentine military dictatorship (March 1976 – December 1983). But this emplotment of history does not adequately explain the origins or the severity of the violence. In part, it is this narrative deficit which keeps the trauma fresh in the Argentine collective consciousness. There is an overwhelming wealth of information about this period yet the traditional models for framing history do not seem to suit the data nor do they fully capture the ethos. They are like loose characters and events searching for a story in which to belong or a narrative to call home. Part of the mourning process is the creation of

emplotments and narrative structures which can make sense—make memory—of the dirty war.

One of the narrative voices ‘making memory’ of this trauma belongs to Martín Caparrós. During his high school years he belonged to the *Juventud Peronista* and *Montoneros* movements, and in 1976 went into exile in Spain and France, where he completed a degree in history from the Sorbonne. He has written extensively on the 1960’s and 1970’s in Argentina, in both novels and non-fiction genres. Through this work, he has become one of the leading thinkers who is ‘making memory’ of the dirty war. The remainder of this introduction will define some of the important terms and concepts to be explored and will conclude with an outline of the remaining chapters.

State Terrorism: Political Antecedents, Traumatic Effects

Throughout the 20th century, Argentina suffered six military coups—1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976—the last one being the longest and bloodiest of all. A civilian government followed each of these dictatorships. Some transitions, like the one between José Félix Uriburu, dictator between 1930 and 1932, and Agustín P. Justo were merely the transference of power to a civilian government who carried on with basically the same political agenda and economic policy. Other transitions, like the one between General Edelmiro Farrell and Juan Domingo Perón in 1946, ushered in a significant change in the government’s fundamental politics and economics. Perón’s radically new political program incorporated some aspects of Italian—and to a lesser extent German—fascism; most notably placing the working class’s needs at the center of economic policy while fostering a strong nationalist

cultural identity. While Peronism gave voice to a large disenfranchised sector of Argentine society, it inevitably displaced the traditional landed elite, as well as a mature middle class, who now forged a political alliance based on their common perceived enemy, and turned to a sympathetic and conservative military for aid in expediting a 'return to normalcy.' These two antagonistic centers of political power wrestled for control over Argentina for over 40 years.

In the struggle for preeminence in power, the single most important loss was the collapse of political institutions. After the 1930 military coup, the Argentine Supreme Court handed down a ruling on the legitimacy of the new president, which became the basis for the authority of de-facto governments (Gillespie 4-5). By permitting an alternative to the electoral process to stand as a legitimate path to the presidency, the Supreme Court effectively made the electoral process irrelevant for the next fifty years. The rest of the political institutions fell like dominoes. The irrelevance of the electoral process undermined the legislative branch, which derives its power from the consent of the people through elections. With the legislative branch powerless in the system of checks and balances, the judicial lost its check power over the executive as well. Nearly all formal political power were now channeled through the office and the person of the president, giving rise to personal power based on either being the president, or in one's ability to influence the president through advice or requests.

If the basis for the president's political power lay in his ability to command the military to either install him in office or defend him from adversaries, many opposition leaders saw armed rebellion as the only alternative. Some, like the

Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL), *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR), and *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), took the tactic of directly engaging the military through guerilla warfare. Others, like the Peronist, used armed rebellion (carried out by their armed wings, like the *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP) and later the *Montoneros*) as one means among many to destabilize the government, thus causing its collapse. The masses also employed other direct methods of exercising their raw, unmediated power, such as strikes, riots and non-compliance with the law.

American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington coined the term Mass Praetorianism to describe the nearly impossible task of governing a state whose political institutions have been eliminated. Praetorianism is the power to install or remove anyone from the highest office of government virtually at whim, much like the Praetorian Guard did with many Roman emperors after Tiberius and Caligula.

Enrique Peruzzotti succinctly describes this phenomenon:

Huntington presents praetorianism as a result of a developmental lag of political institutionalization in relation to socioeconomic development and social mobilization. The result is political mobilization without political integration. New social and political actors are being mobilized without the simultaneous building of political institutions that could articulate and aggregate their demands. In the absence of mediating institutional mechanisms, social and political forces confront each other 'nakedly', i.e., their politicization is not channeled by institutional mechanisms but consists of an unmediated war of all against all.

It bears reminding at this point that Thomas Hobbes had proposed that the natural state of the political man was of “war of all against all.” By early 1976, forty five years of unmitigated institutional erosion had taken its toll. Argentina’s

economy was in shambles, the political leadership of Isabelita Perón was bankrupt, and the guerrilla organizations made death a daily spectacle.

Hobbes solution to the problem of “war of all against all” was the mutual consent of all to consolidate all power in a single individual or small group, which he called the Leviathan. Argentine political scientist Guillermo O’Donnell coined the term *Bureaucratic Authoritarian State* to describe the particular way in which the Hobbesian Leviathan manifested itself in Argentina—and throughout the rest of Latin America—during the second half of the twentieth century. The notable difference between Bureaucratic Authoritarianism and traditional dictatorships like Nicaragua’s under Daniel Ortega or Spain’s under Francisco Franco is the establishment of military regimes run by committees.

The 1976 military coup received superfluous praise by nearly all sectors of society. Argentine author and intellectual figure Jorge Luis Borges famously labeled it the “gentleman’s coup” (Feitlowitz, 6). Jacob Vincent, an American missionary who moved to Argentina in 1973, reported that:

Everyone that we know, who has expressed themselves was more than ready for the military takeover. They were fed up with the inability of the elected government. There were no mass demonstrations against the *coup* and a very noticeable sigh of relief was evident amongst most of the population (Vincent, 10, emphasis in original.).

The problem of creating a Hobbesian Leviathan to govern a country is that the order they impose exacts a high price. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of Bureaucratic Authoritarianism is the regimes’ unparalleled brutality and suppression of civil society and political movements. In Argentina, the de-facto government mounted a de-facto war, commonly referred to as the *guerra sucia*.

The *guerra sucia*, or dirty war is, in many ways, a term still in search of a definition. There are a few non-controversial facts associated with it which help make the term useful. It is well known that it involved illegal acts of terror such as robbing, kidnapping, torturing, and murdering. It is also well known that most—if not all—these illegal acts were not brought to justice, but were committed with impunity. It is also a fact that the acts were committed by armed paramilitary revolutionaries, armed syndicates, the police and the military. Finally, it is generally agreed that it ended in December 1983 with the exit of the military regime, although even in this there is room for debate.

The beginning, however, is more controversial. Some historians place it at the beginning of the sixth and final military coup in Argentina, in 1976. Others place it at the inception of the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (AAA), a terrorist group funded by Perón's government which started operating in 1973. Others place it with the beginnings of the *Montoneros* and *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP) and the beginning of the fifth military coup, in 1966. Others place it with the inception of the *Uturuncos*, the first leftist terrorist group, in 1961, or even with the first person to “disappear” under a military regime, in 1959.

It is commonly agreed that the different actors in this war committed different types of illegal acts. Usually, the armed paramilitary killed military personnel in the northern jungles of the country in guerrilla warfare; the urban revolutionaries engaged in vandalism, robbery, kidnappings and assassinations; and the syndicates were responsible for many assassinations. But the most insidious illegal acts were perpetrated by the police and military against *possible* enemies of

the state, who were made to ‘disappear.’ These victims were first sequestered—or *chupados*—without any due process. If this happened at their home, their property was usually looted as well. They were taken to clandestine detention centers—or *chupaderos*—where they were tortured. The largest of these centers was the *Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), through which it is estimated some three thousand people were detained at one time or another, although there were over six hundred other centers throughout the country. While some were detained for several years and were released when the dictatorship ended, and some were released without any explanations, the vast majority of the *desaparecidos* were killed, or ‘executed,’ their bodies dumped in mass graves, incinerated or flown out to sea where they were dumped. In much smaller—yet still significant—numbers, children born in captivity or taken captive under the age of two were given up for adoption to friends and families loyal to the military regime. In even smaller numbers, some of the detained adults suffered from the so-called ‘Stockholm syndrome’ and worked for the military personnel, and in very few instances even gained enough freedom to run errands. In all cases, however, when family members or friends inquired about their loved ones, no information was ever given.

Once victims entered this system, they became *desaparecidos*. The then president of the Military Junta, Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla, when pressed to provide a list of the people who had disappeared, defined *desaparecido* as follows:

¿Qué es un desaparecido? En cuanto esté como tal, es una incógnita el desaparecido. Si reapareciera tendría un tratamiento X, y si la desaparición se convirtiera en certeza de su fallecimiento tendría un tratamiento Z. Pero mientras sea desaparecido no puede tener ningún tratamiento especial, es una incógnita, es un desaparecido, no tiene

entidad, no está, ni muerto ni vivo, está desaparecido. (Clarín, 14 Dec 1979)

By making the *desaparecido* someone who is neither dead nor alive, s/he is regarded with indifference for which nothing can be done. Because a person who is a *desaparecido* could fall under either category, the *desaparecido* is really neither alive nor dead. It is a fate worse than death. As Elie Wiesel famously stated: “the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference.”

One fact for which there is more consensus now than when the dirty war ended is the number of casualties. The deaths of police and military personnel have been estimated fairly closely to around 677 individuals who died in armed confrontation. The far greater and more ambiguous number is of the *desaparecidos*. The *Comisión Nacional de los Desaparecidos* (CONADEP) was able to document the cases of nearly nine thousand individuals while Amnesty International claimed an estimate of over thirty thousand. By the late eighties the discovery of some mass graves increased the official count to thirteen thousand, and the release of U.S. President Richard Nixon’s administration documents revealed a communiqué between Argentina’s Armed forces and Henry Kissinger in which the Argentines were admitting secretly to nearly twenty-seven thousand by 1978.

The greatest challenge to establishing a full definition is the lack of consensus on how to emplot these facts and into which metanarrative they should be emplotted. The first metanarrative was the one employed by the leftist groups which framed their actions in terms of a “civil revolutionary war.” They took their examples from the Russian revolution, Mao’s Chinese revolution, Castro’s Cuban revolution, the examples of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and the *Tupamaros* in other

South American countries. The biggest or most important of these groups were the *ERP*, the *Frente Armado Revolucionario* (FAR) and the *Montoneros*. This metanarrative is undermined by at least two factors. Firstly, although Marxism is still an important framing ideology in Latin America, it is nonetheless a decidedly minority one and lacks the broad support necessary to build a consensus metanarrative in Argentina, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, lacks credibility in most of the rest of the world as well. Secondly, the violence committed in the name of revolution—or even in the name of fighting *against* the revolution—is simply not sufficient to explain even a third of the violence comprised by the dirty war. In short, not many bought it then, even fewer buy it now.

The second metanarrative to emerge was the “war of counterinsurgency,” It was first proposed by the military in documents such as the *Informe final* of 28 April 1983, in which they justified their actions in the name of defending the nation against Marxist “insurgents” or “terrorists.” It is undermined by reasons similar to the first metanarrative. Again, the number of “terrorists” neutralized represents a small fraction of the overall number of illegal acts committed by the military and the police. Secondly, the “war of counterinsurgency” was given only as they were about to relinquish their hold on government, and after years of denying any such war even existed. Ultimately, it is seen as a poor attempt at a cover-up.

The third metanarrative, called “the theory of the two demons,” originated with the *Comisión Nacional de los Desaparecidos* (CONADEP) report *Nunca más*, written in 1983 by Ernesto Sábato. According to this theory, actors on the far left and the far right committed illegal acts of violence. Left unsaid was the tacit

agreement—at least at first—that those committed by the right, such as the military, police and the terrorist groups such as the AAA, far outweigh those committed by the left. Its greatest strength is its biggest weakness. If the ‘revolutionary war’ is the thesis from the left and ‘war of counter insurrection’ is the antithesis from the right, the theory of two demons is an attempt at a Hegelian synthesis which acknowledges the existence of radically divergent political ideologies competing violently to gain—or retain—hold of government. However, instead of framing it within the context of ‘war,’ the ‘two demons’ theory talks about ‘excesses’ from the ‘far left and the far right.’ While this reframing reintroduces the legal process in adjudicating responsibility for illegal actions, the continued use of euphemisms such as ‘demons’ and ‘excesses’ helps to displace these actions to the few on the extremes. It was hoped that this would satisfy the people’s thirst for justice. When it was proposed in 1983, it was as bold a political move as could have been made to bring those responsible to justice while preserving the fragile civilian rule, but it is now seen as unsatisfactory for building accurate historiographic models which are both informative of what happened in the past and instructive of how to proceed as a nation in the present and future.

One problem with this metanarrative is that in practice the left-side demon has been forgotten as such and really only the right-side demon was prosecuted, leaving the impression that there really was only one demon who, for no apparent reason, decided one day to engage in state-sponsored terrorism. To aggravate matters, two controversial laws were passed in 1986 which brought an end to the judiciary process: the *ley de punto final* and *ley de obediencia debida*. The first

imposed a retroactive statute of limitations, while the second absolved from responsibility those who were simply following orders. To add insult to injury, Menem's government granted a blanket pardon, reversing most of the feeble steps towards justice taken under the early years of the Alfonsín administration.

The final emplotment option is to take an historical perspective. Several historical factors should be considered. One is Perón's politics of personality. After Perón's ouster in 1955 and the military's outlawing of the *Partido Justicialista* which he had founded, some politicians were beginning to posit a *Peronismo sin Perón*. To make himself indispensable to his party and to Argentina, Perón fomented the organization and institutionalization of factions within *Peronismo* on both the left and right of the political spectrum. By encouraging division, he cultivated the myth that he was the only one who could hold the party—and even the country—together. After his return in 1973, he began the process of consolidating the political party by elevating figures from the traditional, right-wing base. Thus much of the violence between 1973 and 1976 which is sometimes considered part of—or at least a prelude to—the dirty war was in fact infighting between the political right and left of the *Peronistas*; at first vying for his attention, and after his death vying for power.

Closely tied to Peronism is the rise of syndicalism's political power in Argentina. Unions and syndicates existed before Perón: as in many other countries, left-leaning groups usually organized them. But Perón was the first to recognize the political potential of the nascent Argentine working class and was the first to politically enfranchise this sector of society through the syndicate organizations. His

success was so thorough that the political machinery remained virtually intact through the syndicates even after he was removed from office in 1955. As a result, Perón was able to exercise a great deal of influence from abroad between 1955 and 1973; whenever he wanted, Perón could bring the government to its metaphorical knees by calling a work stoppage or slow-down.

A third factor was the effect of the cold war. From the left, the success of the Cuban revolution fomented the rise of armed Marxist guerrillas throughout Latin American. In Argentina, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* were organized and trained in the mid to late 1960's to aid Ernesto 'Che' Guevarra and his revolutionaries in Bolivia. After Guevara's death in 1968, the group's purposed turned towards revolution in Argentina. Peronist intellectuals on the left started to incorporate and rework Marxist elements in an effort to formulate a *Peronismo sin Perón*. Juan José Hernández Arregui, one of the principal framers of the *Izquierda Nacional* in the mid 1960's, was the first to suggest that, if the Argentine working class is essentially Peronist, a Marxist revolution should necessarily originate from within Peronism. Thus the tactical position the Marxists should adopt is not to fight Peronism, but to join it and change it from within. John William Cooke, hand-picked by Perón to be the leader of the *Partido Justicialista* between 1955 and 1959, came to the conclusion that Peronism in the 1960's should become more revolutionary. After visiting Castro's Cuba in 1961 he adapted for Peronist use the theory of *Foquismo* which was inspired by Guevara, developed by Régis Debray and applied in Congo and Bolivia by Guevara. With these ideological underpinnings, the youth of

the 1960's and 1970's with any interest in revolution found a ready outlet for their energy and drive in what broadly became known as *Juventud Peronista*.

But the cold war also influenced the military. The United States, whose foreign policy framers tended to view Latin American countries as “for us” or “against us” in terms of the cold war, set up the School of the Americas in order to train key military personnel in “counter insurgency tactics” which included military combat against *guerrilla* warfare, as well as intelligence and espionage work, and even torture techniques. The military also acquired counterinsurgency techniques from the French experience in Algiers.

The final factor to consider is the continuity and rupture between the six Argentine military coups of the twentieth century (1930, 1943, 1955, 1963, 1966 and 1976). By the Supreme Court's decision legitimizing the 1930 coup, the military became, in effect, a fourth branch of the government as well as its own political party with its own political interests. The military's objective in the first four coups were provisional from the outset: they simply wanted to step in temporarily in order to reign in a civilian government which, in their view, was causing more damage than good to the political body. This was reflected in both the organization of the coup and the implementation of the subsequent government. Mostly junior officer cadets with little planning and small forces carried out the first coup. Once in power, the military had widely diverging views but no concrete plan as to how to run government. They were quickly ousted within two years. This strategy was altered for the last two: in stark contrast to the 1930 *coups*, the architects of the last two intended to establish military rule on a permanent basis. The last one was so

well orchestrated that, as noted earlier, it was called a “gentleman’s coup” by conservative observers, and the military was able to implement its plan for ruling through state-sponsored terrorism. Finally, the main ideological opposition during the first two dictatorships came from the moderate *Unión Cívica Radical* party, while *Peronismo*—whether in power or not—represented the main opposition in the last four coups.

Thus the Dirty War was, in essence, a prolonged argument that ended in fratricide. From the military coup of 1930 on, the Argentine body politic suffered from the profound inability of competing internal political factions to work together. After Juan Domingo Perón’s ouster in 1955, the internal breakdown of political discourse was exacerbated by external rhetoric. By the early seventies, the disintegration of public discourse in the civic arena and the prolonged stalemate between competing factions for office and for power gave way to clandestine armed para-military activities organized around terrorists groups. For such a Gordian knot as this, the military dictatorships—especially the dictatorship of 1976—saw itself as an Alexander wielding the sword of state terror that would not so much solve the problem as eliminate it.

While all Argentines who were alive during the last dictatorship bear witness—to some degree—to the trauma, the generation that grew up during this dictatorship has a unique perspective. At that time, an author from an older generation, such as Luisa Valenzuela, could publish a book called *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (1976), because the depths to which the nation had sunk into chaos and turmoil was, in her experience, beyond any ‘normal’ national experience: it was

extra-ordinary. By contrast, someone of Caparrós' generation or younger could only have written "esto es lo normal" because this was the only Argentine political experience they had until they were in their 30's. It is this unique witness of growing up under 'abnormal' or traumatic circumstances and of the subsequent return to 'normality' which is of interest in this dissertation.

Memory and Narration

Neurobiologists are constantly improving our knowledge of the workings of the human mind and are discovering that memory is a very complex and highly specialized process. Without going into minute details not pertinent to this investigation, we can summarize by postulating that the brain has two memory systems—one verbal and another non-verbal (Van der Kolk in Bloom, 5). Under normal conditions, the two function in an integrated way: "from the time we are born we develop new categories of information, and all new information gets placed into an established category, like a filing cabinet in our minds" (Bloom, 5). The non-verbal system seamlessly interacts with the verbal in filling in the 'filing cabinets in our mind' with new information. For instance, the words 'mint julep' will trigger very different information depending if one has ever been to the Kentucky Derby. For the un-initiated it is a drink, but for the person who has been to the springtime ritual at Churchill Downs, the word evokes sensations and emotions as well: the texture and taste, the color, even the emotions associated with it and the surrounding context become inscribed by and are evoked through the words 'mint julep.' And one of the uses of language—whether we speak or think—is to synthesize information sequentially; in other words, to emplot it using established

categories of narrative. To extend the example of 'mint julep,' a person who has experienced one at the Kentucky Derby could create an entire narrative to explain the personal significance of the drink.

Severe stress causes the verbal and non-verbal memory systems to literally dis-integrate. The disintegration poses two problems. Firstly, non-verbal, emotional memory becomes "engraved" and "can be difficult or impossible to erase" (LeDoux in Bloom, 5). Secondly, words vanish: "at the time of the trauma they [people] become trapped in 'speechless terror' and their capacity for speech and memory [are] separated" and "the nonverbal memory may be the only memory a person has of the traumatic event" (6). Thus a person's verbal memory of a traumatic event can be inaccessible because they have no words with which to access it with the conscious mind, much less think or narrate it. Words are important because they "allow us to put the past more safely in the past where it belongs" (6). Words allow us to process and compartmentalize the experience in distant temporal categories, but "without words, the traumatic past is experienced as being in the ever present 'Now'" (6). Both problems create the necessary mental conditions for flashbacks, which are sudden intrusive re-experiencing of a fragment of one of those traumatic, un verbalized memories where trauma is not so much *remembered* as *relived*.

But as a record-keeping construct, memory is often flawed. Neurobiologists and scientists who study memory have recently suggested that "memories are susceptible to inaccuracies partly because the neural system responsible for remembering episodes from our past might not have evolved from memory alone. Rather, the core function of the memory system could in fact be to imagine the

future” (Sharot, 10). This has two implications: firstly, that neurobiologists have stumbled onto what the social sciences have known for quite some time and have repeated in celebrated truisms such as “those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it” and secondly, *making memory* –or remembering—is not easy. Ireneo Funes, of Jorge Luis Borge’s story “*Funes el memorioso*,” and people with hyperthymesia are exceptional precisely because they remember everything they experience in great and specific detail. For the rest of us, the memories of events are abstracted, synthesized. Details are altered or deleted in order to fit into or modify memory constructs already abstracted. This is because, as Dr. Tali Sharot explains, “we use the same neural system to recall the past as we do to imagine the future, [therefore] recollection also ends up being a reconstructive process rather than a videolike replay of past events, and thus is susceptible to inaccuracies” (11).

Of particular importance to this investigation, even “flashbulb memories” — memories of unexpected and arousing events, such as traumatic events— are subject to manipulation. According to Dr. Tali Sharot, “the structures deep in our brain ‘Photoshop’ these images, adding contrast, enhancing resolution, inserting and deleting details” (9). Historical memory must then be constructed, taking care to minimize these photoshop effects. However, if the flashbulb memories are of collective traumatic events, its historical memory must be reconstructed by the society. To adapt Francois Lyotard’s prescription for creating knowledge in the postmodern society, the collective memory or ‘metanarrative’ of the dirty war must be reconstructed by communal consensus. This remains one of Argentina’s greatest challenges.

Trauma Theory

I will examine Martín Caparrós's first three novels in light of Michael Rothberg's framework of Traumatic Realism which he formulated to bridge the gap between the realist and antirealist camps within Holocaust studies. The realist approach "[considers] the Holocaust according to 'scientific' procedures and [inscribes] the events within continuous historical narratives" (xvii). Emblematic of this tendency—for Rothberg—is Hannah Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil' and her suggestion that "evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension" (qtd. in Rothberg xviii). The antirealist "claim that the Holocaust is not knowable" and "cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata" (xvii). Representative of this tendency—which Rothberg considers is probably more well known—is Elie Wiesel's contention of the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust and his claim that "Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized...[T]he Holocaust transcends history" (qtd. in Rothberg xvii). These two dramatically different approaches are brought together and moved into a broader theoretical conversation through an overarching framework he calls Traumatic realism. According to Rothberg, "Traumatic realism mediates between the realist and antirealist positions in Holocaust studies and marks the necessity of considering how the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of genocide intersect and coexist" (xxiii).

In constructing this theoretical framework, Rothberg has identified three demands that confronting trauma makes on attempts at comprehension and representation, and he connects them to three crucial socio-aesthetic categories:

firstly, a demand for documentation is connected to realism; secondly, a demand for reflection on the formal limits of representation is connected to modernism; and thirdly, a demand for the risky public circulation of discourses on the events is connected to postmodernism. As Rothberg explains, “a text’s ‘realist’ component seeks strategies for referring to and documenting the world; its ‘modernist’ side questions its ability to document history transparently; and its ‘postmodern’ moment responds to the economic and political conditions of its emergence and public circulation” (xxiii). These three are bound together using Walter Benjamin’s metaphor of a ‘constellation of meaning’ which “opens up the possibility of thinking through the overlapping of historical moments” (xxv). Instead of thinking of the six different military *coups d’etat* individually, of Juan Domingo Perón as a self-sufficient topic, or of the dirty war as something pertaining to just the last *coup*, the constellation of meaning “blasts open the continuum of history” so that all these historical moments—as well as any other—can be brought together to represent the traumatic event itself, or even just an aspect of the traumatic event.

I will explore through the lens of trauma theory the narrative techniques Caparrós employs to construct his constellation of meaning, which orbits the trauma of the Argentine dirty war. This approach to literary criticism draws from Freud’s work on trauma and the subconscious by way of Lacan and attempts to show how “art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*” (Feldman, XX). Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich in *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (1967), Nadine Fresco in “Remembering the Unknown” (1984) and Shoshana Felman and

Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) contributed to the formulation of Trauma Theory as a critical means for approaching literature written in the wake of the Holocaust. Since then, it has been further developed and employed in several articles and books Geoffrey Hartman, Sandra Bloom and Cathy Caruth, among others.¹

The basic premise of Trauma Theory, according to Hartman, is that traumatic knowledge is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the registering of the traumatic event in such a manner that it bypasses consciousness and becomes imprinted directly in the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event in the form of a perpetual troping of it (Hartman, 537). This happens because, as Bloom explains, there are two forms of memory whose function under normal circumstances is integrated seamlessly: one is verbal and stores verbal interpretations of experiences; the other is largely non-verbal and records “impressions” of visual, auditory, olfactory and kinesthetic images as well as physical sensations and strong feelings. At the moment of experiencing stress or trauma, the individual loses the capacity for speech and the capacity to record the experience verbally and is left with the imprint of non-verbal images, sensations and feelings (5-6). The inability to verbalize condemns the experience to the “eternal now” in which non-verbal memory processes are constantly and unwittingly triggered in the exercise of daily living, repeating —or re-presenting— the trauma.

¹ By Hartman: “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies,” “Public Memory and Its Discontents,” and “Testimony and Authenticity.” By Caruth: “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” “Traumatic Awakenings,” Trauma: Explorations in Memory, and Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History.

This repetitive representation of trauma presents itself as a form of what Feldman calls 'knowing without knowing.'

According to Laub, there are three modes of dealing with this type of memory. The first is to attempt the quixotic task of describing the indescribable through narration. The daunting magnitude of such an enterprise—the creation of new words and grammars to narrativize what does not conform to any previously known plot—many times precipitates the witness to the second modality, which is silence. The silence, however, only dooms the witness to its continued representation in the “eternal now.” The third is to create a grand history that stands not only as a witness to the trauma, but as a witness to its fated representation. These narratives become “a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim” (69).

Given the above, the general organization of this dissertation will examine *No velas a tus muertos* (1986), *Ansay, ó los infortunios de la gloria* (1984) and *La noche anterior* (1990) for narrative clues about how trauma is represented and to what degree they satisfy the demands of traumatic realism. It should be noted that *No velas* and *Ansay* reflect what Laub's would classify as an attempt at describe the undecidable. *La noche anterior* and Caparrós' next novel, *El tercer cuerpo* (1990), reflect the Laubian 'silence' and continued representation in the “eternal now.” It is not until the three volumes of *La voluntad* (1997-9), written in conjunction with Diego Anguita, and the monumental 950+ page *La Historia* (1999) that Caparrós

creates the 'grand histories' that stand as witnesses to the trauma and to its fated representation. For now, these last three novels will be left for another time.

Outline of the Dissertation

The dissertation will examine the first three novels published by Martín Caparrós in the order in which he wrote them. *No velas a tus muertos* (1986) presents the core of traumatic experience by examining in great historical detail the events of the early 1970's, as well as several narrative strategies for representing these events. These elements include death, exile, belief, betrayal and loss. *Ansay, ó los infortunios de la gloria* (1984) examine these same elements in the context of a Spanish Commander's experience of Argentina's war for independence. Caparrós uses some of the narrative strategies employed in *No velas*, but proposes new ones as well. More significantly, *Ansay* completely rethinks the use of historical documentation in literary representation which allows it to blast through the continuum of history, and it thus provides a very extended meditation on the possibilities and limits of both accessing and representing history. *La noche anterior* (1990) severely curtails the use of historiography and focuses in on exploring further the themes of exile and belief. The reward for such a risky narrative strategy is that it frees Caparrós to explore the limits of the *Nouveau Roman*—a form which sought to move beyond mere representations of reality to the creation of reality within the text itself. In theory, such a strategy would bypass the inadequacies inherent in representation by presenting the reader with a narrative toolkit in order to actively and immediately—or unmediatedly—construct the meaning of the themes. The degree to which these three novels successfully satisfy the demands of

traumatic realism will be the measure by which they contribute to our better understanding of the Argentinian dirty war.

Chapter 2: The Black (W)Hole at the Center: *No velas a tus muertos*

A su manera este libro es muchos libros,
pero sobre todo es dos libros.
—Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*,

No velas a tus muertos was the second novel published by Martín Caparrós, but the first one he wrote.² Its complex structure features multiple intertwined plots by multiple narrative voices which utilize multiple lexical registers and genres. To add to the complexity, narratological doubles (in both characters and events) abound: some are diametric opposites (doppelgangers), others are mirror duplicates while still others are recursions. Finally, oblique references to clandestine groups and people in Argentina during the early 1970's embedded in historical (and autobiographical) events make this novel a very difficult text to access for readers not intimately acquainted with porteño culture, slang and current events of the time, nor with the hermeneutic acumen to unravel the novel.

María José Punte's very thorough reading in *Rostros de la utopía* is the only in-depth print analysis to date. Much of her analysis has been invaluable for making my reading, not the least of which are instances where, in my opinion, she is either uncertain or mistaken in her analysis. Our readings will necessarily diverge since, as the subtitle of her work indicates, her main objective is the analysis of Peronism in Argentine novels of the 1980's, whereas my objective is to explore traumatic realism

² The date of completion at the end of *No velas* reads "1-VII-1981/París – Balsaín – Madrid" while that of *Ansay* reads "Vasaín y Madrid, 1982." *Ansay* was published by Ada Korn publishing house in 1984, while the first edition of *No velas* was published by Ediciones de la Flor in 1986. A second version was published in 2000.

and the constellation of meaning in Caparrós's work. Thus I have ordered my analysis differently, and will point out where our readings diverge.³

The novel at its core is the story of a Montonero cell group planning and carrying out the "*ajusticiamiento*" (assassination) of a *bourgeoisie* bureaucrat. The events are set in four days in January 1976, and move chronologically from the time they receive the order by the Montonero military command, through the process of discussing its merits, to the final "execution" of the operation (and the bureaucrat). Intertwined are the back-stories of how three of the members of the cell group (Carlos, Estela and Hernán) became politically engaged earlier in the decade. The story of the fourth member, David, is conspicuously absent. What appear to be miscellaneous, unconnected fragments of writings fill up the rest of the novel.⁴

A close reading reveals that the novel has many possible interpretations, that the chaotic jumble of events can actually be understood in several ways simultaneously, some of which suggest completely antithetical outcomes to the novel.⁵ It suggests that at the heart of the novel lies the story of an epoch that defies description, as if trapped by the gravitational pull of what Nadine Fresco calls "the gaping, vertiginous black hole of the unmentionable years" (Felman 64). Caparrós's strategy is, like when measuring the distance of a stellar object from the earth, to

³ Punte's analysis has the following outline: 6.3.1 Configuración textual, 6.3.1.1 El registro del lenguaje, 6.3.2 Puntos de vista, 6.3.2.1 Carlos, 6.3.2.2 Hernán, 6.3.2.3 Estela, 6.2.3.4 Secuencia cinematográfica, 6.2.3.5 Los textos poéticos de Carlos, 6.3.2.6 R., 6.3.2.7 Los epígrafes, 6.3.3 El peronismo militante, 6.3.3.1 La militancia

⁴ Punte does not try to describe a main story; rather, she privileges the narrative of the three main characters as representative of an era, with the movie script forming a unifying thread between all three.

⁵ Punte's reading, for instance, does not really give a satisfactory account for the epilogue.

take the angle of the event, so to speak, from multiple points of view and get its parallax. But like with any parallax, objects viewed from different angles will present slightly different profiles which must be reconciled. To understand how the novel accomplishes this we must first unpack its narrative structure.

A first reading of the novel reveals many narratives constantly vying for the reader's attention; one narrator tells his or her story for a few lines or pages, then another and so forth. Each has a very distinct style. The first is an internal, stream-of-consciousness monologue of Carlos Montana—a man in his thirties, with a doctorate from Paris, and who desperately wants to be a writer—while he is sitting at a bar by himself. The second is in the style of a movie script written—as can be deduced later—by Carlos Montana. The third narrative voice belongs to the young Hernán, of about eighteen years of age. His story is written in the form of an extended confessional monologue to his best friend David who, by all indications, has been found dead. The next voice belongs to a young girl in her mid-twenties named Estela, who at first writes in the form of a diary, but halfway through the novel, her narration changes to one-sided dialogues. This is followed by a continuation of the movie script, and then by a minor text—barely one paragraph long—which will be repeated several times throughout the novel and begins with the words: “Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso...” (23). By the end of the first chapter, it starts to become clear that the movie script, along with Carlos, Estela and Hernán's narratives are of greater importance. The three personal narratives provide three distinct rhetorical parallax points from which to observe the epoch.

But Carlos's movie script serves as the basic, fundamental, underlying story, which is where the first parallax measurements must be taken.

O juremos con gloria morir

The story presented through the movie script—called “O juremos con gloria morir,” taken from the last line of the Argentinian national anthem— narrates the discussion and planning of an *ajusticiamiento*. The action begins with scene 1.1 on the night of Monday, 12 January 1976, 8:30 pm —when Estela first receives the orders from her superiors from the *Montoneros*⁶ organization— and progresses through scene 18.2 the morning of Thursday, 15 January 1976, 6:15 am, when the assassination attempt takes place. Written in third person objective, present tense, it contains only scenographic details and dialogue lines. Any indication of the various characters's moods or thoughts are communicated only through detailed descriptions of body postures, facial expressions, and/or by what they say. The flat tone of the scenographic instructions, the precision of time references, and the descriptions of actual or plausible places in which the action develops gives this narrative a very strong mimetic imprint, as if it were a dramatic recreation of actual events. The overall effect of these narrative strategies is to make this narrative voice the most believable of the novel.

⁶ The Montoneros were a paramilitary organization started in the mid-'60's. Originally, they were intended to organize the youth and the more 'active' (violent) sympathizers of Perón. They often clashed ideologically and physically with the older and more conservative sectors of Peronism. On May 1, 1974, they were formally repudiated and expelled from Peronism by Perón himself. After Perón's death on July 1, 1974, they continued to be active throughout the 1970's, claiming that they represented the original and true spirit of the revolutionary Peronist movement.

O juremos follows Freytag's five-part outline⁷ fairly closely. The characters—Carlos, Estela and Hernán—are introduced in the first chapter, along with their noms d'guerre, which are Bocha,⁸ Lucía and Santiago, respectively. Together they form a minor cell group of the *Montoneros*. Carlos is in his mid-thirties; Estela is eight to ten years younger, has brown hair, green eyes and freckles; Hernán is tall, has long, blond hair, and is still a teenager. Estela meets some men in a bar and receives a package—it is assumed it contains the dossier for the *ajusticiamiento*—then proceeds to Carlos's apartment with Hernán for an emergency meeting. Notably, the fourth member of the group, David—or Pato, as he is known in the group—is missing and has not checked in with central command in a couple of days.

The bulk of the second chapter's action is a discussion about the operation. In the meeting initiated in chapter one, a heated discussion ensues about the political meaning and ramifications of carrying out the assigned operation. Carlos fails to see the underlying purpose for the mission and raises some very strong objections. Estela attempts to reason with Carlos by agreeing on some points and seeking patience or understanding on others. Hernán, meanwhile, is detached, distracted and deep in thought or annoyed at Carlos's persistent questioning.

In the third chapter, the characters crack and show their weaknesses. It becomes apparent that Estela does not really understand the ideological differences

⁷ Gustav Freytag, in examining classical and Shakespearean drama, outlines five parts to any drama: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action and *denouement*. In addition, he observes three moments which occur in the rising action and after the climax: the exiting, tragic and last charge. See Die Technik des Dramas, Chapter two, section 2 Funf Teile und Drei Stellen.

⁸ Bocha: Argentine slang for "head" or "brain."

between their group and the *ERP*,⁹ nor is she capable of discerning the probable effects of carrying out what the leadership is asking the cell group to do and is relying heavily on the *Montonero* leadership to know what they are doing. It also appears that Hernán quickly becomes exasperated with what he perceives as endless discussion and arguments and is eager to see some action. It is also clear that Carlos has deep-seated (and well-founded) reservations about the organization's lack of vision and planning, but it seems that he is moved —perhaps even haunted— by some other force which compels him to go along with what he seems to believe is a fool's errand. In spite of these shortcomings and disagreements, they all agree to carry out the plan.

A closer examination of this key discussion will help show how Caparrós satisfies the demand for documentation as well as the demand for the formal limits of representation. Carlos begins by criticizing the lack of political discussion within the cell groups: "Claro, no tenemos casas ni tiempo para discutir política, pero para salir a tirar tiros en nombre de esa política fantasma siempre se encuentra infraestructura... ¿Qué pasa?" (65). He then criticizes the lack of political clarity on the part of the leaders. "Últimamente desde la caída de Quieto¹⁰ es todo pura labia... No hay ningún... La política no baja ni siquiera una vez por mes..." (79). Estela has

⁹ ERP, or *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, was a paramilitary revolutionary organization started in the mid-1960's to train in Argentina and aid Ernesto "Che" Guevara and the Marxist revolution he was leading in neighboring Bolivia. After the death of Guevara, the group was repurposed to operate within Argentina.

¹⁰ Roberto Quieto, originally a part of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias*, eventually became one of the principal leaders of *Montoneros* when these two groups merged in 1973. He was taken by the police on 28 December 1975 and has never been found.

no answer for Carlos's criticisms so he draws his own conclusion, which serves to summarize the crisis confronting the *Montoneros* in January of 1976:

“...yo creo que, en este momento, está claro que hay un peligro de golpe de estado bastante inminente, no? Y que eso, o sea ese golpe de estado no se va a revertir por medio de operaciones militares que lo único que hacen es meterles el dedo en el culo a los milicos... Aunque sea contra un burócrata, la cosa es más o menos lo mismo. Entonces no la vamos a aclarar reventando gente por ahí. Y lo que sí vamos a hacer es darles más argumentos para el golpe...” (92)

In retrospect, Carlos's analysis is correct. This particular assassination would provoke the military more than further the *Montonero* or Peronist cause. Carlos's criticism in the cell group echoes the arguments put forth by Rodolfo Walsh and Roberto Quieto at the time: namely, that a coup was imminent and that the Montoneros' strategy needed to adapt to the times and change their tactics because they would not be able to withstand a full frontal military assault.¹¹ Quieto's strategy was to force Isabelita Perón's ouster through early elections. But this seems to have been a minority voice within the group. The majority preferred to let the military remove Isabelita through a *coup*, which would lead to an all-out confrontation with the military. They seemed to think that, in spite of the tremendous odds against them, they could win.

Quieto and Walsh represented the voices of reason within the *Montoneros* who had serious reservations about such a plan, but suppressed their internal

¹¹ Apparently, Rodolfo Walsh and other intellectuals within Montoneros were already thinking as early as December 1975 what to do, not if, but when the military coup came. The plans for the coup had been leaked to Walsh and others in the *Montoneros* intelligence by mid-January 1976. However, it seems that the rest of the leadership severely misjudged the times by thinking a military coup a remote possibility rather than a certainty. See Walsh's letter 29 December 1975 and Robben's *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*, p 161.

conflicts and went along with the majority decision out of group loyalty, until they were captured. In the story, Caparrós gives Carlos the same role within the cell group: he represents the intellectual who has the depth of perception and imagination to envision the consequences of various possibilities. Caparrós is able to satisfy the demand for reflection on the limits of mimetic representation by creating a character that embodies the intellectuals within the *Montoneros*. He is also able to satisfy the demand for documentation by setting the discussion in mid-January; the month after Quieto was captured and about the time Walsh received the first reports of an imminent military *coup*. Simply referencing Quieto's name—at this time and in the context of this argument—overlays the entire discussion in Carlos's apartment that night with a very rich and nuanced texture of historicity.

Confronted with Carlos's criticism and analysis, Estela quickly admits to a lack of political clarity: "Es cierto que existe un déficit a nivel de la discusión política" (65). What she will never admit to, however, is that it stems from a lack of identity. When Carlos proposes that the Montoneros are not that different from the ERP,¹² Estela quickly replies: "Primero que nosotros tenemos diferencias políticas profundas con el errepé porque ellos hacen todo lo que hacen desde... desde fuera del peronismo" (92). In other words, ERP is categorically wrong because they are not Peronists.

¹² Unlike the *Montoneros*, which originated within the Peronist movement, the ERP never acknowledged Perón or his movement as truly revolutionary. After the *Montoneros* merged with the *FAR*, their political ideology gradually became more Marxist. By 1975, the Montoneros's political agenda was Marxist in all but name, yet the *Montoneros* persisted in believing they were the true spiritual successors of Perón.

Caparrós seems to enjoy creating dialogue scenes which serve to represent a point made in a direct statement elsewhere. In the following scene, even the choice of words themselves can potentially betray the non-Peronist origins of an idea, which then comes under attack. Hernán's non-Peronist choice of words gives Estela the excuse to reprimand him, but he is oblivious to her own choice of words:

Hernán (reaccionando): —Sí, no!... Lucía tiene razón, Bocha, el problema es el desarrollo de una política consecuente y no vamos a... no vamos a pararla o a revertirla porque haya un peligro de...
Estela (sonriente, lo interrumpe y se dirige a él): —Bueno, che, tampoco te pongas acá a reivindicar a Codovilla¹³...
Hernán (se ríe, pero no entiende): —¿Por qué?
Estela (riéndose): —Y, por lo de consecuente...
Hernán: —Bueno, vos sabés que... el corazoncito...
Estela: —Cuidado con las desviaciones, eh compañero...
Hernán (sigue riéndose, pero parece un poco ofendido): —Bueno, no jodamos, no jodamos... No jodamos, porque...
Estela (con la sonrisa todavía marcada en su cara pecosa, limpia, con un sello de clase): —... Una, que viene del peronismo de toda la vida... (96)

Again, Caparrós overlays the discussion he created between Estela and Hernán with a rich mimetic texture by referencing Codovila's name. But the strategy he employs is slightly different than when he references Quieto. In this case, Codovila serves as an historical reference instead of the present milieu. The term 'consecuente' is so ingrained in Argentinian leftist discourse that it is regularly used almost inadvertently, as Hernán has in this occasion. Yet it is still very much identified with Communism —and with Codovila specifically— to the extent Estela, whose is from

¹³ Victorio Codovilla was a prominent member of Argentina's Communist Party. Throughout the 1920's he represented Argentina in all the major Communist International meetings, and in the 1930's served as an advisor to the Communist Party of Spain prior to and in the early stages of the Spanish Civil War. His particular use of 'consecuente' was ingrained in Argentine politics as part of Communist discourse.

the traditional and conservative middle class, notices the use of this particular word, which she considers 'out of place' in a *Montonero* meeting. As the leader of the cell group, Estela must keep the others in line and remind them that they are Peronists, thus feels compelled to reprimand Hernán. In the course of doing so, however, she ironically employs the term 'compañero,' which has been even more associated with communism, especially after Che Guevara and the Cuban revolution popularized it in the 1950's and 1960's throughout Hispanic America. She also employs the term '*desviaciones*' which was used to describe what a Marxist neophyte might do or say which indicates s/he was slipping back into his/her former *petit bourgeoisie* worldview, with its attendant *deformación de clase*. Finally, to underline the irony, Estela's freckled and clean face is described again to show she comes from a well-to-do, upper-middle class family, even as she is claiming to have been a Peronist her entire life. The use of a unique vocabulary used at a specific time and in a specific place embeds the humor in historicity, demonstrating that only a prior familiarity with the broader time and place in question is an essential precondition for the transmission of the humorous pericope —and by extension, the story as a whole.

