



“Fiction or Death”: Novels of the Children of the Detained-disappeared as Vehicles for Mourning¹

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Resumen: El presente artículo propone una lectura de las novelas escritas por los hijos de detenidos-desaparecidos argentinos como instrumentos de duelo. A través de la ficción como testimonio, el lector deviene testigo de la vivencia de la catástrofe del narrador, lo que resulta en un acto de rememoración central en el duelo hecho a través de la literatura. Las novelas que analizamos aquí, *Los topos* de Félix Bruzzone y *Diario de una princesa montonera* de Mariana Eva Perez, constituyen un cruce de caminos de testimonios: el testimonio heredado de los padres desaparecidos, el testimonio de crecer como hijos de desaparecidos, y el testimonio creado en el lector a través del acto de la lectura.

Palabras Clave: duelo, ficción, testimonio, rememoración, desaparecidos.

Abstract: The present article proposes an understanding of the novels written by children of the Argentinean detained-disappeared as instruments for mourning. Through fiction as testimony, the reader bears witness to the narrator's living within the catastrophe of the detained-disappeared, resulting in an act of remembrance that is at the very center of the work of mourning through literature. The novels that we analyze here, *Los topos* by Félix Bruzzone and *Diario de una princesa montonera* by Mariana Eva Perez, constitute a crossroads of testimony: the inherited testimony of the disappeared parents, the testimony of growing up as children of the disappeared, and the reader's testimony created in the act of reading.

Key Words: mourning, fiction, testimonio, remembrance, disappeared.

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¹ "Once the title of the present article had been selected, it was brought to our attention that Jordana Blejmar had chosen the same phrase from Perez's novel for her article entitled: "Ficción o muerte! Autofiguración y testimonio en *Diario de una princesa montonera –110% Verdad–*".

0. Introduction

In their seminal work on testimony, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub refer to the Shoah as an “event without a witness.” While survivors of the Shoah and other atrocities do indeed share their own testimony of their struggle and their survival, we must count their witnessing as anomalous minorities. Yet as literature and art have demonstrated time and time again, even those remotely removed (either temporally or spatially) from the annihilation of testimony listen to the imperative to bear witness that emanates from the lacuna. Such is the case of the children of the detained-disappeared² of the Southern Cone who seek to address and testify to their family members’ forced disappearance: in the often arduous and fruitless search for any trace of truth, they become witnesses by proxy for those who never returned. Nevertheless, as Giorgio Agamben writes, those who seek to bear witness in the name of those who never returned assume “the charge of bearing witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness” (Agamben, 1999: 34).

This very act of bearing witness to a lack of testimony is in itself its own form of testimony. Such is the case of several documentaries and novels produced and written in the last decade by children of the detained-disappeared in Argentina, where the testimony by proxy of the detained-disappeared is located within the child’s own testimony of struggle with his or her inheritance. In his book *Identidades desaparecidas: peleas por el sentido en los mundos de la desaparición forzada*, Gabriel Gatti refers to many of these works by children of the detained-disappeared as forming part of a “narrative of absence of meaning” whose center of discourse radiates from this very realization of an absence of testimony, understanding it fully as a direct result of the utmost catastrophe. We understand novels such as Félix Bruzzone’s *Los topos* (2008) and Mariana Eva Pérez’s *Diario de una princesa montonera -110% Verdad-* (2012) as exhibiting this crossroads of testimony *through fiction*, in which the protagonists (like the authors themselves) are children of the detained-disappeared, as well as forming part of Gatti’s “narratives of absence of meaning.”

We will seek to show that the very characteristics of these “narratives absent of meaning” permit the novels to assume a critical position with respect to the catastrophe itself in an attempt not to recover that which has been lost, but rather to question how we

² For the present article we choose to use the term detained-disappeared to refer to those victims of state terrorism in Argentina, and other countries of the Southern Cone, in the 1970s and 1980s. This dual term encompasses those who were detained, tortured, and disappeared. Additionally, we use the verb disappear both as an intransitive and transitive verb, mimicking this versatility that exists in Spanish, which in referring to detained-disappeared individuals places emphasis on the fact that one does not simply disappear; in certain circumstances “one can be disappeared by force”.

have proceeded in remembering that which has been disappeared. At the center of this proposal is the notion of the idoneous nature of fiction for confronting a past whose very definition is built on disappearance, challenging the traditional understanding that testimony necessarily means truth or even verisimilitude.

Through this understanding of fiction as testimony, we propose that the two novels in question can be understood to function as instruments for mourning or, as the term coined by Dominick LaCapra, a “working-through” the catastrophe of the disappeared, precisely thanks to the protagonists’ bearing witness to their own search for their family members, erecting, in the words of Felman, a Monument to Witnessing. This exercise in active witnessing functions at various levels: firstly, within the diegesis itself through the first-person narrators who bear testimony of being children of the detained-disappeared in the search for any information about their lost family members and the construction of the identities that arise from this very process; secondly, the novels themselves, having been written by children of the detained-disappeared, directly bestow upon the reader the responsibility of receiving this testimony of dealing with absence through fiction.