But there are further reflections on the formal limits of representation to be made which also consider the public circulation of discourses. After a few more rounds back and forth between Carlos and Estela, she finally falls into her own trap of circuitous logic when she brings the discussion to a close with the following:

La política que hacemos la hacemos como parte del pueblo, como un sector de vanguardia del pueblo, y evidentemente la mayor parte de nuestras acciones son recogidas y reivindicadas básicamente por el conjunto del pueblo peronista, eso no lo podemos olvidar ni un momento! Sobre todo en un momento como éste donde el movimiento está totalmente... descabezado y existe una burocracia sindical

claramente contrarrevolucionaria, donde los burócratas intentan erigirse en jefes absolutos del movimiento desde la muerte de Perón, y del partido y... evidentemente los únicos que seguimos rescatando el contenido revolucionario del peronismo somos nosotros y el pueblo peronista eso lo sabe!... Entonces la forma consecuente de seguir demostrando esto es hacernos ecos... eco de... este... las reivindicaciones populares! (98)

Estela's reasoning only serves to prove Carlos's analysis essentially correct and to demonstrate that Estela—along with the majority of the *Montonero* leadership—is blind to the broader tactical situation, and deluded by a messianic logic that dictates that whatever they do is inherently right because their cause is just and supported by the masses. She—and in this she represents the *Montonero* leadership by 1976—is sadly blind and completely misguided with respect to what the *pueblo Peronista* knows or wishes: they are tired of violence and are not engaged in any 'reivindications,' nor are they following the diehard (literally, diehard?) Montoneros in their revolution.¹⁴ As a final ironic display of inconsistency in thought, she slip towards the end of her ill-reasoned argument and employ the term "*consecuente*," which she had chided Hernán for using only a few minutes previously.

Chapter four shows all three characters planning and carrying out preparations for the operation. This part of the *O juremos* movie script consists mainly of short dialogues and actions scenes showing Estela meeting with other *Montoneros*, Carlos procuring weapons, and Hernán looking for David (unsuccessfully). In the last chapter, the final details are readied for the operation.

¹⁴ Multiple sources attest that by the time the military carried out the *coup*, the majority of the people, for better or for worse, supported it because they were tired of bombings, death and fear and thought it would lead to peace. See Romero, p 214, Feitlowitz, p. 6 and Vincent, p. 10.

But there are two significant developments which could jeopardize the mission, and speak to the possibilities (and limitations) of representation.

First, Estela and Carlos become romantically involved. Two days before the *ajusticiamiento*, Carlos and Estela go out to a movie and she returns home with him instead of going home her boyfriend, Esteban *el Cordobés*, who is her immediate supervisor in the *Montonero* organization. Early the next morning, Carlos and Estela stake out the target's house from a nearby corner, posing as a couple and kissing passionately. Later in the day, she returns to her house and her boyfriend, and he is much more worried about the possibility of her being captured by the police and revealing their hide-out than of her seeing another man. She takes offense at his lack of jealousy and storms out, telling him she will not be home that night either. Later that evening, Carlos, Estela and Hernán decide to stay at Carlos's apartment so they can leave together early the next morning for the mission. Hernán, who has been shown looking for David, tearfully tells the group what he has learned about David's fate. After they comfort him a bit, Hernán is left to himself in the living room, mumbling to himself, while Carlos and Estela go back to his bedroom. Once there, however, it is suggested Carlos can't "get in the mood." He offers his apologies and says perhaps he is nervous after all, while she stares at the ceiling.

Beyond simply adding romance (is it *de rigueur* for the movie genre?), a love subplot addresses the issue of couple-hood. Estela's boyfriend is much more worried about Estela's faithfulness and loyalty to the *Montoneros* than to him personally, to the point he acts indifferently when Estela reveals she may have been unfaithful to him. While Estela has invested herself into the *Montoneros*, she clearly

wants more out of a relationship. At least between Carlos and Estela there are no such expectations. This serves as a metaphor of what the *Montoneros* had become along the way: many of the youth of that decade who had earlier poured all their illusions of a revolutionary today and a better tomorrow onto the *Montoneros* were now being rewarded with an organization that was “going through the motions” of a passionless revolution which was trying desperately to ignore the clear signals of the impending defeat. And the alternatives, like Carlos that night, were apparently not altogether satisfactory.

The second significant development was discovering that David had been killed. This becomes the reason for Hernán’s narrative of remembrance and remembering. It also turns David into Hernán’s own personal martyr. “[T]e juro que mañana voy a estar pensando en vos, mañana cuando caiga ese hijo de mil putas voy a pensar en vos,” Hernán tells the ghost of David, (261). Rather than stopping a revolutionary, killing David created Hernán’s revolutionary voice.

The next morning, they drive to their target’s house and the action ends in the middle of a shootout, the outcome of which, for reasons which we will examine later, is unclear. For now we can conclude that the particular strategies with which Caparrós satisfies the demand for history give it a very believable narrative voice, which makes this appear to be the central story.

The choice of the movie script genre responds, in part, to the imperative to capture not only historical events and quotidian acts, but to also represent the genres popular at the time. In this case, Caparrós imitates the third stage of the *Tercer Cine* movement. Started in the 1960’s, *Tercer Cine* criticized neocolonialism,

capitalism and the Hollywood movie industry, from the production to distribution and even consumption. The *Grupo Cine-Liberación* (Argentina), *Cine de la Base* (Argentina), *Cinema Nôvo* (Brazil), Cuban Revolutionary Cinema and Jorge Sanjinés's work (Bolivia) are all associated with *Tercer Cine*. The term was coined in a manifesto written by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, founders of *Grupo Cine-Liberación*, and loosely associated with the *Montoneros*. This group's most important works during the 1970's included *La hora de los hornos* (1968), *El camino hacia la muerte del viejo Reales* (1968), *Ya es tiempo de violencia* (1969), *El familiar* (1973) and *Los hijos de Fierro* (1975). Important films from *Cine de la Base*, which was loosely associated with the *FAR/FAP*, include: *México, la revolución congelada* (1970), *Ni olvido, ni perdón* (1972), *Los traidores* (1973), *Me matan si no trabajo y si trabajo me matan* (1974), and *La AAA son las tres armas* (1977).

According to Getino, the first stage of *Tercer Cine* in Argentina (1966 – 1972) was characterized by its formation and initial activities against the dictatorial regimes, including an entirely clandestine mode of distribution and delivery to the public. These movies were predominantly documentaries aimed at raising social consciousness about the political, economic and social realities of the nation and the continent, from a Marxist worldview. The second stage (1973 – 1974) exhibited cooperation with the Cámpora and Perón administrations and the ability to distribute and deliver movies within main-stream cinema industry. While the documentary style was continued, more realist and allegorical movies with linear story lines began to appear which had better mass appeal in the commercial public theaters. The third stage marked the return to clandestinity and the search for new

forms of resistance, including new genres and styles of movies. According to Getino, the movement “entered into a period of critical revision and self criticism. To do so in the realm of practice seems to be the best method, in that the self criticism is constantly being verified by the concrete rendering of ideas, ideas that are always tied to the necessities of the national reality and to the questions of political strategy” (80). *O juremos* imitates the third stage of the movement because Carlos’s character functions as a voice of critical revision and self-criticism within the movie.

Like many of the *Tercer Cine* movies, *O juremos* responds to two external works: the Argentine national anthem and *Los traidores*. The title reminds the reader immediately of the lines from the Argentine national anthem: “Sean eternos los laureles/ que supimos conseguir./ Coronados de gloria vivamos/ o juremos con gloria morir.” Putting aside any arguments about who —if anyone— won, the *Montoneros* did not earn the ‘laurels of victory’ in this revolution; thus to live ‘crowned in glory’ does not seem to be a realistic option. Given the implicit criticism of the *Montonero* leadership in *O juremos*, the only honorable outcome would be death. But as will be demonstrated, that, too, is uncertain. *Los traidores* by Raymundo Gleyzer is a thinly veiled criticism of union organizers who started representing the workers but who, as they moved up the ranks of the syndicate and then the Peronist political machine, were seduced by the power of politics and corrupted by money under the table from the industrialists. The main character, Roberto Barrera, is closely based on José Ignacio Rucci, casting an actor with a moustache like Rucci, and even having the character drive a Gran Torino coupé.¹⁵

¹⁵ Argentinian muscle car in the 1970’s.

Like *Los traidores* the movie script of *O Juremos* represents a realist movie which critiques the leadership of the organizations supposedly looking after the interests of the workers. Unlike *Los traidores*, the leadership of the *Montoneros* are not 'bought' by the military and the industrialists; rather they are intentionally blind to the impending military *coup* and the subsequent systematic repression.

Caparrós thus satisfies the demand for reflection on the limits of the movie genre. A movie script only accentuates the inherent limitations of a realist movie, such as predominance of straight third-person narrative (because a first-person point of view with a dubbed narrator would break the realist perspective) and the inevitable abbreviation and simplification of the narrative to what can be shown in a couple of hours.¹⁶ In order to create these richly contextualized dialogues in the movie, Caparrós must sacrifice background information which would explain how Estela has come to think of herself as a life-long Peronist even though she looks like the daughter of a middle-class businessman, why Hernán is disinterested in anything but action, and most importantly, why Carlos ultimately capitulates to the group's will and goes along with the plans, even though he knows the *ajusticiamiento* is a fool's errand from which nothing good or useful for the cause could possibly come. In short, the movie script for *O juremos con gloria morir* raises more questions than it answers. This, in part, explains the reason for the existence of the next three narratives; it lets the characters explain—in their own voice—what

¹⁶ The majority of novels-turned-into-movies demonstrate that the movie either chops a novel down to size, leaving out the interesting but secondary plots, or shows the novel to really be a long story with parts that were neither interesting nor relevant in the first place.

made them join the *Montoneros* in the first place, how their time in the organization has transformed them, and why are they still a part of it in early 1976, when the situation looks so bleak.

Finally, the choice of the movie script responds to the demand for reflection on the public discourses round the event. In *La voluntad*, Eduardo Anguita and Caparrós show the rise of the Argentine film industry in 1974, and how Argentine movies were outperforming Hollywood movies. That year, six movies would reach 1.5 to 2 million box office sales. “No es la primera vez en la historia del cine argentino que un film alcanza tales repercusiones” Anguita and Caparrós quote Enrique Raab, from an article in *La Opinión*. “Sí es la primera, en cambio, que seis películas llenan al mismo tiempo las salas céntricas y decenas de salas de barrio, relegando al cine extranjero a un increíble segundo plano” (389). Clearly, Argentine film in the mid to late 1970’s represented a calculated risk, one in which the size of the audience weighed on the balance against the relative risk of distribution and viewing.

Estela’s diary (and dialogue)

A theoretical reader who only would have read the movie script *O juremos* would be left with questions about why Estela has a position of leadership in the cell group and yet is unclear about political ramifications an *ajusticiamiento* might have, or why she is unclear about what differentiates the *Montoneros* from other militant groups. Unanswered in the movie script, it is up to Estela’s narrative to answer these questions.

Estela is a relatively young college student in her mid-twenties (born approximately 1950), and the daughter of an upper middle class family from *barrio norte*. Her story is presented through her diary entries in the first three chapters (starting on 27/7/1972 and ending around 26/5/1973), and then through one-sided dialogues in chapters four and five. Her writing is typically informal, yet somewhat self-conscious, and reflective. Her one-sided dialogues, however, are much more oral in quality, and the language employed is much more dependent on the topic and especially her interlocutor, changing the level of vocabulary and the register of formality slightly to accommodate a discussion with her boyfriend about *Montonero* business (technical vocabulary, serious tone), another girlfriend when talking about boys (informal tone, but both well educated and from *barrio norte*), and a *barrio* housewife she is helping through the *Montonero* organization (simple vocabulary in a very amiable, “customer-service” register).

In the first chapter she shows herself to be a relatively naïve girl who is nonetheless interested in expanding her horizons. To do so, she writes a diary in order to reflect on current events as she has seen them:

“[C]uando empecé a escribir este diario (dioses, hace cuatro años, que pendeja¹⁷ era!-) me propuse que no fuera una novelita rosa limitada a mis pequeñeces, sino reflejar también lo que pasaba a mi alrededor, en el sentido más amplio de la palabra (y precisamente en estos años hemos expandido nuestro alrededor hasta la ínclita selene¹⁸), claro que visto a través de mi prisma personal, si no mejor me ponía a juntar diarios viejos. (53)

¹⁷ Pendeja: f. of *pendejo*, a pubic hair. In Argentina it also connotes someone young.

¹⁸ Ínclita: Latin for famous. Selene, archaic Greek lunar deity. It is a purple prose reference to the moon walks of Apollo missions which landed a total of 12 men on the moon between July 1969 and December 1973.

For her, writing is a tool for reflection on the world around her. In other words, she imposes upon herself the demand for reflection by setting out to discover the formal *possibilities* of representation. We, as *voyeur* readers of her musings (which, in spite of her intention to avoid it, does sometimes exhibit *novela rosa* and purple prose) become witnesses of her transformation from the naïve daughter of a businessman to a *Montonero* leader.

At first, she thinks the *Montoneros* overly rely on past events for legitimizing present activism and political incitement: “...hay algo que no termina de convencerme en todo esto, y que quizá sea la razón por la que no me interesa militar con ellos. Creo que son las continuas referencias al pasado como piedra de legitimación, o un cierto espíritu revanchista, no sé bien como definirlo” (21). She does not care to muddy the present by overlaying old problems on top of the problems in the here-and-now. While this (and the meticulous dating) adds credence to her own observations about what is happening in her “now,” it limits her to what she can understand through her own means, unmediated by historicism.

She also finds militants to be too reactionary at first, as when a girl from the JP¹⁹ finds Jorge Luis Borges’s story “Los inmortales” objectionable on the grounds of his politics: “No soporto las intervenciones de la mina²⁰ de jotapé que pretende descalificarlo por reaccionario y “gorila”” (27).²¹ (So much for her comment in *O juremos* about being a lifetime Peronist!) However, she does consider herself a sympathizer. She wants to be a part of something bigger than herself, to contribute

¹⁹ JP: Juventud Peronista, the high school wing of the Montoneros.

²⁰ Mina: Porteño slang for a beautiful or sexually attractive woman, a “chick.”

²¹ Borges was always a staunch supporter of conservative politics.

to bettering society, and the Peronists are the only ones doing anything, as far as she can tell. "...creo que en este momento y en este país se pueden hacer una serie de cosas para cambiar las condiciones de vida de la gente. ¿Esas cosas pasan por el peronismo? No pasan por otro lado, en todo caso, ellos por lo menos tienen los pies en la tierra" (22). In short, the Peronists (and the various associated groups) are not perfect, but they are the only ones doing anything to bring about social change she sees are needed.

There are two events which help push Estela to become more militant: the "Trelew massacre"²² and her own experience in jail. María Ollier, in her book *La creencia y la pasión*, builds the case for how the Trelew Massacre helped swell the ranks of the militant groups, thus corroborating the historicity of the impact of the massacre on a young and impressionable Estela. The massacre awakens a sense of righteous indignation she doesn't quite understand:

Me siento llena de un odio extraño, desconocido, que no tiene nada que ver con la política. Quizá pensábamos diferente (de hecho, creo que es así), pero esto sobrepasa completamente toda consideración política. Son simplemente unos bestias.... Hay algo nuevo, algo que debe ser lo que llaman odio, no lo sé, pero por momentos se me pone la piel de gallina y se me escapa alguna puteada incontrolada. Quiero

²² On 15 August 1972, 110 political prisoners from the Rawson penitentiary in the province of Chubut attempted to escape. Of these, only the six who organized the attempt (one of which was Roberto Quieto, discussed earlier) managed to board the plane, commandeered by fellow militants on the outside, and escape to Salvador Allende's Chile. In addition to the six who successfully escaped, another 19 made it to the airport, but were too late to board the plane. These were captured and taken to the Naval base near Trelew, where they were shot "while attempting escape" on 22 August, a story no one believed. Three of the 19 survived and told their version of the story to Francisco (Paco) Urondo, who published the interview in the magazine "El descamisado" in mid 1973, and later published the interview in book form. Later, Urondo worked for *Noticias*, where a young Caparrós got his start in journalism. For more information see Urondo *La patria fusilada* or Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La pasión según Trelew*.

escribirlo para aclarármelo.... Temo esta sensación que no entiendo, me descoloca. (46)

Although she turns down the invitation to attend a protest, she begins to question her non-participation. If the massacre at Trelew made her feel righteous indignation, it was still a rather abstract mental exercise. But spending time in jail herself would turn it personal.

A month later, Estela attends a screening of *La hora de los hornos* (sponsored by Grupo Cine-Liberación, discussed earlier)²³ at the university; she is caught in a police roundup and spends the night in jail. While this was a rather mild act of social rebellion and the police did overstep their legal authority, Estela can't help but correlate her experience with the massacre at Trelew. If she couldn't quite define how she felt after learning of their ordeal in prison, she knew exactly how she felt when she was there herself:

...sobre todo la impotencia. Eso es lo peor. La humillación. Esa sensación de no poder hacer nada, no poder defenderse, de que te tienen totalmente en sus manos....Y ellos se preocupaban por hacértela sentir, que sepas bien que te tienen, que si te dejan es de puro perdonavidas.... Pensé mucho en los que mataron en trelew [sic]. Los entendí un poco mejor. (78)

The humiliation and impotence she experienced in jail changed her, and she noticed it when she returned to school. She had experienced something that for her was life-changing, yet everyone at school seemed to go out of their way to act as if nothing happened.

²³ *La hora de los hornos* (1968) by Fernando Solanas was a three-part, four-hour long documentary about foreign imperialism in Latin America. *La hora de los hornos* was originally conceived by its author to be “un artefacto cultural con fines a generar conciencia sobre la situación política argentina y latinoamericana” (Halperin 17).

Estela is initiated into the *Montoneros* and is instructed about the revolutionary worldview by her new boyfriend, Esteban *el Cordobés*. She met Esteban at an *asado* in early September, then spent weeks wondering if he noticed her, what he might have thought of her, that she probably was too *bourgeois* for him, that if he noticed her he will let her know, and so on in the rosiest of *novela rosa* style (which she did not want her diary to contain). When they finally start dating a month later (about two weeks after the incident in jail), Esteban becomes the working-class, street-smart yet handsome guy who sweeps up the daughter of a white-collar businessman:

Con él me doy cuenta de todo lo que me falta. De todas las deformaciones de clase que acarreo. Había (y supongo que habrá todavía muchas otras) muchas cosas de las que yo no me daba cuenta, pero es evidente que el vivir siempre entre determinada gente me ha determinado mucho. Son cosas que una piensa teóricamente, pero de ahí a verlas en una.... Estuvimos hablándolo mucho: es increíble lo claras que se ven las cosas cuando él las explica, tan justas.... Se nota que no las ha leído en ningún libro; son las cosas que la vida le ha enseñado, duras de aprender, pero que llegan por lo tanto a adquirir una profundidad extraordinaria. (99-100)

Her best friend Mariana, also a militant in the *Montoneros* had already told her about her weaknesses, her “deformaciones de clase,” and that she will grow soon enough (22), but with a handsome young man like Esteban, perhaps it is easier for Estela to assimilate the criticisms about her *petit bourgeois* upbringing and to change for him. It is ironic that her transformation from deformed *petit mademoiselle petit bourgeoisie* to morally enlightened and upright militant revolutionary is emplotted in a *novela rosa* style, which she had set out to avoid in her diary. Or perhaps that is exactly the point: neither the press releases and news interviews about the Trelew Massacre nor the monumentally long documentary *La hora de los hornos*, had

stirred her to active participation in the *Montoneros* nearly as much as her personal experience in jail (her personal documentary) or, especially, her romantic involvement with Esteban—her own personal *novela rosa*—with the romantic hero opening her eyes to the revolution. I wonder if Caparrós might have been tempted to represent them singing a duet of “I am sixteen going on seventeen,” from *The Sound of Music*.

Estela continues writing a few more entries in her diary, through 2 November 1972, and then abandons it until 21 May 1973, just a few days before Héctor Cámpora takes the office of president. She skipped narrating about Juan Domingo Perón’s first (aborted) attempt to return in November 1972, the different factions of Peronism –which threatened to pull it apart— working together to campaign for the FREJULI ticket, headed by Cámpora and Solano, and the FREJULI electoral victory with over 50% on 11 March. She writes on 21 May that she has not had time to write because she has been busy, and that for security reasons she has stopped writing so as to not give the authorities any more information in the event she were captured. She recognizes that once Cámpora becomes president on 25 May, she will be at liberty to write all she wants without fear from the government. But she is not sure if she will.

The diary may belong to Estela, daddy’s little *bourgeoisie* girl, but she is now Lucía, the *Montonera*. While Estela has never been enthusiastic about historical reasoning, she did write reflectively about the day’s events, trying to make sense of them. There was some critical distance in doing so. But Lucía has abandoned any delay in reflection, and only shows action in the now.

Her last entry, dated 26 May 1973, describes the activities of the day before, when Cámpora was installed as president. She shows how far she has come when she describes the students' behavior at the plaza:

...hay que notar que hasta nuestros estudiantitos aburguesados que siempre hincharon tanto las bolas estaban saltando, el que no salta, están saltando, es un gorilón, ellos que estaban siempre con sus críticas zurdas, sin tragar al Viejo, bueno, como yo al principio, que decían que la revolución es tarea exclusiva del proletariado. El flaco tiene razón cuando dice que son historias de pequeño-burgués. (152)

She has come a long way in a short time. She does recognize she was like the "estudiantitos aburguesados" not so long ago, but she still looks up to Esteban as her source for more knowledge and understanding of the revolution.

After this the diary genre disappears and is replaced by only her voice in various dialogues. The real-time insert in the quote above "el que no salta, están saltando, es un gorilón" functions as a direct quote flash-back to events she is describing in her diary "...nuestros estudiantitos... estaban saltando...." "El que no salta es un gorilón" was one of the songs chanted by the *Montoneros* that day.²⁴ The rest of her diary entry has ever-larger irruptions of the historical present into the reflective writing of the immediate past until the diary genre vanishes. What should be the next diary entry is replaced by Lucía's voice talking to different people at the popular gathering to celebrate Cámpora's ascension to the presidency on 25 May, that is, the day prior to the final diary entry.

In chapter four, she talks with her friend "negrita" about how "tío" Cámpora, as he was affectionately known in Argentina, had been a positive thing for Argentina, that she and Esteban are talking about having a baby, and that she is

²⁴ For these and other popular *Montonero* songs, see Galasso, p 1157.

exited about “negrita” being pregnant. The reference to Cámpora sets the conversation between 25 May and 11 July 1973, when Cámpora resigned the presidency. It also shows that the *Primavera camporista* (as it eventually became known) was a time of euphoria and hope for the future. With her friend Diego she complains about being the only woman in the house she shares with Esteban and other militants, and feels like everyone assumes she will do all the domestic chores because she is a woman. She dislikes the house being trashed with guns and papers strewn all about. She mentions that since Rucci’s death a couple of months ago, there has hardly been any political discussion, but she is looking forward to Pepe’s new document about unstable equilibrium, which situates the conversation in late 1973.²⁵ With her friend Mariana, Estela confesses that she and Esteban now have a more mature relationship. It turns out he likes some of her *bourgeois* traits (for instance, her *barrio norte* accent, her clothes), and that she sees them more as equals in a relationship as opposed to an impressionable young girl in awe of her revolutionary hero boyfriend. In a discussion with Esteban, she caught him cheating with another girl and is upset with him. She doesn’t think such silly business (*tonterías*) merits breaking up their relationship, but she chides him because they,

²⁵ José Ignacio Rucci was Perón’s right-hand man in the syndicates. Rucci was assassinated on 25 September 1973, ostensibly in retaliation for the killing of *Montoneros* by right-wing Peronists during Perón’s return on 20 June 1973. Rucci’s assassination let Perón to publicly cry for the first time, and precipitated his worsening health. It also let to Perón giving the green light for launching José López Rega’s assassin squads, the *Alianza Argentina Anticomunista*. ‘Pepe’ is Mario Firmenich, who was one of the top *Montonero* leaders at the time. He viewed Argentine civil government in general, and Cámpora’s government in particular, as an unstable equilibrium. See Pigna’s interview of Firmenich.

as leaders, should be setting an example of what a militant, revolutionary couple should be.

In her second dialogue with Diego, Estela complains about all her class work at the university, and that the *Montonero* work in the university arena is probably going to come to a close soon. Times are getting tough for the *Montoneros*. She feels the *Montoneros* were right in leaving the plaza,²⁶ but that they had missed their chance to reconcile when Perón called them back, and that things had gotten really bad after his death. They even closed *Noticias* and the *Montoneros* couldn't stop it. The student front is tough to work because it is all theoretical to them. She feels that working in the syndicate front would be more real because the struggle is more authentic for them. The closing of *Noticias* dates this conversation sometime after 26 September 1974. By January 1975, Esteban and Estela have separated, but Esteban sends her a letter wishing her a happy new year, and expresses a desire to get back together, if she wants. Sometime after that, Esteban and she discuss the possibility of getting back together. She confesses having slept with Diego, but claims that it was just to pass the time. If they are to get back together now, however, she wants to do things right, live on their own, without other militants in their house.

The final chapter reveals that Esteban and Estela do move back in together. It contains three dialogues which show three key aspects of Estela during the present time of the movie script. In the first, Estela is introducing *Señora Rosa*—a working

²⁶ An obvious reference to 1 May 1974. More is discussed about this event in Hernán's story, analyzed later in this chapter.

class housewife the *Montoneros* are assisting with basic food and access to medical care—to Hernán, who will be in charge of dropping in from time to time to make sure her household's basic needs are satisfied. The second dialogue, pages 246 – 247, reproduces and augments what has already been shown in the movie script (scene 5.3) on page 132, where Estela reports back to Esteban about how the news of the *ajusticiamiento* was received in the cell group. Her last dialogue, on pages 154 – 155, reproduces a different section of the dialogue that has already been shown in the movie script on page 172. Finally, Estela is shown gently criticizing what she considers Carlos's intellectual posturing, which he must be doing in order to avoid opening up to everyone else. In Estela's dialogue, the first half of the conversation is shown where she tells Carlos he must open up, that the problem is not generational—because Esteban is about his same age—but rather intellectual: “Quizás sea más un problema de clase, sabés, de formación intelectual, y todo eso. Sí, eso puede ser, está claro que la gente más intelectualizada valora más otras cosas y muchas veces se aleja de las cosas más simples, más puras...” (255). The last lines of Estela's dialogue on page 255 are repeated as the first lines of the dialogue between her and Carlos in the movie script (scene 9.3) on pages 172 – 173. The dialogue in the movie script, however, serves as an opportunity to show Carlos as the intellectual (he smokes a pipe in the scene and muses on how life is like a movie) ruminating on how militant activism should be simply 'life.' It shows that Estela has reached a point of emotional and intellectual self-realization where she is equally comfortable amongst the *bourgeoisie barrio norte* intellectuals as well as with the blue-collar working class, and being intimately familiar with both, she has

conscientiously chosen to not become too intellectual because, as she tells Carlos, she believes too much knowledge and intelligence makes a person too critically detached from the more concrete, simple or the 'real' aspects of life.

The second half (the dialogue) complements the first half (the diary) by showing an Estela who is continuing to mature, who has learned from her mistakes, who is taking on more responsibility for herself and within the *Montonero* organization. She has become the level-headed and self-realized individual she had aspired to become, or wrote about becoming, in the first chapter. While she is quite capable of analyzing what happened to the *Montoneros* in the months immediately following their expulsion from Peronism, she has conscientiously chosen to concentrate on the simpler aspects of revolutionary life —the 'revolutionary couplehood,' managing the student front, then tending to the needs of the people in the *barrios*— rather than the intellectual aspects such as a definition of the *Montoneros's* ideology, differentiation between them and other revolutionary groups, or of political calculations of the possible consequences of an *ajusticiamiento*.

The juxtaposition of diary and speech also speaks to Caparrós's ability to satisfy the demands for documentation as well as to reflect on the demand for reflection on the formal limits of representation. In the diary writings, there is ample evidence of historicity which can be corroborated through sources external to the novel. Dates of rallies and the Trelew Massacre are easily verifiable, as are the general activities of *Grupo Cine-Liberación*. What may be surprising is that the dialogues are equally rich with historiographic detail. She evokes specific songs

typically heard at *Montonero* rallies and the references to names and events help situate the different dialogues within a relatively narrow time-frame. Equally surprising is the ability to represent the reflection of events. The diary is a natural genre for self-reflection, and while she does exhibit a certain degree of introspection, she also wanders off into daydreaming about boys (*novela rosa*) and to the use of a highly stylized language, sometimes excessively so (purple prose). But in the dialogues, her analyses are much sharper and to the point, and her discussions about couplehood are much more serious than the daydreams of an adolescent girl. By learning to reason without the mediation of writing, her thoughts are much more sophisticated and mature in content, yet simpler in language.

Hernán's confession

The next narrative voice belongs to Hernán, who by 1976 is eighteen years old (born approximately in 1957, like Caparrós). The oral quality of Hernán's first person monologue is even more pronounced than Estela's because he flutters from topic to topic, now telling a story, now offering an opinion about someone or some event. The present time of the narration is the night before the *ajusticiamiento*, which according to the movie script (scene 17.6) would be January 14, 1976. The motive for the monologue is to mourn David and to ask his forgiveness. Although he cannot bring himself to say directly what happened, it is insinuated that David has been killed, presumably by the police or the Triple A.

Hernán's rememorative narrative begins when they were in third year of secondary school, in 1971, and progress chronologically to the present. We learn that Hernán and David were from *Barrio norte* and learning about themselves:

“estábamos descubriendo las palabras, empezábamos a descubrir el valor de una frase en nuestro mundo de pichones de intelectuales, de hijos de la intelligentsia, como leí el otro día que nos decían” (17). As such, they were well read in orthodox Marxist theory, and wanted nothing to do with Peronism. A couple of classmates, El Polaco and El Ruso, recruited them to form a small ‘revolutionary’ Peronist cell by explaining arguments learned from Hernández Arregui: if the revolution was going to come from the people (the proletariat), and the people were Peronist, then it followed that the revolution would come through Peronism.²⁷ That changed the game for Hernán and David. “...regla de tres simple, la formulita, no había con qué darle...de repente todas las teorías de la zurda quedaban como sanata de intelectual descolgado” (18). *Avant garde* Marxism in Argentina was revolutionary Peronism. “Éramos marxistas e íbamos a meternos en el peronismo. Para estar con el pueblo. Para cambiarlo desde adentro” (20). They immediately join the *Ruso* and the *Polaco*’s revolutionary cell group, although at first they just discussed political theory, movies and girls, listened to music and painted graffiti. “Era más bien una militancia interior, o casi cultural, porque en lo político hacíamos bastante poco, al principio” (42). But they didn’t consider themselves Peronists just yet: “éramos Marxistas que entendían el proceso” (40).

Of all the narratives in the novel, Hernán’s private history is embedded in public history the most and affords Caparrós the opportunity to satisfy the demands

²⁷ Juan José Hernández Arregui, (1913 – 1974), was a politician, university professor and political philosopher. His writings, especially *¿Qué es el ser nacional?* (1963) and *Nacionalismo y liberación* (1969) contributed to the *Izquierda nacional* movement, which reconciled Trotsky Marxism and the early revolutionary Peronism of the 1940’s.

for documentation. Hernán remembers hearing inside stories about Mario Firmenich,²⁸ Carlos Olmedo,²⁹ and remembers hearing Rodolfo Galimberti³⁰ speak. We learn the young revolutionaries read Mao, Juan José Hernández Arregui, and John William Cooke,³¹ as well as Peronist magazines such as *El Descamisado*,³² *Mayoría*,³³ *Así*, and *Noticias*.³⁴ For a period he even worked at *Noticias* and specifically mentions Rodolfo Walsh,³⁵ Paco Urondo,³⁶ Zelmar Michelini³⁷ and Juan Gelman,³⁸ all famous writers and reporters who actually worked for *Noticias*.

Much of Hernán's narrative dwells on the public manifestations, such that his private story and public history fuse together, especially in chapters two and three: the first mass meeting of the Juventud Peronista at the *Nueva Chicago* football

²⁸ Mario Firmenich (1948), one of the founding members of the *Montoneros*.

²⁹ Carlos Olmedo (d 1971), a leading ideologue of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias*.

³⁰ Rodolfo "El loco" Galimberti (1947 – 2002) was one of the top leaders of the *Montoneros*.

³¹ John William Cooke (1920 – 1968), politician and political philosopher. Between 1955 and 1959, was commissioned by Perón as his representative in Argentina. Introduced the philosophy of foquismo to the Peronist left.

³² *El descamisado* was an important Montonero magazine, published between May 1973 and April 1974

³³ *Mayoría* was a Peronist magazine started in 1956 by Tulio and Julio Jacovella. Its founding premise was that the ideology of Perón's first tenure had departed from the original revolutionary Peronism of 1943 – 1945.

³⁴ *Noticias* was a daily newspaper that ran from November 1973 through August 1974.

³⁵ Rodolfo Walsh (1927 – 1977) was an investigative journalist a writer and an important leader in the Montonero organization.

³⁶ Francisco "Paco" Urondo (1930 – 1976) was a journalist and a militant in FAR and later Montoneros.

³⁷ Zelmar Michelini (1924 – 1976) was a Uruguayan politician and reporter who lived in exile in Argentina after the Uruguayan military coup of 1973.

³⁸ Juan Gelman (1930) is an author and journalist who has won several prestigious awards, including the Premio Cervantes (2007), Premio Juan Rulfo (2000) among others. He was active in FAR and later in Montoneros, but distanced himself from this organization in 1979.

stadium,³⁹ the commemoration at the boxing federation and at the Peronist party's headquarters in honor of the militants killed in Trelew,⁴⁰ Juan Domingo Perón's first return to Argentina,⁴¹ Cámpora's victory at the ballot box,⁴² the founding ceremony of the *Unión de Estudiantes Secundarios*,⁴³ Héctor Cámpora's ascension to the presidency and the liberation of the prisoners from the prison in Villa DeVoto,⁴⁴ and Perón's second return (also known as the Ezeiza Massacre).⁴⁵ Hernán's story serves as an eyewitness account of many of the major *JP* and *Montonero* public acts during 1972 and 1973. Of these, both of Perón's returns and Cámpora's inauguration are key to understanding Hernán character—as much for what he says, and what he doesn't say—as well as understanding the center of Caparrós's constellation of meaning.

The telling of Perón's first return (towards the end of chapter two) is lengthy and plotted in a Campbellian mythic hero journey. In this case, both David and Hernán share the Odyssey-like adventure in which they take the train out to the suburbs, get lost trying to find the meeting place, arrive two hours late, get in the back of a truck with several other Montoneros, endure the pot-holed back roads of Buenos Aires suburbs, stop for the night at the house of some laborers—it is the first time they come face to face with a poor worker in whose romantic image these boys have pledged to become revolutionaries—traverse a meadow, and finally arrive at

39 28 July 1972

40 22 August 1972

41 16 November 1972

42 11 April 1973

43 20 April 1973

44 25 May 1973

45 20 June 1973

the side of the highway to get a glimpse of the mythic leader as his car drives into town, only to find the military shooting at them, Perón landing elsewhere due to a breakdown in security, chaos, and retreat. They escaped the danger, but they did not return empty-handed; Hernán returned feeling for the first time like a true Peronist rather than 'a Marxist who understood the process' and who was going to 'change Peronism from the inside.'

If the public spectacle of Perón's thwarted attempt to return is transformed into a private, hero-quest moment of personal growth for Hernán, Cámpora's election and inauguration is disorienting and filled him with bitterness. Firstly, the logic of putting resources and energy into an electoral campaign went against everything he knew as a young Marxist neophyte. Seeing the 1973 presidential elections as a political opportunity to seize the government, many clandestine organizations changed tactics from armed confrontation and violence to political campaigning. The military dictatorship of Lanusse was ineffective and the military wanted out. The Peronist were not able to get Perón on the ballot, but in conjunction with some minor provincial parties, the Peronist formed the FREJULI Party,⁴⁶ nominating Héctor Cámpora and Vicente Solano Lima for president and vice president, respectively. But Hernán and his friends never really understood it:

[F]ue una de las épocas que menos claro lo teníamos, con perón afuera y cámpora-solano de candidatos, te decía que no la entendíamos demasiado..., antes estaba tan clarito con las acciones de las orgas y los actos violentos y la oposición directa... Era un clima nuevo, que no habíamos vivido nunca, buenos aires toda empapelada de afiches electorales, la televisión que no paraba de hablar de política (o mejor dicho de las elecciones), nosotros nos prendíamos pero el

⁴⁶ *Frente Justicialista de Liberación Nacional.*

enemigo estaba menos claro, había más enfrentamientos con la derecha del movimiento que con los milicos, con los gorilas. (118)

The peaceful democratic process was a completely alien concept for Hernán and his group. Their political theory was founded on classical Marxism by way of Maoism and refined by Che Guevara, Régis Debray's theory of foquismo by way of John William Cooke, as well as Juan José Hernández Arregui's thesis for an 'Izquierda Nacional' which predicted that the Argentine proletariat that would lead a prolonged revolution would be found within the Peronist movement. These ideological pieces fit together for a prolonged armed confrontation like in Fidel Castro's Cuba, not for a relatively peaceful transition to democratic socialism like in Salvador Allende's Chile. Their ideology required enemies, and since the military was no longer putting up a fight, the new enemies were becoming the syndicalist and the older, more conservative members of the Peronist movement.

Secondly, Hernán is left with the distinct impression after the Ezeiza massacre that the electoral process had been a waste of time and that the Peronist right and the syndicates had duped him —along with all the rest of the *Montoneros*. Thus he cannot bring himself to remember the happy and joyful moment of Cámpora's inauguration because of the anger it produces:

Pero no puedo hablar de aquello, me hace sentirme un estúpido, un infeliz. Me jode pensar que nos hayamos podido equivocar así, todavía pensarlo, en abstracto es jodido pero... pero recordar cada una de las situaciones, cada uno de los momentos de alegría de esos días alrededor del veinticinco de mayo... No, pato, no puedo. Perdoname pero ahora no puedo.... Y debe ser porque estábamos tan contentos, tan seguros... tan simplemente seguros de que estábamos ganando, de que ya faltaba muy poco... que ahora me da una mezcla de vergüenza y rabia y sobre todo una tristeza enorme, pato, perdóname, no es que lo olvide, no, simplemente no puedo recordarlo. (155-6)

The shame is for having been duped into helping the right-wing Peronist. The anger is against those who used him and other youths like him to gain power, and the sadness is for having lost when he thought his side had won. What should have been a happy memory of electoral victory is swallowed in silence, identical to the silence Nadine Fresco identifies in Holocaust survivors: “It was a silence that swallowed up the past, all the past, the past before death, before destruction” (Laub 64).

Perón’s second return was scheduled for 20 June, barely a month after his hand-picked candidate Héctor Cámpora had assumed power and his government was able to lift the ban on Perón’s entrance to Argentina. Unlike the first arrival, for which the Montoneros met clandestinely and travelled secretly, the various groups met out in the streets of a nearby neighborhood the night before, danced in block parties, and prepared their signs and banners. It was, in many ways, the continuation of the party that started with Cámpora’s inauguration. When they arrived at the meadows outside the airport, a platform with a podium had been prepared so that Perón could address the crowds that had come to welcome him. Although still organized into a company flanked by armed defenders and which moved with a leader, the atmosphere was that of a picnic until shots rang out. Then there was mass hysteria, people running in every which direction, taking cover wherever they could, violence, savagery, brutality and death. Hernán recounts unconnected images: hiding behind some woman’s voluminous *derriere*, and the crack of a log making contact with a skull. It was later discovered that the right-leaning syndicate-backed faction of Peronism had hired some hit men, armed them

with machine guns and set a trap for the Montoneros. This is Hernán's most traumatic moment and it compromises his ability to remember the event:

[M]e asombra el recuerdo que tengo de la cosa. Porque tengo la impresión de que la imagen en sí era bastante escalofriante, grupitos de cuatro o cinco más bien cagados de miedo porque pensábamos que en cualquier momento podían aparecer los sindicales de nuevo, en medio de un bosque bastante cerrado, buscando gente a gritos, y ya con muy poca luz. Si lo pienso así lo puedo describir, algo recuerdo, y sobre todo me lo contaron muchas veces, pero mis imágenes no son ésas, son muy diferentes. No son imágenes reales, pato, sabés? Pensando en ese atardecer más bien lo que me viene a la cabeza son otras cosas, las fotos que vi después, en la revista así, o en el desca, o los relatos de compañeros colgados de los árboles, es increíble, yo no vi a nadie así pero ahora de alguna manera lo veo, sabés.... (165)

Whereas Hernán has not forgotten about Cámpora's inauguration but chooses to not remember, Hernán is not able to remember his version of the Ezeiza massacre because the event was so shocking and disorienting he was unable to process and store it in his memory as a narrative. What he remembers most coherently are the narratives others have provided him and the images from the magazines. With these, he has reconstructed a memory which is somewhat his, but mostly belonging to others. His own memory remains silent; trauma, "concealed behind a screen of words, again, always the same words, an unchanging story" codified for him in the text and images of magazines. As Fresco explains, the "screen of words" was the mechanism used by Holocaust survivors to conceal the "vertiginous black hole": "The silence was all the more implacable in that it was often concealed behind a screen of words, again, always the same words, an unchanging story, a tale repeated over and over again, made up of selections from the war" (Laub 64).

Hernán's angry invectives about being forced to remember become strongest when the past is, as it were, filled with the presence of the now: "...cómo carajo no

nos íbamos a creer que estábamos ganando, la puta que lo parió, que habíamos ganado y me cago en la reconcha de la lora cómo querés que piense en todo eso, pato, ahora, ahora en este momento si..." (157). The juxtaposition between the present mourning—where he is mourning of David—with the past celebration—Cámpora's triumphal inauguration—and subsequent trauma—the Ezeiza massacre—effectively halt Hernán's work of making memory. In the moment of attempting to remember Ezeiza and mourn David, Cámpora's victory becomes lost in a black hole that collapses past into present.

Through the character of Hernán, Caparrós shows two ways in which the limits of representing the center of the constellation of meaning are reached through Hernán's nebulous portrayals of both events. In the first one, Caparrós has Hernán refuse to remember. It is the perfect inversion of what Cathy Caruth poses in her study of Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras's *Hiroshima mon amour*, where the French actress *betrays* the memory of her German lover's death at the end of World War II to a Japanese lover many years later by telling him the story of her German lover. Hernán refuses to betray the past—even if he is narrating to David, who was there, but since he is dead, he is really just retelling himself—yet is equally effective at "isolating the all of madness and the nothingness of forgetting" (Caruth, 34). This mirrors what Rothberg calls the realist tendency which suggests traumatic events are not 'radical,' nor do they possess any depth or extraordinary dimensions.⁴⁷ How could a national *Montonero* block party be 'radical'? And yet for Hernán it is a

⁴⁷ This follows Hannah Arendt's line of reasoning about the "banality of evil:" she suggests that "evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension." Quoted by Rothberg, p. xvii.

memory whose meaning was infused with trauma, which he refuses to recount; one manifestation of what Fresco calls “the gaping, vertiginous black hole” of the experience of trauma (Laub, 64).

In the second one, Caparrós has Hernán remember some very specific events, but then claims his memories have been overwritten by what he heard from friends and saw in magazines. In the moment, he was not able to construct a satisfactory narrative to account for the experience, thus his narrative memory absorbs other narratives to compensate the deficiency. This seems to echo what Rothberg calls the antirealist tendency, which would suggest that for Hernán the event transcends history.⁴⁸

This is the genesis of the black hole. Caparrós has simultaneously affirmed and denied both the realist and antirealist tendencies: he affirms each one separately, and yet in the affirmation of both a paradox is created which denies both. The whole of these two narratives—which coincidentally lie at the center of the novel—constitute the black hole which in-and-of-itself defies description beyond the banality of calling it a black hole, and which serves as the gravitational center for past, present and future events.

This was the turning point for Hernán; the beginning of the end. He remembers becoming more militant, Cámpora being kicked out of office on 13 July of 1973, new elections, Perón returning to power, the Triple A, Lopez Rega, and a return to clandestinity. One of the high points was that after he graduated from

⁴⁸ This follows Elie Wiesel’s line of reasoning about the Holocaust: “Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized.... [T]he Holocaust transcends history.” Quoted in Rothberg, p. xix.

secondary school and David and Hernán had parted ways, he started working for the leftist newspaper *Noticias*. He was star-struck with members of the staff who were true intellectual revolutionaries, like Rodolfo Walsh, Paco Urondo, Zelmar Michelini, and Juan Gelman. It is here he secretly decided to become a reporter. The anecdotes concerning Hernán's affiliation with *Noticias* is the most autobiographical part of the novel, which parallels Caparrós's experience at that daily. After the newspaper was closed, Hernán took some other odd jobs and started working in the barrios, which is where he reunited with David and became integrated into the Montonero cell which was now going to attempt an assassination. As the Peronists as an organization splinter and José Lopez Rega through the AAA makes it much more dangerous to be a *Montonero*, many of the high school- and college-age youth who were celebrating Cámpora's inauguration have now deserted the ranks and blended into the silent masses. "Yo la verdad que no entiendo, hermano," Hernán finally tells David, "hay cosas que nunca entendí... sigo sin entender muy bien cómo vamos a hacer para ganar, me entendés, para terminar de ganar" (256) When he examines truthfully his shared trajectory with the *Montoneros*, comparing where they are now with where they were when Cámpora won, he does question how they are going to win. But his feelings of loss soon cloud his judgment: "Cómo voy a decir esas cosas ahora, cómo te voy a decir esas cosas,... Perdoname, hermano, sí, perdoname, vas a ver como vamos a seguir hasta donde sea" (256). His head might say things are hopeless, but his heavy heart tells him to go on.

If much of Hernán's narrative dwells on the public and historically verifiable events, stories of the heart make up the rest of the content. At first, the

'revolutionary' group he belongs to talks about 'girls,' but none really has had any personal experience with members of the opposite sex. They criticize how the guys from the country clubs only talk about girls's *derrieres*; they say they do not want to objectify women (at least not that way) so they comment on the eyes, or the color of the hair, or the smile of different girls. Above all, they dream of being with a girl who is a companion in the revolutionary struggle; they idealize being part of a revolutionary couple.

David is the first to experience sex, but Hernán is the first to have a steady girl friend. He meets Mirta Balmes at the school party at the end of the third year of high school and dates her for over a year. He narrates his first kiss with her, as well as his first sexual encounter. The problem with Mirta, however, is that she is not a militant. Hernán tries to introduce her to the rest of the group a couple of times, but Mirta never has much interest what they do. Eventually, the group starts to distance itself from Hernán, at least in leadership matters, until they break up. He then meets Mariel soon after Cámpora wins the election, who along with two other girls are looking for a militant group to join, and they start dating. This lasts a year or so until they break up because it seemed like all Mariel wants to do is have sex but that they do not have much else in common. Once he starts working at *Noticias*, he is seduced by Graciela, an older reporter who is married, but whose husband is a businessman and is frequently out. But these are merely one-night stands and nothing comes of it. Hernán's one-night stand with Soledad, however, becomes the motive for his confession in the present.

During the summer of 1975, David met Soledad. But he was too shy to introduce himself or ask her out. Hernán encouraged David repeatedly to go ahead and ask her out because Hernán knew David really liked her. With his friend's support, David finally asked her out and were a couple shortly after. But when David went on vacation with his family to Misiones, Hernán and Soledad slept together at a cabin in *el Tigre*.⁴⁹ Before David came back, Hernán and Soledad agreed they would tell David that it was Hernán's idea. This was because Hernán wanted David to take her back because Hernán saw how happy David was with her, and because this way he could be angry at Hernán and still take Soledad back without losing face. What Hernán couldn't tell David then (and laments that he will never be able to tell David now) is that Hernán also liked Soledad from the beginning, but didn't tell David because he wanted to give David a chance at being in a relationship like he had experienced with Mirta and Mariel. And worse than that, it was Hernán who had invited Soledad to the cabin, not the other way around. Hernán ends his monologue confessing his betrayal and asking for forgiveness. This done, he is now able to utter David's full name, David Barenstein, which Hernán now raises up as a banner, and he promises to continue fighting and dedicates the next day's *ajusticiamiento* to the memory of David.

Inside Carlos's Head

Carlos narrates the last major story. He is over thirty years of age (born circa 1945) and has a doctorate from a university in Paris. His stream of consciousness

⁴⁹ Riverside town north of Buenos Aires. Famous for its luxurious hotel, country clubs and summer homes.

narrative is non-linear, poetic and lyrical, and demonstrates an intimate familiarity with high (French) culture. The entire narrative takes place one February afternoon, at a bar called *El Londres*, which in the movie script seems to correspond with scene 14.1, p 237.

The first organizing theme of Carlos's narrative is the women in his life. The first was Soledad, which he hardly talks about. She was his girlfriend when he was twenty. Next is Michelle, a French girl whom he met in Paris while studying at the Sorbonne. His relationship with her lasted a year or two, but he eventually tired of the lack of commonality. He was Argentine and there were things she just didn't get about him or his writing, which were in Spanish. That is when he met Cecilia, the true love of his life. She was also from Argentina and had gone to Paris to attend the university. Within a week he had practically moved into her apartment in Rue de la Roquette, and later that summer they took a two-week trip to Italy. The euphoria of first love eventually turned into routine, which instigated their first fight. He slammed the door and spent the night at Michelle's apartment, but the second night he came back and they made up. Soon after, Cecilia becomes pregnant, and they both decide to return to Argentina to be closer to family and raise their daughter, Rosa. For reasons which are not explained, they separated once back in Argentina. His first new girlfriend there was Laura. She was from the working-class and they had met through the *Montoneros*, but her lack of sophistication soon bored him and they soon drifted apart. He also had a one night stand with Estela, described earlier, and there are insinuations he occasionally will have a girl over to his bachelor pad every so often. Lastly, there is the mysterious girl with yellow eyes which is sitting at a

table across the bar where he is thinking about his life. In a way, she is a device with which to segue between different memories at different times, but he is truly mesmerized by her yellow eyes.

He likes to think of himself as a sparrow without a nest. Soledad had tried to get him to commit to marriage, settle down and start a family, but was unsuccessful. Michelle, apparently, never had any kinds of expectations about their relationship. If he were to have married anyone, it would have been Cecilia; not so much because of their child together, but because of their compatibility (same cultural background, shared experience abroad, and similar worldview). One evening, he invites his friend *El loco*, the manager at *Noticias* who is married with kids and envies Carlos's bachelor life, to drop by his apartment for a conversation. Carlos tries to believe the feeling of superiority he gets from *El loco* telling him as much. After *El loco* leaves—around ten at night—he thinks about going out to a café to write, thus enjoying *El loco*'s envy of his freedom, but winds up staying at home and masturbates to a memory or mental image of Cecilia.

An important aspect of Carlos's narrative is his use of language to explore the formal limits of representation.⁵⁰ He accomplishes this by first dismantling the traditional formal constraints of syntax: capitalization is all but eliminated, punctuation is reduced to little more than the comma, and the formal boundary between narration and direct speech is eliminated. By employing poetic techniques—such as repetition and alliteration in combination with a syntactic breakdown—

⁵⁰ Punte brings up many of the points brought up here, but develops them in slightly different ways. See Punte, p 126.

he extends the traditional semantics and pragmatics of prose —where each word references one meaning, and the entirety of the text leads (ideally) towards one interpretation— into the realm of poetry: the reader becomes poetically open to a net of meaning for each word and for the text as a whole. In short, Caparrós gives Carlos a new semiotic construct with which to create meaning which pushes forcefully at the boundaries of the formal limits of representation.

The following lines are taken as representative of his entire narrative and will show his poetic use of language in prose form. In the following, he describes thinking to himself of how he could (but probably never would) approach the girl with yellow eyes reading a book, across the bar:

Obviamente esquivarás su mirada, la mirarás en el techo donde sus ojos son menos peligrosos repitiéndote las frases encantatorias a mí también me interesa margueritte duras las palabras que nunca le dirás, que tal vez le dirás nunca y que inician tus recuerdos del futuro, archivadas como si fuese suficiente, subjuntivo futuro o pretérito perfecto, inmaculado de toda realidad. Y al cabo de un momento volverás la mirada hacia su mesa, sus ojos amarillos ya tan absortos como antes, inmoderadamente cantábiles, enfrascados en el libro habías perdido o recuperado la oportunidad y a margueritte duras la había conocido en París sí en el '71 yo pasé allí unos tres años en aquella época muy interesante sabés los días del mayo fueron inolvidables y después un verdadero cambio en las relaciones entre la gente una gran libertad y sus ojos perdidos en el libro, *veux- tu lire*, en ese libro ajeno en ese libro que nunca habías escrito, *ce qu'il y a d'écrit?*, que tal vez estés escribiendo, subjuntivo futuro o pretérito perfecto, esperanzado de vaga realidad... (242)

The words seem almost to bounce off each other, adding new dimensions of referentiality with which to push at the boundaries of representation, creating his own constellation of meaning out of words. Some play with concepts, such as *mirada*, *mirar*, and *ojos*; in the first line of the quote, *mirada* (her gaze) plays with *mirarás* (he will see) which introduce *ojos* (eyes). It is picked up later with *volverás*

la mirada and *ojos amarillos*, which now are described as *absortos*, and after a long interlude, with *ojos perdidos*. Some words play with sounds and rhythm, such as *duras*, *nunca* and *dirás*. Because the traditional punctuation is absent, a single combination of words can take on multiple meanings, as in *margueritte duras las palabras*: When *duras* is understood as *margueritte*'s last name, and the last word of Carlos's direct speech, *las palabras que nunca le dirás* is simply and literally words he will never tell her. But if the last word of his direct speech is *marguerite*, then *duras* qualifies as 'harsh' those very words, as in: the harsh words he will never tell her. In the absence of punctuation and capitalization, both alternatives are poetically in play. A similar 'interpretive net' could be shown with *recuerdos del futuro*, which then play on *subjuntivo futuro*, and *pretérito perfecto (recuerdos)*, which themselves are based on *fuese suficiente*, but also introduce *inmaculado* (perfection) de *toda realidad*. Caparrós, through Carlos's narrative, pushes at the limits of representation by creating a linear prose language which communicates by means of a non-linear poetic hermeneutics.

Carlos is gifted in creating with words and his single greatest ambition is to be a writer. His great character flaw, ironically, is that in many ways he is mediocre and cliché and never seems to be inspired. He takes a scholarship to study at *La Sorbonne* so that he can live in Paris and become a writer. While there, he does all the cliché things one would expect of a Latin American writer following in the footsteps of Julio Cortázar: he wears a beret and sports a beard *a la* Che Guevara and frequents the *Quartier* along with all the rest of the Latin Americans. He takes long strolls through the Parisian streets and boulevards, ducking into quaint little cafés

for inspiration; and although he avoided thinking about Cesar Vallejo, Cortázar or Miguel Ángel Asturias or a number of other Latin American writers who had lived and written in Paris, his poems —on the off-chance that he writes anything— are “caudalosamente nerudianos.” (56) With Cecilia, he becomes involved with a group of Argentines who are trying to get a magazine started on literature and current events in Latin America, but he soon quits the group (although Cecilia remains active). In general he comes off more as a dilettante than either a writer or a militant. Although he graduated with a doctorate, returning to Buenos Aires was, in his view, a big admission of defeat. Once back in Buenos Aires, another magazine project fell through, which is why his friend *El loco* hires him to write for *Noticias*, a daily newspaper which had started a few months earlier. The newspaper job pays well, which allows him to live comfortably and give Cecilia a generous monthly stipend to help raise Rosa, but he feels he has “sold out” and lost his independence by having to submit his *écrits* for anyone’s approval.

Part of his problem is that Carlos is constantly referencing high culture in his thoughts and in his writings, and belittling what he considers *petit bourgeoisie*. When *El loco* comes to visit Carlos at his apartment, they discuss Rembrandt and Goya, and engage in other “flirteos históricos con la historia y otras disciplinas” (248). When sitting at the bar, he not only wonders about talking to her about Marguerite Duras (127), but also about Carlos Fuentes or Hernández (11). When he first notices Cecilia at the Sorbonne, he desires her intensely precisely because she was also a part of his high culture: “...la mirabas, estudiaría historia o literatura, perfecto, escuchaba religiosamente a foucault y la regadeseabas con futuro en los

ojos,...” (55). He idealizes Cecilia’s apartment location: “...dos piezas cerca de la bastille, rue de la roquette, viejo corazón del París proletario, del París heroico, te gustaba pensar que...habían empezado allí las grandes revoluciones del siglo pasado...” (85). When he storms out on Cecilia, he accuses her of being cold by yelling, “...no se puede estudiar amor en los libros de von Clausewitz...” (89). Even when thinking to himself he will drop references to French philosophy, as when he references Jacques Derrida in the following phrase: “...significando la diferencia, tu diferencia en la deferencia de los canas periodista testigo...” (13). On the other hand, he finds *El loco*’s folksy comparison absurd: “...los dirigentes son lamentablemente tan necesarios como el 60 a las seis de la tarde si tenés que ver a una mina en olivos...” (83).⁵¹ He also describes derisively Cecilia and his trip to Italy as a *petit bourgeoisie* adventure: “feliz parejita de middle-west conociendo la Europa de Arthur Frommer...” (87). But unlike Cortázar’s references to Biafra in a text about bathroom noises (“Lucas, sus pudores”) or playful writings about *Cronópios*, Carlos comes across as pedantic, cliché or a snob. It is kind of reminiscent of a Woody Allen movie—*Annie Hall* (1977) or *Zelig* (1983), for instance—where Woody Allen, the writer, will have a male character state that he suffers from ‘male penis envy.’ In *No velas*, Caparrós, the writer, creates Carlos, the writer, who doesn’t so much state as demonstrate he suffers ‘writer’s envy.’

⁵¹ 60 is a reference to a commuter bus that ran between Buenos Aires northward towards the *Olivos* neighborhood. Mina is a “hot chick” in porteño slang. *El loco* is referring to how, in spite of the fact that the bus will be crowded, it is the only way to get from downtown to *Olivos* on public transportation.

One theme which surfaces often is on “the thousands of possibilities of suicide.” He introduces the topic in the first page: “... vas a pensar en las miles de posibilidades del suicidio y preguntarte por qué, no vas a saber, te vas a decir que no sabés, sabrás que tu respuesta te hiere, te disminuye, que te desenmascara y vas a dejar tu respuesta sin pregunta...” (10). Whenever he takes up the subject again, it will repeat many of the same phrases, weaving topics he is thinking about right then, and suggesting he is closer to the answer. In his mind, Carlos creates thousands of possibilities of how the future could unfold, but at some point he must decide on one, eliminating all others. Punte has suggested, quite correctly, that “cada decisión es la muerte de una posibilidad, de ahí la imagen del suicidio” (129). In an effort to postpone execution of other realities, he postpones decisions whenever possible: does he introduce himself to the girl with the yellow eyes or not? In his mind, either option is real —or alive— until the inevitable moment of having to make a decision, at which time all the other possibilities ‘commit suicide,’ so to speak.

As with Estela and Hernán’s narratives (and even the movie script narrative, to some extent), Caparrós satisfies the demands for historical documentation through Carlos’s narratives by inserting historical references into a fictional story, or by inserting Caparrós as a witness to an historical event. Examples of the first include Cecilia attending Foucault’s lectures on history at the Sorbonne, Carlos working for *Noticias* newspaper, or Carlos meeting a *Montonero* contact at a

bookstore on *Avenida Corrientes*,⁵² among many others. As a witness to historical events, Carlos seems to arrive late to most things. He arrives in Paris in 1969, one year after the May revolution, but he hears about it from Cecilia, who was there at the time, and heard the stories of Daniel Cohn-Bendit⁵³ standing up to the chief of police. He returns to Argentina in early 1974, missing all the grass-roots events of 1971 – 1972 described by Estela and Hernán, or the events of the “Primavera Camporista” described by Hernán. He is, however, present for two of the lowest events for the *Montoneros* and the Peronist: the 1 May 1974 rally in front of the Plaza de Mayo, and the death of Perón on 1 July 1974. The particular language Carlos uses allows for the reflection on the limits of representation.

For his first assignment for *Noticias*, El Loco asked Carlos to cover the 1 May 1974 gathering at Plaza de Mayo to hear the president, Juan Domingo Perón speak to the masses. He remembers the old syndicate organizations such as the CGT⁵⁴ and the more conservative side of the Peronist movement gathering on the right side of the Plaza de mayo, while the younger Montoneros and JP filled in the left.

Intertwined in these memories are earlier memories of his mother’s reaction to Evita Perón, as well as his internal debate about the merits of the first Perón regime (he was a demagogue, but at least Evita introduced the women’s vote). But as soon as Perón steps out onto the balcony, Carlos’s narrative concentrates on Perón’s speech, which would alter the course of Argentine history and change his life. As he

⁵² Avenida Corrientes in Buenos Aires is famous for its book stores and coffee shops.

⁵³ Daniel Cohn-Bendit (b 1945), is a French-born German politician. He is a somewhat minor but legendary figure of the May 1968 student uprising at the Sorbonne.

⁵⁴ Confederación General del Trabajo

sits in the bar remembering Perón's speech, the narration attempts to convey the chaos of the moment:

Y un momento de asombro, y los gritos que siguen, ambos gritos, saludos a vander⁵⁵, perón en las alturas y su voz colérica hoy resulta que algunos imberbes⁵⁶, y abajo las manos como espadas, pretenden tener más méritos que, y un rugido rabioso, MON, ofensivo, TO, desafiante, NEROS CARAJOS, polifonía ciega y sorda y peron todavía aullando las organizaciones sindicales que han visto caer a sus dirigentes asesinados decía, gritaba, sin que todavía haya sonado el escarmiento, y ya no podés ver, ni oír ni reportear el momento te anula aniquila tu vuelo te sumergen los cuerpos en delirio, gritando en remolino, los palos de las banderas volviéndose garrotes y los dirigentes intentando vanamente el encauce, todavía alcanzás a verlo al lito queriendo contener porque la gente está empezando a darse vuelta, a caminar a darse vuelta a irse aserrín aserrán,⁵⁷ y los únicos maderos los que empuñan las manos, y san juan sin iglesia y los gritos ofensivos son ahora desprecio es el pueblo que se va, aserrín, ya todos caminando todos casi todos enarbolando astas y cachiporras y cadenas, aserrán es el pueblo que se va, marcha lenta y crispada y

⁵⁵ When Perón says: "...Por eso compañeros, quiero que esta primera reunión del Día del Trabajador sea para rendir homenaje a esas organizaciones y a esos dirigentes sabios y prudentes que han mantenido su fuerza orgánica, y han visto caer a sus dirigentes asesinados, sin que todavía haya sonado el escarmiento...", the Montoneros and Juventud Peronista shout out in reply: "¡Rucci traidor, saludos a Vander!" José Ignacio Rucci, was a syndicate leader and right-hand man for Perón until the Montoneros assassinated him in 1973. The far-left segments of Peronism thought he was a traitor because while Perón was still in exile, he publicly repudiated Lanusse's Gran Acuerdo which proposed a civilian-military government, yet cultivated many relationships with the military which discredited his public stance. Augusto Vander was another one of Perón's emissaries and syndicate leader who was assassinated in 1969. (Ortiba.com)

⁵⁶ According to most historians, the precise moment Perón openly and formally disavows the Montoneros and Juventud Peronista is when he utters the following in his speech: "...Decía que a través de estos veintidós años, las organizaciones sindicales se han mantenido inamovibles, y hoy resulta que algunos imberbes pretenden tener más mérito que los que durante veinte años lucharon..." (Ortiba.com)

⁵⁷ "Aserrín, aserrán/ los maderos de San Juan/ piden pan y no les dan/ los maderos de San Juan" is the Argentine version of a popular Spanish children's song. After the first few minutes of Perón's speech, in which he praised the conservative syndicates and denigrated the more radicalized youth, the Montoneros and Juventud Peronista start filing out of the Plaza to the chant of "¡Aserrín, aserrán, es el pueblo el que se va!"

estruendosa, mientras sigue el discurso, perón perón desgañitándose
allá arriba y las espaldas, gorriones abandonando el nido destruyendo
el nido quemándose las naves navegando sin brújula ni timón ni
órdenes en un mar enemigo y llegan los sindicales el desbande los
golpes las caídas el pueblo que se va conseguiste salir de alguna forma
aserrín aserrán, lo habías cantado, es el pueblo (35)
que se va. (53)⁵⁸

In the above can be heard clips of Perón's speech and the youth's responses shouted out as chants. Mixed in between, Carlos has inserted visual descriptions, emotional editorials of what was going on, and his own reaction to events. Caparrós in essence creates a language in which he can represent everything all at once, but which is difficult to decode. It depicts what Dori Laub calls 'the imperative to tell:' "There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time,... to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory* and *speech*" (Felman 78). In creating this complex language that requires a *Lunfardo* dictionary in one hand and a history of leftist militancy in the 1970's in the other, Caparrós comes very close to jeopardizing satisfaction of the demand for the circulation of the event in public discourse, precisely because it is an hermetic discourse that hides as much as it reveals. Thus Carlos's narrative also portrays what Laub's calls 'the impossibility of telling:' "the imperative to tell the story... is inhabited by the impossibility of telling" because the available language is inadequate and the invented language is incomprehensible (Felman 79).

It is all one long sentence that spills into the next section and needs to be disentangled to be comprehensible. "[P]erón en las alturas," "abajo las manos como

⁵⁸ Carlos's narrative is intertwined with all the other narratives. Unlike the other, Carlos's narrative will break in the middle of a thought; thus the end of this quote comes several pages later.

espadas,” “la gente está empezando a darse vuelta” and “marcha lenta y crispada” give us some visual cues of Perón as a demi-god up on high, the throng with hand like swords, and after Perón’s words the masses leaving, marching. “[S]u voz colérica,” “un rugido rabioso,” “polifonía ciega y sorda,” “perón todavía aullando,” and “los gritos ofensivos ahora son desprecio” attempt to describe the loudness of the event, but they also serve to qualify the discourse on both sides with adjectives of anger and even hatred. The *Montoneros* and the *JP* are to him like little sparrows leaving the Peronist nest. The image of sailing on the seas without a rudder or a compass is a reference to Plato’s analogy of government as a ship of state and Athenian free-for-all democracy as a ship with no guidance.⁵⁹ Carlos finds that, in the presence of that much raw emotion, he is unable to maintain his detached critical stance and is swept up with the masses: “el momento te anula,” he tells himself, “aniquila tu vuelo” and “te submergen... en delirio,” and later, when he joins some of the *Montonero* chants, “lo habías cantado.”

Carlos’s narrative represents Laub’s paradoxical ‘imperative to tell’ and ‘inability to tell’ about the event, which culminates in silence just as much as Hernán’s narrative represents the banality and uniqueness which should not or cannot be remembered. Estela’s narrative is fraught with contradictions because she lives in the now, free from historical thinking. So while she understands certain things very well, these pockets of understanding do not come together into a whole of meaning that coherently makes sense of everything. In essence, far from bringing closure to the explication of the movie *O juremos*, the narrative of these three

⁵⁹ See Plato’s *Republic*, book VI.

characters has revealed there are black holes of silence that hide reality. But Carlos has some other texts which might help, although the outlook is not promising.

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso

There are six very similar paragraphs in the novel, which start with the same words: “Un paso seguido de otro paso.”⁶⁰ in which Caparrós plays a clever trick on the reader to demonstrate the power of familiarity heuristic.⁶¹ This seems to be a paragraph from a short story Carlos is working on. The action of the paragraph seems to narrate the moments before Carlos, Estela and Hernán execute the operation described in the movie script. With each iteration, the semantics are altered slightly, but a cursory reading would hardly detect the changes. More significantly, the syntax of the paragraph slowly begins to shed punctuation, making the reader fill in the missing markers which delineate the various phrases and sentences. The following is the paragraph from chapter 1:

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso. Ella sola delante. El y yo seguimos. ¿Qué hora es? Tranquilo, todavía tenemos seis minutos. Ah. Y otro paso y pasos y más pasos. La vereda no contesta los ruidos, sólo oscura. Revisar cada momento, cada futuro momento. Un charco a esquivar. El saldrá de su casa cuando la luz se apague. Che, ese tipo ahí. No está con una mina. Ah. Pasos. La calle de tierra. El no tiene porque sospechar nada. Tres días sudando este momento. Che, ya tendría que salir. No, pibe, tranquilo, todo está al pelo. Tres días. Pasos y repasos. Falta poco. Está empezando a clarear, viste. Ah. La noche fue muy larga. Pero él saldrá a las 6:15. En punto. (23)

⁶⁰ These occur in chapter 1 after each of the four main narrative voices has made an appearance (23); at the beginning of chapter 2 (62), chapter 3 (114), chapter 4 (168) and chapter 5 (228); and again near the end of chapter 5 (268). As careful as Punte is to analyze every narrative voice in the novel, an analysis (or even a mention) of these paragraphs is curiously missing.

⁶¹ This is the psychological term for an individual's ability to make quick decisions based on past experience.

Subsequent iterations of this paragraph start to alter the syntax and word choice, but follow the general same idea. The following are the first two lines of the next four iterations:

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso. Ella delante, la seguimos, qué hora es? Tranquilo, todavía tenemos seis minutos. Ah.... (62)

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso. Ella primero después nosotros, qué hora es? Tranquilo, todavía nos quedan seis minutos. Ah.... (114)

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso. Ella sola delante. El y yo seguimos qué hora es? Tranquilo todavía nos quedan seis minutos, ah.... (168)

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso. Ella sola delante él y yo seguimos qué hora es? Tranquilo todavía nos quedan seis minutos. Ah.... (228)

By the time the reader encounters the last iteration at the end of chapter 5, all syntactical markers are eliminated:

Un paso seguido de otro paso y otro paso delante ella él y yo seguimos qué hora es tranquilo todavía nos quedan seis minutos ah y otro paso y pasos y más pasos la vereda no devuelve los ruidos sólo oscura revisar cada momento cada futuro momento un charco a esquivar saldrá de la casa cuando la luz se apague che y esos dos ahí no es una pareja ah pasos la calle de tierra no sospecha nada tres días mudando este momento che ya tendría que salir tranquilo pibe está todo al pelo tres días pasos y repasos falta poco está empezando a clarear vista ah la noche fue muy larga pero saldrá a las 6:15 en punto. (268)

Without formal syntax, meaning becomes somewhat arbitrary: adjectives and adverbs once grouped with one set of nouns, pronouns and verbs could now be grouped with others, altering the meaning slightly without having altered the word themselves nor their order. For instance, the syntax of the first five paragraphs suggested the first lines of the last paragraph's missing syntax be filled in thus: "...y otros pasos. Delante ella, él y yo seguimos. ¿Qué hora es? Tranquilo, todavía nos quedan seis minutos...." However, it could be filled in thus: "...y otros pasos delante.

Ella, él y yo seguimos. ¡Qué hora! Es tranquilo. Todavía nos quedan seis minutos...”

By filling in his or her own syntax in a different way, the reader could alter the way in which the same words form different clauses, generating different meanings.

Thus these six paragraphs demonstrate two opposite phenomena: on the one hand, by slowly removing syntax, Caparrós is empowering the reader to construct his or her own relationships of meaning between words. In the final paragraph, the reader has nearly absolute control over what that story will mean. Simultaneously, Caparrós is training the reader to read the final syntax-free paragraph in a pre-determined way: or, put more bluntly, Caparrós blinds the reader to other possibilities and dupes him or her into believing it is the only reading.

Caparrós poses the same problem in a one-sentence paragraph that closes chapter 3 (the central chapter), but that narratively does not belong with any other narrative voice: “Los aztecas conocían la rueda: solo la usaban para hacer juguetes” (165). An obvious question is why did they not use it to develop transportation technology, as happened in the ‘old world’? It is a question that has intrigued anthropologists, but Caparrós’s implication is that they simply did not think about it, and that their familiarity heuristic conditioned them to thinking of it only as a child’s plaything.⁶²

⁶² Tim McGuinness lists the following as one of seven theories he has collected on the subject: “They never made the connection from models to large scale - this is a known phenomenon that exists even today. As difficult as it may seem to a modern mentality, it is entirely reasonable for this failure to grasp the significance of toy wheels to have existed. Thus, small wheeled effigy models were as far as the thought process progressed. However, there is no proof, one way or the other for this.” See <http://www.precolumbianwheels.com/>

In both sets of paragraphs, Caparrós thus reflects on the formal limits of representation in tandem with the public circulation of discourses on the event. If the author strays too far from the reader's expectations—that is, the readers' familiarity heuristic derived from previous encounters with the formal conventions of realist plots, trauma literature or dictator novels—the 'message' of the text may be misunderstood, or not understood at all. In the introduction to the second edition of *No velas* (2000), Caparrós describes the process by which he came up with the ending for the novel, and how it was received: "Después nadie supo leer ese final. Quizás no era importante, salvo para mí. Puede que fuese sólo la manera de poder cerrar mi primera novela" (6). Equally problematic is the case of being 'distasteful.' Hernán Sassi who, when writing about the *grupo Shanghai* with which Caparrós was associated in the mid '80's, opined that this group's narrative was 'spoiled' by superfluous postmodern sensibilities: "Los textos de M. Caparrós,... fueron reducidos... a cierta enfermedad que concentraba –muerte del autor y celebración del texto mediante– intertextualidades múltiples y autorreferencialidad en dosis tan altas que echaban a perder toda narración" (Sassi). While the comment is directed at the body of work of Caparrós and other authors from the *grupo Shanghai*, as an example of that body of work, *No velas* is representative of the 'sick' and 'spoiled' postmodern narration. Caparrós seems aware of this, and yet chooses to put his work into public circulation for the few who find this accessible, informative or even interesting precisely because it presents a narrative toolbox from which the reader can accept the meaning suggested by the author, or choose to rearrange the narrative pieces to conclude something different, as will be shown next.

Historia para (no) ser escrita...

There are two notes for the plot of two stories which carry similar titles. The notes serve as meditations on the limits of representation. The first text is in Chapter 2 and is called “Historia para (no) ser escrita, por falta de espejo, o miedo a herir.” The notes to the first story situate it in Paris, at the Bataclan Theater, at three in the morning, with Chico Freeman⁶³ playing the blues on a saxophone. The low lights and the smoke help to set the scene for an ambiguous or even misleading story. A tall, handsome man with blond curly hair is with a woman who is shorter, a plain face, and is uglier than he. The observer, however, is caught up in the heat of the moment, the whiskeys, the smoke, and has become obsessed with her. The blond guy has his hand on her shoulder and it slowly slides off as she distances herself from him and moves towards the narrator. In that moment, the narrator feels pride when she rejects the blond man’s advances. But when she makes eye contact with the narrator, he ducks out of the establishment. The note ends stating that the text is an attempt to write himself into a story that would replace the letter he can’t write Cecilia. The story’s tension relies on imagery and description, anticipating the narrative techniques he will develop further in *Ansay*, and will be featured prominently in *La noche anterior*.

⁶³ The specific reference to Chico Freeman that night in Paris is one of the few anachronisms of the novel. Carlos’s time in Paris was in the late 1960’s through early 1970’s. Freeman was at Northwestern University until he graduated in 1971. By the late 1970’s and early 1980’s —the time when Caparrós would have been in Paris and Spain—Freeman had already recorded some of his early albums and would have made some of his early European tours.

María José Punte believes the letter Carlos can't write is about his infidelity with Michelle during the first night of Carlos and Cecilia's fight. However, I believe it to be the notes he wrote the second night of his fight with Cecilia, and is attempting to aestheticize a certain mood he happened to catch at the bar where he is writing:

Y sin embargo la noche siguiente no volviste a lo de michelle, querías explotar tu tristeza, estallarla estetizar tu tristeza con sabido clasicismo, un ballon de rouge⁶⁴ y quizá pudieras escribir algo, los versos más tristes, esa noche palabras te repiqueteaban la boca, impidiéndote hablar, todo amago de verso contenido, esta noche, sumergido por ese endecasílabo así que te fuiste a escuchar jazz para lavarte en música y al final tomaste unos apuntes y a las tres cuando cerró el boliche te fuiste caminando tu alcohol hasta la rue de la roquette, y no te abría, y si está con un tipo, o no está,...(89)

Rue de la Roquette is the street Cecilia's apartment is on. When Cecilia doesn't open the door immediately, he is worried perhaps she is with another man. His worry is not his (or her) jealousy, but of the awkwardness of the situation. Sex, at this time and place and in these circles, was casual, and jealousy would have been for them some *bourgeois* affectation based on an antiquated notion of sexual possession. I don't think Carlos is worried about confessing he slept with Michelle the night before. He is, however, worried about being mediocre and cliché.

In his narrative where he described writing down the story, his references to a sentimental French movie about a red balloon and Pablo Neruda come off as cliché. Also, a story about an Argentine in a Paris bar late at night—in a smoke-filled room with jazz music prominent but in the background— already belongs to Julio

⁶⁴ *Le ballon rouge* (1956) by Albert Lamorisse is short movie about a boy who befriends a sentient, mute, red balloon, filmed in the Belleville neighborhood of Paris. It won the Oscars for best foreign film, along with several other prestigious awards from Europe. Like Carlos's story, *Le ballon rouge* has little dialogue, relying instead on the aesthetic effect of imagery. Bullies eventually pop the red balloon.

Cortázar, whom he references: “Humo. Feeman. Saxo. Blues. Y el perseguidor que ya no es un cuento, cazador cansado,...” (94). The ambiguity of the setting is also reminiscent of Cristina Peri Rossi’s *La nave de los locos*, from which he borrows the character *Equis*: “desde los imperceptibles escalofríos se sabrá que vos equis, personaje, estás tratando de ser un relato que reemplace la carta que no te puedo escribir, Cecilia, que me duele escribirte” (95).⁶⁵ If this story should not be written, it is because it demonstrates Carlos’s writings are mediocre. All he can write in Paris is a pale repetition or recombination of texts (or films) by Cortázar, Peri Rossi, Neruda and Lamorisse. He is confronted with the problem that cliché representations which do not reflect his own personal experience but rather reproduce great literature is not particularly valuable in artistic, historical, personal or even economic terms.

The second text is found in chapter 3 and is called “Historia para (no) ser escrita en esa casa del tigre, en una tarde (como hoy) de lluvia, con leños en el fuego y vos, o bien tus ojos.” The notes indicate the story would start on a rainy autumn day in Paris. Outside, Argentines are singing their sadness and desires. Inside, a sensual scene is described: “...tu vientre los húmedos deseos y profundos el ojo de tu cuerpo abierto a la mirada de mis escasas torres (decir en suma la insaciabilidad de los encuentros)...” (147). Then the narrative should describe the rain avoiding the easy parallelisms (although he does allow himself to reference Huidobro’s “Arte poética”: “hay que llover la lluvia como gotas,... contar lo que es el agua pero no cantarla...” (147). At this point the narrative progresses through a series of images

⁶⁵ Again, another rare instance of anacronism. *La nave de los locos* was published in 1982, at least ten years after Carlos’s time in Paris, and two years after Caparrós finished writing the novel, but four years before *No velas* was published.

which try to explain exile-ness. The rain (water) becomes the motive for talking about the exile boat; exile becomes the motive for citing *El Cid* marching off into exile with his thirteen companions and that in the parallels he is trying to build the horses are the storm and that there weren't just thirteen, but many. He should not be tempted to talk about the moon because the exclusive sun of the story is her eyes. Or better yet, make the comparison in order to destroy the moon as a symbol of the country of wanderers and emphasize there is only one horse. After the interlude on exile filled with imagery, the story should continue thus:

Para volver entonces a la historia (que, como ya estará claro, será sólo una excusa para callar tus nombres) y contar que las calles se vaciaron, y la desolación de un atardecer de ese día de lluvia (o de cualquier otro, la generalización se hace evidente) lejos de aquellos bosques que ya ni acaso existen, y dibujar con detalles un árbol, una rama cualquiera de una calle extrañada, de una calle ya extraña, y descubrir (aunque tal vez el truco sea ya muy conocido) que ese árbol está aquí y nunca estuvo que esa rama no fue pero yo la vi ayer, ahí, sobre la parada del bus de las mañanas, y explicar así la indecible confusión, el repetido espanto de no saberse dónde... y así pintar que los caminos son todos menos uno cuando no es ese uno, pero dejando ambigua esa unidad (¿mi ciudad o tus cuerpos?) no para confundir al lector, sino por ser honesto. (148)

The last scene is of them by the chimney with the river visible through the window with the sound of the fire crackling and the keyboard clicking. He would be writing, torn between "cantarte y confundirnos" (148).

The story is about how to represent love and exile. The title could be misleading because the house in Tigre is where Hernán and Soledad had their affair, but the action takes place in Paris. The sensuous love scene is aestheticized, and there is an attempt to do the same with the description of the rain, but allusions to Huidobro make it a bit cliché. Leaving Buenos Aires in exile by boat is a cliché

associated with many famous Argentines, including Mariano Moreno (whom we will see in the next novel), José de San Martín, Juan Manuel de Rosas and even Juan Domingo Perón, not to mention Carlos Gardel singing “Por una cabeza.” *El Cid* is not as associated with exile as he is with triumph on the battlefield, but it is a well-known portion of his story. And describing a woman using parallelisms with the moon is as common a trope as could be found in western literature. Literary tropes, in and of themselves, are cliché.

Yet when he returns to ‘history,’ the story starts to take on uniqueness. The emptying of the streets can be interpreted as a reference to the *Montoneros* leaving Plaza de Mayo on 1 May 1974, or it could be the people who were listening to the Argentine singers leaving. The rainy afternoon in the woods could be a reference to the first time Perón tried to return, in 1972, or it could be that afternoon. The mode of representation that Carlos has found that works is to represent something with enough specificity to make it real in multiple places or at multiple times, or at least appear so even if it never was. The only way Carlos (Caparrós?) has found to honestly represent the ‘unsayable confusion and the repeated scare’ of exile is to represent specific ambiguity.

In these notes, there is enough specificity to guess at who the couple is. Because the title mentions a cabin in El Tigre, it could be Hernán and Soledad, but the reader would have to wait until chapter five to discover that. The Paris setting would also suggest Carlos and Michelle, or more likely Cecilia, since she has always been ‘the one’ for him. But the reference to exile does not fit with Carlos’s first trip to Paris—which was to study—and the description of the woman’s eyes being the

only sun in the story suggest it may be in the future, perhaps about the girl with the yellow eyes sitting at the bar. There is enough specificity to draw a number of conclusions about the couple, but enough ambiguity that any one of them could be true. As we shall see later, this story becomes the basis for *La noche anterior*.

Pero callarlos

There are four oniric texts which have the title “Pero callarlos”: the first is in Chapter 1, two more are in Chapter 4, and the last one, which is similar in many ways to the first, is in Chapter 5. All are written in first person. Punte suggests that these, along with the two previous texts, are about Carlos’s need for self-justification: “En general son textos que buscan autojustificarse, que hablan del miedo, la soledad y de una mujer inalcanzable” (141). I believe they go a little beyond that.

In the first story, a magician is performing a magic trick —while wearing white gloves, with his hand inside a black top hat, he must manipulate a grey dove and transform it into red and green handkerchiefs— but something goes wrong. He then proceeds to explain—in a language he later discovers is French—his mistake. The only one who will understand him is the rabbit in the hat of the magician on the eighth row, and he will not clap. Everyone else is swept by the rhetorical flair of his *mea culpa* and claps vehemently.

In the second story, the narrator sees himself as a character in a Quino cartoon,⁶⁶ walking across the frames (in color), which eventually becomes a desert.

⁶⁶ Joaquín Salvador Lavado (1932), better known as Quino, is a famous cartoonist best known for his character *Mafalda*.

He knows himself to be stranded with no provisions and that he will die in the desert. His ragged face contrasts sharply with his impeccable suit. He believes tomorrow will be Friday. The personality which narrates begins to distinguish itself from the personality which is being narrated. The narrated has a blurry face, the narrator is all eyes. The narrator wants to tell the narrated to just stay and wait for death, but the narrated continues until he arrives at an oasis in a Divito cartoon,⁶⁷ which is sure to be a mirage. After a long stay, he continues to walk towards the sea, but that death from thirst will soon come. He falls into the sea, which is actually a letter (or word) soup which is being drained from below. The character grabs on to a letter and wants to see the word, but he is pulled under. I think Punte is onto the meaning when she writes: "El oasis se refiere a la utopía de encontrar un sentido en las palabras" (141).

The narrator is lying on the ground being kissed by nine rattlesnakes. He can only see the legs of the indigenous people who, by the cracked appearance of their feet, must live miserable lives. They believe him to be a god because the snakes do not kill him, but he knows he had received an antidote much earlier. He stands up and is given a mask to wear which has an orifice for the mouth, but none for the eyes. On the inside of the mask is a protuberance which goes in his mouth. He begins to speak words he learned when he received his antidote, muffled by the mask. The indigenous people repeat his words, pronouncing differentiated phonemes for the

⁶⁷ José Antonio Guillermo Divito (1914 – 1969), is an Argentine cartoonist best known for the comics "Rico Tipo" which was usually populated with cartoons of impossibly beautiful girls whose lack of personality was compensated by smiles and curves.

first time. From the darkness of the mask he continues to lead the indigenous people's words for a long while until the rain comes, at which point the indigenous people carry the narrator on their shoulders. Again, Punte is on-target when suggesting that the story is about Carlos's doubts about what he is doing: "su actividad intelectual, su militancia. Hablar no desde sí mismo, sino desde una máscara" (142).

The last story repeats the first, with some key differences. The description of the magician's stage and failed trick is similar, but the ending is longer. After the exculpatory oration in French which garners more applause than the trick itself would have, he notices that the magician's rabbit in row eight is still not smiling. He quickly reviews his speech in his mind and finds several rhetorical flaws, for which he quiets the crowd and proceeds to deliver a second oration meant to correct the faults of the first. As he starts, he realizes that there will be no end to the recursive exculpatory explications.

As a whole, there is a level at which these four texts are about Carlos's insecurities, but they are also allegories of the major narrators of the novel, and ultimately are reflections on the limits of representation itself. In the stories about the magician, there is the performance anxiety of messing up on-stage, and having to cover it somehow, and the story of the cartoon portrays a character about to die of thirst who drowns in a sea of letter soup. The story about the mask does not show the main character to be anxious—although snakes and masks with no eyeholes and foreign objects in the mouth might give most people reason to be anxious—but it

does have the other element common to all four: the allegorical representation of language.

As the character in the story about rattlesnakes, Estela only partially sees “the people” and imagines them to be ragged and destitute. She dons the mask of militancy and garbles words she learned elsewhere through the protuberance in her mouth (phallogentric image notwithstanding), as when she muddles through an ill-reasoned defense to Carlos’s questions about the logic of mounting an *ajusticiamiento* at that time.

Hernán is like a well-dressed cartoon character who wanders from a Marxist frame into the frame of the desert of the *Montoneros*, where his crisp suit (leftist or progressive political ideology) doesn’t quite go with the ragged and unshaven face (popular or *Montoneros* ideology) —another mask— and he knows he will die of thirst. The first person narrator splits from the first person character in much the same way as a mirage is a double image of a place that does not exist. Like the character who spends some time at an oasis filled with beautiful fantasy cartoon women he knows is a mirage, Hernán basks in the Cámporista spring. When the action continues, Hernán finds himself working at *Noticias*, a veritable soup of letters. But as things turn sour for the *Montoneros*, Hernán desperately clings to a letter from a word he cannot quite see until he is sucked into the vertiginous black hole. It is reminiscent of a line from Paco Urondo, editor in chief (secretario de redacción) for *Noticias*: “enfundé un arma porque busco la palabra justa.” (Desaloms). ‘Busco la palabra justa’ could be understood to mean ‘I am searching for

the right word' or 'I am searching for the word "just".' Hernán, too, was searching for a word in the letter soup, but only managed to grab on to a single letter.

The magician's tale is an allegory of Carlos and the movie script. As creator of an ordinary and common place show, something has gone wrong for which the magician must resort to a verbal explanation of the ideal visual representation of what the spectators should have seen, in much the same way as Carlos must resort to providing an explanatory narrative to cover the inadequacies of an otherwise ordinary and commonplace movie. But finding this explanatory narrative inadequate as well, he quickly discovers the recursion of inadequacies and explanations would be infinite. There is, therefore, no perfection but only an imperfect movie script (or performance) —which many people will applaud anyway— and imperfect exculpatory texts (Carlos, Estela and Hernán's narrations) of how the movie should have been understood, which will capture even more applause than the movie itself. But these, as noted, will have their problems as well because they hide more than they reveal anything. Thus Carlos's other smaller texts will be needed to explain how to read the previous texts, etc. In theory, perfect representation would necessarily be infinite; thus a practical limit of representation is the limit of expiatory texts an author has the capacity to produce, or a reader has the tolerance to digest.

Puente, 18.2 and R.

The last three sections of the novel are 'the magician's trick gone wrong,' so to speak. *Puente (la voz de su amo)* and the enigmatic *R.* comprise the sixth chapter, which functions as an epilogue.

In *Puente*, we see Carlos on the bridge of a boat leaving Buenos Aires. It is the classic cliché of exile and he even quotes a line from *Mi Buenos Aires querido*. There is a woman with yellow eyes; it may be the same one from the bar, but nothing is certain when Carlos has ‘trained’ the reader to look for ambiguity and misdirection. Two women show up at three in the afternoon of a hot summer day to bid him farewell; they may be Cecilia and Rosa, but not necessarily. At dinner he takes up plurilingualism, etiquette and *politesse* once again. But most importantly, there is a tomorrow: “sé que mañana empezará cuando yo quiera y no en la madrugada (tal vez, por intrusiones). Que me despertaré igual. Que me despertaré, mañana. Que mañana existe. Con certeza estática” (273). *La voz de su amo* is the tag line from the Gramophone Records label (later Victor and later RCA) on which so many tango songs were stamped, but it also says something about Carlos’s true master —self-preservation and literature before militancy— which contradicts the movie’s narrative (at least up through scene 18.1), as well as Carlos’s narrative.

The movie script’s last scene (18.2), contains the ‘magician’s error.’ The entire movie has been shot in third person, and the instructions for the beginning of the scene call for the camera’s angle accordingly: “La cámara está situada ahora en la esquina del bar de la calle suburbana que los personajes relevaron los días anteriores” (269). The car in which the three approach the target’s house appears from the other side: “De repente vemos aparecer, por la esquina opuesta, el Peugeot verde que avanza lentamente....” Precise instructions are given for where the car should stop, where the three characters should stand (Santiago and Estela are on the sidewalk, Carlos is behind them, by the car), and the zoom and cuts the camera

should make. But then a new technique is introduced: “Otro zoom muy rápido lleva a primer plano la cara de Carlos, tenso, los ojos muy abiertos. La imagen se convierte en subjetiva de Carlos, filmada cámara al hombro, muy movida, confusa:...” Nowhere before has the movie called for a subjective shot, nor has the shaky shoulder-mounted technique been used, but these serve to draw attention to the chaos and confusion of the scene. Soon, however, the movie script genre which is limited to showing us what is external to Carlos is overwhelmed by the interior narrative polyphony Carlos employed to describe the chaotic scene of 1 May 1974:

La imagen cada vez más confusa, el objetivo se agrieta, esquirla, se rompe, imágenes partidas deshechas, y la pesadilla y el sueño sean eternos, y él, o yo, o quién cayendo, roto, vos yo él los laureles que supimos cayendo lentamente roto y caía caías caía coronados de gloria la conjugación de la muerte y el disparo, una pistola que se traba, o no se traba, vivamos, los gritos o juremos, el estruendo cayendo yaciendo ya siendo nunca más, más, más, nunca, juremos ya caía, caías, caía, desmoronado, roto o juremos y los pasos mil pasos, corriendo corriendo escapando, huía, con gloria morir. (270)

The magician makes a mistake, breaking the fiction that the movie script is in any way a realist representation. The limits of representation through the movie genre have been reached and breached. Interwoven between descriptions of action the words to the national anthem start to appear, like the counterpoint polyphony with which Carlos described Perón’s speech interrupted by *Montonero* chants. The ambiguity of the grammatical person is introduced, likely borrowed from the ending of Carlos Fuentes’s *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. Syntactic markers like commas and periods disappear, like in the paragraphs which start with “un paso seguido de otro paso...” which opens the text to multiple groupings of word, phrases and meanings. And like the stories which should (not) be written, it is unclear exactly whose gun

did or did not jam, who fell and who ran away. The movie script becomes inadequate at this point to represent the reality of executing a cold-blooded murder that Carlos believes is pointless. Like the Quino character wandering the desert, Carlos splits into two characters. One is Carlos the *Montonero*, character in a bad movie, who has not been able to figure out how to escape the script written for him in which he must carry out an assassination he believes will accomplish nothing. The other is Carlos the writer of the bad movie, who desperately wants to write how the *Montoneros* cell group carried out the assassination, but the movie script's ability to adequately convey the gravitas of the moment becomes woefully inadequate, and other genres emerge which try to salvage meaning, undermining the project and condemning it to the silence of the black hole.

The final words are given to David and Hernán in four paragraphs which have been building since the first chapter and are the final words on the traumatic event. As a close to chapters 1, 2 and 4 there is one paragraph which records someone's opinion about another person. At the end of chapter 6, the three paragraphs are gathered and a fourth is added which clarifies as much as it raises questions. The last paragraph identifies David as the critic in the first three paragraphs and insinuates that the speaker in the fourth is Hernán. Since David is dead in Hernán's narrative, it is assumed this dialogue is taking place in the great beyond. While David tries to describe what aspects of Carlos did not sit well with him, Hernán describes the one characteristic that cannot be named: "Lo que nos hizo Carlos cuando vos caísteis preso aquella vez, justo antes de esa operación, te acordás, es no tiene nombre!" (274). In Caparrós's constellation of meaning, what Carlos did

to David and Hernán at the personal level is what Perón did to the *Montoneros* and the rest of the revolutionary militants at the national level. There are words which fit the description, such as betrayal or abandonment, but the banality of using ordinary words—which themselves are arbitrary constitutive elements of the imperfect system of language—do not capture the profundity of the experience, which should best be left as a nameless black hole.

Predominant Elements

‘Death’ is the strongest leitmotiv of the novel. At the surface level, death is a constant element in all narratives. Early in Estela’s diary she reveals she had an abortion (26), and news of the deaths in Trelew was a key event which helped her become more aware of politics and become politically active (46). Early in their militancy, Hernán remembers that “en ese entonces todavía la muerte y los muertos eran solo banderas a levantar” (69). He also narrates about the death of “el moncho,” in the suburb of William C. Morris, who was shot by police at point-blank range while tangled up in a barbed wire. The dates, names and circumstances do not match, but is an episode reminiscent of the death of Fernando Luis Abal Medina, one of the early *Montoneros* leaders, shot in William C. Morris in 1970.⁶⁸ The death of Perón is a lengthy part of Carlos’s narrative (pp. 217 – 23; 238 – 9), and he comforts Cecilia the night Esteban *el cordobés* (not Estela’s boyfriend) commits suicide in Paris (242). In the movie script, the *ajusticiamiento* the *Montoneros* cell group is ordered to carry out is the chief cornerstone for the movie script. Certainly, David’s

⁶⁸ The death of Abal Medina is still remembered as *el día del Montonero*. See Reato.

death is fundamental to the plot of the movie script, and provides the underlying reason as well as sets the tone for Hernán's narrative.

At a deeper level, Carlos's leitmotiv of "las miles posibilidades del suicidio" is an important aspect of representing decisiveness as suicidal in the sense that any decision effectively kills all other possibilities. Also, the absence of David's narrative in the novel metaphorically reinforces the plot element of his disappearance and death in the movie script: unlike the other three members of the cell group, his explanatory narrative is conspicuously absent from the novel. We only hear a faint whisper from him in the section entitled *R*, at the end. In an interview with María Esther Gilio about the first volume of *La voluntad*, Caparrós offers the following opinion about the relationship between remembering, disappearance and their decisions: "Lo terrible es que con los recuerdos de la muerte se taparon los recuerdos de la vida, lo cual es una forma de volver a desaparecer a los desaparecidos. De quitarles sus elecciones, su historia, y todo aquello en que creían, y que en un momento los llevó a decidir que podían dar la vida para conseguirlo." (Gilio, Brecha). Possibilities and potentialities "commit suicide" when a character decides on one course of action over others. By remembering their death only, their singular choices are made to disappear a second time. Caparrós represents the second disappearance by excluding David's narrative. However, Hernán's memory of David effectively represents the aesthetic quality with which death was imbued during the 1970's. "Había una idea estetizada de la muerte," he tells Gilio. "Hay una frase de Rafael Alberti que dice algo así como 'que maravilla los 20 años; esa edad en que uno elegía morir heroicamente para escuchar, después de muerto, lo que dicen

de uno’.” Structuring Hernán’s narrative as an extended monologue addressed to David affords Caparrós the opportunity to represent Alberti’s aesthetic sensibility about Death.

‘Belief’ is another obvious element in the novel. In this novel, the question of militancy is really to what degree do the different characters believe in the *Montoneros* metanarrative. Punte notes that the initial stage for all three characters was that of an intellectual inquiry of reality and the causes of injustice, which led them to come in contact with the working class. She also notes that their central opposition is to the *bourgeoisie* worldview; one which they were born into but which they no longer believe. Finally, she notes that the progression of militancy begins with a grand adventure in which they attend rallies and spread pamphlets, then morphs into political participation in the electoral campaign and volunteerism and finally into militarization. Parallel to this deepening involvement in the *Montoneros* is a deepening belief in the objectives and methods of the revolution. She notes that, except for Carlos, the characters are swept up in the moment and are not capable of reasoning through the implications of militarization (145-6).

Belief in something bigger than the self was, in Caparrós’s opinion, much easier at this time. In the article about this same time period cited earlier, he states: “Yo creo que era mucho más fácil ser joven en esos tiempos. Uno podía adoptar objetivos que estaban planteados de antemano, que se habían ido conformando desde décadas atrás” (Gilio). Hernán and his friends seem to have fallen into what he called a “*militancia interior*” based on these ready-made objectives or ideologies which later made it easy for the *Montoneros* to absorb the group (42). Estela also

identified that, for a young open-minded person at that time, the larger umbrella of Peronism was pretty much the only secular alternative to a capitalistic materialistic worldview (22).

The appealing aspect was that, like any belief system, it offered the youth something bigger than themselves into which they could escape freedom. In his seminal work *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm observes what he calls Automaton Conformity: that is, changing one's ideal self to conform to a pre-made type of personality dictated by society. He also notes that with the advent of the protestant reformation, the mechanisms for enforcing conformity which once largely existed outside the self—with the priest and Saints as mediator between God and man—became internalized by rethinking humanity's relation to God as immediate and the emphasis on answering to one's conscience. Caparrós notes how militancy enforced conformity through an internal mechanism of consciousness similar to what was introduced with Protestantism: “Había una especie de modelo único: el guerrillero era la aspiración de casi cualquier politizado de la izquierda. Un pintor, fuera bueno o malo, si tenía verdadera conciencia política, tenía que dejar los pinceles y tomar los fierros. La forma de participación era una y única” (Gilio). It is easy to see how Caparrós is able to arrive at this conclusion: for example, Juan Gelman was labeled a ‘traitor’ by the *Montoneros* when he left in 1979 based on ideological differences, and Paco Urondo and Rodolfo Walsh paid dearly when they subsumed their talents to this ‘one and only’ model of militancy. Caparrós effectively represents the types of compromises intellectuals had to make in order to “fit in:” Carlos had to give up a purely Marxist militancy in order to work with the *Montoneros*, he had to give up his

writer's independence when he started working for *Noticias*, and he had to give up his better judgment when he decided to go along with the *ajusticiamiento* in spite of all the arguments he brought up which suggested it was a bad idea. By contrast, Estela is represented as the ideal militant precisely because, once she committed herself to the cause, she never again questions the underpinnings of her automaton conformity to that 'one and only' model of militancy.

'Carlos' is another element in Caparrós's constellation of meaning. The four characters, Hernán, Estela, Cecilia and Carlos, could be mapped onto a Cartesian grid where one axis is labeled "belief" and the other is labeled "wisdom." In such a grid, each character would represent one quarter of the grid. Estela and Cecilia have the capacity for complete faith, while Carlos and Hernán do not. Carlos admits to Estela in the movie script that he feels more like a spectator than a participant of the revolution: "Te diría que para mí todo esto más que poesía, épica o de la que quieras, es una película, entendés?... no un poema en el que te zambullís y que te atrapa y existe en vos sino una película, yo sentado en la butaca de un cine.... " (172). Poetry is the genre which would swallow his whole being; movies are merely for spectators. Hernán is basically Carlos, only ten years younger: "si tuviera diez años menos podrías haberte llamado hernán, o santiago, y eso se nota, o notará quizá, y que nunca podrías haberte llamado estela, o lucía, y eso se nota, o notará quizá" (267). Like Carlos, Hernán knows something is not quite right and admits as much to David: "...sigo sin entender muy bien cómo vamos a hacer para ganar, me entendés, para terminar de ganar" (256). Perhaps in a few years and with more life-experience he would choose to flee like Carlos, but at the moment his life-long friend

has just died and Hernán is not about to betray his memory. Where Hernán and especially Carlos have reservations, Estela does not, which makes her the unwavering mirror image of Hernán. Conspicuous for her absence in Buenos Aires is Cecilia, who tried to get Carlos to participate in concrete ways while in Paris, and who suggested moving back to Argentina because she wanted to be a part of the changes taking place at the time. One night in Paris they got into a discussion about their child, which evolved into a discussion about where to go and what to do in the future. Carlos seems to want to stay in Paris, but Cecilia does not: “...en realidad carlos lo que me parece inaceptable es que sigamos dilettando por acá cuando en la argentina están pasando cosas tan importantes a nivel de movimientos de masas me parece imperdonable....” (216). In like manner, along the wisdom axis Estela and Hernán represent young, inexperienced and unsophisticated wisdom while Cecilia and Carlos, for being older and having the Parisian experience, represent the more seasoned wisdom. Thus Hernán is starting to become skeptical and is somewhat naïve; Estela believes sincerely in the *Montonero* cause, but is also intellectually unsophisticated; Cecilia has the intellectual acumen to match any intellectual and has enough belief in the revolution to suggest returning to Argentina in 1973; and Carlos is the prototypical skeptical intellectual. Once the novel ends, the voices of Estela and Cecilia disappear, and Hernán’s becomes a ghost. Only Carlos voice will remain.

Finally, the novel serves as a prelude to ‘exile-ness.’ The novel does not dwell so much on the experience of exile itself as the preconditions which led to Carlos’s exile. Perón’s exile is only relevant to the extent it provided an excuse for Hernán

and David to embark on their hero-quests to find out what being a *Montonero* really meant. Ultimately, Estela, Cecilia, Hernán and Carlos represent four possible views on the revolution. Carlos chose to escape automaton conformity to the ‘one and only’ form of militancy which was leading to an illogical militarization, but the price was the “death” of Hernán and possibly Estela, as well as abandoning Cecilia; that is, turning his back on the other possibilities.

Conclusion

In this novel Caparrós has satisfied Rothberg’s demand for documentation of this period copiously. The events and milieu witnessed by all three are verifiable, and in some cases the novel adds the richness of personal motivations, hopes, aspirations, and conflicts which help to contextualize the events in a narrative texture not found in the history books or easily teased out of primary sources. It also satisfies Rothberg’s demand for reflection on the limits of representation by creating the structure of a flawed narrative and the infinite recursion of explanatory narratives. The novel has not appeared to satisfy the risky circulation of the event in public discourse. In the prologue he claims he believed many more were writing novels about the period of political militancy in the 1970’s and was surprised to find that, as of 2000, this has not been the case. The monumental five volume work *La voluntad* published in the late 1990’s eventually did satisfy the demand for the circulation of these events in public discourse,⁶⁹ but it is a very different type of text; a hybrid between a history book, a novel and oral histories. However, the novel does

⁶⁹ See, for example, his introduction to Audiovideoteca; or the reference made in the TV program “Palabras más, palabras menos” (8 Oct. 2010), in which the work itself is praised, although Caparrós’s more recent political views are called into question.

gives a body and a voice to three primary elements of Caparrós's constellation of meaning: death has a voice through Hernán's monologue with David, Estela's diary and voice speaks for idealized militancy, and Carlos's internal monologue voices his own personal contradictions as well as those of the *Montoneros*, leading him to chose exile, where he could someday tell himself: 'novelas a tus muertos.'

Chapter 3: The Revolutionary Novel: *Ansay, ó los infortunios de la gloria*

Yo lo vi en su memoria.
—Gabriel García Márquez,
Crónica de una muerte anunciada

Ya preveo que cederé a la tentación
literaria de acentuar o agregar algún
pormenor.
—Jorge Luis Borges, “La intrusa”

Ansay, ó los infortunios de la gloria was the first novel published by Martín Caparrós, but the second one he wrote.⁷⁰ While its emplotment is much more straightforward, it exhibits a palimpsest of narrative voices which imitate a number of genres contemporary to the times of the author (1980s) as well as the subject (1810s). Its distinguishing feature is the copious use of historical primary materials interwoven into the narrative, blurring the distinction between history and fiction. In addition, the dialogic interplay between a postmodern historical narrative voice and Ansay's own texts blurs the distinction between the present and the past, forming part of Caparrós's 'continuum of meaning.' Curiously, its scarce critical reception has been mixed and it was not particularly popular in its time. Where the center of Caparrós's constellation is ultimately an indescribable black hole of meaning about the militancy of the 1970's, the revolutionary war provides a parallax point by which to triangulate its meaning in the present.

The organization of Caparrós's novel *Ansay* is based on the historical Ansay's *Relación de los acontecimientos ocurridos con motivo de la contrarrevolución en Mendoza y sucesos posteriores*, as is found in the Biblioteca de Mayo edition. The

⁷⁰ The date of completion at the end of *Ansay* reads “Valsaín y Madrid, 1982.” Faustino Ansay was a Spanish military commander posted in Mendoza at the outset of the Argentine struggle for Independence.

Relación is divided into two parts. The first part, called *Extracto de lo sucedido en la ciudad de Mendoza en los meses de junio y julio de 1810 con motivo de la revolución de Buenos Aires*, contains the details of events in Mendoza, including what letter or memo was sent and to whom, with extracts or even the entire letters or memos reproduced in the footnotes. This seems to be the account Ansay, Torres and Liaño set down to paper while in Montevideo (Luna 98-9), or while in Carmen de Patagones (Ansay 3418). It is written in third person and contains much of the official correspondence sent between the different government agencies and individuals. An addendum called *Representaciones de varios asuntos de prisiones* contains letters written on behalf of the prisoners of war held in Las Bruscas/Santa Elena.

The second—and much longer—part of Ansay's *Relación*, called *Relación de los padecimientos y ocurrencias acaecidas al coronel de caballería don Faustino Ansay*, contains his account of the entire ordeal from the start of the revolution to his eventual return to Zaragoza in 1822. Narrated in first person and containing copious footnotes describing the various characters introduced in his story, it is the basis for Caparrós's narrative and the section he will quote the most. This part of the *Relación* has a much greater literary feel because it is divided into ten chapters, recreates dialogues, and narrates down to every bayonet thrust of the more exiting actions episodes. An appendix records some 120 official letters and memos sent and received by Ansay during the course of these events.

The novel's first part contains an array of narrative voices and genres. Some are what I'm calling 'conventional' narrative voices, while others are

'historiographic.'⁷¹ Excerpts from Faustino Ansay's *Relación*, Mariano Moreno's the *Gazeta de Buenos Ayres* and *Plan revolucionario de operaciones*,⁷² and María Guadalupe Moreno's letters to her husband comprise some of the 'historiographic' narrators. The 'conventional' narrators can be anything from traditional third person voice, first person stream-of-consciousness, or even imitations and parodies of the Romantic genre or 16th century *Relaciones* by conquistadors and their historians. The twenty-nine chapters of the first part contain the story of Ansay from the start of the revolution (while he was still in Mendoza) to the capture of Montevideo by the Revolutionary army. A brief interlude contains Moreno's introduction to his translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract*, an explanation for the source of María Guadalupe Moreno's letters, and an excerpt on writing from Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia general*.

The second half of the novel, however, is very different from the first. There are four numbered chapters named "Los infortunios," in which a modern historiographer reflects on the task of creating an historical narrative while describing how he would narrate the second part of Ansay's ordeal (from his second imprisonment in Buenos Aires to his return to Spain). Alternating between these

⁷¹ By 'conventional' and 'historiographic' I wish to distinguish narratives originating from the author's imagination, from narratives originating from reframing historical records.

⁷² In June 1810, Mariano Moreno, on behalf of the *Primera Junta*, started the *Gazeta* in order to report the news about the *Junta's* business, about the political state of affairs in the country, and about news of other revolutions in other parts of the continent. It is the public voice of Moreno. Sometime later that year, a group of men who called themselves the *Sociedad Patriótica* began to meet and discuss politics at the Café de Marco. The *Plan*—attributed to Moreno, written in late 1810, and circulated clandestinely—detailed how the group was to acquire and hold power. It was not published until 1895, after it was "(re)discovered" in the General Archives of the Indies in Seville, Spain.

four chapters are another five titled “La gloria,” which narrate the adventures of a mythologically heroic Ansay who finds himself stranded in America during the great age of discovery and conquest, lives with native tribes with bizarre customs, and eventually is able to return to civilization. The epilogue wraps up the novel by reconciling “Los infortunios” chapters with those of “La gloria.”

Historical Background of the Historiographic Narrative Voices

Faustino Ansay is the main character of the novel. The majority of what historians know about him comes from his *Relación*. Born in Zaragoza in 1765, he arrived in Buenos Aires in 1794 as a second lieutenant. By 1803 he was promoted to commander at arms and deputy of the exchequer for the city of Mendoza.⁷³ When the news arrived there in June 1810 of the events of the *Semana de mayo* in Buenos Aires,⁷⁴ all but Ansay, Joaquín Gómez de Liaño⁷⁵ and Domingo de Torres⁷⁶ were in

⁷³ At this time, Mendoza was a city within the Intendency of *Córdoba del Tucumán*, thus Faustino Ansay's immediate superior was the governor of Córdoba, who by 1810 was Juan Gutiérrez de la Concha.

⁷⁴ The events of *Semana de mayo* were triggered when news of the fall of the *Junta de Cadiz* in January 1810 reached Buenos Aires on May 17. This formally delegitimized Baltazar de Cisneros as viceroy—who was already informally delegitimized, since in his brief tenure he proved to be ineffective in dealing with the local politics of Buenos Aires—as the government body that named him had been dissolved. An intense week of public and private debates ensued which resulted in the formation of a provisional *Junta* in Buenos Aires, now commonly known as *Primera Junta*. One faction of *criollos* wanted to seize the moment to sever all ties to Spain and establish a liberal government based on the models afforded from the USA and French revolutions. A more moderate group proposed establishing a *Junta* composed of *criollos* until such time as King Fernando VII was reinstated or a new one was established. After one week of public speeches and a number of propositions, a conciliatory temporary compromise was reached. Formally, the purpose of the *Primera Junta* was to govern until such time as representatives from the various regions of the viceroyalty could be sent to govern as a representative *Junta*, which would govern the viceroyalty in the name of Fernando VII. Informally, it is the beginnings of independence, as the body never swore allegiance to the Regency nor the Cádiz Cortes.

favor of recognizing the authority of the Junta in Buenos Aires. At first, in order to avoid bloodshed, he relinquished command of the barracks. But having received orders from his immediate superior to disregard the request from Buenos Aires,⁷⁵ Ansay, with his faithful followers, was able to slip in at night and recapture the barracks, and more importantly, all the munitions contained therein. The city government agreed to an uneasy truce in which Ansay retained control of military affairs while the other ministers retained control of civic duties. This lasted until mid-July, when Juan Bautista Morón entered the city with troops from Buenos Aires with instructions to bring the insurrectionist back to Buenos Aires. Ansay and his group surrendered peacefully. He thought about escaping while en route and meeting up with the 'Royalist' group in Córdoba, but he never had the opportunity, which saved him from facing execution in Córdoba along with Gutiérrez de la Concha and Liniers.

After a summary trial in Buenos Aires, the group was banished to Carmen de Patagones,⁷⁶ where he, Torres and Liaño remained until 1813. In a daring raid, the group commandeered a British boat which took Torres and Liaño to Montevideo.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ The city's accountant.

⁷⁶ The city's treasurer.

⁷⁷ The governor Juan Gutiérrez de la Concha and the former Viceroy Santiago de Liniers did not consider legitimate the reasons for deposing Viceroy Cisneros, thus they at first did not agree to send delegates to Buenos Aires *Junta*. However, Buenos Aires sent an army which quickly captured and executed the leaders of the 'insurrection.'

⁷⁸ Carmen de Patagones is the southernmost city of the modern Province of Buenos Aires, on the northern banks of the Río Negro.

⁷⁹ Montevideo vacillated sending delegates to Buenos Aires until June 1810, when word of the formation of the formation of the *Cortes de Cádiz* arrived. Since Buenos Aires refused to swear allegiance to the new Spanish authority, the Cabildo in Montevideo did not send representatives to Buenos Aires. Montevideo would

They then took over the city of Carmen de Patagones, making it a Royalist city.

Torres and Liaño meanwhile sent another boat to Carmen de Patagones to pick up Ansay, who had stayed behind and, with his captors now his prisoners, he ruled the city for a few months, making many improvements.

Once in Montevideo, Ansay was put in charge of the fort on one side of the bay and helped organize raiding parties to go into the countryside to procure cattle and vegetables to feed the troops and the civilians living in the fort. Montevideo eventually negotiated a surrender with terms that would have allowed them safe passage to Spain. This, however, was ignored and they were taken to Buenos Aires where they were imprisoned in several locations and finally transferred to Córdoba and later Las Bruscas—a veritable island in the middle of nowhere—soon after renamed Santa Elena.⁸⁰ At one point there were nearly 500 prisoners of war from Montevideo, Chile and Alto Peru detained in the worst conditions imaginable. Due to deteriorating health, Ansay managed to get a transfer to an infirmary in Buenos Aires in 1820 from which he easily escaped, made it across the river to Colonia, then to Río and eventually back to Zaragoza by the fall of 1822, where he wrote his memoir. He died there in 1825.⁸¹

Ansay's diametric opposite in the novel is Mariano Moreno. Nicholas Shumway called Mariano Moreno "the first significant creator of Argentine guiding

remain a Spanish stronghold until June 1814, when the Junta forces finally forced their surrender.

⁸⁰ The name *Las Bruscas* derives *brusquilla* a type of bushy grass which grew abundantly in the swampy marshes all around. It was given the name Santa Elena 'in honor' of Napoleon's island-prison.

⁸¹ For a fuller but abbreviated account of his life, see Felix Luna's *Segunda Fila*. For his complete account, see his *Relación*.

fictions” (23). Born into a strict Catholic family, Moreno was an exceptional student, which earned him entrance to the seminary in Chuquisaca (now Sucre, Bolivia), where he became acquainted with the writings of Montesquieu, Raynal, Voltaire and Rousseau. Both his strict Catholic upbringing and a predisposition to old-fashioned clericalist logic as well as a genuine admiration for the new Enlightenment ideas are evident in his texts. Thus Moreno becomes the foremost proponent of implementing a modern liberal government. As secretary of the *Primera Junta*, Moreno wielded nearly as much power as its president, Coronel Cornelio de Saavedra. Political disagreements with Saavedra caused him to resign by November. In January of the following year he embarked to England in order to serve as ambassador, but died en route, either by illness or by artifice. He left behind a vast collection of prose, which Shumway categorizes thusly:

His prose reveals at least two Morenos; the first an heir to the Enlightenment who defends freedom of expression, free trade, common sense, *vox populi*, liberty, equality, and happiness—common fare of any Enlightenment writer and material from which Argentine textbook writers have found much to quote in praise of liberty, reason, and, of course, Moreno. The second Moreno is a frighteningly authoritarian figure reminiscent of Machiavelli, the Grand Inquisitor, and the French Jacobins. On the second Moreno, liberal historians have little to say;.... (27-8)

These two Morenos are contrasted sharply by Caparrós in the novel: the first through excerpts from articles written for the *Gazeta de Buenos Ayres*, the second through quotes from *El plan revolucionario de operaciones*. When reading the *Gazeta* in light of *El Plan*, as Caparrós editing would suggest in the novel, perhaps a better mission statement for the *Gazeta* was that it should ‘spin’ the news to fit the revolutionary government’s narrative.

The inclusion of Moreno's writings in the novel also serves as a conduit for bridging the revolutionary war with the militancy of the 1970's. Shumway attributes the creation of several national mythologies to Moreno, some of which ideologically fuelled one or the other sides of the "dirty war." On the one hand, Moreno's writings in his *Plan* gave leftist license for the use of violent tactics. "In the 1960s and 1970s," notes Shumway, "third-world leftists resuscitated the Plan as a way of giving authority to their support of violent revolution, forced redistribution of wealth, and an isolationist anti-imperialism" (42). On the other, the military took the doctrine of the elimination of enemies seriously. Shumway observes the following: "Moreno's notion that a progressive state could be attained only by eliminating enemies was also a necessary guiding fiction behind the 'Dirty War' waged by the 1976 – 1983 military government against some real and many fictitious subversives" (40). In this way the myth of Moreno, "el prócer" in *Ansay*, the most radical of the May revolutionaries, continues to be spun in the present.

Cornelio de Saavedra's importance in the historical background to this novel is as a foil to Moreno. Where the latter is intellectual, radical and brash, the former is military, moderate and astute. Where Moreno favored setting up a centralized government run by a few enlightened aristocrats, Saavedra embraced a broader populist pro-Catholic conservative government. As Shumway notes, these two formed the basis of Argentine political parties: "Morenismo soon gave birth to the Unitarian party, which as its name suggests favored a strong centralist government controlled by porteño elites. Similarly, Saavedrismo quickly evolved into an opposing party called Federalist, which favored provincial autonomy and tended to

be more populist” (43). Caparrós shows the effects of Saavedrismo in Buenos Aires society through the letters María Guadalupe Moreno wrote to her husband, unaware he had died.

A Master-Class on Historiographic Imagination

The postmodern historian’s texts need to be examined first. This narrator writes in first person whose present time is in Ansay’s future. Unlike any of the conventional narrative voices, this one opens an infinitely regressive epistemological loop (he knows that we know that he knows, etc.) causing a narrative rift through which he inserts himself forcefully into Ansay’s story as its creator commenting on his act of creation. Especially in the second part of the novel, the text reads as a master-class on how to narrate—and interpret—historical fiction.

The postmodern historian narrative voice is present throughout the novel, inserting editorial comments and philosophical musings throughout the first half until he shatters the artifice of the novel in “La realidad” at the end of the first half. In the second half, this narrator begins to explain his reasoning behind his narrative choices by writing out a full explication of how he would go about writing Ansay’s novel if he were to continue, but since the pretense is dropped, he is not. This provides the reader with two analytical strategies for deconstructing *Ansay* in particular and historical novels in general. Firstly, by showing us how he *would* (but *will not*) write certain episodes in the second parts of the novel, he is giving us interpretive clues for how to read the first part of the novel. We learn about the implied author’s strategies for choosing certain qualities in his narrators (1st or 3rd

person, internal monologue, etc.) and certain genres. Secondly, in the narratological analysis he provides, he examines in detail the limits of conventional representation, which imply the need to find new models. For this reason, it is necessary to examine this narrative voice first, especially the chapters called “Los infortunios” from the second part of the novel, in order to interpret the rest of the novel.

The postmodern historian narrative voice is present from the very first of the novel. In the first chapter, two lines of dialogue are repeated four times within the framework of four different narrative voices to show four different approaches to it beginning. The postmodern historian frames the first iteration of the dialogue as follows:

—¡Ha llegado un correo, mi comandante!

—Ya.

Si insisto en que precisamente ese día, once de junio, cayeron sobre Mendoza los primeros copos del invierno no es por capricho ni cromatismo narrativo; más adelante, el desarrollo de esta historia de sombras hará evidente la pertinencia del citado trastorno. (9)

His insistence on the detail of snow is completely unrelated to the two lines of dialogue that precede it, and the importance of snow never materializes beyond the chromatic imagery of a dead zambo laying in the freshly fallen snow which will be narrated at the foot of the same page. It seems pedantically unnecessary. The purpose of these few lines at the beginning, however, is to make the reader aware of his presence.

This same narrator frames the second chapter, “El desengaño,” with a pithy observation at the beginning and end about how a moment measures a man: “Un hombre puede suponerse una talla de hombre, puede vivir una vida deseando que le llegue el momento de probársela. Un hombre puede, llegado el momento, descubrir

que no era quién pensaba” (14). This is the chapter in which the townsfolk discuss whether or not to recognize the authority of the *Junta provisional*, and Ansay finds himself decidedly in the minority, and forced to surrender his command of the barracks. At the end of the chapter the postmodern historian closes the chapter thus: “Un hombre puede, llegado su momento, no dar la talla que se suponía. Este hombre pasará, tal vez, muchos de sus días consecuentes intentando recuperar su propia estima” (21). The echo of the first paragraph in the ending serves to frame the chapter, as well as foreshadow the nature of Ansay’s quest throughout the rest of his ordeal.

In chapter nine, called “La ciudad,” this narrator takes up an entire chapter to describe the Buenos Aires of 1810, the Buenos Aires to which Ansay was being brought in chains, the Buenos Aires he feared entering so much; Buenos Aires in anaphoric adjectival phrases. Here are three examples:

Una ciudad tan fagocitaria que los indígenas de la región no trepidaron en desayunarse al primer europeo que se acercó a sus costas, el piloto Juan de Solís, que ni siquiera conquistó, como su colega noruego Harold Hardrada, los seis pies de tierra que toda tumba requiere. (55)

Una ciudad tan transparente que su verdugo titular combina estas funciones con las de pregonero público, reuniendo idealmente en una sola persona las dos caras de la justicia, el enunciado de la ley y el castigo de su quebranto. (56)

Una ciudad tan orgullosa que ha querido ponerse a la cabeza de las provincias de su virreinato, sin reparar en medios, y todavía no ha inventado el tango. (58)

The first example is the first in the chapter and alludes to the founding of Buenos Aires; a time before 1810. The last example is the last in the chapter and alludes to later cultural developments; a Buenos Aires after 1810. They help to indicate that, while there is a sense of taking a snapshot of 1810 in this chapter, they really form a

part of an historical continuity and the endurance of certain aspects unique to Buenos Aires. The other adjectives used to describe Buenos Aires are: *bastarda*, *apetecible*, *despiadada*, *beata*, *morbosa*, *descarnada*, *española*, *medrosa*, *ignara*, *comerciante*, *rica*, *generosa*, *precaria*, *sucia*, *pretenciosa*, *agraciada*, *provinciana*, *pequeña*, and *oscura*. These, like the paragraph about transparency, describe different aspects of Buenos Aires in 1810, some which have remained, like the description of the availability of a great variety of products from around the world in the “merchant” paragraph, or the overabundance of natural resources, especially meat, in the “rich” paragraph. Other paragraphs seem to describe a Buenos Aires which was very different from its late 20th century version: in the paragraph describing how “Spanish” the city was, it reminds the reader that the major entertainment used to be the bull fights. Finally, some paragraphs demonstrate how the more things change, the more they remain the same. In the paragraph describing how “morbid” the city was, we see how the bodies of slaves who died on the slave ships en route were dumped in the empty lots, and the bodies of Indians were hung from the archways of the *Cabildo* for their owners to claim and bury. Certainly there are no slaves or indigenous indentured servants any more. But the cultural practice of claiming the dead has remained, if only the affiliations have changed: in recent times, the *desaparecidos* were dumped in mass graves—or by the side of the road, or (in an ironic twist) out at sea—and the *Madres de la plaza de Mayo* (and later the rest of the family members) still turn up—at the very same plaza, just a few meters away from the *Cabildo*!—to claim their dead. It is yet one more reminder of the

continuum of cultural meaning, and the haunting legacy of foundational violence, linking the past and the present.

Finally, there are five paragraphs in which the postmodern historian waxes philosophical about writing. Most of these serve to start the chapter by way of an exploratory meditation on the relationship between writing and a particular concept, such as exile or love. Four of them can be identified by the shared beginning: “Nadie puede escribir” I will examine the first one in detail and then note differences in themes or strategies employed in the other four. To begin the 8th chapter, called “El destierro,” the narrator opens with a meditation on exile:

Nadie puede escribir sobre el exilio, porque escribir es el exilio siempre. Antes del exilio la palabra no tenía conciencia de sí, era una sola, piedra blanca sobre piedra blanca. El buen salvaje será un ser sin memoria. Sólo es posible escribir desde el exilio, y la pregunta es hacia dónde. No es una pregunta para la que yo tenga respuesta, ahora, ni don Faustino Ansay, comandante de fronteras que sólo escribía doce años más tarde, la tiene entonces, mientras se aleja de esa ciudad que lo enterró durante tanto tiempo. La cifras no importan, ni acaso los lugares. Un rey moro de Granada, un rey se compadecía de sí mismo en una palmera tan remotamente africana como él: “Tú también eres, palmera/en esta tierra extranjera”. Ninguno de los dos ha conocido ni lo hará nunca la tierra donde imaginan que no serían forasteros....
(50)

The paragraph begins with a statement that has a syllogistic balance: *nadie* and *siempre* stand at the ends of the sentence and qualify the two middle statements “escribir sobre el exilio” and “escribir es el exilio.” If we accept the correspondence that writing is exile, then we must imagine someone who, in the process of writing, is exiling. We must also note that the correspondence only works in one direction; he does not say that exiling is writing, as that would mean that no one could do “writing about writing” (which is plainly not the case). Rather, he is saying no one

can exile *exile* (read the first one as a verb, the second one as a noun). Writing is superfluous until a distance has been created; until someone has been exiled. Then in writing, the exiled exiles a part of him or herself but doesn't know where it will eventually arrive and be understood, and thus complete the communicative act.

To build on the syllogism, the paragraph references three exiled writers. "[P]iedra blanca sobre piedra blanca" references César Vallejo, whose poetry was not well received in Perú, thus he exiled himself to Paris. More specifically, the words seem to reference Vallejo's poem "Piedra negra sobre piedra blanca," from his posthumous collection *Poemas humanos*; thus it seems like a misquote at first. But placing a black stone on a white seems to indicate a tomb in Vallejo's home town of Santiago de Chuco, Perú, and the poem is, at face value, about how the poet already has a memory of his death on a rainy Thursday in Paris. And death, in the Biblical tradition, entered the world through Adam and Eve, for which they were exiled from the Garden of Eden. But the white stone over white is what writing is before the exile; before death, the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, Biblical tradition or Thursday afternoons. Without all that, writing is the idea before the word is put to the paper. For a writer, it doesn't yet exist.

The second exiled writer alluded is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, exiled from continental Europe after publishing *Emile*, in which he mounted a defense of Christianity through the character of a Unitarian vicar, whom both Calvinist in his home city of Geneva, and Catholics in France despised on theological grounds. The "buen salvaje" is a reference to Rousseau's view that primitive man, unspoiled by society, is in essence good. They do not experience exile—which is to say they do

not experience death—nor do they have memories of their death, as Vallejo did. Thus the noble savage is a creature with no memory.⁸²

The final person quoted is Abd al-Rahman I, also known as al-Dakhil (the immigrant), founder of the Umayyad dynasty of Córdoba, emir from 756 to 788. In his early 20's, Abd al-Rahman fled Damascus and barely made it alive to al-Andalus, and never returned home. Although he—like a palm tree in Spain—has put his roots down in al-Andalus, he is nonetheless aware that he—like a palm tree in Spain—will always be a bit out of place.

Ansay—like Vallejo, Rousseau and Abd al-Rahman—is an exile as well. He went to America to seek fortune when he was 26, but returned in defeat in his early 60's to write his memoirs. Caparrós, through the narrative voice of the postmodern historian, identifies with all of them because he, too, has been exiled. It is this quality of being exiled and of writing from exile which unites all these men; more fundamentally, exile ties the story of Ansay and the May Revolution in 1810 with the story of Caparrós and the left militancy in the 1970's. In effect, Caparrós—through the postmodern historian narrative voice—has described the relationships—the gravitational pushes and pulls, if you will—between Vallejo, Rousseau, Abd al-Rahman, exile and writing within Caparrós's constellation of meaning.

The common elements in the other four paragraphs of philosophical musings start with a similar syllogism and further describe the relationships between Ansay, Caparrós, writing and the elements discussed: “Nadie puede escribir sobre un dios, cualquier dios, porque El es siempre la génesis de toda escritura” (65). “Nadie puede

⁸² It goes without mention that it is understood that the savage could not write because it would be superfluous.

escribir el amor, porque el amor es el antónimo de la escritura” (125). “Nadie puede escribir en la victoria, porque escribir es la derrota siempre” (138). “El mar ha sido siempre metáfora de las fronteras y las fronteras rotas, de lo incontrolable” (153). In most cases—excluding love—Caparrós draws a parallel between his personal experience in the present time (the early 1980’s, while in exile in Spain), and Ansay’s experience in the past (in the 1820’s, after escaping the American revolutionaries). Both fought for an ideal or a belief, both lost, and both went into exile in Spain, and both wrote about it. These five paragraphs serve to firmly establish a close connection between the postmodern historian narrative voice and the character Ansay within Caparrós’s constellation of meaning.

The postmodern historian is the only narrator for the four chapters called “Los infortunios” in the second part. In those four chapters, he picks four different moments in Ansay’s ordeal in order to not write about Ansay, but to describe what his writing strategies would be, if he were to write the story, which he has not. The first two chapters contain multifaceted discussions about narratology and epistemology—within the context of the chosen moments—which we will have to carefully go through. The third chapter contains some miscellaneous narratological considerations as well as an example of how he would construct a dialogue scene and the fourth contains a description of *Las Bruscas* concentration camp, where Ansay spent the last three years of captivity. There is always an undertone running throughout the second half: it contains what he would write, how he would write it,

why he would write it one way and not another, if he could be bothered to write it, which he cannot; but in writing about how and what he would, he in fact has.⁸³

In the first chapter, the postmodern historian demonstrates his strategies for using primary sources, historical knowledge and his own imagination—the strategy of employing historical imagination as first described by Robin Collingwood—to compose an historical narrative which attempts to be über-truthful in the sense that it not only does not distort history, but tries to get at the root causes—whether these be emotions, convictions or ideas—which help bring to the surface the underlying reasons why a certain thing happened, or happened in specific ways; and once these are ascertained, to find creative narrative ways to represent them.⁸⁴

The moment chosen for “Los infortunios 1” is Ansay’s return to Buenos Aires, along with the rest of the Spanish officials arrested in Montevideo. Specifically, the narrator freezes two moments: when Ansay is paraded along with the rest of his fellow officers through the streets, and his interview with the Supreme Director Gervasio Antonio de Posadas.⁸⁵

The postmodern historian narrative voice opens the chapter by revealing what is known from historical sources: “Las Fuentes históricas disponibles aseguran que los jefes realistas capturados en Montevideo fueron recibidos a su llegada a Buenos Aires...” (197). They were received with insults and rotten food thrown at them by the multitudes lining the street. This poses no problem for the narrator to

⁸³ This narrative device seems to borrow from Borges’s technique of composing a narrative based on a book review. See, for example, “*Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain*” or “*El acercamiento a Almotásim*,” both in *Ficciones*.

⁸⁴ For more on historical imagination, see Dray and Lemisko.

⁸⁵ Gervasio Antonio de Posadas served on the Second Triumvirate (Aug. 1813 to Jan 1814) and as the first Supreme Director (Jan 1814 to Jan 1815).

represent: “...basándose en tales recuerdos, no resulta demasiado dificultoso presentar a dichos oficiales caminando con pesadez...” (197). While that may be acceptable for Ansay’s *Relación*, the narrator believes there must be some representation of emotion on the part of the captured in general, and Ansay in particular. For this reason, the narrator decides to add the following detail: “... a don Faustino Ansay entre ellos, si bien por razones que no tardaré en exponer lo supondremos por el momento incluso entre los pocos que intentaron mantener la frente erguida ante tanto infortunio...” (197). Ansay’s head held high will be the motive for the detailed analysis of his emotions for the next three pages.

The narrator begins by explaining why he thinks Ansay might have his head held high. To do so, he must demonstrate the use of historical imagination: “Pero si bien es relativamente fácil imaginar el corto trayecto recorrido desde la ribera hasta el fuerte..., el movimiento se complica sumamente a la hora de adjudicar a los prisioneros, y sobre todo al nuestro—¿nuestro prisionero?—, las emociones pertinentes a tal momento” (197). The narrator starts by supposing fear, but it can’t be just any fear; it must be a specific type of fear. He eliminates the types that come from a sudden scare, as the prisoners have been well aware of their destiny for days. Also, Ansay may make use of generalized reproaches against the inhumanity of the situation in order to mask the fear (199). The narrator also thinks it might be consistent to imagine Ansay bluffing to himself that they should kill him already and be done with his suffering. Overlaid one upon another, they help focus in on the particular nature of fear Ansay might be experiencing, which would be consistent with holding his head high.

The narrator is aware that at some point in the process—although it follows Collingworth’s suggested methodology—the narrator has slipped ever so subtly from history into fiction, but feels it would be appropriate if he has been able to ‘appropriate’ the character. To do so, he must forget about an historical Ansay: “[olvidar] para este fragmento las supuestas coordenadas reales del supuesto personaje real, ese Faustino Ansay que vigila desde la historia con justa y divina cólera los sacrílegos sacrificios que hago en un altar que es suyo a quien sabe qué dioses innombrados” (201). The narrator is, in the best Collingworthian tradition, extremely sensitive and empathetic with his subject and is aware that he has taken some liberties with the representation of Ansay. The strategy the narrator uses to represent this compromise is the ‘interior monologue’ or ‘stream of consciousness.’

In the rest of the chapter he applies similar strategies for narrating the rest of the officers accompanying Ansay. He would describe noses, mouths, faces and especially eyes in Lombrosian detail.⁸⁶ He would ascribe the underlying reasons for their desire or need to join with something larger than themselves, something the narrator assumes is universal enough to simply mention and drop. For reasons explored in the next chapter, this assumption may not be valid.

The final part of the novel examines the narratological problem of repetition: “casi todas las situaciones de esta segunda parte tienen un cierto regusto a déjà vu, a segundas partes que nunca fueron buenas. Hemos aprendido en alemán que, en los casos en que la historia se repite, la primera vez semeja una tragedia y la segunda

⁸⁶ Cesare Lombroso (1835 – 1909) was the founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology and developed a theory of Anthropological Criminology in the physical description of characters was essential for identifying potential criminal traits.

una farsa" (206).⁸⁷ The question of sequels does not seem to be an issue for Ansay when he wrote his *Relación*: his objective was to faithfully narrate what he lived through. However, it is an issue for the postmodern historian on several levels: at the historiographic, economic and narrative levels, the narrator has no interest in writing a farce. Also, he can't end the story in Montevideo or much less in Buenos Aires; the story is not complete until Ansay returns home and begins to write about it. The problem for the narrator, then, is how to change the way in which his story is presented without misrepresenting Ansay's story.

From the practical narratological questions of the first chapter, the narrator turns to epistemological questions in the second. The moment to which the narrator returns several times is: "don Faustino Ansay está en la cárcel, en un jergón de paja y tienen frío" (222). He wonders what questions Ansay might be asking himself in that situation, knowing full well no answer is possible (220). The problem is that he is (or was) real, yet what is known about him is hopelessly incomplete: "[H]abiendo existido, sobreviviendo de él un legajo polvoriento y obviamente manuscrito en el archivo militar del Alcázar de Segovia, su única existencia real es la del militar, la del hombre hacia fuera" (221). All that is known about him is an exterior shell, but this does not help the narrator "flesh out" the character. Ansay-the-soldier is a reflection, a shell; only one facet of the complete Ansay-the-man. Having this information actually makes writing Ansay's story more difficult: "Y es peor que si no hubiera existido *en la realidad*. Porque ni soy enteramente su dueño, ni se impone por sí

⁸⁷ The narrator is citing the first two lines of Karl Marx's *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (1852) in which he criticizes Louis Bonaparte for the farcical imitation on 2 Dec. 1851 of Napoleon's *coup d'état* on 18th Brumaire VIII (9 November 1799).

mismo a mis caprichos. Intento respetar lo que de su verdad atisbo, sin encontrar generalmente más que barreras. Intento sobrepasar sus pálidos reflejos..." (221). The *Relación* of Ansay-the-soldier is monolithic in his self-representation, blocking Ansay-the-man from emerging from his text. It exhibits the same type of screen of words Nadine Fresco describes as hiding the vertiginous black hole of traumatic experience: "The silence was all the more implacable in that it was often concealed behind a screen of words, again, always the same words, an unchanging story, a tale repeated over and over again..." (qtd. in Feldman 64). The screen of words repeated over and over which the postmodern historian cannot penetrate is the manifold ways Ansay has of stating: "I did my duty."

If the narrator is unable to discern Ansay-the-man behind his screen of words, the narrator runs the risk of resorting to lies. "[M]e deslumbra el temor de la mentira. Mentira. ¿Qué es mentira y qué verdad en la vida olvidada de un hombre que ya no es más que un legajo polvoriento y obviamente manuscrito en un Castillo de techos de pizarra e inequívocas reminiscencias disneylándicas?" (221). There are a couple of different ways the above could be understood and they come through best in translation. Firstly, taken at face value, it would mean something like: 'I am blinded by the fear of lying. Lies. ¿What is a lie and what is truth in the life....' In this case, the narrator is searching for the face of Ansay and instead is blinded by coming face to face with the possibility of lying, which prompts an honest and reasoned inquiry into the nature of lying. Secondly, taken as a rhetorical question, it would mean something like: 'I am blinded by the fear of lying. That's a lie. ¿What's a lie and what is truth...? *Nothing.*' In other words, the narrator could be confessing at this

point the futility of this line of inquiry because the data is simply lacking, making the difference between a lie and the truth irrelevant. I tend to side with the first interpretation, but I do not discard the second when interpreting his representation of Ansay.

Another epistemological problem is Ansay's understanding of his times. The narrator believes everything about Ansay demonstrates he was a pre-modern person who just simply could not comprehend the changes happening in the world:

...para un sujeto como Ansay el hecho significó la ruptura de un orden colonial que hasta allí todo autorizaba a considerar como eterno.... No creo que Ansay haya podido entender en ese momento que lo que ocurría marcaba el comienzo de un orden nuevo.... Supongo que más bien creía que se trataba de una interrupción pasajera, de un ligero desarreglo de lo fatal:.... (221)

Today's concept of modernity comes to the average philosophy student prepackaged in Will Durant's *History of Philosophy* or some such tour of intellectual history starting with Copernican heliocentrism, Descartes's *cógitó*, Hume's skepticism, Newtonian science, Locke's *Treatise on Government*, and Smith's capitalism, expanded and fleshed out with the writings by Voltaire, Montesquieu and Jefferson, among others, and rounded off with stories of the industrial revolution. It is (relatively) easily packaged into a semester-long college course, and it forms one of many foundational stones for understanding the reality construct as developed within which modern Western society operates. For a man like Ansay, born when this worldview was still being shaped, and living on the periphery of the periphery—about as far removed from the metropolis as one could be in those days—what we now understand as modernity was still as fanciful as the notion of colonizing the moon is in the first decades of the twenty first century.

Closely associated with this problem is the narrator's problem of understanding Ansay. Specifically, as a postmodern man who is deeply grounded in the Lyotardian 'incredulity toward meta-narratives,' the narrator finds it extremely difficult to understand Ansay's worldview: "ese bloque de convicciones tan sólidas, tan monolíticas, lo son precisamente demasiado para ser creíbles" (222). In an age of incredulity, it is nearly impossible for the narrator to confidently ascertain the character of a person whose worldview is rooted firmly in a belief system. In an interview with María Esther Gilio about writing *La voluntad* nearly fifteen years later, Caparrós notes the difficulty of accurately representing the values of the past in the present:

No sabía desde dónde recordar. No había un espacio de pensamiento desde el cual reflexionar sobre esa historia. Una gran cantidad de ideas que pertenecían a esa época ya no eran válidas o funcionales. ¿Con qué premisas? ¿Desde qué posición política rever una época que tenía presupuestos totalmente específicos? (Gilio)

If it is problematic for events witnessed by the author to be represented within the value system in which they transpired at a future time when those values are no longer shared, it is nearly impossible to first empathetically deconstruct a text whose underlying worldview is inaccessible in order to construct a fiction which re-contextualizes the subject within that same worldview, even as it explains how to translate that worldview into the present. In other words, writing with a Jamesonian negative hermeneutic in mind is nearly impossible. He identifies with Borges's story "La búsqueda de Averroes," in which Borges wonders how someone who has no concept of *tragedy* and *comedy* is able to translate them into a culture which has no concept of *tragedy* and *comedy* (222).

Having established that working from Ansay's worldview towards his is arduously difficult—if not impossible—the narrator proceeds to work from his worldview towards Ansay's. The narrator wonders if thinking about the women in Ansay's life—the slaves Carmela or Lumba—or even of the idealized medieval courtly love impossibility of Aurora Talla could keep Ansay going. The narrator discards these as exalting the slaves to that place of preeminence in Ansay's heart would be unrealistic from his worldview, and for Aurora to be Dulcinea to Ansay's Quijote would not be enough. The other inconvenient bit is that two of these three are fictional characters. The narrator then wonders if perhaps the constellation of meaning around family, honor, country, king and God would keep Ansay motivated, perhaps as a perpetuator of the heritage of the famous conquistadors of Spain's glorious past. But these are discarded as well: "la comparación es insostenible a menos que don Faustino Ansay, coronel de caballería se convirtiese enteramente en sombra china, adalid de yelmo y Cierra España,... que escapara de la realidad heroica que quiso construirse para caer en un delirio heroico, huir" (224). Ansay's only out is to go crazy; to Quixotify his narrative of reality. "Para mí este hombre no tiene salida—o no más que el delirio—: ha luchado, ha perdido,... y la imposibilidad de sus sueños ha sido demostrada, y por eso le invento dudas y quebrantos" (224). With this the narrator has pretty much made up his mind as to how to portray Ansay: he must have lost his mind.

The third and final epistemological problem is one of understandability to the audience. The narrator, still unsure of this narrative emplotment choice, concludes the chapter by telling the end of Borges' story about Averroes: Averroes

finally decides to compare tragedy and comedy with the nearest elements he can find in Arabic culture, for which there are copious examples (albeit imperfect or deficient). While it transmits an idea of what Aristotle meant, they are also woefully inadequate or perhaps even completely wrong. The narrator's message at the end of this chapter is clear: Ansay does not understand his times, the narrator does not understand Ansay's convictions, and the narrator has no good way to make Ansay accessible for a late 20th century audience. Perhaps the epistemological inaccessibility at so many levels is so insurmountable is utterly impossible to represent Ansay-the-man without recourse to a strategy that is woefully inadequate or perhaps even completely wrong.

In the third chapter he jumps to the time when Ansay enters *la Guardia de la Carlota* in Córdoba, where he will be held for a little over two years. To do so, he simply chooses to jump three months with no more justification than to state that a novelist can omit whatever is boring. What follows immediately is a revealing meditation on the difference between history and literature. He calls history *poiema*—that which is made and is static—and he calls literature *poiesis*—that which is being made and dynamic—. While the distinction is clear, it is also false because everyone takes the bits and pieces they want out of 'history' and makes their own narratives about history. Thus the two genres are really variants of the same.

En historia, aparentemente, nada se fía a la precariedad de una escritura, que no es más que el medio; detrás, tranquilizadora, gigante,—inexistente—, está la realidad, el hecho, y los hechos techos son—para guarecerse de las inclemencias de la duda—. En la narración, en cambio, el medio se hace confesamente centro, foco y

enfoque y radiación, el justo medio. Toda Historia es una novela vergonzante. (245)

He undermines the certainty of history with the words ‘aparentemente’ and ‘inexistente.’ History’s legitimization is based on things external to the historical text. Even if facts are verifiable, there really is no way to corroborate its emplotment. Literature’s legitimization, on the other hand, is contained within the text itself. From this he makes the claim—going beyond postmodern historian’s claims—that history is really just literature; a shameful novel. Thus *poiesis* is the act of doing the historical deed and/or writing the story; *poiema* is the written text about the story. As an interesting side note, Caparrós’s view of history and literature has not changed much in nearly thirty years. In an interview about *Argentinismos* for *Canal 5 Noticias* in July 2011, when asked about the difference between ‘relato’ and ‘historia,’ he said the following: “historia como tal no pasó; hubo un presente que ya no es más, y por lo tanto lo que nos queda es el relato que hagamos de él.” It is a perfect paraphrase of Hayden White’s philosophy of history.

In this chapter the postmodern historian narrative voice finds this to be a convenient place to ‘invent’ a dialogue based on Ansay’s *Relación*, about why he did not leave his house much. During the 1806 British invasion Ansay requisitioned horses in that town so that his troops could do double-time to get to Buenos Aires as quickly as possible. The locals did not appreciate it and they still remembered Ansay ‘robbing’ their horses, ten years later. The narrator finds it an appropriate point to have two locals (one *must* be named Zoilo, presumably because it is a funny ‘country’ name) discuss Ansay’s arrival, and remember how Ansay had taken their horses; the other then comments that at least then they had horses, because with

the way the government in Buenos Aires is now... (the comment, the narrator thinks, does not need to be finished). The point of creating the dialogue is to represent what Moreno had called—in a text cited in the first part of the novel—the “silent observers” whom he labeled as the truly egotistical people (the patriots being the best, and with the enemies at least you knew where they stood), the ones that could not be trusted. In essence, the postmodern historian narrative voice has employed the strategy of specific ambiguity—the strategy discovered by Carlos when writing the “Historias para no ser escritas” in *No velas* to represent the ‘unsayable confusion and the repeated scare’ of exile—to represent a scenario derived from the use of historical imagination to explore what Moreno’s “silent observers” might have done or said when Ansay appeared in their town in chains. The narrator, by taking details from Ansay’s *Relación* and from Moreno’s *Plan* and ‘imagining’ a conversation between two country hicks, has depicted in a fictional conversation the ‘truth’ that the ‘silent observers’ are really the majority of the people in any revolution, anywhere and in any time period. The parenthetical scene yields many valuable interpretation clues for how to read other dialogues of the first part of the novel. More importantly for this chapter, it demonstrates how the postmodern historian narrator constructs a narrative which is in flux between *poiesis* and *poiema*. The message by now is clear: there might be a better representation of truth through literature than through trying to keep to the artificial constraints of historiography.

The moment the postmodern historian narrative voice discusses in “Los infortunios 4” is Ansay’s time in *el depósito Las Bruscas*, swampy wasteland in the

middle of nowhere. Within a year it was renamed Santa Elena, in honor of Napoleon's prison-island and like its homonym, escape was nearly impossible simply because of the terrain. By this point in the examination of Ansay-the-man, the narrator has all but decided he will portray Ansay-the-character as fading into dementia: "la presencia de su personaje también va desdibujándose poco a poco en la novela, dejando cada vez más espacio a su fantasía conquistadora y salvífica" (265). The only problem is that the narrator seems to have failed to convince himself Ansay has gone crazy and must repeat it: "insisto, podemos aprovechar el insistente delirio de un coronel aragonés que se interna por los pajonales en cueros y gritando arcaísmos..." (266). His insistence seems to be directed just as much to himself as to the reader, to reassure himself his historical imagination has provided reliable results. The form of Ansay's (imagined) delirium—wandering naked and shouting in an archaic language—reflects the "adventures" he created for himself as an escape mechanism.

The big issue for the narrator in this chapter, however, is the existence of a fully operational concentration camp in Argentina:

[P]ara mí fue grande el asombro al enterarme de que en año de gracia de 1817, en plena edad de los intachables padres fundadores, el gobierno del Director Supremo de las Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata don Juan Martín de Pueyrredón mantenía en la campaña bonaerense un depósito donde se hacinaban en condiciones dudosamente reivindicables más de quinientos prisioneros españoles. En aquella guerra por excelencia "limpia" y modélica, la guerra de la Independencia, había reclusos que ya, adelantándose aparentemente a su tiempo, pedían el respeto de sus "derechos del hombre". (266)

The myth of the clean and ideal war emerges from Moreno himself. Shumway picks up a quote from *El Plan* in which Moreno writes: "I place myself in the hands of

Providence so that God could guide my knowledge regarding our most just and holy cause” (Shumway 35). But in *Ansay* that certainty of purpose and conviction is undermined in the epigraph to the epilogue, where Caparrós quotes nearly the same words, only written at another time, by another revolutionary fanatic, from another country: “Obro conforme a la voluntad del Creador omnipotente. Lucho por la obra de Dios. A. H., *Mein Kampf*” (287). The second quote immediately raises questions about the validity of the first one, calling into question the myth of any war being thought as “clean” and idealized.

The Argentine war of independence produced myths of bravery—Juan Bautista Cabral, “soldado heroico/ cubriéndose de gloria,” (Marcha de San Lorenzo) saving his general’s life on the battle field—and righteousness—the myth of a common soldier not allowing San Martín into the munitions room without first taking off his spurs—among other virtues, which has elevated the war onto a pedestal of idealism, especially through those associated with general José de San Martín.⁸⁸ Juan Martín de Pueyrredón⁸⁹ is attached to San Martín’s story only in that Pueyrredón actively supported the military campaigns of José de San Martín to Chile

⁸⁸ Born in the Americas but educated in Spain, he saw military action in Spain before renouncing his post and coming to Argentina to aid in their Independence efforts. Famous for meticulous planning and irreproachable conduct, he famously led the army across the Andes Mountains to liberate Chile and then proceeded to Peru. After meeting with Bolívar in Guayaquil, San Martín resigned his post in favor of the other liberator and retired to Europe.

⁸⁹ Born in 1777, he was educated in France and helped in the defense of Buenos Aires against the British invasions of 1806 and 1807. He formed part of the first Triumvirate, and was named Supreme Director, a position he held from 1816 to 1819. His policies while in office demonstrate that he favored *Morenista*-Unitarian politics, especially the centralization of power in Buenos Aires, which precipitated armed resistance from the interior provinces.

and then later to Peru from his position as supreme director. Thus discovering there was a concentration camp comes as a shock which tarnishes the image of the war.

While the surprise could be interpreted ironically, there are stronger reasons to believe it is genuine because of the tone the narrator uses to represent *Las Bruscas*: “[Dar] al capítulo correspondiente a su permanencia en Las Bruscas las características de un informe—escrito en el tono más neutro y administrativo posible—sobre el funcionamiento de dicho campo” (266). When Caparrós was asked about the tone of *La voluntad*, which narrates events that to him are momentous or important, he reveals he selected a neutral, administrative tone in order to not take anything away from the story. “Estaba claro que tenía que ser una prosa lo más llana posible porque las historias eran lo suficientemente significativas como para que casi cualquier adorno fuera una sobreactuación” (Pérez). Therefore, the neutral tone of the rest of the narrative reflects the gravitas and respect the narrator wishes to convey in the description of *Las Bruscas*, a fragment of which reads thus:

Se trataba de una porción de tierra insalubre ubicada a siete leguas de la guardia del Salado, en la frontera Oeste: uno de los puntos más insanos de la provincia, rodeado de pantanos de aguas salitrosas y corrompidas cubiertas de espadañas que criaban toda clase de insectos. Se contaba en la región que las dos veces que se había intentado establecer una estancia en el lugar los colonos se habían visto obligados a desertar por la ingratitud del suelo y la proliferación de las enfermedades. Además, en verano, el calor evaporaba las aguas de las lagunas, y los pozos que se cavaban sólo daban agua salobre.
(267)

The rest of the chapter continues representing the camp and the state in which the men lived there, with the occasional paragraph from Ansay's *Relación* inserted as a quoted paragraph, to remind the reader that the novel has a protagonist (266).

Perhaps it is an admission on the part of the narrator that there are moments of trauma where the veil of words is more a shroud of dignity which should be respected rather than pulled to the side with historical imagination strategies which shuffle historical sources creatively to invent a truth or an observation that, while it speaks to the present, quite likely betrays the reality of the past.

The postmodern historian narrative voice has conveyed a prolonged reflection on the possibilities and limitations of representation throughout the four chapters of “Los infortunios.” The possibilities, limitations and strategies of historical imagination are revealed and discussed. The problems of epistemology at all levels—the subject’s ability to know his own times as well as the narrator’s abilities to understand his subject—along with the complications these pose for accessing and transmitting a representable truth relevant to the present time are examined. The uneasy relationship between historical fact and narrative emplotment is analyzed. While deference is given to the underlying truth constructed through narrative in the abstract or intellectual inquiry of a subject—such as when exploring the nature of Moreno’s “indifferent majority” through a reconstruction of an even in Ansay’s *Relación*—the more visceral matters are deemed best treated plainly and without adornment out of respect for the consequence of the present being touched by the past.

For reasons more pertinent to *La noche anterior*—the next novel to be analyzed—it would be convenient to identify of the postmodern historian narrative voice with Carlos Montana, the main character of *No velas a tus muertos*. Strictly speaking, it is not necessary for a full analysis of *Ansay*, but there are enough

intertextual clues to validate the assumption simply on what is presented in this novel. Firstly, every section of the novel is preceded by an epigraph. The one for the interlude quotes Carlos Montana: “Las más de las palabras son infamias, pero los más de los silencios son palabras, dijo, y estalló en la carcajada brusca que lo llevó a una muerte merecida” (179). It supposedly is a quote from “Con Alcaraz” and speaks about what the silences say, a theme developed in *No velas* in sections like “Pero callarlos....” Secondly, the postmodern historian shares some narrative strategies, such as the use of specific ambiguity, which have already been identified with Carlos Montana in *No velas*. Looking forward, the postmodern historian narrative voice, when musing about Ansay’s state while in jail, and why he does or does not doubt his world view, concludes that the doubt the narrator would undoubtedly experience would be a direct result of losing the war. For the postmodern historian narrative voice, that doubt would manifest itself as contemplating a fissure in the rock of reality, through which he is confronted with the presence of the black hole of trauma:

Es un resquicio peligroso, una grieta por la que puede verse el vértigo de la incesante caída, la fisura en la cueva que habitó durante quince años Juan el Evangelista desterrado en la isla de Patmos, en el Dodecaneso egeo. Allí, la contemplación a través de la grieta de las calmas aguas de la bahía de Skala lo llevó a pergeñar el Apocalipsis, su más lúcido delirio, inatacable y sólido, una esfera de historias del futuro que le contó su dios. (225)

The reader who does not equate the narrator with Carlos would have no idea why the narrator would make that association. Carlos, on the other hand, has experienced defeat and exile in *No velas*, and as we shall see in *La noche anterior*, has visited the island of Patmos and reflected extensively on John the Evangelist and

the *Book of Revelation*. To say the postmodern historian would have cracked in this situation does not tell us much; to say Carlos Montana—the man who fled Buenos Aires in the wake of a *Montonero ajusticiamiento*—would have cracked in this situation is quite different.

The First Part: The “Safe” Historical Novel

The first part of the novel is a ‘proof of concept’ of how to narrate an historical novel—such as Caparrós understands the genre at the time—using the strategies laid out by the postmodern historian narrative voice in “Los infortunios” chapters of the second part of the novel. Caparrós creates a number of different narrative voices which utilize a number of different genres to either reframe stories presented in primary historiographic sources or ‘fill-in-the-gaps’ utilizing historical imagination. This type of historical novel is the “safe” kind to narrate because it mostly conforms to the parameters expected for the genre. We will examine the historiographical narrators first, then the more ‘conventional’ narrative voices.

Representation Through The Recontextualization of Historiography

In this section I wish to show how Caparrós reframes Ansay and his milieu using historiographic primary sources. Caparrós is unsatisfied with the representation Ansay gives himself in his *Relación*, what I will call Ansay-the-soldier—which hides Ansay as much as reveals him—and wishes to form a fuller picture of Ansay-the-man through the reframing of historical texts and the (re)creation of details based on historical imagination. To do so, Caparrós must first deconstruct Ansay’s texts and then reassemble the various stories in new narrative frames which, as we have already seen, can be challenging. To reframe Ansay’s

milieu, Caparrós selects texts from Mariano Moreno's articles for the *Gazeta* and juxtaposes these with his writings from *El plan*. These will show a very liberal, *avant garde* thinker in some respects yet conservative, sanguinary and ruthless in others. Finally, Caparrós includes letters from María Guadalupe Moreno, Mariano's wife, which portrays how the liberal revolution headed by Moreno progressed—or devolved—after a year. The Morenos's writings will show the emergence of the possibility for a radically new Enlightenment-based 19th century liberal democracy from May through November 1810 and its implosion after the *Saavedristas* rout the *Morenistas* out of the revolution. To accomplish both, Caparrós makes use of historical documents to create "historiographic narrators."

Ansay's first person narrative is taken directly from the second part of his *Relación*, which he wrote in 1822, once he returned to Spain. The sections found in the novel sometimes are separated from other narratives by a space, other times they are woven into other narrative voices' material so that it becomes difficult to disentangle where Ansay starts and others end. Below is the first instance the historiographic narrator Ansay speaks, in the second chapter called "El desengaño", when the city of Mendoza first finds out about the events of the *Semana de mayo* in Buenos Aires:

Como el gobierno revolucionario ordenase se celebrara una junta para escudriñar los sentimientos del pueblo, y nombrar diputados para que marchara a la capital, el 23 de junio a las dos de la tarde nos reunimos en consejo todas las autoridades con el ayuntamiento y los vecinos más pudientes, y tomando la palabra el señor don Domingo García, cura vicario, hizo ver el fin del objeto de aquella reunión, que cada uno manifestase libre y espontáneamente su sentir sobre la instalación de la nueva Junta de Buenos Aires. No hubo en qué trepidar, todos, todos y aún los prelados regulares resolvieron obedecer a la Junta revolucionaria que se componía del

intendente don Cornelio Saavedra (coronel del regimiento de Patricios; uno de los motores de la revolución, a pesar de ser muy beneficiado de España por las recomendaciones del señor capitán general don Santiago de Liniers, a quien mandó quitar la vida), del doctor don Juan José Castelli (muy perverso, hijo de un boticario, murió desesperado de un cáncer, sin duda castigo del cielo por las blasfemias que profirió por su boca en el Perú, donde por su influencia, pues se le decía Pico de Oro, predicaba la irreligión), don Manuel Belgrano Pérez (fue menos malo, hijo de un peluquero), don Miguel de Azcuénaga (Coronel del regimiento de milicias de infantería de Buenos Aires, de familia distinguida, de buen caudal, enemigo de todo lo europeo), doctor don Manuel Alberti (Cura de San Nicolás, bastante malo, hijo de un extranjero que vendía puercos; murió de repente sentado en el vaso), don Domingo Matheu (catalán muy ordinario y muy contrario a sus paisanos los españoles), don Juan Larrea (catalán de alguna instrucción, pero muy perverso, deudores ambos en España y por eso se decidieron a ser insurgentes), y secretarios los doctores en leyes don Juan José Paso (hombre malo y acomodaticio) y don Mariano Moreno (hombre muy sanguinario).
 ¡Qué escena para un hombre de honor y qué estaba colocado a la cabeza! (14-5)

There are several things to note about the above. Firstly, Caparrós quote of Ansay is rather lengthy, which has two effects. On the one hand, the story presented in the novel satisfies—at first reading—the demand for documentation by including a substantial quantity of original testimony of the reception of the May revolution in Mendoza. This gives the text the aura of authenticity or truth. On the other hand, it raises the question of fidelity to the original; whether the content has been edited or even modified.

Secondly, Caparrós has picked a quote with two contrasting characteristics. One characteristic is the presentation of historical specificity. The quote gives very specific dates and times for the meeting, as well as who spoke first, and what people formed the *Junta revolucionaria*. There is a factual concreteness of being able to corroborate elsewhere the names and places alluded to which lends historical

credibility to the unique details about the meeting itself. The other characteristic is the representation of Ansay's subjective opinion, presented as objective descriptions of the individuals named, such as perverse, bad, ordinary or sanguinary, or their ascendancy —sons of druggists, hog herders, barbers— or their place of origin —Americans or Catalans— or even how they died. In stark contrast is his representation of himself as honorable and in a position of leadership; as part of “todas las autoridades con el ayuntamiento y los vecinos más pudientes.” By framing the narrator Ansay in this way, Caparrós is able to delineate a distinction between presentation and representation; or between the ‘truth’ of history and that of narrative.

After the first instance of quoting from Ansay's narrative, there is a section of dialogue between two strangers talking about whether or not the *Junta* is sending a troop of 1,500 men from Buenos Aires, followed by a meditation —about a page and a half— on choice, and another couple of lines of dialogue about the troops. Ansay's narration continues thus:

Me llega, en fin, el tiempo de tomar la palabra, y dije: que por ningún motivo podía obedecer a la Junta provisional, respecto a que no era autoridad constituída (sic), ni sus órdenes venían por conducto de mis jefes, y más aún cuando estaba en la capital el excelentísimo señor virrey y capitán general don Baltasar Hidalgo de Cisneros, por quien se me habían comunicado siempre las disposiciones superiores que (17-8)

The quote ends in mid sentence, as if he had been cut off. It represents what happened at that meeting, in which Ansay, don Domingo Torres and don Joaquín Gómez Liaño were effectively cut off from everyone else because they were the only ones not in favor of complying with the Junta of Buenos Aires. The interrupted

speech is followed by yet a few more lines of dialogue about troops, this time about what Ansay may have requested from Peru.

The two paragraphs quoted above are actually part of three paragraphs in Ansay's *Relación*. Caparrós does introduce some changes worth noting. There are some changes in punctuation and grammar, suppression of sentences, addition of a phrase for clarification purposes, and the parenthetical notes in the novel are rendered as footnotes in the *Relación*. The following are the salient differences (marked in *italics*):

Como el gobierno revolucionario ordenase se celebrase una junta para escudriñar los sentimientos del pueblo, y nombrar un diputado para que marchase a la capital, *entretuvimos el tiempo con don Joaquín de Sosa, ... como así lo entendieron. Aquí empieza la época de los trabajos.*

El 23 de junio, a las dos de la tarde, nos reunimos en consejo todas las autoridades con el Ayuntamiento, y los vecinos más pudientes, y tomando la palabra el señor don Domingo García¹³, cura vicario, hizo ver el fin y objeto de aquella reunión, que cada uno manifestase libre y espontáneamente su sentir [*Caparrós adds: sobre la instalación de la nueva Junta de Buenos Aires*]. No hubo en qué trepidar. Todos, todos y aun los prelados regulares resolvieron obedecer a la Junta revolucionaria, que se componía del intendente don Cornelio Saavedra, del doctor Juan José Castelli¹⁴, don Manuel Belgrano Pérez¹⁵, don miguel de Azcuénaga¹⁶, doctor don Manuel Alberti¹⁷, don Domingo Matheu¹⁸, don Juan Larrea¹⁹, y secretarios los doctores en leyes don Juan José Paso²⁰, y don Mariano Moreno²¹.

¡Qué escena para un hombre de honor y que estaba colocado a la cabeza! *La observé con harto sentimiento mío, previendo las results.* Llega, en fin, el tiempo de tomar la palabra, y dije: que por ningún motivo podía obedecer a la Junta provisional, ... por quien se me había comunicado siempre las disposiciones superiores que *se agregaba conocía muy bien a todos los señores que componían dicha junta y sabía sus sentimientos: ...*

¹³ Cura y vicario, bello sujeto, de ciencia y virtud. (3370-1)

Some changes are minor: where Ansay might use periods, Caparrós replaces them with commas; where the first uses commas, the second might eliminate punctuation

all together; some words capitalized by Ansay (like Ayuntamiento) are not by Caparrós. Also, where Ansay consistently will use the “-se” ending for all preterit subjunctives, Caparrós will switch between “-se” and “-ra” endings, which is more in line with contemporary use.

Other stylistic changes are more consequential: what Caparrós quotes as parenthetical observations are rendered as footnotes, footnote 13 about Domingo García is suppressed, and the parenthetical comment about Cornelio Saavedra is taken from a footnote where he is first introduced two pages earlier. Ansay actually has a footnote commentary for every new person introduced in his narrative. But by eliminating don Domingo García’s comment and keeping the comments about the revolutionaries—even making sure Cornelio Saavedra’s is included—Caparrós has made Ansay appear more opinionated about the revolutionaries than trying to be thorough in his descriptions. To be sure, Ansay is opinionated, but this strategy accentuates the first, while suppressing the second.

Finally, some changes are major: Caparrós takes the beginning subordinate clause of the first paragraph and makes it the beginning of the text in the second paragraph, suppressing the rest of the paragraph which talks about how Ansay was able to stall a meeting until the 23rd. More significantly, Caparrós divides the last paragraph by including the first sentence as part of the first quote, and continuing a couple of pages later starting with the third sentence, where Ansay replies. The second sentence in Ansay’s *Relación* —which describes how Ansay observed and anticipated the results of the meeting— is replaced with a meditation on how Ansay never really chose to defend the king:

Es curioso que don Faustino Ansay no haya tomado nunca la decisión que tantos trastornos le acarreó.... Que no se haya preguntado si los nombres rectores, ReyPatriaDiosEspañaHonra, seguían siendo mucho más que sonidos en sus labios cansados....

Mucho tiempo después... se dirá que quizá podría haber elegido, y que su elección tal vez hubiese sido otra. (16-7)

The two paragraphs of this meditation are reminiscent of the style of historiography which Juan Bautista Alberdi accuses Bartolomé Mitre of utilizing when he wrote his *Historia de Belgrano*: “La mitad del libro de Mitre es *historia hipotética, ó en pretérito condicional del subjuntivo*; historia de lo que hubiera sucedido si no sucede lo que sucedió sin que falten documentos auténticos probatorios de eso que no sucedió porque sucedió otra cosa” (91). Caparrós has no documents to prove Ansay had any doubts, but he has chosen to represent it for reasons which—presumably—will be made known later in the novel. As we have seen, Caparrós—through the postmodern historian narrative voice—has questioned how it is even possible for him to understand—much less represent—such unswerving conviction in the wake of the collapse of all grand metanarratives. History, for Caparrós, is more malleable than a collection of documents.

In the end, Ansay’s *Relación* portrays a loyal Ansay who did not think twice about taking the position of defending his King against the May revolutionaries (usurpers, in his view, of legitimate authority) in Buenos Aires, and even as he is writing his memoir, he does not seem to have second thoughts. By using very nearly the same words, suppressing some, adding others, drawing the reader’s attention to some footnotes, and inserting a long meditation on choice, Caparrós is able to portray an Ansay set in a pre-modern worldview at the very moment the liberal component of the modern worldview is beginning to manifest itself and which will

eventually supersede it. In his own eyes, Ansay is, as it were, a hero like Achilles, whose mighty deeds of bravery, strength and honor surpass his tragic defeat. In Caparrós's eyes, Ansay is, as it were, a hero who, like Achilles, has a very big and glaring flaw which Caparrós wants to understand and represent.

The strategy of narrating by weaving direct quotes and reframing their context is employed elsewhere: for instance, the sixth chapter, called "La caída," is composed entirely from quotes taken from Ansay's *Relación*, with two bible verses inserted between paragraphs. In the novel, the entire chapter reads fluidly, as if originally written so in its entirety. But when compared to Ansay's *Relación*, it becomes obvious the paragraphs are composed from different parts, sometimes separated by a few pages, some paragraphs of the novel composed by sentences from different paragraphs of the *Relación*, some sentences or paragraphs in the novel reframed out of order from how they appear in the *Relación*. The careful editing, again, does not alter so much as underscores certain aspects Ansay portrays about himself.

However, Caparrós uses quotes from Ansay in other ways as well. In the third chapter, called "La proeza," he weaves quotes from Ansay's *Relación* in ways that blend it in with the novel.

El sereno acaba de cantar las once, y lluvioso, y don Faustino Ansay entra en el salón de su casa, donde lo esperan, como otras veces desde el principio de los acontecimientos, tres camaradas. Es jueves, 28 de junio.

—¿Cómo andan las cosas?, pregunta Godoy tras los saludos de rigor.

—Muy mal, responde Ansay, y después de algunas dilaciones y titubeos: ¿Qué determinan ustedes en estos asuntos? ¿Quiénes están unidos a mí?

Los ministros Liaño y Torres y el capitán Godoy responden con tono firme que no se separarán de él hasta la muerte.

—Bueno, dice Ansay, entonces debemos poner inmediatamente manos a la obra.

—¿Pues qué hay?, lo interpela Torres.

—Voy a dar el asalto al cuartel esta madrugada, que ya lo tengo bien premeditado y he dado algunos pasos de observación.

—¿Y cómo ha de ser?

El comandante expone entonces su plan, que es aprobado con grave entusiasmo por sus tres compañeros. (22)

At first reading, this does not seem to be a quote from Ansay's *Relación* at all, but rather Caparrós's fictional handiwork. The dialogue, for instance, is framed in a third person narrative, as opposed to Ansay's first person. However, a careful comparison with the passage from Ansay's *Relación* shows it to be an indirect quote, of sorts:

Como la noche fuese lluviosa, y me sirviese de gran disgusto lo que pasaba, después de haber inspeccionado lo que debería hacer mejor, me fui a casa de los ministros²⁷, trabamos conversación con algunos sujetos que allí había con el mayor sosiego al parecer. Retirados todos, quedamos los dos ministros y don Jacinto Godoy²⁸. ¿Cómo andan las cosas?, pregunta el señor Liaño. Muy mal, repliqué; y después de algunas conferencias, les pregunté a los tres: ¿Qué determinan ustedes en estos asuntos? ¿Quiénes están unidos a mí? Puntualmente respondieron que no se separaban de mí hasta morir... (sic) Bueno, dije; así nadie se aparte de mi presencia. ¿Pues que hay?, me repusieron. Voy a dar el asalto al cuartel esta madrugada, que ya lo tengo bien premeditado, y he dado algunos pasos de observación. ¿Y cómo ha de ser?, me preguntaron. Les dije el plan que se debía hacer porque el pueblo estaba muy conmovido, y es necesario sea con la mayor seguridad y sigilo. En efecto; les pareció acertado el plan que les propuse....

²⁷ Don Domingo de Torres y don Joaquín Gómez de Liaño.

²⁸ Capitán de milicias urbanas de caballería, de buenos sentimientos; fue nuestro confidente desde aquel momento; hijo del alcalde de 2º voto, le arruinaron por no ser ruin de sentimientos. (3375)

There are some differences between Ansay's *Relación* and Caparrós's novelized version of the events: the dialogue has been reformatted to conform to dialogue lines commonly found in the rest of the novel—as well as common to the novel

literary genre— and the first person narrative framework has been replaced with third person. Also, footnotes are missing, the importance of which was already discussed. But important and unique to this passage is the choice of what details have remained intact, and which have been altered. In both versions, it is a rainy night and the lines of dialogue are identical. But the location of this meeting has been changed (in the *Relación* they meet at the house of Liaño and Torres, whereas in the novel they meet at Ansay's house) and the first line is spoken by different characters (Liaño in the *Relación*, Godoy in the novel). This presents a double problem of historical reliability: firstly, speech acts are notoriously suspect for historiographers. They are viewed more as summaries rather than accurate transcriptions of speeches or dialogues. The second problem is that some details are clearly falsified: according to Ansay's *Relación*, they do not meet at Ansay's house but at Liaño and Torres's, the conversation does not start when Ansay enters but after everyone else has left, and Liaño is the one who starts the conversation instead of Godoy.

The adjustments to the plot do not alter its main thrust, but it does put the careful reader on notice that literary considerations for narrative emplotment may be placed above historiographical ones, as the postmodern historian narrative voice makes clear later in the novel. The superiority of narrative considerations is also manifest in the formatting of the page. Unlike the other extensive quotes in which they are set apart and have the appearance on the page of a separate unit, these are blended into the rest of the text in such a way that only the reader acquainted with Ansay's *Relación* would identify the text as a quote.

In addition to using extensive quotes from Ansay's *Relación*, Caparrós also uses extensive quotes from Mariano Moreno to show the milieu of the revolution. There are four chapters called "El prócer" in which the counterpoint between Moreno's public discourse in the *Gazeta* (taken from articles published from June through December of 1810) and his more revolutionary discourse in *El Plan* shows an open-minded liberal right next to a Machiavellian Grand Inquisitor. Here is an example taken from the fourth chapter of the novel—the first chapter titled "El prócer"—in which Moreno expounds on how the new government should communicate with the people:

...El pueblo tiene derecho a saber la conducta de sus representantes, y el honor de estos se interesa en que todos conozcan la execración con que miran aquellas reservas y misterios inventados por el poder para cubrir los delitos.

Mariano Moreno, *Gazeta de Buenos Ayres*, 7-VI-1810

.... Muy poco instruido estaría en los principios de la política, las reglas de la moral y la teoría de las revoluciones, quien ignorase de sus anales las intrigas que secretamente han tocado los gabinetes en iguales casos; y, ¿diremos por esto que han perdido algo de su dignidad, decoro y opinión pública en lo más principal? Nada de eso: los pueblos nunca saben, ni ven, sino lo que se les enseña y muestra, ni oyen más que lo que se les dice.

Mariano Moreno, Plan de Operaciones

.... Cuando el Congreso General necesite un conocimiento del plan de gobierno que la Junta Provisional ha guardado, no huirán sus vocales de darlo, y su franqueza desterrará toda sospecha de que se hacen necesarias o temen ser conocidos, pero es más digno de su representación fiar a la opinión pública la defensa de sus procedimientos y que cuando todos van a tomar parte en la decisión de la suerte, nadie ignore aquellos principios políticos que debieron reglar su resolución....

Mariano Moreno, *Gazeta*, 7-VI-1810 (31-2)

A careful comparison with the original primary documents shows that the only difference between the quotes in the novel and the originals is that Caparrós updated the spelling of some of the words (for instance, *deja* for *dexa*), thus the

question is really about the particular organization of materials in the order in which they are found. In this case, Caparrós is able to show through extended quotes from Mariano Moreno that to the public he says one thing, but in private he says another quite opposite. In this case, Caparrós has “caught” Moreno telling the general public of the *Gazeta* that the Junta will always keep the people informed because the people have the right to know and it is morally superior for public opinion to judge the conduct of their leaders since everyone participates in government, while at the same time he is proposing secretly in the *Plan* that all governments operate through intrigue and secrecy, and that the people only see and hear what they are fed anyway.

Thus the discussion is one of representation. In the *Gazeta*, the two paragraphs quoted here follow one immediately after the other, whereas in the novel, Caparrós inserts the text of *el Plan* in between. It visually represents one form of discourse forcing itself onto another, visibly rending it apart. In a way, that is a metaphor for the May Revolution. The irruption of a new form of government—a liberal representative one—demands a change in the relationship between government and governed. During the ‘good old days’ of the viceroyalty, government was always an ‘other;’ an entity separate and apart from the people. When regulations were promulgated which the people did not care for, these were simply ignored. Shumway reiterates the phrase “obedezco mas no cumplo,” which encapsulates the *criollos* attitude towards the remote ‘otherness’ of royal authority. With the new order of government, the people—through the assemblies and the Junta—become themselves their own government. It is a paradigm shift not easy to

accomplish in a week in May. And even Moreno, the most radical of the liberal revolutionaries, the embodiment of the May revolution, is trapped between modern liberal democratic ideals and a pre-modern authoritarian practice of power.

Like the description the postmodern historian narrative voice made of a 'morbid' Buenos Aires (discussed earlier) this is an example of how the more things change, the more they remain the same. Caparrós has identified an instance where Moreno has blatantly contradicted himself, which should remind the reader of instances where modern mythological leaders contradict themselves. In the first volume of *La voluntad*—written 15 years after *Ansay*—Caparrós helps the forgetful reader who hasn't made the connection to the present by juxtaposing two letters from Juan Domingo Perón to two different national leaders. To Caparrós's father (who organized the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias) Perón states: "El socialismo es la única forma de acceder a la justicia social." To a leader from the right Perón states: "La gran amenaza en este momento es el socialismo. Nosotros somos la muralla Cristiana contra ese peligro" (Gilio). Caparrós has effectively demonstrated that Argentine duplicity in political praxis can be traced back at least to Moreno.

Moreno continues talking about the public circulation of information in *El Plan* by suggesting that information be controlled through the gazette in a couple of different ways: firstly, to print less issues when the news is bad and more when the news is good; and secondly, to prepare ways to "spin" the news when bad news gets picked up and disseminated by journals from other parts of the continent. Then in the *Gazeta* he expounds on the virtues of free thought, free speech and the free press. This is followed by a paragraph from the Plan where he proposes the gazette

include all manner of articles on their freedom vs. the despot's oppression as if written by average citizens for two reasons: firstly because if the ideas are not well received the government can easily deny the ideas; and secondly, because essays on the virtues of freedom from average citizens who purportedly enjoy them carry much more force than from a revolutionary government who would 'enforce' freedom.

In the second chapter called "El prócer"—the twelfth of the book—Caparrós shows a Moreno grappling with what to do with the "enemy." In the *Gazeta* Moreno feels compassion for the enemies in Córdoba who are suffering for their lack of judgment and stubbornness at a time of inevitable change, yet in *El Plan* calls for the purgation of the blood of the social body and for heads to roll and rivers of blood to flow because no revolution has succeeded otherwise. In the *Gazeta* he spins the intention of the enemies in Córdoba by noting that, since the *Junta* and the royalist both uphold Ferdinand VII as legitimate ruler, it follows that their resistance to the *Junta* is merely discontent over having removed certain individuals from offices of authority. In *El Plan*, Moreno shows that any thought contrary to the *Junta's* will should be viewed as dangerous and as a crime.

In the sixteenth chapter—the third of "El Prócer" series—Caparrós transcribes an example of the exposition of the virtues of liberty in the *Gazeta*, and compares it with a detailed analysis of how to categorize, identify and deal with the population in *El Plan*. He defines people into three broad categories: ardent sympathizers, the enemy and the silent spectators on the margins. The overarching criterion for ruling and especially for administering justice should be loyalty: those

loyal should be treated with leniency and receive preferential treatment, whereas the enemies should be punished severely and punitively. The silent spectators should be viewed with suspicion. This distinction of different peoples—especially the silent spectators—will be a motive for Caparrós to employ historical imagination in order to construct a vignette already discussed which will serve as a meditation on the silent spectators.

In the final chapter of “El prócer”—chapter 24 of the novel—Caparrós reproduces texts from *El Plan* which show Moreno deeply distrusts people and believes the best way to rule is through fear. Alongside is a text from the *Gazeta* announcing the suppression of honorific titles. Then from *El Plan* is a paragraph in which promotion through the mid-level positions in government and the military should be slowed down, and establish in its place an elaborate system of awards and prizes to lull the employees with false prestige and keep them out of the actual offices of power. In essence, Caparrós has demonstrated how Moreno eliminated the old titles of nobility, which bestowed honor and pride on its bearers and a seat in the house of power, and in its place proposes new awards and prizes, which bestow honor and pride on its bearers without any real attachment to power. Apparently, Moreno never fully internalized the French revolutionary ideals of *liberté et égalité*.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom Moreno admired the most, theorized on these two in *The Social Contract*. These were addressed again in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. The phrase we now associate with the French Revolution originally had *liberté et égalité*, and sometimes included *fraternité ou la mort*, but it was one of many slogans at the time. The government of the Third Republic made it the national motto of France in the late 19th century, after dropping *ou la mort*.

The chapter—and Moreno’s quotes in the novel—end on an ironic note taken from the *Gazeta*.⁹¹ Moreno argues that people tend to be comfortable with the known and familiar, and that radical change has always required copious bloodshed. It is ironic because the change Moreno has been proposing all along is freedom and a liberal government, yet the methodologies he has espoused to achieve these objectives actually would instill fear in the masses. The romanticized image of Moreno—the one most Argentines gleaned from the myths learned in school; derived, in turn, from his writings in the *Gazeta*—is the patriotic hero who envisioned a revolution which would usher in a modern liberal state founded on the French revolutionary values of *liberté et égalité*. The *real politik* image of Moreno—the one Argentine mythmakers like Paul Groussac and Ricardo Levene would rather pretend he had not existed or written *El Plan*—is the despot in the making who saw in the May Revolution an opportunity to wrest power from a weakened Spain and concentrate it in the hands of the elite and enlightened *criollos* like himself (Shumway 41). By presenting both sides of “el prócer” next to each other, Caparrós is forcing the reader to come to terms with the antithetical, incompatible, and even irreconcilable tendencies in Moreno, who incarnates the May Revolution, and is one of the ideological grandfathers—on both sides—of the *Guerra sucia* of the 1970’s, which is the black hole around which Caparrós’s constellation of meaning revolves.

If Moreno’s texts reveal the profound contradictions in the ideological leader of the May Revolution, the letters María Guadalupe Moreno wrote to her husband reveal the measures taken by Saavedra to excise the poison from the nascent body

⁹¹ Caparrós incorrectly cites the issue of 3 Oct. 1810, when it is actually from 15 Nov.

politic. Disillusioned with the conservative turn the May revolution took after the installation of a the *Junta grande*, which comprised delegates from across the former viceroyalty of *La plata* and retained Saavedra as president, Mariano resigned his position as secretary in November 1810 and embarked to England as ambassador in January 1811. He died 4 March while en route: the official cause of death was acute overdose of medicine, but rumors—which have not been proven or refuted—suggest his death may have been premeditated, perhaps by order of the *Saavedristas*. Meanwhile, his devoted wife María Guadalupe had written a series of letters which end in August 1811, when the news of his death arrived Buenos Aires.

Chapters 7, 14, 20 and 28 reproduce four letters María Guadalupe wrote between 20 April and 29 July in which she professes her love for him, how much she misses him, family matters (such as rent payments) and personal business (such as books loaned or received from friends). More importantly for the development of the novel, the letters give us insight into the political developments as well. In the first she notes:

...estas cosas que acaban de suceder con los vocales, me es un puñal en el corazón, porque veo que cada día se asegura más Saavedra en el mando, y tu partido se tira a cortar de raíz,... Los han desterrado a Mendoza, a Azcuénaga y Posadas; Larrea a San Juan; Peña, a la punta de San Luís; Vieytes, a la misma; French, Beruti, Donato, el Dr. Vieytes y Cardoso, a Patagones;.... Del pobre Castelli hablan incendios, que ha robado, que es borracho, que hace injusticias, no saben cómo acriminarlo.... (47-8).

All the people she mentions were known supporters of the *Morenista* faction. Many played important roles in the *Semana de mayo*, while others were distinguished citizens of Buenos Aires. The second letter adds a few more details which confirm the Saavedristas' intention to 'cut at the root' the Morenista party. The third letter

contains much more extensive information on how the military commanders in the north are disgusted with the new government and would rather disband than to continue fighting for them. The final letter reveals the *Morenistas* are all but gone from Buenos Aires.

As with Moreno's writings taken from the *Gazeta* and *El Plan*, the letters are faithful copies of the originals and can be checked against the copies found in Enrique Williams Alzaga's *Cartas que nunca llegaron*. Since a single letter takes up the entire chapter, analyzing how Caparrós contextualized them means looking at the chapters immediately before and after. In all cases, these interrupt a crucial moment in Ansay's story. For instance, the first letter (7th chapter) comes on the heels of "La caída," which tells about how Ansay was finally arrested without a fight, and precedes "El destierro," which narrates Ansay's journey in chains from Mendoza to Buenos Aires. There is a contrast, not unlike Moreno's texts from the *Gazeta* and *El Plan*, but on an affective plane. Where Ansay in the *Relación* is resolute in fighting for king and honor, María Moreno comes across as emotionally dependent on Mariano. Caparrós will remind the reader in the interlude that María survived Mariano's death—she lived until 1854—raised their son and had a difficult life because the various governments neglected paying her pension at times. This suggests that she was not as dependent on Mariano as she thought she was when writing the letters, which insinuates that perhaps Ansay is not as unwavering in his commitment either. In fact, as we shall see later, Caparrós does not believe Ansay could have survived his ordeal without some psychological escape mechanism.

There are a few other quotes from historical documents which should be mentioned in closing. Firstly, letters from Ansay or from other officials are quoted—most of these in their entirety—as one more narrative form within the relevant chapters. Most of these can be found in the appendix to Ansay's *Relación*—which contains some 122 official memos and letters—but some are transcribed from other sources, such as the “Proclama” of 26 May 1810 (13). Secondly, the first two paragraphs from Moreno's translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract can be found in the interlude. Here Moreno simultaneously extols the simple truths about society to be found in Rousseau's work, yet suppresses the chapter on religion because “el autor tuvo la desgracia de delirar en materias religiosas” (181). Shumway notes that this introduction is a perfect illustration of Moreno's Enlightenment ideology struggling against his strict Catholic worldview (30). Finally, the last paragraph—about a page and a half long—is taken from Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia General de las Indias*, which illustrates the profound power and mystery the written word was for the Native Americans. It is in this written word that Caparrós will have Ansay take refuge from the madness of the concentration camp at Las Bruscas in the second part.

Of the 30 chapters that compose the first part of the novel and the interlude, four are composed from Moreno's Plan or Gazeta, four from María Guadalupe's letters, two from Ansay's diary, and another two (a conservative estimate) can be found in fragmentary form throughout the rest of the first part: the equivalent of 40% of the first part and the interlude, or—since the second part is shorter, but does not contain near the volume of quotes—about 1/3 of the novel is quoted from

primary historiographical documents. At face value, it is easy to make the case that Caparrós satisfies the demand for historical documentation. Even acknowledging the Borgesian shift between the version in Ansay's *Relaciones* and the novel—"las pequeñas divergencias que son del caso": dictum from 'La intrusa'—the bulk of the novel's representation of history is surprisingly faithful to the historiographic sources, and yet has effectively reframed the characters of Moreno, Ansay and Saavedra so that they portray the idealistic—and sanguinary and even perhaps mad—revolutionary who fails to garner enough political clout to effect profound and lasting change, the old-guard conservative impossible to dislodge from a pre-modern worldview, and the dull military moderate who eventually ends up ruling the country in 1811 after the *Morenistas* are routed, postponing Moreno's vision of a liberal Argentina by at least half a century. Reframed in this way, the story of the May Revolution begins to look more like the plot seen in *No velas* in which the liberal May Revolution and the *Primera Junta* are framed to look like the *Primavera Camporista*, the escalating factionalism of the *Junta Grande* looks like Perón's brief tenure before his death, and the remainder of the years Ansay was in Argentina look like the period of chaos between Perón and the Military *coup*. In satisfying the demand for historical documentation, Caparrós has also satisfied the demand for reflection on the limits of representation by blurring the line between history and fiction.

Representation Through Historical Imagination

There are three categories of conventional narrators which help connect the representations of fiction into a cohesive story: the traditional third person

narrators, the fictional first person narrators and the postmodern historiographer. Many of these are introduced in the first chapter, by using the technique of repeating a dialogue, and letting each narrator frame it differently. The first realist narrator frames the conversation thus:

—¡Ha llegado un correo, mi comandante!

—Ya.

El soldado hace sonar los tacos de sus botas y se retira, sin mirar hacia atrás. El se ha quedado pensativo. Sólo tras un momento acierta a pensar que debería interesarse por el mensaje de la capital, pero su movimiento se congela. Si esa mañana el cadáver no se hubiese cruzado en su camino, todo sería diferente. Todo.

The lines of dialogue are the same ones used to introduce the postmodern historical narrative voice, discussed earlier. The lines of dialogue are repeated in order to present this different narrative voice. The traditional realist narrates in third person, limited to Ansay's point of view. Narrated in Ansay's present time, the narrator thus efficiently moves the action forward.

The second realist narrator is more concerned with the description of quotidian minutiae:

El comandante don Faustino Ansay se levanta todos los días a las seis en punto de la mañana, llueva o truene, porque es un hombre metódico. Carmela ya sabe que tomará unos mates por todo desayuno y le tendrá dispuestos los enseres, aunque antes deberá servirle el aguamanil y la toalla de hilo para las abluciones. Sospecha también que su amo no pensará en nada mientras cumpla con el rito del agua...
(10)

Like the previous narrator, this one also narrates in third person, but is omniscient. In the paragraph above, the narrator is able to see into the mind of Ansay's slave girl, Carmela. With this narrator there is more description and—for whatever reason— indents the first line of the paragraph, whereas the other realist does not.

This narrative voice—or one very similar to it—is the one that frames the dialogue between Ansay, Liaño, Godoy and Torres at the beginning of the chapter called “La proeza,” discussed earlier.

Yet another realist narrator is the preferred voice to summarize lengthy passages from Ansay’s *Relación*. In these instances, it picks up the unusual present perfect grammatical time for the narration. The following example is taken from the chapter called “La proeza” and narrates what happened immediately after the dialogue discussed earlier:

Ya ha ido saliendo uno por uno de sus vigiliass o del sueño, respondiendo o despertando sobresaltados ante un ligero golpe en la ventana, tal vez, o un aldabonazo sordo en la puerta de maderas recias. Ya han respondido con una ahogada afirmación a la pregunta del comandante,... Ya se han vestido.... Ya han salido a la calle.... Ya han caminado sigilosos por las calles oscuras.... (22-3)

The present perfect tense, coupled to “Ya,” repeated at the beginning of every sentence, gives the narrative a certain rhythm. Although a regular preterit verb construction would have served adequately—perhaps would even be more expected for the circumstance—the present perfect nuances the action in two significant ways: firstly, the specificity of the present perfect—which indicates action begun and finished in the past—lends the narrative an air of factualness. It’s not that events happened; events *have* happened. Indeed, the action does summarize what Ansay describes in his *Relación*. Secondly, the use of the present perfect has a certain “peninsular” ring to it—much like the use of the second person plural conjugations—which signal where Ansay is from, where he wrote his *Relación*, and even where Caparrós is writing the novel. The same narrative strategy

is employed elsewhere, such as in the eleventh chapter (“La cárcel”), and in the twenty fifth chapter (“La recompensa”).

A very entertaining narrative voice is a parody of a 19th century romantic novel or history and is used to narrate the entire 16 pages of the 19th chapter, called “La mulata.” This chapter, which is divided into five parts using roman numerals, narrates one of the completely fictional events of the entire story: the arrival of the mulata Carmela to Carmen de Patagones. For instance, this excerpt taken from the second paragraph imitates the form of address the period authors had for the reader, as well as a preoccupation for narrating events of importance and transcendence.

Nuestra historia no se detendrá en el minucioso recuento de esos ciento veinte hombres y mujeres, en su mayor parte esforzados colonos cuyo estudio no nos aportaría nuevas luces en nuestro conocimiento del género humano: se trataba de sujetos que, si bien de un mérito y entereza fuera de toda duda, representaban esa masa mediana e incolora que no nutre los altos hechos de la Historia. (109)

Caparrós convincingly imitates a 19th century Romantic historian whose elitism drove the new colonies to “import culture” from Europe rather than study the nascent national culture already present. The dialogues between Torres and Liaño, with Ansay sitting to the side, also drip with romantic (both literary and emotional) verbosity, as when Torres inquires if Liaño has seen Aurora, the daughter of a local doctor who had sent her daughter away to be educated at a convent in Buenos Aires, and had recently returned to her father’s house.

—Pues nada he visto, amigo mío, nada he visto, repitió Liaño.
—¿Pero cómo es posible que no hayas notado el halo que desplegaba su presencia. La profundidad de esos ojos a medias velados por la mantilla... Su deliciosa boca, con esos labios finos como magníficos rubíes del Catay... la perfección orgullosa de su pequeña naricilla... La

enternecedora ingenuidad de sus maneras campesinas... ¿Cómo es posible que no te haya inundado el corazón de renovado gozo?
—Ay, Domingo, Domingo...
—Pues sí, amigos míos: estoy enamorado. Esa damisela ha rendido mi corazón sin necesidad de hacer un gesto, con la sola pureza de su celestial presencia... Estoy enamorado, amigos míos. Esa mujer será mi mujer. (115).

The entire paragraph parodies the extreme purple prose quality of Spanish American romanticism, from its preoccupation with only high matters of history to the overly flowery descriptions of Aurora (itself a name well suited to Romanticism). The closest example of this style of prose is found in Moreno's excerpts from the *Gazeta*, such as when he rambles on about what good government can do for the average citizen:

[H]a parecido conveniente que, al mismo tiempo que el Gobierno empeña todo su celo en remover embarazos, disipar contradicciones, arrancar los abusos de una administración corrompida y sembrar las semillas de todas las virtudes, estimulando el honor de la milicia, la pureza de los funcionarios públicos, la integridad de los magistrados y el amor de la patria en todos los habitantes de estas vastas regiones; se comuniquen también algunas observaciones, que enseñen al pueblo lo que es, lo que puede, lo que debe, y todo lo que concierne a una completa instrucción sobre sus intereses y derechos. (100)

Once the beautiful words and grand ideas are removed, the paragraph in essence says that good government will root out all that is "bad," and will teach the people what they should know about their interests and rights. The underlying assumption is that people do not really know what their own best interests are and need a benevolent *caudillo* to take care of them. Put bluntly, the message of the paragraph does not sound appealing in the least. But in the ornate language of Romanticism, it casts the government in the best possible light, doing all it can to help out the masses. The credibility of Moreno's writings in the *Gazeta* are already severely

compromised by the parallel exposition of his more sanguinary thoughts in *El Plan*; and the parallel of Romantic literary style between the *Gazeta* and the chapter “La mulata” help to mutually discredit the authenticity of either narrative. In short, the capacity for Romanticism itself to convey facts or authenticity is questioned.

A curious third person narrator belongs to Carmela, Ansay’s slave. There are two scenes where this voice portrays an Ansay who is angry and caught up in the emotions either right before or right after the heat of confrontation. It is marked by the repetition of “dice que,” as in the following example, taken from the second chapter, which narrates how he clearly stated in the assembly that he would not recognize the authority of the Junta provisional. The paragraph starts in the middle of the sentence:

dice que ya sabe que ellos siguen reunidos, acaba de llegar a casa del ministro Liaño y lo encuentra con Torres que también es leal y les dice que ya sabe que están todos en casa de Godoy, dice que todos los conspiradores están allí y él ya lo sabe,... (18)

This narrative voice is perhaps Caparrós’s weakest parody or imitation. Except for the repetitiveness of “dice que,” there is really nothing else about the language which distinguishes Carmela as a young slave girl, or at the very least uneducated. To have Carmela narrate these two passages, however, is of some importance to the novel. It privileges the narrative authority of a slave and a woman—who in that context does not have any power—to narrate Ansay’s thinking about his own power. Also, Ansay’s *Relación* omits any mention of love or even sexual companionship, so Caparrós has invented a sexual tension between Ansay and Carmela—in the fifth chapter, after Ansay has successfully taken back the barracks, he strokes his ego even as he strokes himself in his bath tub, while Carmela narrates

what he says, apparently without fully understanding what he is doing—, has Ansay daydreaming along with Liaño about the beautiful Aurora, and creates another slave girl, Lumba, as his sexual companion during his time in Montevideo, whom Ansay confuses with Carmela. This invention helps the postmodern historical narrator use historical imagination in order to give Ansay reasons to persist in his loyalty to a worldview whose structure has been dismantled. For now, it portrays Carmela as the principal witness-narrator of a private Ansay worked up into a very manly display of outrage and righteous indignation about affronts to his personal honor.

The next type of conventional narrators tells the story of Ansay from the first person point of view, without quoting from his *Relación*. There are a couple of instances where we the readers see Ansay's running commentary on reality. The first instance it is employed is in the first chapter, immediately after the paragraph in which a realist narrator merely states that Ansay thinks to himself that everything would have been different had that dead person not crossed his path earlier in the morning:

maldito zambo no tenía por qué morirse justo cuando cae la primera
nieve, no tenía por qué morirse pobre y solo y dejar su cuerpo su
cadáver como herencia maldita como reproche, mudo, con los ojos
que nadie va a cerrar y no tenía por qué mirarme así desde tan lejos...
muerto todavía, con tus ojos que nadie va a cerrar.
—¡Ha llegado un correo, mi comandante!
—Ya. (9-10)

The short dialogue—which is the third time it appears in the chapter—is located at the end rather than the beginning. Ansay's thoughts themselves begin without capitalization, and the period is pretty much eliminated, except at the end. There are also no references to what he is doing or where he is going; we only see what he is

seeing and thinking. These strategies come together to create the illusion of reading Ansay's thoughts, which are rather base and common. The debasement of the dead zambo in Ansay's private thoughts has the effect of making Ansay seem petty and heartless, but also remind the reader that an accurate portrayal of the worldview shared by Ansay's social class is not the egalitarian sensitivity more or less common in modern Western society. This worldview is a product of the Enlightenment political philosophers, the American and French revolutions,⁹² and is about to come into direct confrontation with Ansay's now-antiquated worldviews.

A very interesting first person narrator crops up to describe a nightmare in the eighth chapter, called "El destierro," and serves as another example of historiographic imagination. Ansay relates in detail in his *Relación*, his trip from Córdoba to Buenos Aires. By the time he reaches *el fortín de Areco*, about 145 km away from Buenos Aires, he describes the reason for his apprehension at reaching Buenos Aires.⁹³ Caparrós captures a few words from the following, and quotes it as a line of dialogue, with an ellipsis before and after. The following is taken from Ansay's *Relación*, with the part quoted by Caparrós in italics: "Todo el tiempo que aquí estuve *se me ocurrían funestísimos pensamientos a causa de las muchas* prisiones que se hacían en la ciudad de Buenos Aires y sus arrabales" (3397). As he gets closer to Buenos Aires, his spirit falters even more:

⁹² Some of the main political philosophers in mind here are John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Thomas Payne and Thomas Jefferson.

⁹³ Fortín de Areco: A locality in the province of Buenos Aires now known as Carmen de Areco. Ruta Nacional 7, the main highway from Buenos Aires to Mendoza, still runs through the town.

Quebrantado bastante mi espíritu al considerar lo venidero, aumentándose cuanto más me acercaba, anduve este día y el siguiente seis, como 15 leguas temiendo de entrar en la jaula y a las tres leguas de la ciudad de Buenos Aires nos detuvimos, y desde la cañada de Morón, pueblo de sus inmediaciones, puse el parte de mi llegada al presidente Saavedra para esperar su respuesta sobre el destino de mi persona. (3397)

Caparrós represents Ansay's anxiety at the *fortín de Areco* by quoting a few words about "funestísimos pensamientos" as an independent line of dialogue (52). But when Ansay describes in his *Relación* feeling even more anxious by the time they reached the *cañada de Morón*,⁹⁴ Caparrós represents it in the form of a nightmare narrated in first person:

Pero ya estoy llegando a donde vaya, porque veo ante mí ese puente que sin duda debo atravesar, extendido sobre la llanura en la que nada impide el paso pero obviamente el único camino posible es el del puente. Y le falta una parte a su esqueleto de madera, que seguramente traerá entre sus ropas esa figura negra que se acerca desde todas partes, bajo sus ropas negras que distinguí a lo lejos y ahora reconozco perfectamente como el largo hábito gris de un franciscano tonsurado, la capucha encasquetada hasta las orejas improbables. En realidad nunca esperé que tuviera rostro.... (53)

Caparrós overlays the troll bridge myth,⁹⁵ changing the troll for the figure of death, onto very specific details of the history of the *cañada de Morón* and packs it into Ansay's nightmare as an oneiric representation of the increase in anxiety Ansay merely states he is experiencing in his *Relación*. In the dream, Ansay must answer a question put to him by the death or be hanged, by God and king. Death asks Ansay

⁹⁴ The *cañada de Morón* was an area about 35 km to the west of Buenos Aires through which the Río de las Conchas (now Río Reconquista) crosses the pampas from south to north. In 1773, Pablo Márquez constructed the *Puente Márquez*, a wooden structure 27 meters in length over the river. With the construction of the bridge, the camino de los Gaona was extended from the villa de Morón to the villa of Luján. The road is now part of Ruta Nacional 7.

⁹⁵ In the myth, a troll guards a bridge and does not permit anyone to cross until a riddle is solved.

why he is going to the city, and Ansay, unable to lie, answers: “to be hanged by God and king.” At that point, Ansay thinks he should have lied in order to escape the infinite circle. Like Carlos Montana’s story of the explicating magician found in *No velas*, Ansay’s dream has a narrative quality that hinges on a paradox which triggers an infinite recursion. In this case, the trope of the troll bridge is inverted: the hero must cross the bridge, not to fulfill his hero-quest, but to be punished. In the regular trope, only the worthy or the smart person able to solve the troll’s riddle may pass. In Ansay’s case, only the idiot who clings to the honorable virtue of honesty will pass. Again, Caparrós wishes to suggest that, had Ansay thought about the times in which he lived, he might have seen the paradigm shift which the May Revolution would come to mean, and he might have made a different choice in his allegiances. By putting it in a dream, Caparrós insinuates that, even if he were not conscious of his choice, he could have been aware of its possibility at a subconscious level. Also, the reconfiguration of Ansay’s statement about his spirit being “quebrantado bastante” into an oniric narrative is a strategy Caparrós has used before. The strategy portrays Ansay’s angst at not really having any choice in which he is master of his fate.

In conclusion, the purpose of multiple narrators and genre reproductions or parodies, beyond merely moving the story forward, is twofold. Firstly, the narrative palimpsest is, in Caparrós’s view, a better representation of the milieu. Caparrós’s answer when asked about the multiple genres in *La voluntad* applies even more so to *Ansay*:

Supongo que la cruza de géneros tiene que ver con esta idea de reconstruir un panorama de época... porque una época está hecha de

muchos géneros. Si vos querés contar un fusilamiento o un romance o las variables económicas de una época, lo podés hacer manteniendo una unidad genérica de cada uno de esos relatos. (Pérez, 2)

Thus the reproduction of various genres is meant to contribute to giving the novel a more complete “feel” for the period being narrated.

Secondly, as we have seen, probing the interstices between narrative voices and genres permits a negative hermeneutical approach to elucidate on the historicity or artifice of the narration, not only of the story being told, but more fundamentally, of the historical documents themselves.

The Second Part: The “Risky” Historical Novel.

Like the tip of a diamond pressing against a glass pane, the beginning of the final chapter of the first part, called “La realidad,” becomes the breaking point from which the entire artifice of the traditional historical novel shatters, revealing that behind all the narrative voices and genre reproductions—or parodies—of the first part lies what is fundamentally a writer’s construct. The postmodern historian narrative voice shatters the artifice in just one sentence: “Si ésta fuese, en lugar de un tratado o intentona sobre el poder y la impotencia, una novela histórica, bronces más brontos deberían necesariamente derribar de sus muros aquellas piedras cuya sola función es el ocultamiento obstinado de lo heroico, lo marmóreo” (169). Clearly, the narrator is working on the premise that the historical novel genre had pre-established norms, one of which was the vindication of its main character. But that is not the point of this novel and the narrator is not only aware of the deviation from the norm, but shatters the artifice of a novel by directly telling the reader: “this is not an historical novel.”

It is, however, an exploration about power and impotence on two levels. At the surface level, it is about the power and impotence of the different historical figures to act within their historical circumstances. Ansay has the power and experience of military command to take back the barracks in Mendoza and commandeer a ship and take over Carmen de Patagones without shedding blood, but is impotent to stop the revolution and to keep himself out of prisons and concentration camps. Moreno has the power of the position of secretary of the *Primera Junta* and of a media outlet for his prolific writings on liberal ideals, but is impotent to impose his revolutionary will on the *Junta* which could have radically altered the course of the first few years of the May Revolution. María Guadalupe has the power—such as it is—to write and tell her husband about the changes happening in Buenos Aires after his departure but obviously is impotent to prevent or undo the routing of the *Morenistas* by the *Saavedristas*.

At a narrative level it is just as much about the power to examine primary historical documents carefully in order to satisfy the demand for historical documentation. It is also about the power to employ historical imagination in order to emplot historical data in a new and different narrative, or even to create new data and new meaning or reframe the past in terms relevant to the present through historical imagination. However, it is also about the impotence of the autobiographical narrator to fully understand his historical circumstances (in certain occasions), the impotence of the contemporary narrator to understand the subject's worldview or the subject himself, and the impotence to faithfully represent the subject and his milieu respecting the subject's own context and worldview and

yet making that context not just accessible but understandable and even meaningful for the present historical context and worldview.

The second part of the novel contains the numbered chapters on “Los infortunios,” discussed earlier, but it also contains—shuffled between those chapters—other ones called “La gloria.” Where the first part of the novel contains a proof of concept for the use of historical imagination in the creation of an historical novel, the chapters of “La gloria” contain a proof of concept about the use of historical imagination in the creation of an apocryphal primary text. In particular, imagining and creating the text that a lunatic Ansay “en cueros y gritando arcaísmos” might have occasionally stopped to write down—like Samuel Taylor Coleridge about his Kubla Khan—his delirious visions of adventure as a survivor of Pánfilo de Narvaez’s fateful expedition, but obviously has not.

Perhaps basing the conjecture on the similarity of the name of Ansay’s *Relación* with Álgvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufraios* (originally called *La relación*), and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s *Infortunios de Alonzo Ramírez*, Caparrós makes use of historical imagination to envision an Ansay brought up on stories of the conquistadors, and eventually decided to come to the Americas to seek his fortune just as the men in those stories did. In the thirteenth chapter of the first part, called “El origen,” we learn that he learned to read and write from his uncle Cozme Picazo, priest of the town of Utebo, near Zaragoza. Although Cozme was a very strict headmaster at his parochial school, he had a passion for telling a certain type of story: “la del relato de las glorias indianas del Imperio” (74). Thus Ansay heard, and read, the stories of Hernán Cortés, Francisco Pizarro, and Juan Ponce de

León, and discussed them at length with his uncle. Once Faustino grew up, his father suggested he join the army, at which visions of all the childhood stories prompted him to accept.

Caparrós has thus constructed a plausible scenario in which Ansay, in the middle of executing a particularly daring military maneuver, such as taking back the barracks in Mendoza, would narrate the event back to himself imitating the style of the 15th century chroniclers, much like a child playing hockey might narrate his moves in the style of a radio or TV sports announcer: “he shoots, he scores!” The piece is introduced thus:

...servirá a su rey y a su patria y a su destino en ellos, él, que confundió su tiempo, él, que sabe que ha nacido tarde, que siempre ha ansiado un yelmo de metal y una mesnada y la selva cerrada y virgen por testigo, la gloria de Cortés, la de Pizarro y el mundo deslumbrado y un Bernal Díaz por cronista para mundial ilustración del comandante de fronteras de esta ciudad maldita de Mendoza don Faustino Ansay, de Zaragoza, que ahora debe esperar que cante el gallo. (24)

As the tale progresses, the narrative begins to take on the tone of an old conquistador's *Relación*:

Así que, como lo llevo dicho, llegaron sin más acecho y a pasar por el boquete del muro y sobre el viejo horno de pan los otros nueve en el momento mismo que el comandante se echaba sobre los soldados de la guardia, que formarían a lo menos una buena decena, con una maniobra que por estar tan bien combinada los dejó sin reacciones ni contesta y así se rindieron al comandante y le rogaron su clemencia pero no mostraban en realidad sus rostros grande congoja,... (27)

The entire five pages where Caparrós parodies Bernal Díaz del Castillo is brilliant.

Caparrós is able to reproduce the archaic language convincingly. Adopting the archaic tone parodies Díaz, clearly signaling Ansay's accomplishment as an ironic feat. Yet there is just a touch of humanity and dignity which the reader can identify

with, which is that Ansay finally, for once in his life, is getting the chance to participate in the adventure he had dreamt about—in that archaic language—for so long. It is like watching a fifty-year-old man act as giddy as a little child who finally gets to do something he had dreamt about his whole life. But it is also pathetic, in that Ansay's grand moment in life is a rather inconsequential raid, and in no way can it be compared with the daring deeds of Pizarro or the resulting glory, honor and fame which Cortés amassed from his labors.

In the chapter called “La realidad”—in which the postmodern historical narrator reveals *Ansay* is not an historical novel—Ansay is portrayed in Montevideo observing the inevitability of their defeat and sorting through options that might save him from prison. The last option considered is for Ansay to become his own narrator:

[A]sumir enteramente la enormidad de su osadía y pensarse sin más tapujos como un personaje de ficción, de cualquier ficción y también el creador de dicho personaje si hace falta o sea un autor autobiográfico, único realmente capaz de modificar la propia historia y así pensar... en giros copernicanos y sobre todo pedestremente imposibles que lo harían aparecer por ejemplo como gobernador de la provincia de Córdoba del Tucumán en medio de una paz incontestada o fiero conquistador de la ínsula de la reina California o abogado porteño y líder insurgente o pelotari ruso o conde de Utebo o princesa Carlota o mapamundi o capitán general de la expedición destinada a reimplantar el orden en estos agitados países o su padre o yo mismo o tantas otras cosas que la posibilidad lo sobrepasa y aniquilaría tal vez.... (176)

These are admittedly impossible possibilities in any version of reality which requires the mind to admit outside stimuli as a limiting descriptor. But if reality were unburdened of the senses and constructed strictly within the narrative realm of the mind—where the psyche constructs the *persona*—a person could view

himself simultaneously as the main character and the narrator of his narrative. This structure is reminiscent of the *Pero callarlos* text by Carlos Montana in *No velas*. In the story the Quino-cartoon character wandering the desert –panes of his cartoon begins to see the narrator separately from the narrated once the character becomes convinced he will die of thirst. By employing this same narrative strategy in *Ansay*, the postmodern historian narrative voice is clearly representing Ansay's situation in Montevideo as hopeless. Also, the limits to which Ansay can conceive his own reality in a strictly mental realm are entirely defined by him. Some, like the narrator, would be impossible for Ansay to even conceive of simply because it would be an unknown entity. Others, like Ansay's father, would be impractical because it would be too well know. Still others, like the governor of Córdoba, would be implausible because its constitutive elements are too close to an external reality which is much different. And yet others, like the conquistador, might fit into this escape mechanism because Ansay already has the predisposition to fantasize about these types of adventures, as already shown in the chapter about his upbringing and his self-narrative of his greatest exploit. With this, the novel's emplotment has been set for the five chapters called "La gloria" in the second part of the novel.

"La gloria" narrates in first person the adventures of Ansay who loses everyone to a shipwreck except Alonso de Miraño and Juan de Torrejón. They first wind up living with an indigenous tribe called the *Igualones*, but they soon left them because nothing great could come of staying with such barbarous men. They wandered the plains towards the mountains in the west, until they found a plain covered in cacti with edible tunas around which various indigenous tribes had

gathered to eat the fruits for the season. One of these tribes, the Amaraces, enslaved Ansay while other rival tribes did the same to the other two men. He endured slave labor until the next year, when the Amaraces returned to the plains of the tunas, where Ansay was sold to the Tutulas. He was treated much differently in the new tribe. He miraculously cured a sick person, drawing the admiration of the local *Tulasai* or healer. Ansay was given a house, and converted the tribe to Christianity, and the tribe gave her a girl named Garubí, who became his wife. He lived with the *Tulasai* for some time, until he discovered that the Spanish had a settlement due south. To escape a heated argument with the leader, he went to the Spanish settlement, called San Juan de las Higueras, where he met up with his friends Miraño and Torrejón. Ansay informed the city mayor about his ordeal amongst the natives, and about the emeralds of the Tulasai. This prompted an expeditionary party, which was as much an excuse for Ansay to avenge himself of the wrongs he suffered. The narrative ends with the Christians falling on the Tulasai, scoring a great victory, and the heavens parting open for God to show his face to Ansay.

The literary sources for this narration are varied. Some elements derive from the people Ansay knew, geography and edible plants and foods of the Americas. The names of the characters “Miraño” and “Torrejón” clearly correspond to Ansay’s fellow royalist Liaño and Torres, and the tribe of the barbaric “Igalones” seems to be a derisive gloss of the ‘democratic’ revolutionaries. The mountains were across the plains to the west, the ocean to the east (198). Ansay describes a tree which looks like an *Ombú*: “era un a modo de olivo gigantesco como de setenta varas y su tronco muy intrincado....” (188). Miraño gets sick from eating too many tomatoes

(195), the tuna-producing cacti are opuntia, commonly known as prickly pear, India figs or nopales (209). The indigenous people drink chicha made from maiz (233) and smoke “tapaco” (235), and ate “pimientos verdes muy pequeños, que aquí tienen y son rabiosos como el fuego” and agua ardiente (243). All these edible plant products and foods are native to the Americas.

Some of the elements derive from information Ansay received directly from indigenous peoples, or modern anthropological observations of contemporary isolated Native Americans. In the novel, Ansay learns from the Indian guide employed in the journey from Buenos Aires to Carmen de Patagones that Indian men “buy” their wives from the fathers and brothers, which scandalized the Europeans (89). While this does not appear in Ansay’s *Relación*, it does appear in Ansay’s delirious narrative (217). The Tutulas also practice endocannibalism by grinding up the bones of the deceased relatives and mixing it in their food or drink (215), not unlike the practices of the Matsés peoples of the Peruvian and Brazilian jungle region.

Many elements are borrowed from literature. Miraño and Torrejón landed with another group of men elsewhere on the coast. Before meeting up with Ansay, the group did not have enough food, so turned to “the custom of the sea,” or cannibalism, not unlike an example found in Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s *Infortunos de Alonzo Ramírez*. But when everyone else was dead and eaten, they stopped “que por ser como hermanos no se comieron” (191), unlike the brothers mentioned by Ulrich Schmidl in *Derrotero y viaje a España y las Indias*, and later fictionalized by Manuel Mujica Láinez in “El hambre.” Ansay describes eating bitter

roots and later shellfish soon after being shipwrecked, like Álvaro Núñez described in *Naufragios*. Unlike the Ansay of the *Relación*, the imaginary Ansay of *La gloria* is a very close observer of the indigenous population, like Álvaro Núñez, who provided a wealth of anthropological data about the peoples he encountered. Sometimes Ansay compares the reality of “La gloria” with that of Don Quixote, as when Ansay was bought from the Amaraces by the Tutulas and taken to their village: “tal como fue una vez llevado el Amadís de Grecia cautivo por presente al muy sabio Fristón, mago de Nubia,...” (229). Later he describes some pieces of pottery in Quixotic terms: “muchas vasijas y cazos de todos los tamaños y que guardaban las pociones deste brujo, como las del gigante Fierabrás” (237). Many more elements are borrowed from Borges. Ansay describes the Indian’s sexual practices in Latin, like the Scottish missionary David Brodie in “El informe de Brodie:” “...y bailaban solos los hombres, y otrosí aprovechaban si se llegaba alguna hembra et faciebant fornication sub visum omniorum...” (210). And like the witch doctor Brodie meets among the Yahoo, the witch doctor of the Tutulas—the Tulasai— “estaba ciego, que es condición para ellos y por esto en proclamándolos brujos les ciegan la mirada, que lo hacen cuando son creaturas y con un tizón de fuego...” (237). He also has a nightmare which is reminiscent of “Las ruinas circulares:”

...era que estaba yo en medio de un gran fuego, que era redondo como las casas dellos, y este fuego avanzaba sin forma de apagallo, y sobre el fuego en sus llamas danzaban unas calaveras con sus ojos muy verdes y esplendentes e yo les suplicaba por que no avanzaran y les rezaba para ello y ellas soltaban hartas risotadas, que resonaban muy luciferinas, y ya me veía yo abrasado y por poco en cenizas, y a más comido por las Calaveras que llevaban dos cuernos como diablos,... (277)

Unlike the dreamer of “Las ruinas circulares,” the dreaming Ansay prays for salvation from the flames. As his arms burn off, they fall and turn into shining swords with jewels encrusted in the hilt, indicating his trials will serve to become the weapons of glory for whoever eventually comes along and wields them.

The palimpsest of literary references remits to yet another: “su directo conocimiento de la campaña era harto inferior a su conocimiento nostálgico y literario” (Borges, “El sur”). Ansay, the lunatic narrator of “La gloria,” has constructed his own delirium from literary references learned as a child, much like the delirious narrator of “El sur” has reconstructed the pampas more from literary references than from observation. The postmodern historian narrator who imagined a lunatic Ansay narrator of “La gloria” has likewise imagined the lunatic Ansay based on the postmodern historian narrator’s knowledge of literature more than anything else. In a sense, Ansay is like the man in his dreams whose arms turn into swords in the circular flames, and the postmodern historian narrator is the man who comes by later and uses them to bring honor and glory to himself. Through historical imagination, the postmodern historian “finds” the story of Ansay now turned into something completely different from the Ansay of his *Relación*, but that has not stopped the postmodern historian from employing it for his own purposes. In representing the way in which historical imagination can be employed to create an apocryphal primary source, Caparrós has created in the second part a narrative that also represents the complex relationship between the historian and his subject when he engages in historical imagination.

Predominant Elements

Death, the most prominent element of the earlier *No velas*, is conspicuous for its absence in this novel. Ansay's two major feats—retaking the barracks in Mendoza, and commandeering the boats and the town of Carmen de Patagones—are remarkable in that there were no casualties taken or inflicted in either maneuver. There might have been some during the months of resistance in Montevideo, but these are not narrated. The fear of death does appear, however, as a the major psychological motivation for the doubts and questions the narrator imagines Ansay to have, and Ansay's continued defiance of the same is the narrator's greatest barrier for truly understanding his subject.

'Militancy' in the context of the 1970's entails violence and armed confrontation to be sure, but is much more tied to the personal commitment to certain ideals and the willingness to go to the extreme of fighting and dying in the promotion of these. In essence it is faith in something external to the self, perhaps less transcendent than religious faith, but nonetheless capable of instilling in neophytes the will and the drive to act upon that faith, in the name of that faith, for the advancement of that faith's cause. The revolutionary war for independence from Spain is almost always viewed as an example and model to follow. Ansay was willing not only to die but to endure prison and abuse for his convictions about king, country, God, honor and family. Moreno was willing to fight—and he may have died—for his revolutionary convictions. But more troubling are the revelations regarding his convictions about the necessity of ruthless and sanguinary tactics, as well as a certain elitism which undermined his democratic rhetoric.

'Exile' figures much more prominently in this novel than in *No velas*. Ansay experiences being exiled three times: he was exiled by the *Primera Junta* to Carmen de Patagones, where he served two years of a ten year sentence. The Directory of Posadas exiled him to Córdoba, and afterwards the Directory of Pueyrredón to Las Bruscas. Finally, he exiled himself back to Spain. But he was not the only one to experience exile. Although Moreno left for England on a diplomatic mission, he was really putting distance between himself and Buenos Aires in the wake of his failed *coup* of the revolution. The *Morenistas* were exiled to different parts of the country; Ansay records five of them arriving at Carmen de Patagones. Saavedra left Buenos Aires to take command of the Northern Army, but the First Triumvirate soon deposed his government and then exiled him to San Juan. The Second Triumvirate recalled him to Buenos Aires but he escaped imprisonment by exiling himself to Chile. Before becoming Supreme Director, Posadas had spent a year exiled in Mendoza as one of the *Morenistas* exiled during the Saavedra regime. The Directory of Álvarez Thomas—which succeeded his—imprisoned him, and he spent the next six years in 22 different prisons. Before assuming the Directory, Pueyrredón spent a year exiled in San Juan, and once his government fell he escaped prison by exiling himself to Montevideo. Depending on the inclinations of the government at the time, Pueyrredón spent time in Buenos Aires, but also in exile in Rio de Janeiro, and France. Finally, even the great revolutionary general with the most unblemished reputation of all the revolutionaries associated with Argentina exiled himself from the Americas, spending the remainder of his days in England and France. Although he offered on at least two separate occasions to come back to Argentina in the aid of

its defense from French invasion, the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas graciously declined his offer. Almost everyone who participated in the political economy of Buenos Aires ended in exile.

‘Representation’ is given a very direct and careful treatment in this novel, especially in connection with historiographic material. To only narrate the apocryphal writings of a lunatic Ansay would be too bold, too radical a departure from what is expected of an historical novel. To narrate only the first part, with its palimpsest of narrative voices and genres, would have only produced—at least as far as the historical novel had done up to that point—a flat historical or epic hero which may have been admired from afar but never really understood. By representing both, Caparrós has satisfied the public’s expectation for an historical novel as well as his own demand for fullness or completeness of representation. Ansay is not a hero: he lost. But he has terribly interesting heroic qualities—loyalty, faithfulness, belief—which have been worth exploring.

Reception

While not terribly popular in its time, *Ansay* has received the most critical attention of all. Silvia G. Kurlat-Ares first examined *Ansay* in her book *Para una intelectualidad sin episteme* (2006) and summarized these in a paragraph for an article called “Post Utopian Imaginaries” for Sara Castro-Clarén’s *Companion to Latin American Literature and Culture* (2008). Kurlat-Ares finds the book “remarkable” because for her “it attempts to explain the roots of present-day violence by going back in history” (“Post Utopian Imaginaries” 629). After summarizing the novel, she observes that “Moreno’s Jacobinist discourse destroys both the idealism of the

adventure-seeking Ansay and the purity of the revolutionary movement.” She exemplifies the reader who ‘gets it.’ She concludes that, because of the strategy of employing so much primary historical material, “*Ansay* is amongst the first to successfully criticize the ideological constructions of utopian literature without falling into its traps” (629).

Hernán Sassi also examined *Ansay* in his journal article for *El interpretador* called “A pesar de Shanghai, a pesar de Babel” (Dec. 2007), in which he suggests that from the Shanghai group and the *Babel* magazine they published for a few years, there are nonetheless some works worth examining. Alas, Caparrós’s works belong to the other group, works which he characterizes as “sarcófagos abiertos solo por arqueólogos de la ciencia literaria.” About *Ansay*, he only has a one sentence summary: “[parodia] a Alvar Núñez en *Ansay o los infortunios de la dicha* [sic] (1984), novela que en sus páginas se postulaba como ‘tratado sobre el poder y la impotencia’ pero que naufragaba bajo una bulímica ingesta de textos diversos, de prosódicas repeticiones, pasajes metaficcionales y numerosos juegos de palabras.” He exemplifies the reader who ‘doesn’t get it.’ According to Sassi, the different texts, play on words and metafictional texts only serve to alienate the ‘average’ reader like him, relegating the novel to the labs of literary archeologists.

Conclusion

In this novel Caparrós has satisfied Rothberg’s demand for documentation of this period profusely. The quotes from primary sources comprise about a third of the text itself, and even the sections clearly developed through historical imagination explore themes not touched upon by the primary sources, yet quite

likely to represent an historical truth which has relevancy in the present. It also satisfies Rothberg's demand for reflection on the limits of representation by creating a very detailed and complex theory of representation, and then postulating two proof of concepts which demonstrate its principles. It partially satisfies Rothberg's demand for the risky circulation of the event in public discourse because, while it makes the text public, it employs such rarefied narrative strategies that only highly motivated readers find accessible. Finally, historical distance provides the necessary perspective to measure the parallax of Caparrós's constellation of meaning by provided some points of continuity between the past and the present, such as the custom of claiming the dead near the Cabildo or the near-inevitability of exile for those who attempt to revolutionize Argentina.

Chapter 4: The Hermetic Novel: *La noche anterior*

Verás que todo es mentira,
verás que nada es amor.
Que al mundo nada le importa...
¡Yira!... ¡Yira!...
—Enrique Santos Discépolo

La noche anterior was the third novel published by Martín Caparrós and one of his favorite works.⁹⁶ In this novel, Caparrós attempts conveying the black hole of trauma without actually representing it. In *No velas* the limits of representation were reached and breached. Words failed to adequately and fully represent trauma: attempts to do so either ran up against the antirealist impossibility of explanation or the realist banality of ordinary words pressed into the service of representing extraordinary events. In *Ansay*, the limits of historiography were reached and the risky attempt at re-creating events and characterization through historical imagination were tentatively probed. In *La noche anterior*, Caparrós abandons the attempt to say anything about the black hole or provide information about it. The logic of 'cause and effect' which traditionally binds historiography as well as realist narrative is abandoned. Instead, the narrative strategy for this novel is to create the conditions for the reader to experience the black hole through impression which dis-locate and dis-orient the reader, who must then actively re-create the black hole and its constellation of meaning.

The constellation kit which is *La noche anterior* is organized similarly to *Ansay*: two longer parts divided by an interlude—called the second part in this

⁹⁶ In an interview for *Audiovideoteca de Buenos Aires*, Caparrós says the following: "He escrito algunos libros que leyó bastante gente,... y algunos libros que no leyó nadie y me parecen buenos, que valen la pena, como *La noche anterior*"

work—with an epilogue at the end. The first and third parts contain two types of chapters that alternate with each other, not unlike the second half of *Ansay*. The first type is a palimpsest of voices—sometimes phrases or even just a few words long—gathered from many different sources. The general impression is like a literary version of the Pleiades meteoric shower in late July or early August: they appear to be like many small, bright lights crossing the sky, all more or less travelling in the same direction. The alternating chapters contain three short, very descriptive stories: one is of a man and a woman (half of the time they are in a bedroom), the second is of two men walking down the sidewalk, and the third is a transcription from sections of *Vita et Miracoli Beati Johanni Evangelistae*. The second part of the novel is allegedly a transcription of a manuscript taken from a modern, anonymous, undated manuscript kept in the library of the St. John Monastery, on the Island of Patmos. These are the various elements which will create the impressions of dislocation and dis-orientation, and which will need to be re-configured in order to create the black hole of meaning.

The style of the novel reproduces the *Nouveau Roman*—theorized by Alain Robbe-Grillet—in which character development and plot are subordinated to hyper-description. However, it would be more accurate to suggest that the narrative plot is subordinated to two themes—exile and faith—which operate like the fundamental interactions that bind the constellation together.⁹⁷ Character development is deemphasized. Carlos Montana—essentially the same character from *No velas* and the postmodern historian narrative voice of *Ansay*—is the main character of *La noche*

⁹⁷ In physics, gravity, electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force and the weak nuclear force are the four *fundamental interactions* that bind the universe together.

anterior. Although it could be argued that Carlos fundamentally does not change, the novel does represent his desire and attempt to do so. The rest of the characters are flat mirrors off of which Carlos reflects his image. Plot development is similarly secondary in importance. The novel does not contain a singular plot per se; rather, it contains many parallel plots, distributed across time, that come together as if pulled together by the themes of exile and faith.

Firstly, Patmos is the island to which the author of the book of *Revelation* was sent into exile. The book of *Revelation* became, according to Carlos, the classic book about exile and singlehandedly transformed the early Christianity of the first disciples into an institution. More recently, Patmos is the island Carlos visits with Jeanne, his girlfriend, while on a vacation designed to save their relationship. Finally, a story occasionally surfaces about Carlos being associated with some other people around a murder as the reason he had to leave “home” to go into exile. The details are vague—he speaks “castellano,” he has a poster in his room of a woman with a caption underneath which reads: “volveré y seré millones,”⁹⁸ but it never mentions Argentina specifically—but they suggest events similar to those narrated in the movie script of *No velas*. These three different stories are bound through exile-ness—as if pulled together by a gravitational force—into the novel’s constellation of meaning.

⁹⁸ In Argentina this slogan was plastered on *Montonero* posters of Evita Perón, but historiographers are unable to pinpoint when she might have said this. American writer Howard Fast puts this phrase in lips of Spartacus in the eponymous novel (1951). And oral tradition ascribes them to Túpac Katari (1750 – 1781) as his last words before being executed for leading an indigenous revolt against the Spaniards. For more details, see Sasturain.

The Nouveau Roman

Since *La noche anterior* is so indebted to the *Nouveau Roman*, it would be helpful to review some of its salient aspects. Alain Robbe-Grillet acknowledges his indebtedness to Roussel's literary sensibilities in his essay "Enigmas and Transparency in Raymond Roussel." According to Robbe-Grillet, "Raymond Roussel describes; and beyond what he describes there is nothing, nothing of what can traditionally be called a *message*" (79). In a later essay called "New Novel, New Man," Robbe-Grillet compares the role of description in the 19th century novel with its counterpart in the new novel:

[T]he place and the role of description have changed completely. While the preoccupations of a descriptive order were invading the entire novel, they were at the same time losing their traditional meaning. Preliminary definitions are no longer in question. Description once served to situate the chief contours of a setting, then to cast light on some of its particularly revealing elements; it no longer mentions anything except insignificant objects, or objects which it is concerned to make so. It once claimed to reproduce a pre-existing reality; it now asserts its creative function. Finally, it once made us see things, now it seems to destroy them, as if its intention to discuss them aimed only at blurring their contours, at making them incomprehensible, at causing them to disappear altogether. (147).

In short, while description in the 19th century novel locates the reader by describing a realist *mise-en-scène* into which the characters are placed, description in the new novel dis-locates the reader by purposefully destroying any link between reader and text realities, forcing the reader to inhabit the reality of the text.

The *Nouveau Roman* proposes a radically different plot structure as well. Where events progressed from one moment into another in the 19th century novel, the causal relationship is eliminated in the new novel.

[I]n the modern narrative, time seems to be cut off from its temporality. It no longer passes. It no longer completes anything. And this is doubtless what explains the disappointment which follows the reading of today's books, or the projection of today's films. As much as there was something satisfying in a "destiny," even a tragic one, by so much do the finest works of our contemporaries leave us empty, out of countenance. Not only do they claim no other reality than that of the reading, or of the performance, but further they always seem to be in the process of contesting, of jeopardizing themselves in proportion as they create themselves. Here space destroys time, and time sabotages space. Description makes no headway, contradicts itself, turns in circles. Moment denies continuity. (155)

Since the 'triumph' of science in the Renaissance, reality is understood as the complex interrelatedness of everything through the simple mechanism of cause and effect. But in the *Nouveau Roman*, this 'governing principle' of reality is sabotaged, forcing the reader to discover and adopt the 'governing principle' of the novel instead.

Finally, Roussel's *coup de grâce* to the technique of pointless description and action developed in the *Nouveau Roman* is to even deny it the beauty of the word. "His style is lusterless, neutral...", says Robbe-Grillet of Roussel's texts, "a prose alternating between simple-minded monotony and laborious cacophonous jumbles" (80). In short, as Robbe-Grillet says of Raymond Roussel, the *Nouveau Roman* "has nothing to say, and says it badly" (80).

While the text itself does not reveal its purpose, it nonetheless has one: to engage the reader actively in the re-creation of meaning. By undermining the conventional elements of narrative, it removes the distractions so that the reader can get to the main question. To do so, Roussel assists the reader by providing questions through the device of mystery. "[M]ystery is one of the formal themes most readily used by Roussel: search for a hidden treasure, problematic origin of

some character or object, enigmas of all kinds proposed to the reader as to the heroes in the form of riddles, puns, codes, allusions, apparently absurd series of articles, etc.” (81). The riddles and enigmas, once presented, are never resolved within the text. To do so would be to fall prey to the antiquated 19th century notions out of which the *avant garde* novelists are so desperately wanting to progress or evolve. Instead, the author presents the reader with the void:

Empty enigmas, arrested time, signs which refuse to signify, giant enlargement of the tiny detail, narratives which come full circle: We are in a *flat* and *discontinuous* universe where each thing refers only to itself. A universe of fixity, of repetition, of absolute obviousness, which enchants and discourages the explorer.... (86-7).

The author gives everything to the reader to make sense of the flat and discontinuous universe of enigmas, dis-located time and dis-chronic settings, and even provides some initial questions through the device of mystery. But the reader must do all the work of creating meaning through poetic interpretation.

By adopting this narrative technique, Caparrós is setting forth a very intriguing, bold and nearly impossible proposition. It is intriguing because it pushes at the limits of representation by attempting to convey exile-ness without an actual representation of being exiled; all the enigmas, mysteries and repetitions give the reader the tools to create the representation herself. It pushes beyond the limits of the technique of specific ambiguity described in the second chapter of this study, by completely removing any possible means of association with the reader’s reality. It is the attempt at the transmission of experience unmediated by representation. It is bold because, realized in its purest form, this narrative strategy necessarily implies leaving completely unsatisfied Rothberg’s demand for historical documentation, as

these would create nexus points between the realities of the novel and the reader in the *mise-en-scène* descriptions, and would be forced to adopt the cause and effect logic required by historical analysis.

It is also bold because it is likely to leave unsatisfied Rothberg's demand for the risky circulation of the event in public discourse by discouraging most readers rather than captivating them. Robbe-Grillet was already aware of this problem. In his essay "New Novel, New Man" he expresses it thusly:

What disturbs the spectators fond of "realism" is that there is no longer any effort to make them believe in anything—I would almost say: on the contrary.... The *real*, the *false*, and *illusion* become more or less the subject of all modern works; this one instead of claiming to be a piece of reality, is developed as a reflection on reality (or on the *dearth of reality*, as Breton calls it). (150)

The risk is of alienating the reader who approaches the text expecting the author, having successfully achieved the illusion of realism through the representation of its subject matter, to persuade the reader about some here-to-fore unexplained point about being exiled. Rather than persuade the reader to believe in its representation of reality, the text demands that the reader deconstruct all representations of reality down to their constitutive elements and reconstruct the true reality behind the representations, much like the postmodern historian narrative voice reconstructed a true reality for Ansay out of the pieces of Ansay's *Relación*. The reader who approaches the text searching for something believable is summarily dismissed.

Descriptive Chapters

The first chapters we will examine closely are the "descriptive" chapters which employ the form of the *Nouveau Roman* approach championed by Robbe-Grillet. In these, the effect is to freeze the action or make it appear as if in slow

motion, describing with exhaustive precision the position of every limb and geometric trajectory of every movement, similar to what the postmodern historian narrative voice achieved in the second part of *Ansay*, only without the running commentary on what considerations went into certain narrative choices. The effect is not unlike Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (*The Pier*, 1962), a 28 minute sci-fi film composed (almost) entirely of black and white still photos.⁹⁹

Bedroom Scenes

These are seven different chapters, each about a page and a half to two pages long at most, which describe in a monotonous flat tone what could be conveyed in a dozen pictures. In each there is hardly any action or dialogue. Six are in the first part of the novel while the last is the final “descriptive” chapter in the third part. In the first, “he” (presumably Carlos) is by himself writing (16-7). In the second he is observing “her” (presumably Jeanne) lying in bed naked (21-2). In the third, he is at a bar observing a beautiful blonde woman (from the previous chapter, we know the “other woman” is a brunette, so this is a different woman) (26-8). As in the episode with the girl with yellow eyes (*No velas* 11 ff.), or the story to not be told where Carlos observes a woman at the Bataclan (*No velas* 93), he observes the woman and then walks out of the bar without ever speaking to her. In the next chapter “he” and “she” (presumably Carlos and Jeanne) are described lying naked in bed (32-4); the bulk of the action hinges on describing his maneuvers to remove his arm from under her head without waking her, with the added complication that she has rolled over

⁹⁹ The relationship is not coincidental, as Robbe-Grillet and Marker independently collaborated on several projects with Alain Resnais in the French Left Bank Cinema movement, which had close ties to the *Nouveau Roman* movement as well.

from one side to the other. The subtle difference—indicated by a sigh from Carlos—from two chapters ago is that this time there is a hint of the laxity that settles in a relationship after the initial exuberance has worn off. In the next chapter they are at a restaurant and he tells her a story about how he once killed a person (38-40). In the next chapter they are again lying in bed and staring at the ceiling (44-5). He has just told her something; she asks him to say it again and he refuses. It is at this point she suggests that maybe taking a trip together might fix things. He laughs and says “no hay nada más literario que un viaje.” By now, another narrative thread in the novel has already revealed that the trip is to the Island of Patmos, off the coast of Greece, in the Aegean Sea. The final chapter in this narrative thread is not presented until the very end of the third part of the novel, which is of them lying naked in bed, again.

The chapter where they are at a restaurant bears closer examination as it provides an example of the Robbe-Grillet-style hyper-descriptive narrative, and gives us what may be the only glimpse in this novel at the underlying reason for Carlos’s exile. The scene at the restaurant is described in minute detail. The chapter begins with these words:

Están sentados frente a frente, acomodados a los lados opuestos de una mesa en cuyo mantel de cuadros rojos y blancos se aprecian los restos o huellas de una comida que sin duda acaba de terminar: una mancha rojiza, amplia y difusa junto a él, entre sus codos apoyados en el mantel, en el espacio que debieron ocupar los platos y, al lado de las copas vacías, una mancha de tono oscuro y color indefinible que sólo por su ubicación remite al vino presumiblemente derramado. Partiendo en dos la distancia que los separa, sobre la mesa, hay un cenicero lleno de colillas y, mas a la derecha—si se adopta el punto de vista de ella—, casi al borde de la mesa cubierta por el mantel de cuadros blanco y rojos, una botella vacía de chianti, envuelta en paja,

que sostiene una vela a medio consumir que ha derramado sobre el cuello de la botella obscenos lamparones de cera ambarina. (38)

The rest of the paragraph and the next continue the description: he rests his chin on his hands and his elbows on the table, while she is leaning back in her chair and fingering a lock of her hair (she seems to do this a lot). He is droning on about a story in a more or less monotone voice, but her eyes get big and she stops fingering her hair when he gets to the line “es cierto que maté.” (38).

At this point, two key revelations are made: one about the traumatic event, and another about faith. The traumatic event is revealed in how he tells the story: “él sigue contando con la misma voz y una prosa tan fluida que alguien quizás podría pensar que muchas veces ha referido ya estas mismas cosas, y temer incluso que detrás de las palabras no quede apenas memoria aunque él haga de tanto en tanto una pausa marcada, como para recordar” (39). This, according to Nadine Fresco, is one of the hallmarks of the black hole of trauma: the masking of the event with rehearsed and meaningless words.

He also seems to reveal that he once had faith: “...de aquella noche y sobre todo de la fe, o la verdad, porque dice que necesitaba de la fe para poder matar, dice ‘necesitaba de la fe para poder matar’ y entonces todo quedaba en simple lógica, dice su voz, la lógica de quien sabe y sabe que los demás ignoran, dice, que los demás no conocen o combate la verdad, dice su voz...” (39). The leitmotiv of “aquella noche” makes a cameo appearance in this text (as it will throughout the novel), revealing that faith was essential for action. Because it was all based on a simple logic, it suggests he may not have retained the faith he once had. The particular

nature of the faith is combative: he is one of the—chosen?—few who know the truth. Others do not know or combat it, presumably based on partial knowledge.

In light of the underlying reason for Carlos's exile and the revelation that he had faith and lost it helps contextualize the rest of this storyline. The minute descriptions of Carlos trying to get his arm out from under her, and of the two of them at a restaurant and then lying in bed are all subtle images of two people who are physically together but emotionally apart. Carlos the writer—the wordsmith who would represent through his stories—attempts to communicate his exiled condition to Jeanne, but is frustrated and falls back on the same meaningless words which actually cover the trauma. He becomes aware of a chasm between them which consists of the knowledge of exile-ness and of loss of faith. It is tantamount to a person recently blinded trying to describe the blue sky to a person who has never been able to see. Merely attempting to communicate his exile-ness and loss of faith leaves Carlos dis-located and dis-oriented, which itself becomes another manifestation of the black hole which hides the trauma.

The final scene at the restaurant introduces one of the main mysteries of the novel: “sin embargo durante mucho tiempo dijo que lamentaba no haber matado nunca, dice: ‘sin embargo durante mucho tiempo dije que lamentaba no haber matado nunca’, que lamentaba la ocasión perdida, que eso decía dice su voz y que acaso una fuga...” (40). One of the central mysteries for the reader to resolve is if he killed someone or if he ran away. The mystery maintains the ambiguity of the ending of *No velas* by also suggesting two different possible outcomes. The mystery

disrupts the ordinary flow of the story, where everything thus far made sense. By contradicting himself, Carlos has created a paradox for the reader to resolve.

Caparrós has been able to implement the style of the *Nouveau Roman* rather well thus far. The tedium of the precision of description has defined little beyond his self-absorption and her seductiveness, creating scenes of naked boredom. The action plods along revealing that he may or may not have had faith in something at some point which may or may not have led him to kill. It succeeds thus far at saying nothing and saying it badly, and—more importantly for this investigation—at representing the unrepresentableness of the traumatic experience and the imperative to find new modes of communicating exile-ness and loss of faith.

Street Scenes

The five “street scenes” among the descriptive chapters are found in the third part of the novel and present a series of verbal photographic descriptions. Their composition is even more static than the “bedroom scenes” chapters, and they are bracketed by two chapters which “frame” the narratives. The first of these chapters is only two sentences long: “[u]na imagen no ofrece precisiones. Si acaso, si algo, las solicita” (87). The second chapter (92-3) describes in detail a man’s left hand with a white Japanese watch around the wrist; the hand holds a white sports bag by the handles. Immediately above is a man’s right hand holding a black bulky man’s handbag. It looks like he might be about to drop it into the white sports bag, which has its zipper undone.

The next chapter (98-100) describes the people attached to the hands from the previous chapter. Only the left half of the man on the right and the right half of

the man on the left are visible. They are young, wearing blue jeans and light, flowing shirts gathered at the armpits—perhaps peasant or puffy shirts?—one white and the other caramel colored, and are walking down a dark street at night. The narrative pauses for an instant to point out the Goyescan brilliance of the white shirt in comparison to everything else under the street lamp. The casual mention of this detail remits the careful reader to the image of Goya's "Los fusilamientos del tres de Mayo," in particular the central image of the man with a brilliant white peasant shirt, and the stigma on his right hand. By referencing the painting, it imbues the image of the young man with the brilliant shirt with the characteristics of the defenders of Madrid: the righteousness of a freedom fighter and the courage of someone willing to die for his cause with open arms. The stigma on Goya's painting remits that hero to another martyr: Jesus Christ. What meaning is starting to come through is not directly expressed through the narrative; it is merely indicated by the white shirt and the mention of Goya. It is through breaking these elements down and reassembling them that a picture of a tragic hero emerges. There is nothing in the text to warrant the man in the brilliant white shirt is going to his death, nor that he is a revolutionary—much less that he believes in a revolution—yet the image recreated from deconstructing the impressions is of a young man who would identify with the adaptation of Horace's lines: "Dulce et decorum est pro revolutionem mori."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Horace's Ode 2 from book III contains the line: "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" which roughly translates as: "How sweet and glorious it is for them to die for their country."

In the next chapter (106), after looking about suspiciously, the young men start walking and talking. At one point, the man on the left puts his right arm over the shoulder of the man on the right, and then removes it. When they get to the corner, which seems to be an empty but otherwise large avenue, they part in opposite directions. The final chapter of this section simply contains the following musing: “Las precisiones de la imagen son inverosímiles. Ya que imágenes precisas no hablarían, si acaso, sino de imprecisiones del recuerdo” (114).

These ‘imprecisions of memory’ are some of the few passages where *La noche anterior* comes closest to satisfying the demand for historical documentation. In the early 70’s, blue jeans were a relatively new item of clothing, and one that was usually identified with youth; so much so, they became an unofficial uniform for members of the *Montoneros* to identify other members.¹⁰¹ When Carlos picked up the delivery of guns from a *Montonero* contact in *No velas*, the movie script specifically mentions him wearing blue jeans (246). The gym bag with guns is another common element. In *La noche anterior* there is a suggestion that maybe the smaller bag contains a gun, which will be delivered or ‘dropped’ to the man with the white gym bag. The suspicious looking-around and the hand over the shoulder are also suggestive of a ‘drop.’ In *No velas*, the ‘drop’ is done at a train station: one man puts the gym bag on the floor while he purchases his tickets, and walks off. Carlos, who is just behind, purchases his ticket, after which he picks up the bag (246).

¹⁰¹ The *Montoneros* officially adopted blue slacks, but many found blue jeans further emphasized their dislike for *bourgeoisie* norms.

The details above seem to warrant the inclusion of the next chapter as part of this narrative strand. The text, barely two sentences long, reads thus: “Aquella noche nos encontramos para consumarla. Y éramos los que éramos, y nos planeaba la muerte como a buitres, o como a serafines, porque la muerte olía y era sorda y la siempre presente, aquella noche, con ese olor a tierra, cuando huí” (122). It reproduces, word for word, a text found earlier (14), which is the source of the leitmotiv phrase “aquella noche” that is repeated quite often throughout the novel. The text relates to the story of the two men at several key words. Firstly, this text talks about meeting up to “consummate” it, and that ‘death circled overhead.’ This fits in with the suppositions made about the previous chapter, and gives further details (about the flight). It also employs slightly different narrative techniques suggested by Roussel. One was to use words that could have different meanings. In this case, the use of ‘consummation’ is vague enough in the first sentence to suggest a sexual encounter. It is not until the beginning of the second sentence that this meaning seems inadequate by suggesting an indefinite plurality of people, and the presence of death. The image of ‘death circling like vultures’ is rather hackneyed, which is also in line with Roussel’s strategy of saying nothing badly. Finally, the paragraph adds a new twist to the storyline. At the restaurant, Carlos (presumably) narrated his story about having killed before—in a rehearsed tone—only to later indicate that maybe he did not. In like manner, this paragraph states that he joined up with others to carry out some plans, but that he may not have participated because he fled. The paradox raised by Carlos at the restaurant resurfaces and again is left unresolved, frustrating the traditional realist reader looking for a narrative resolution. The

details are trivial and there is actually little information to build on for constructing or reconstructing useful historical documentation that would speak to trauma, or exile. Instead, the narrative seem to convey the specific ambiguity of something that once happened at a specific time and place, but that just as easily could have happened anywhere. This seems to be Caparrós's assessment in stating that precise images require clarification and that at best they convey precise details regarding imprecise memories. They require that the reader already be familiar with the subtle meaning of a brilliant white shirt in a Goya painting, jeans, a gym bag, and a dark street, and be able to identify their references. If anything, this demonstrates that behind the precise techniques for representation lie imprecise and sometimes conflicting historical materials on Argentina's dirty war.

Palimpsest Chapters

Alternating between the "descriptive" chapters are the most interesting—and most challenging—chapters of the novel: what I call the "palimpsest" chapters. They contain a dozen or so different narrative voices and texts, none longer than a short paragraph. Read straight through, they are disorienting and appear dislocated bits of narrative material which do not appear to make sense. Presented as atomized texts, regular techniques for interpretation must be abandoned. Instead, two different techniques should be utilized simultaneously to interpret the text: one examines the texts longitudinally as prose, jumping over paragraphs and chapters to construct various different stories or loose thoughts on a single topic; the other examines the texts *in situ* as poetry, gleaning impressions, moods or a theme from the cacophony of words instead of a plot or extended discourse. Both techniques

help to assemble the disparate texts into larger units of meaning which support or reinforce other narratives within the text. I will describe some of the longitudinal groupings and outline their development and then explicate a section of a chapter interpreted *in situ*.

One textual grouping narrates the boat trip of a couple from the Island of Lipsos to the Island of Patmos, and their first day there. The narrative tone is flat, and the style is descriptive and frugal. Whatever characterization is to be conveyed must be inferred from the careful details presented. Other textual references suggest that the two main characters of this story are Carlos Montana and Jeanne, although this is not specified within this storyline. A second grouping corresponds to a random collection of notes taken by Carlos in Paris, between 1979 and 1984 about different topics. A third grouping corresponds to a travelogue (again, although no name is given for the author, the topics and style suggests it is also Carlos's). The difference between the notes and the travelogue might be that the latter seems to be more observational whereas the former are the product of some reflection and meditation. A fourth grouping are the curious enunciations which begin with: "Jeanne, dijo Carlos...." The rest of the sentence contains detailed descriptions regarding precisely how Carlos said Jeanne's name. There are also dialogue lines—usually in triads—which are unattached to an interlocutor, and many times not logically related amongst themselves. In some instances, they echo phrases from other parts of the novel, which helps situate a context for at least some of the enunciations. Most of the time, however, they must be interpreted using poetic strategies. The rest of the groupings are less frequent or more esoteric. Sometimes

they are a single line repeated from somewhere else, or they are unreferenced quotes from the Bible.

The following are the first few lines taken sequentially from the eleventh chapter of the first part (pp. 41 – 42), which demonstrates how atomized the text is. The chapter opens with the following text:

Aquella noche. (41)

This chapter opens with the leitmotiv discussed above, which contains the cliché image of death circling like vultures.

Ella no teje, ya, no hay sol, no hay calma. La barca apunta más y más al cielo, desciende más y más. El agua salpica como lluvia. No hay calma.
(41)

These lines correspond to the storyline of the couple travelling from Lipsos to Patmos. It would be the logical continuation of the bedroom-scenes storyline. At this particular time, they (no names are mentioned, presumably Carlos and Jeanne) are on the boat, which was previously on calm waters. These lines also foreshadow an upcoming story about how the apostle John calmed the seas, which were so rough the sailors thought they would die (50), a reference which recurs later in the novel.

la puerta estaba cerrada/la que siempre estuvo abierta (41)

This line could easily fall off the page unnoticed, but it is full of the potentiality of reference outside the novel itself. The lines seem to be a reference from Michel Foucault's prologue to Raymon Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935), in the Tusquets Spanish edition (1963), translated by Pere Gimferrer, where Foucault notes that Roussel died of a barbiturate overdose in a hotel room in Palermo, behind a locked door that was usually open. This detail is the starting point

for Foucault's first chapter of his book-length examination of the works of Raymond Roussel (1963), whose writing influenced the *Nouveau Roman* movement. In particular this evokes writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras (whom Carlos met in 1971, *No velas* 127), Maurice Blanchot, and Roland Barthes, who articulated a textually self-contained hermeneutics in "The death of the author" (1967). It is, in essence, an obscure clue pointing to the *Nouveau roman* narrative strategies needed to interpret *La noche anterior*, without actually saying anything about *Nouveau roman*, Barthes, Blanchot, Duras, Robbe-Grillet, Foucault, or even Roussel.

—¿Cómo decírselo? (41)

This seems to be a moment prior to the last chapter of the bedroom descriptions, which opens with Carlos having said something which Jeanne did not understand. She asks him to repeat himself, but he refuses. The issue seems to be about things that separate them, and his (in)ability to write. The impression is that he wants to end the relationship. It is at this point she suggests a trip.

"El homicidio se hace humano, terriblemente humano, se personaliza recién en el romanticismo, o con los grandes rusos. Para los clásicos, Sófocles o Shakespeare, el homicidio es una cuestión de fatum, de sino. Es terrible en sus consecuencias, pero no en su concepción, porque el hombre no lo concibe, lo realiza porque así lo señala su destino. El homicidio no merece condena: es una condena. El suicidio es otra cosa" (Carlos, París, 1979). (41)

With this longer paragraph on the history of the concept of homicide it is possible to start threading an idea between it and the previous sections. 'Death' is at the root of the events of "that night," "the waves making the sea rough," the death of Raymond

Roussel and the “death of the author,” the possible ‘death’ of Carlos and Jeanne’s relationship, and this thought on homicide.

—Vive para ti solo, si pudieras.
—Yo nunca fui inmortal.
—Sí, antes. (41)

This dialogic triad references death by mentioning exactly the opposite. Living for oneself, is dying to others, and the denial of immortality is the admission of a future death.

“Buen encuentro. Jeanne es bella e ignora felizmente la literatura. Nada más alejado de las palabras que la forma en que se cepilla el pelo castaño por las mañanas, mirándome, sin disimular siquiera el acto de la seducción. Pasión sin palabras, para mis palabras, espero” (Carlos, París, 1982). (41)

The description stands out in stark contrast to the rest of the chapter because Jeanne seems to be the antithesis of Carlos, the writer, the man, the one full of words, but without passion. Perhaps she could be described as his perfect mirror image: he cannot represent his exile-ness nor his loss, she has no exile-ness nor loss to represent.

Toda estrella es, en realidad, la historia de una estrella. (42)

This line echoes an observation recorded in the travelogue on p. 25:

“En 1850, a propósito de las observaciones de unos astrónomos de Cambridge que habían fotografiado el sol, la luna y la estrella Vega, Charles Delacroix anotó que si la luz de una estrella tardaba, como se creía, veinte años en llegar a la tierra, el rayo que se fijó en la placa había abandonado la esfera celeste mucho antes de que Daguerre descubriera el proceso mediante el cual se logró la captación de esa luz. Toda estrella es, en realidad, la historia de una estrella, el signo que da cuenta de ella, que de ella queda. Toda estrella es literatura, realismo barato, novela histórica.” (25)

The light from the star Vega (which astronomers today calculate is approximately a little over 25 light years away) is merely a story that remains from an event that happened over 20 years ago. It serves as a metaphor not only of past events, but of what becomes of the memories about real people once they are gone: they, too, become stories, literature, cheap realism.

—Jeanne, dijo Carlos, y la forma en que la e final se desvaneció casi antes de ser pronunciada llevaba la amenaza de la lejanía, el aire de una ausencia. (42)

One of the many lines in which the particular way in which Carlos pronounces Jeanne's name is meticulously described. In this case, it is an observation about the particular way the final elided /ə/ of her name is barely whispered in French, as if the letter were falling off the name and dying.

The preceding nine phrases represent less than one half (there are eleven left) of the entire chapter. There are sixteen more such chapters spread throughout the novel. Each loose phrase, taken individually, refers to other storylines in the novel, other enunciations, other observations, and even an entire theory of literary interpretation outside the novel. But when taken together, they are meant to convey (at least in this chapter) the impression of death. For other chapters, there is sometimes (not always) a different leitmotiv which threads the enunciations together. It is the representation of an extremely rarefied literature far abstracted not just from history—which only concerns this investigation—but very nearly from any point of referentiality outside the text itself. The effect dis-locates the reader from any reference to time or place and forces him to co-construct a new constellation of meaning specifically for the novel.

As expected, these chapters do not really satisfy the demand for historical documentation. What few references might be found are really the first clue to an intellectual scavenger hunt across the novel or—what is more daunting—conserved in the archives of western society’s collective consciousness. Because the fragmented text format is unfamiliar, it leaves the reader with more impressions about reading than with ideas or data about what has been read. The text requires a heightened use of memory (or copious marginal notations) to reconnect the internal references—which bounce back and forth across the chapters like several distinct sounds simultaneously bouncing off the walls of an echo chamber—and to thread together atomized bits of narratives and disparate thoughts—which is like disentangling the strings of kites which have crossed paths several times—as well as demanding the wherewithal either to know beforehand or to investigate the occasional reference to some exterior bit of data which—like in the proverbial wild goose chase—may or may not lead to anything useful for decoding the text further. Other zoological metaphors with which to describe the impressions of reading this section of the text come to mind, such as catching the proverbial greased pig, holding the tiger by its tail, or herding cats. This bestiary of analogies about the impressions of reading the text only approximates the experience of reading the text, which is the entire point of the strategy. In the best *Nouveau Roman* tradition, the text does not attempt to say anything about being exiled or provide information about being exiled; rather it has created the conditions for the reader to experience the impression of the dis-location and dis-orientation of being exiled. In this respect it pushes at the limits of representation at the expense of historical documentation,

and possibly of the circulation in public discourse, by forcing the reader into a very exclusive and hermetic constellation of meaning.

Parenthetical Descriptions about Islands of Exile

In the third part of the novel, the “palimpsest” chapters have ten parenthetical interruptions somewhere in the middle which narrates Carlos’s pedantic musings on different ways to arrive at an island: “hay muchas formas, hay muchas diversas formas de llegar a una isla”, te dirá Carlos, Jeanne, hablando como siempre, de otra cosa” (74). The third-person narrator constantly addresses Jeanne with the future tense, giving it the appearance of a second person narrative, with the same (or similar) formula: “...te dirá Carlos, Jeanne....” It is the narrator’s way of predicting what will happen: his prophecy.

In these parenthetical interruptions, Carlos tells Jeanne about nine different islands that are in one way or another associated with being exiled, along with the men associated with those islands: Thomas More and Utopia, Odysseus and Ithaca, Robinson Crusoe and his island, Sancho Panza and Barataria, Noah and his Ark and Mt. Ararat, Christopher Columbus and Guanahani or San Salvador, Charles Darwin and the Galapagos Islands, Hercules and Lipsos, and Napoleon Bonaparte and St. Helen. They do not provide any new historical documentation; rather they serve as reinterpretations of these famous stories or histories through a hermeneutics of exile. There is a certain progression from the island of one’s dream to the island of one’s nightmare; from the island impossible to reach to the one impossible to escape; from the island worth dying for to the one designed for death; from the morally just to the morally corrupt.

Some stories do not stray too far from a conventional hermeneutics. In the story of Odysseus, Carlos sees the impossibility of returning home from war. In the story of Robinson Crusoe, Carlos sees the reassertion of man over nature, a mistake already made long ago; though Crusoe suffered being shipwrecked, he renamed the animals and plants of the island and through hard work became the master of the island. In the story of Christopher Columbus's arrival to San Salvador Carlos sees the story of hope: thinking that the trip was nearly lost, Columbus finds the island which becomes Paradise to him. In the story of Darwin's arrival to Galapagos, Carlos sees the story of an island as a door in time where Darwin was able to provide the initial evidences for a Theory of Evolution. While interesting, they do not present us with much pertaining to this investigation.

Thomas More's Utopia is one that is too perfect: "ante república tan perfecta deberíamos conformarnos con el sueño, y terminar por morir en el cadalso,... las islas de los sueños tienen un precio tan alto de pagar" (76). He understands the conflict between humanist ideals and the *realpolitik* of the court expressed in *Utopia* as having influenced his personal decisions which ultimately led him to be executed for high treason. More dreams of a perfect humanist island, but in reality is isolated. Based on information from *No velas*, it is easy to see that Carlos can identify with More because Carlos, as a purist and an avowed independent, never really felt comfortable with the ideological compromises he had to make in order to fit in with the *Montoneros*.

The hermeneutical reflections in which Carlos muses on politics and power are worth a closer examination as well. In the reinterpretation of the *Ínsula de*

Barataria, Carlos sees Sancho as trapped by don Quixote's dream; what is sometimes called the "quijotización de Sancho:" "...un hombre puede ser presa de los sueños insigneemente esquivos de otro hombre..." (95). This could be reinterpreted in the context of the *Montoneros* being trapped by Perón's dream of returning from exile. But the comparison is never quite made because, having arrived at Barataria, Sancho's rule is exemplary, but one day he leaves because Sancho, the simpleton, understands something profound about power that many other great men have not: "la isla del poder debe quedar en sueños y eso puede entenderlo quien se llame Sancho, que la isla de los sueños del poder se disuelve en el aire al querer aferrarla" (96). This is presented as something Sancho, in his uncomplicated wisdom, has learned in his brief stint as governor of Barataria; but coming from Carlos it seems to be a summary lesson about Argentine politics to be drawn from Perón in *No velas*, and from all the revolutionary leaders who play a cameo role in *Ansay*.

Also, hermeneutical reworkings which touch on fleeing and guilt bear a closer examination. The story of Noah is given a Gnostic interpretation. In Orthodoxy, Noah's Ark is presented as a floating island of salvation, and then Mt. Ararat as the "island" of the pure. But a Gnostic reading allows Carlos to interpret Noah as suffering from survivor's guilt:

Y por eso Noé no puede en su isla Ararat entre los elegidos más que emborracharse, para apagar la culpa de haber sido instrumento, y haber permitido con su fidelidad al gran poder las aguas del castigo, y haber sobrevivido vergonzosamente,... bebiendo en vino lo que en agua debía, pagando por su isla el precio de la traición. (104)

Noah is not seen as a great man of faith. Instead, he is a tool (in its pejorative sense) of the demiurge who offers Noah the opportunity to save himself, thereby saving the fallen and imperfect creation of the false God. This makes Noah the coward who fled and selfishly chose life over the idealism of completely destroying everything. This guilt is, as we have seen, a leitmotiv of Carlos's, both in this novel and in *No velas*: Carlos is the one who fled.

Hercules's arrival on Lipsos presents Carlos with the opportunity to explore complex choices. Carlos retells the story of Hercules's trip to the island of Lipsos in search of the secret to eternal life for his half-brother Iphicles. Once there, the beautiful and hairless Limnia—who will give him the secret if he stays with her—seduces him. His dilemma is that the woman's seduction is both a distraction and the only path for completing the quest. He stays with her since it is part of his mission, but eventually flees the island, carrying the statue of Iphicles under his arm because in his case fleeing is freedom, even if it means the statue of his half-brother turns to dust and he no longer will have immortality. Escaping, in this instance, is a good thing, but it's a place Hercules should have never gone in the first place: "hay quienes saben a cuáles islas no deben llegar nunca porque es inútil para lo que buscan o creen, Jeanne, que buscan" (120). Hercules should have never gone to the island because price for what he sought was the very thing he sought. In like manner, Carlos interprets it allegorically as what he learned while with the *Montoneros* who, like Hercules, were seeking something (a leftist agenda) through a person who was never going to deliver (Perón).

The final hermeneutical exploration is interesting only because Jeanne asks Carlos in which way he would approach an island. He had already launched into talking about Napoleon in defeat arriving at the Island of St. Helena when she interrupts with her questions, to which he answers: “de todas las formas o ninguna o incluso ésta,” and continues talking about Napoleon without giving her question any further thought (124). The story tells us that Jeanne’s purpose is simply to be someone to whom Carlos can wax philosophical, without really expecting—or wanting—to engage in conversation with her. He identifies with all the reasons for approaching exile given above, but defeat seems to be the overarching theme of his experience of exile.

All these stories of arriving at islands, of fleeing, and defeat are metaphors understood, through the hermeneutics of exile, to refer to how Carlos sees his situation. He believes he fled like Hercules, yet he has survivor’s guilt like Noah. He now understands More’s Utopia is an impossibility, and he wishes he would have had the good sense like Sancho to know when to walk away. He knows returning home like Odysseus is now impossible, but he nonetheless has hope, like Columbus, of finding a passage in time, like Darwin, or constructing a new world for himself, like Crusoe. But when all is said, he still feels exiled in defeat, like Napoleon.

Bracketed off in paragraphs, these hermeneutical meditations are an interruption in the *Nouveau Roman* experiment of the palimpsest chapters because they provide islands of regular text which develop an idea along a conventional essay formula. There is no real historical documentation: all stories are based on narratives that circulate in the public domain of general knowledge, at least among

well educated western-culture elites. It does provide, however, an interesting observation on the limits of representation. In these passages, Carlos has something to say about exile, and the *Nouveau Roman* strategies of copious description, pointless narration or bland language are simply incompatible with representing the various metaphors he has constructed in order to broach the islands of exile. In the next section, Caparrós will address more directly what he considers the ultimate text and island of exile: the book of *Revelation* and the Island of Patmos.

The Parisian Anticipation

Carlos's interest in the Island of Patmos and the Biblical *Book of Revelation* appears to be based primarily on the author's condition of being exiled. Religious expressions are, for him, a coping mechanism for what Karl Marx—or probably more properly Ludwig Feuerbach—called the alienated self, in which the idea of God alienates the characteristics of the human being. Where Marx and Engels would find Capitalism to blame for the social alienation of people from their human nature, Carlos would find the idea of God—and especially the idea of an afterlife—as the greatest reason individuals desist actively working towards a better society in this world because, presumably, all social problems are resolved in the hereafter.¹⁰² In his notes from Paris—presumably written before his trip to the Island of Patmos—Carlos explores the possible connections of meaning between religion, faith, exile, John the Evangelist, the *Book of Revelation* and the Island of Patmos. The notes, as

¹⁰² For a closer examination of the concept of alienation, see Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. For Marx's reformulation see *The Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*. Caparrós's thesis that religion—especially a concept of an afterlife—hinders social reformation is explored further in *La Historia* and especially in *Un día en la vida de Dios*.

indicated earlier, are spread throughout the “palimpsest” chapters and must be gathered and reshuffled in order to construct a coherent narrative from them. In this instance, I have organized them to show through Carlos’s own words how religion in general—and Christianity in particular—creates or develops the concept of an afterlife, and then how that becomes efficacious in establishing the Christian theology of an afterlife. For him, the idea of religion is based on something not unlike alienation:

“Toda idea religiosa es la idea de una extrañeza, la percepción de la vida como una realidad que los hombres no se han dado a sí mismos. Han llegado a ella desde fuera, han sido instalados en ella. A partir de esa idea de un desplazamiento surge la pregunta y la búsqueda, y así resulta que el lugar, la tierra o cada tierra, es el lugar de un dios, su propiedad y su criatura, al que el hombre llega como invitado, convidado de piedra” (Carlos, París, 1983). (88)

First is the feeling of alienation or of being exiled which, when analyzed, is found to be inherent to the human condition. As such, it must pre-exist the individual’s birth, making the earth the property of God, and every human a guest. Once a theology is formulated, the process of codifying it begins with the written word:

“Todo escrito es el culto de una ausencia. Si algo se escribe es porque ya no está, o nunca estuvo, o está por estar, quizás, en una espada. Puede estar en potencia, pero su impotencia para estar en acto produce el acto de escribir” (Carlos, París, 1984). (82)

In terms of a theology of an afterlife, the idea exists in the community in a fluid state—still in the process of being formed—until it finally gets written down:

“Pero la escritura es—como bogar—una búsqueda de la repetición que remeda lo eterno. Aquello que sucedió—o nunca sucedió—pierde su condición de fugitivo en un acto que presupone su futura, sistemática repetición: la escritura es el rito iniciático de un ciclo en el que una acción, una imagen, unas palabras, son condenadas a ineludiblemente renacer en cada lectura, en cada exegesis” (Carlos, París, 1980). (19)

Once it is written down, the theology becomes more static or permanent, anticipating Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by suggesting the free flow of the concept of an afterlife becomes static once it is mechanically repeatable in each reading and in each exegesis of the written word. The purpose of codifying the idea in codices and mechanically repeating them like a litany, like any fiction, is to shield the alienated individual against the reality of death:

La ficción como posibilidad de eludir—o combatir, según y cómo—el imperio de la verdad, la Verdad hecha imperio. Ya desde antes de Scherezade las ficciones son un medio para postergar la sentencia de muerte, verdad en acto.... (Carlos, París, 1983) (53)

Fiction as a weapon to battle death itself: in its literal sense the text portrays the great battle against death, but the mere existence of the text in the hands of John's fellow Christians in Asia Minor metaphorically battles John's absence—the death of presence—with them. For Carlos, nothing is more true than death; but the *Book of Revelation*—through its message of hope in the face of despair, its message about a heavenly home in the face of exile, its message of the triumph of life in the face of death—contradicts his truth. Like the conclusion the postmodern historian narrator arrived at about Ansay, the only explanation is that John must have gone mad in the face of defeat:

"Juan en Patmos y su Apocalipsis, gran libro del destierro, el consuelo perfecto de una desesperanza. Ser derrotado, enronquecer enloquecer, saber o ver o recibir y escribir por fin como visión celeste lo que no pudo escribir como crónica de una vida triunfante" (Carlos, París, 1984). (102)

Thus Carlo is interested in visiting the Island of Patmos to find out how the inversion mechanism works; to discover if there is something about the place itself which helped John write his *Revelation*:

“Porque Patmos es la isla en la que Juan escribió—o recibió, según sus palabras—su Apocalipsis; y, aun dejando de lado todo asomo de misticismo, tiene que haber algo en ese lugar en que un desterrado pudo escribir—o recibir—un texto que luego, por siglos y siglos, y tal vez aún, logró funcionar como palabra eficaz para aquellos de quienes el destierro lo había separado” (Carlos, París, 1983). (31)

Perhaps there is something about the Island of Patmos which makes John’s experience of exile different from his own, or of his image of his exile, as he interprets it though the stories of other famous exiles examined earlier.

Several other excerpts from his notebook in Paris flesh out related notions about John writing for a community who was able to imbue the text with truth, turning the word into flesh or incarnating John’s words, and how ascribing his words to another is the most effective mechanism for legitimizing the text as authentic. After examining these preliminary considerations carefully, Carlos is ready to visit the island. While these texts do not satisfy the demand for historical documentation, they do satisfy the demand for the reflection on the limits of representation by examining the place of *Revelation* within the corpus of exile narratives, from the perspective of a philosophy of religion.

Section II, Attilio’s Revelation

The grand revelation of the Island of Patmos is a manuscript Carlos found at the monastery about the origin of *The Book of Revelation*. It narrates the story of Antilio Maneo from Pergamum, the capital of Phrygia, son of a wealthy Roman citizen in the second century, likely tutored in the art of rhetoric, geometry, music

and physics, who became a follower of Montanus.¹⁰³ After a few years at the feet of Montanus, Antilio became convinced that his mission in life was to prove the authorship of the book of *Revelation*. He journeyed to the Island of Patmos to visit the cave where John presumably received his revelation. That region of the island was controlled by an obscure Gnostic sect—the Cainites, presumably exiled to the island to escape persecution elsewhere—whose theology Antilio heard patiently in order to enter the cave.¹⁰⁴ Once Antilius enters the cave, he sees written on the wall: “Yo, Juan de Tiatira, llamado el Iluminado, discípulo de Juan el Evangelista, adorador el más humilde del Señor redivivo, desterrado entre estas piedras he recibido la gracia de la Revelación” (66). With his spirits shattered, he wanders Asia Minor mulling over the teachings of the Cainites until he conceives of the ultimate attack on the demigod creator of this world: to attack truth itself. He writes *De Vita et Miracoli Beati Johanni Evangelistae*, in which he provide documentation that John the Evangelist was in fact the author of the *Revelation*.

¹⁰³ Montanism originated in Phrygia in the second century as a minor sect of Christianity which had an uneasy relationship with orthodoxy. Current scholarship compares Montanism with modern-day Christian movements like Pentecostalism and other Charismatic Movements. Adherents of the ‘New Prophecy’—as they called themselves—advocated a return to prophetic revelation through the *Paraclete*, stricter asceticism than was practiced by other Christian groups, and stricter ethical standards. Their theology relied heavily on the book of *Revelation*.

¹⁰⁴ Cainites believed that the God of the Old Testament was in fact the 33rd and final demiurge, the ultimate antithesis of the true God. The world created by this demiurge actually prevented man from knowing God. Their general theology was predicated on contradicting the laws of the demiurge, to undermine His rule over men, and lead humanity to the real God. Thus they celebrated Cain for being the first to murder. Judas Iscariot was revered for realizing Jesus had to be killed. The *Gospel According to Judas Iscariot* was a canonical text for their group.

The story is itself apocryphal, most likely the invention of Caparrós. While the Montanist and Cainites are attested in history, as is the *The Acts of John*,¹⁰⁵ Antilio and Antipater, the Cainite priest on the Island of Patmos, and the title *De Vita et Miracoli Beati Johanni Evangelistae* appear to be fictitious. Moreover, the story's end seems to borrow its structure from a Jorge Luis Borges story, a strategy we have already seen several times in the previous two books by Caparrós. In "Tres versiones de Judas," Borges presents the investigative work of Nils Runeberg, a Biblical scholar, who presents three possible conclusions, which progressively transform and elevate Judas Iscariot from traitor to the ultimate, secret redeemer. In the story of Antilio, the first ending has him die at the hands of a Montanist disciple, which perfectly inverts their beliefs: the Montanist murders, and the neophyte Cainite Antilio dies a martyr. In the second ending, Antilio commits suicide, in imitation of their most revered priest, Judas Iscariot. A third version alleges Antilio never wrote the text, but left clues scattered about so that *De Vita* could be "found," its false origin "deduced," and *Revelation's* canonicity "corroborated."

De Vita does not seem to exist: the closest text is *Acta Iohannis*—Acts of John— an apocryphal text written towards the end of the second century, but conventionally attributed to Prochorus. The existence of this second text renders completely fictional the two major foundational texts for the exploration of the *Book of Revelation* in the novel and undermines the demand for historical documentation.

¹⁰⁵ The *Acts of John the Evangelist* was an apocryphal text traditionally attributed to Leucius Charinus, a companion of John and associated with several different "Acts," but conventionally attributed to Prochorus, one of the first seven deacons appointed by the apostles (Acts 6).

However, the true author of *The Acts of John* is likewise unknown to history; and, as with the *Ansay* text of “La gloria”—created through the use of historical imagination and given the narrative voice of a lunatic Ansay—Caparrós seems to have created a text through the use of historical imagination which supplies the missing information and fits the current scholarly conjectures. Bruce Metzger, a Greek Scholar at Princeton Theological Seminary, has reconstructed the following profile for the Biblical author:

The *Acts of John* may have been composed by a member of the Hellenistic cultivated classes, who drew upon various literary genres and in so doing, without any specific attachment to a concrete community, sought to propagate a Christianity as he understood it, as the expression of certain aspirations of a philosophical attitude to the world which he held even before his conversion. (178)

Although Caparrós could not have known Davis’s work, Caparrós’s Atilio matches Davis’s outline fairly closely. Atilio is from the “Hellenistic cultivated classes” of Pergamum, was originally associated with the Montanist community, but after a crisis of faith was not associated with any; and his philosophical attitude to the world was informed by the Cainite sect, as well as his own Hellenistic education. As with *Ansay*, the *representation* of historical truth is of greater importance than the historical truth itself.

Prochorus’s Tales

Closely associated with this story are the two chapters “transcribed” from *De Vita et Miracoli Johanni Evangelistae*. The first chapter appears towards the end of the first part, as the last of the “descriptive” chapters. It narrates how the disciples, upon witnessing Jesus’s ascension into heaven, drew lots for where each would go to preach the gospel throughout the world. When John learns he is to go to Asia

Minor, he at first fears for his own life, but quickly regains his composure and accepts his lot. Taking Prochorus with him, he sets sail. On the fifth hour of the fourth night of their voyage, the ship is besieged by a storm. When the sailors request help from John, he prays and commands the sea to be calm. In seeing this miracle, everyone on board falls to his or her knees praising God and asking John for his blessing. In this way, John's voyage to Asia Minor and Carlos and Jeanne's voyage to the Island of Patmos are pulled together into the constellation of meaning through the shared experience of rough seas on the voyage there: arriving to Patmos—like being exiled—can be a rough trip.

The second chapter is the first of the “descriptive” chapters in the third part of the novel. It tells the story of how one day, when John was in his cave, he sent Prochorus to town for ink and parchment. When he came back, John spent the next six days dictating his visions to Prochorus. Then they made copies and sent them to the different cities in Asia Minor. Soon after, news of Emperor Domitian's death reached Patmos,¹⁰⁶ and John returned to Ephesus with Prochorus, to the delight of the Ephesians, by whom the *Revelation* had already been well received.

As with *Ansay's* “risky” historical novel—the narrative of a crazy Ansay wandering the Pampas like a conquistador—the “historicity” of these two chapters is much more fluid. Although several early Christian communities drew strength and inspiration from the *Acts of John*, the Synod of Hippo Regius (393 CE) did not include it in what eventually became the Catholic Canon. The Second Council of Nicea (787

¹⁰⁶ According to tradition, John the Evangelist was exiled to the island of Patmos by Domitian, who was Emperor of Rome from 81 to 96 CE.

CE) condemned it as heretical, sealing the fate of all known copies to the fire. What is left are quoted in other texts (usually condemning it), or in very few and incomplete extant texts. To complicate matters, the newer Latin versions seem to have purged the stories which were problematic for orthodox theology, and even added some which do not appear in the Greek versions. Using historical imagination, Caparrós has “filled in the gaps” of the *Acts of John* in *De vita*.

In the most complete known extant Greek version of the *Acts of John*, the first 18 verses are missing: the 19th verse merely states: “Now John was hastening to Ephesus...” (James). The first story quoted from *De Vita* seems to fit the missing verses of the *Acts of John* by narrating events from the time of Jesus’s ascension to the time he was on his way to Ephesus, in Asia Minor.

In the Latin version, the Emperor Domitian summarily condemns all Christians to death. But after a lengthy episode in which the Emperor Domitian interrogates John and commutes the death sentence to banishment for having proven the goodness of Christianity through arguments and miracles, there is a one line sentence about John’s exile to Patmos: “And straightway John sailed to Patmos, where also he was deemed worthy to see the revelation of the end. And when Domitian was dead,... John went to Ephesus, and regulated all the teachings of the church....” (“Acts of John (Apocryphal)”). The entire second chapter seems to expand on the few lines contained above, where John receives the revelation, and then goes to Ephesus upon Domitian’s death, “filling in” what now appears as a gloss over in the Latin version of *Acts of John*. Unquestionably, there are problems. The difference in the name of the text—*De Vita* instead of *Acts of John*—is undeniable, although

there are plenty of medieval lives of saints whose titles start with *De Vita et Miraculis*.... The style of the two chapters in *La noche anterior* exhibit a more carefully constructed literary style than the telegraphic Greek and Latin translations of *Acts*, but would be adequate imitations of early mediaeval Apocrypha. Overall, these discrepancies are attributable to what Borges would have called “las pequeñas variaciones y divergencias que son del caso” (Borges “La intrusa” *Brodie* 14), and as the representation of truth supersedes historicity in other areas, it would not be surprising that at the core of the novel it would be the same.

The Limits of Historical Imagination

The story about Antilio and *De Vita et Miracoli* calls into question the foundation of a faith that could endure exile by dis-locating and de-stabilizing the authorship—and authority—of one of its principal texts: the *Book of Revelation*. As already seen in *No velas*, Carlos struggled to wipe aside the doubts which arose from *Montoneros* leadership’s inability to respond to his objections and analysis, and ultimately chose to walk away from the organization; to renounce his faith in the revolution. In *Ansay*, the postmodern historian voice is likewise unable to comprehend the endurance of faith—in this case in the pre-modern worldview inscribed in the concepts of God, King, Country, Honor and Glory—in the face of irrefutable evidence to the contrary. In *La noche anterior*, Carlos is confronted by the text of a man who, like Carlos, experienced exile, but who, unlike Carlos, was not only able to retain his faith, but was able to give hope to those he left behind. Unable to comprehend how that could happen, Carlos invents a text borne of the disillusionment of Antilio, thereby turning the *Book of Revelation* into the illusions of

a lunatic named John the Illumined. Unfortunately, it falls flat precisely because it relies too extensively on creating brand new texts through historical imagination when very similar historical primary sources exist already.

The novel attempts to elevate the importance of *Revelation* in the early coalescence of a haphazard collection of Christian followers in the first century to its institutionalization in the 4th and 5th centuries, when the emerging religion fused its authority with the power of Rome. According to the novel's argument, *Revelation* was—and still is—the single most important text of the New Testament canon in terms of reviving the Christian movement by reaffirming yet, at the same time, radically pushing back the promised second return of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it pushes the claim that John the Illumined—not John the Disciple or John the Apostle—wrote *Revelation*. In addition, the text that proved its authenticity and that guaranteed its place in the canon was actually, itself, apocryphal.

In reality, *Revelation* was as important as portrayed to only a few groups, such as the Montanists, who themselves were considered suspect by the more orthodox groups. Within the larger Christian community, *Revelation* has always been viewed with suspicion and is one of the most controversial books to be included in the Christian canon. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not use it in their Liturgy. Protestant groups, which tend to ascribe to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, would probably feel more comfortable—theologically speaking—if the book were removed from the canon altogether. Martin Luther lobbied to exclude it from the canon, and John Calvin famously wrote a commentary on every book of the

Bible except for *Revelation*.¹⁰⁷ Also, *Revelation's* inclusion in the New Testament canon was made *in spite of* the Church fathers finding the *Acts of John* to be apocryphal.

In short, because the claim of the importance of *Revelation* is too high; because the evidence for undermining its claim to truth is based too much on historical imagination without supporting historically verifiable documents; because there already existed historical documents very similar to the ones created entirely out of historical imagination; and because Biblical scholars already have stronger and more damning evidence which casts greater doubt on the truth claims of *Revelation*, this part of the novel's project fails from the perspective of satisfying the demand for historical documentation. Rather than provide an "Adlai Stevenson Moment" which could have irrefutably demonstrated a less ambitious claim—the dubious inclusion of the *Book of Revelation* in the canon in spite of overwhelming evidence for its exclusion, or human and fallible machinations in the councils which ultimately determined what texts were divine and infallible, for instance—based on actual apocryphal texts—such as the Acts of John or the Gospel of Judas, for instance—or not utilizing historical imagination to reconstruct texts that are actually lost—for instance, the acts of the Synod of Hippo Regius of 393, during which the current Catholic Biblical canon was finally decided—has undermined this

¹⁰⁷ In this sense, Luther and Calvin reveal themselves to be men of their times. Humanist Biblical scholars in the early 16th century such as Cardinals Ximenes and Cajetan, and Erasmus of Rotterdam were in favor of removing *Hebrews*, *James*, *Jude* and *Revelation* from the canon because of the problem of dubious authorship. While the Catholic and Protestants eventually kept these books in the Bible, at least in the Lutheran Bible their questionable inclusion was noted by placing them at the end of the New Testament.

point of the novel, providing a “Colin Powell Moment” instead.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps this, too, is a way of saying nothing and saying it badly.

The greatest irony of *La noche anterior* is that it presents strategically pointless false details about a book written *precisely* to represent the reality and urgency of the second coming of the Christ; to persuade people to believe in His return. The real, the false and the illusion about the authority of *Revelation* becomes more or less the subject of *La noche anterior*. It does not claim to represent any reality about *Revelation*, nor about the condition of exile which is at the heart of its genesis, but it does develop a reflection on the reality of *Revelation's* reception as well as on the reality of the island(s) of exile that connect that book to the present.

Carlos's Conclusions About the Island of Patmos and the Book of Revelation

Setting aside the problems created from overreliance on historical imagination, for the time being, and taking the manuscripts presented in the novel at face value, Carlos is able to reflect in his travelogue on what he discovered about the *Book of Revelation* and on the condition of being exiled from his visit to the monastery, and the opportunity to read the manuscripts transcribed in the novel. Just as with Ansay, he finds the abyss of faith impossible to bridge between himself and John:

“Detenerse en lo desesperado o ridículo de cualquier intento de identificación con Juan. No bastan un destierro común y un lugar

¹⁰⁸ On 25 October 1962, US Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson famously questioned his Soviet counterpart about whether they were setting up nuclear missiles in Cuba. After Valerian Zorin insinuated that was not the case, Mr. Stevenson proceeded to demonstrate through copious amounts of irrefutable evidence that the Soviet Union was in fact stockpiling nuclear weapons in Cuba. Ever since, a grand revelatory moment is called a “Stevenson Moment.” On 5 Feb. 2003, US Secretary of State Colin Powell famously addressed a special plenary session of the United Nations about US evidence for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. While very eloquent, the presentation was based on faulty data which was soon proven incorrect, de-legitimizing the US's position in the Iraq war.

visitado para compensar el abismo que se instala, en todos los sentidos y, sobre todo: ¿cómo llegar desde la fuga a reconstruir lo que fue dicho desde la más pura creencia, desde la pasión de la Verdad?” (del cuaderno de viaje). (36)

Whereas in his notes from Paris Carlos was reasonably sure there must be something about the Island of Patmos which infused the Book of Revelation with efficacy, the Carlos of the travelogue is certain the efficacy is predicated on faith, which he lacks. Thus John and the Island of Patmos could never be added to Carlos's list of famous people who have experienced exile on famous islands. The *Book of Revelation* no longer has a place in Carlos' constellation of meaning because he is forced to acknowledge John kept his faith while Carlos lost his. Exile-ness, after all, is not the central question in *Revelation*: it is faith. The second entry about the *Book of Revelation* reveals the following:

“Aunque todo, incluso el Apocalipsis, es en definitiva un calipsis, una veladura, un encubrimiento, la multiplicidad de las interpretaciones posibles ocultando lo que se pretende mostrar” (del cuaderno de viajes). (101)

The experience of visiting the Island of Patmos to receive some great revelation about the condition of exile-ness appears to have been about as fruitful as Don Quixote's visit to the Cave of Montesinos (Quixote II, XXIV). Just as Don Quixote is dis-oriented and de-stabilized upon hearing from Durandarte that perhaps Don Quixote is not the great knight-errant he thought he was, Carlos seems to be dis-oriented and de-stabilized regarding his initial assumptions about the *Book of Revelation* and the Island of Patmos. But rather than admit that his own loss of faith prevents him from understanding any text based on faith, he summarily dismisses

Revelation as just more words that cover up rather than reveal anything; cheap literature.

The last two chapters of the novel portray Carlos “killing” his infatuation with John’s *Book of Revelation*. Throughout the storyline presented in the “palimpsest” chapters is the narration of he and her (presumably Carlos and Jeanne) embark on their journey from Lipsos to Patmos, including the time at the restaurant near the village square, spending time at the nudist beach, then the walk up the hill to the hotel and installing themselves for the night in their room. A side note to this has been the presence of a gypsy knife salesman who travels with them on the boat and from whom Carlos eventually buys a knife while in the town square. The knife’s presence in the bag is noted, including how it casually fell out at the beach, and about how it was placed on the writing table, next to Carlos’s papers. Some other unrelated paragraphs—including the palimpsest chapter examined closely earlier—insinuate that “death is near.” In the last chapter, Carlos gets out of bed, walks to the door, lights a cigarette, and notices the light of the moon bouncing off the blade of the knife. The chapter ends with “Ya lo inevitable tuvo, hace tiempo, lugar” (130), leaving the reader in suspense about whether Carlos uses the knife to kill or not. The question about the past resurfaces in the present about the future: has he/will he kill?

However, there are two phrases from different “palimpsest” chapters which help elucidate on a possible outcome. Firstly, he notes that Jeanne is Juana in Spanish; that is, the female form of John (128). Secondly, he comes across a seemingly bizarre observation which he jots down in his travelogue:

“Porque cuando escribió aquella obviedad en la que pretendía que el suicidio es la forma más alta de la masturbación, es evidente que sólo estaba dando forma literaria a la expresión de dos tendencias que tuvo demasiado cuidado en evitar, siempre” (del Cuaderno de viaje). (47)

Apparently, he is referring to the concept present in Taoism, which considers energy (Qi) to be intricately connected to bodily fluids (Jing). Once all Jing has been expelled the body dies. The highest concentration of Jing is found in semen; thus a man would want to conserve as much semen as possible, as this would conserve his Jing. Thus male masturbation that leads to ejaculation is viewed as “energy suicide.”¹⁰⁹

Given the above, something else is killed in this novel. In the last of the “bedroom scenes,” Carlos is described lying next to Jeanne in bed, caressing her body while he masturbates. By this we see that Carlos has not literally killed Jeanne with a blade—a phallic symbol—so much as metaphorically killed his relationship with Jeanne, just as he had previously killed—although perhaps in different ways—his relationships with Michelle, Cecilia, Laura and Estela in *No velas*. Also, by noting that Jeanne is “Juana” in Spanish, a deeper metaphor is opened: Jeanne is really a female representation of John, the author of the *Book of Revelation*, and the multiple ways of pronouncing her name are multiple variations on the expression of Carlos’ obsession with the *Book of Revelation*. By killing his relationship with Jeanne, he has effectively killed his obsession with John and the *Book of Revelation*.

Predominant Elements

‘Death’ is very much present, as it is in all of Caparrós’s works, albeit in an abstract way: in the aesthetic sensibilities associated with the ‘death of the author,’

¹⁰⁹ For further details on the Taoist development of sexology, see Juan.

as the primary truth against which religions construct their reassuring theologies, as a dubiously remembered precondition for Carlos's exile, and the final death of his obsession about John and the *Book of Revelation*. As with *Ansay*, 'death' is the underlying condition for many of the other elements in Caparrós's constellation of meaning.

'Exile' is again one of the big themes for the novel. The murder accusation is given just enough treatment to make it a plausible underlying reason for Carlos's exile, but its certainty is questionable, raising the issue of Carlos's reliability to accurately remember the past or to be trusted to transmit it honestly. The various parenthetical approaches to islands dwell on different ways in which the condition of being exiled has been or could be thought of in relation to famous stories of real and imaginary people and places. Finally, while the text successfully leads the reader through various considerations regarding the *Book of Revelation* to the central point of Patmos being the quintessential island of exile and John's *Revelation* being the definitive text on exile, the problems discussed earlier offer an underwhelming climax.

Once more, 'faith'—or the lack thereof—is Carlos's biggest problem when faced with understanding an historical figure. John's faith in his gospel in the face of being exiled is incomprehensible to him. The fiction of Antilio's confabulation of *De vita* is much more believable to Carlos than the possibility of a John—whether the Apostle or the Evangelist, which Biblical scholars tend to differentiate, or even the fictitious John the Illumined—could have written the text from a position of faith. He claims he once had faith and that he needed faith in order to take a life, but this

claim is suspect at best: if it is the same character as *No velas*, it could be argued that Carlos never really had faith to begin with, making his militant period appear more like dilettante posturing. It is hard to not wonder if Cecilia—who had a similar background and intellectual formation as Carlos—would have been able to understand John and the Christians of his time better simply because she might have been able to bridge the gap and, even if she didn't share John's faith, she at least understands the mechanisms by which faith could have operated while in exile to produce a text such as the *Book of Revelation*.

'Carlos' is back as a protagonist and narrative voice, like in *No velas*, but brings with his characterization some of the specific narratological preoccupations with faith and historical imagination developed in *Ansay*. He doesn't change much in this novel: he is still self-absorbed and cares more about his writing and what he has to say than about something external to himself such as a significant relationship or a cause. People in his life, such as Jeanne, who could have been more significant, are merely mirrors in which he can narcissistically gaze upon his reflection. He has managed to move progressively further away from Argentina: where *No velas* dealt with the time and place of his Argentina, and *Ansay* still dealt with the place, *La noche anterior* represses Argentina enough to never mention it directly. His prose is no longer attempting to imitate Latin Americans living in Paris, like his unavoidable imitation of Cortázar, Vallejo and Neruda in his first stay in Paris. He is at best furthering or, at worst, imitating the narrative techniques of the *Nouveau Roman*, although he is about twenty to thirty years too late to participate directly in that group.

Conclusion

In this novel Caparrós has not satisfied Rothberg's demand for historical documentation. By completely fabricating two texts with historical imagination, Caparrós squandered a perfect opportunity to utilize actual extant Biblical apocrypha with the same overwhelming results achieved in *Ansay* to criticize Latin American revolutionary projects. Caparrós does, however, satisfy Rothberg's demand for reflection on the limits of representation by attempting the audacious project of transmitting the idea of exile-ness without actually representing it. The descriptive and palimpsest chapters showed a mastery of the *Nouveau Roman* style and achieved the objective of not saying much (at least at face value) and of saying it badly through mind-numbing precision of detail. The technique of narrating ambiguous specificity developed in *No velas* is employed again in the description of the two young men in jeans and puffy shirts to describe something that seems to have taken place in Buenos Aires, but could have happened anywhere. Finally, *La noche anterior* does not seem to satisfy the demand for the risky circulation of the event in public discourse. The elements that make it so intriguing are precisely the ones that tend to push away the average reader, evidenced by Caparrós' own admission that not many people have read this book.

My own final assessment is mixed. On one side, I understand that, if the novel's narrative techniques were to adhere to the *Nouveau Roman* model, the text had to be self-contained; even the purported historical documents would ideally exist exclusively within the text. Maybe Caparrós is pointing to a worldview shared

by Gnostics, neo-Platonists and surrealists—and maybe even the practitioners of magic realism and *Nouveau Roman*—who reject this mess the rest of humanity calls ‘reality’ precisely because it is so imperfect and there must of necessity be something more. As such, the novel rejects—not only in content but also in form—any mediated experience of reality, such as history. The only valid form is the immediate experience of the thing itself. In communication—the transmission of ideas and thoughts—the only valid form is the medium; the text, in this case. Thus it would be unsatisfactory for the text to *represent* exile-ness and loss/lack of faith: it must re-create the experience wholly self-contained within the text. Having said that, I still maintain that, had Caparrós worked in an actual historical text, I believe it would have been more “efficacious.” The mere attempt at the transmission of ideas or thoughts presupposes the possibility of a shared experience of reality, a point which could have been conveyed with his previously employed techniques of adapting primary sources to serve the narrative. Ultimately, it is an intriguing presentation of the possibilities and limitations of representation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I find Caparrós' novels to present compelling narratives worth reading. He truly has a gift for emulating many different narrative voices with distinct gender, class and even time-period accents, as well as genres. The storylines are interesting and the characters are believable, but most thought-provoking are the creative ways in which he structures the various plots. While his journalistic work is well known and he has received several honors and prizes for his later work, his first three novels are in some ways more worthy of close readings because they set the tone for future narrative projects. For every novel I have provided a tentative conclusion regarding whether or not the novels satisfy the three demands identified by Rothberg. Here I want to revisit those tentative conclusions as a group in order to extrapolate patterns and tendencies, and even anticipate in which direction his literary production went afterwards.

Firstly, Caparrós clearly satisfied the demand for documentation in the first two novels. The copious references in *No velas* to epochally accurate quotidian places, people and events alongside their historically meaningful counterparts represent living in Buenos Aires very truthfully. The unique use of the abundance of primary historical documents in *Ansáy* is equally impressive, and lends credence to the narrative carefully constructed from historical imagination. On the other hand, the decision to create fictitious materials in the guise of historical documentation which reveals the artifice of Christian faith diminishes the impact of the argument of *La noche anterior*. This, unfortunately signals a trend which Caparrós continues in *El tercer cuerpo* (1990), in which he has the opportunity to bring to light obscure

events (at least at the time) associated with the *Guerra de las Malvinas*, but instead appears to have created a fictitious history with a few similarities. With *La voluntad* (1997-9)—written in collaboration with Diego Anguita—and *La Historia* (1999), Caparrós takes the historicity and anti-historicity to its logical conclusions. *La voluntad* became the definitive history of the dirty war from the perspective of the revolutionaries. Both authors collected various types of period documents and interviewed many of the participants, and then compiled a three-volume narrative (five volumes in its second and definitive edition, 2007-8) which has become a touchstone for the documentation of that period in Argentine history. On the other end of the spectrum, Caparrós published *La Historia* which, in spite of its title, is a complete fabrication, but claims to have influenced important Enlightenment texts which had a profound influence in shaping liberal political views of the late 18th and early 19th century era of transition to democracy. The historical imagination works slightly differently in that it creates a completely fictional document—which in the novel is purported to be real—which helps explain reality. In *La noche anterior* and *El tercer cuerpo*, historiographic documents and events are created which are similar to real ones, which diffuse the effect of the novels. Therefore, the departure from satisfying the demand for documentation fortunately seems to have been a temporary phenomenon.

Secondly, Caparrós overwhelmingly satisfies the demand for reflection on the formal limits of representation, especially in these first three novels. His use of multiple genres and narrative voices to construct non-linear storylines forces the reader to engage the text and think about what is being represented, and how. His

initial construct of 'the endless explanatory recursion' in *No velas* turns the character of Carlos Montana into the author and the first critic of the movie *O juremos con gloria morir*, suggesting that the limit of comments upon comments is, in theory, limitless. The postmodern historian narrative voice's careful and detailed narratological explanations not only connect the past with the present but give insight into how to interpret the novel. The imitation of the *Nouveau Roman* push at the limits of what can be done strictly in the narrative realm, without recourse to a predetermined reality outside the novel, such as historiography, and at transmitting the experience of exile-ness and loss of faith without ever representing it per se. *La Historia* is also an incredibly complex and dense novel, which, at over 950 pages, demands a lot of time, patience and endurance from the thorough reader. Aside from these four works, his later novels tend to have more conventional structures which are more accessible for the general public, but this does not always imply a lack of sophistication or inadequate exploration of the possibilities or limits of representation. In *La voluntad*, *La Historia* and *A quien corresponda* (2008), for instance, the line between history and fiction is so elusive it can be deceptive. Unbeknownst to most TV critics, Caparrós does present a coherent perspective on history throughout his works and in his TV interviews. For him, history is a tool for navigating the future. He does not seem to appreciate dwelling on past mistakes or digging up dirt on people. Instead, the purpose of history is to deal with the problems in the present.

Finally, Caparrós's satisfaction for the demand for the risky public circulation of discourses on the events is more questionable. The complex nature of the three

works will immediately exclude a large number of readers looking for something to stimulate their minds momentarily on their daily commute or while lounging at the beach. The fragmented texts, the palimpsest of narrative genres, the cacophony of narrative voices, the obscure references to high French culture—in short, everything that contributes towards satisfying Rothberg’s second demand—almost necessarily precludes the possibility of satisfying the third demand. Other works are much lighter: *El tercer cuerpo* is a clever detective novel while *Un día en la vida de Dios* (2001) is a fun and farcical romp through world history through the eyes of God Himself. Later works seem to have done better: *La voluntad* is a very well known text in Argentina, meaning it has reached a critical mass of public circulation which affords it the status of itself being the point of reference for historiographic documentation, instead of having to rely on other documents to validate it (at least at the general public level). He won the *Premio Rey de España* for *Larga distancia* (1992), a collection of travel articles written for the monthly *Página/30*. *Valfierno* (2004), a more traditional historical novel than *Ansay*, won the 2004 Premio Planeta, and his most recent novel *Los living* (2011) won the Premio Herralde. He also won the Premio Konex in 2004 in the category of *Memorias y Testimonios*. His travel articles, compiled into books have sold well. These include *La Guerra moderna* (1999), *El interior* (2006), and *Una luna* (2009). The counterbalance to his historical novels and novelized histories provide his take on current events, informed from his involvement in *Montoneros* and his studies in history. These include *La patria capicúa* (1995), *Extinción* (2001), *¡Bingo!* (2002), *Qué país* (2002), *Contra el cambio* (2010) and *Argentinismos* (2011). Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as

Rodrigo Fresán, who shot immediately to public prominence with his very clever collection of short stories called *Historia argentina* (1991) as well as good connections in the publishing industry and a good sense of how to work the media, or Federico Andahazi, who made a grand entrance amid a scandal about whether or not his first novel *El anatomista* (1996) merited the Premio Forabat, Martín Caparrós first published intellectually compelling and challenging works of limited mass appeal, and only later turned his narrative skills towards the production of works that had greater public circulation.

In the years since the end of the last military dictatorship, Argentina has made slow and halting progress towards rebuilding the political institutions necessary for a robust democracy, but it has not been an easy process, and has not happened without a measure of controversy, contention and self-contradiction. The persistence of dredging up the dirty war to impute culpability for atrocities committed during that period waned in the 1990s, but has picked up again in recent years. There seems to be enough distance to look at the period with a critical eye which nuances events beyond merely assigning culpability and legal responsibility. Caparrós's incredibly creative ability to 'make memory' of the dirty war period and the aftermath of exile and loss of faith—examined through the prism of traumatic realism—provides a valuable perspective worth exploring for those who still believe in Argentina.

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