We wish to explore in greater detail this intersecting of testimony within the novels themselves, as well as to highlight the distinction Gatti makes between narratives of meaning and narratives of absence of meaning. Next, we will describe in greater detail what the mourning process involves (especially as it pertains to literature) and how we intend to apply it to the case of the novels in question. Finally, we will then proceed with the analysis of both novels with the intention of demonstrating how both, albeit in different ways, bear witness to the inheritance of a lack of testimony and assume a critical position with respect to this process, thus creating from the novel a vehicle for the mourning process that is carried out in the act of reading itself.

1. A Crossroads of Testimony to Catastrophe

Dori Laub’s understanding of the Shoah as “an event without a witness” in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* emphasizes that this incapacity to truly “witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation” (Felman and Laub, 1992: 82). In addition, Giorgio Agamben elaborates on this idea that all survival testimony in itself “contained at its core an essential lacuna” (Agamben, 1999: 13). In the words of Primo Levi, “those who saw the Gorgon,” that is to say those who directly witnessed destruction, “have not returned to tell about it” (Levi, 1989: 83). Gabriel Gatti echoes this idea of an abyss in testimony in his work on identity in what he calls the “field of

the detained-disappeared”³ in the case of Argentina and other countries of South America. For Gatti, the figure of the disappeared constitutes a catastrophe that results in a break in sense or meaning and in language itself: “¿Cómo administrar una muerte sin cuerpo? ¿Cómo representar lo que sucede en lugares de donde el lenguaje fue expulsado, chupado, y la norma era excepción?” (Gatti, 2011: 19)⁴.

Nevertheless, despite the impossibility of bearing witness for those who never returned, those who did survive and who were able to bear witness to what they did experience are witnesses by proxy: “We speak in their stead, by proxy” (Levi, 1989: 83). For Gatti, in the case of Argentina, the ex-detained-disappeared (the “reappeared”) are those who tackle head-on the task of describing the reality where language fails, heeding the imperative to listen to the absence and bear witness in light of catastrophe. In referencing Adorno’s famous dictum on writing poetry after Auschwitz, Gatti cites the work of Elizabeth Jelin stating that the answer to the question of how to bear witness in the face of extreme violence should not stem from its unnarratable condition, but rather in terms of language’s own restrictions and limitations (Gatti, 2011: 71). Why, in the words of Agamben, should we “confer on extermination the prestige of the mystical” by calling it ineffable, unsayable? (Agamben, 1999: 31). In her pivotal work on trauma, Cathy Caruth explains that the original meaning of *trauma* in Greek is *wound*, and that trauma⁵ is “always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth, 1996: 4). Whether it be through a witness by proxy or the testimony of an ex-detained-disappeared individual, the testimonies of catastrophe must be spoken and thought about, albeit perhaps not always in the most conventional and traditional ways. Referring to the limits of language, Gatti cites the recently deceased poet Juan Gelman: “Esas palabras nuevas, ¿no son acaso una victoria contra los límites del lenguaje? [...] Hay millones de espacios sin nombrar y la poesía trabaja y nombra lo que no tiene nombre todavía” (Gelman *apud* Gatti, 2011: 71).

3 Gatti defines the “field of the detained-disappeared” as a field of study that has come into existence since the seventies: “a lo largo de los años que van desde la década de los setenta hasta hoy se ha ido consolidando un campo del detenido-desparecido” (Gatti, 2011: 25).

4 An example of how the catastrophe of forced disappearance results in a break in language is how complications can arise with the use of terms like orphan or widow/widower: how can one be an orphan to one who is neither alive nor dead, but simply absent? (Gatti, 2011: 26).

5 Here I use the word trauma as used by Caruth: “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (1996: 11). However, it is important to note that Gatti distinguishes between trauma and catastrophe, characterizing the latter as a shorter experience which is assimilated and normalized; a catastrophe for Gatti is much more profound and intense (2011: 36-37).

The children of the detained-disappeared of Argentina are charged from very early on with an identity defined primarily by the loss of the parent(s). To be a child of the detained-disappeared means inheriting a void and a lack of meaning which "risk consuming the children's affective world and displacing their own history as individuals" (Ros, 2012: 27). Especially during the years immediately after the dictatorship, discovering the truth as to what happened to disappeared parents or family members often proved difficult as there existed in many instances an unspoken pact of silence between parents or children, or the disappeared were even still blamed in the collective imagination of those more removed from the disappeared (Ros, 2012: 26; Kaiser, 2005: 29). While during the years following the founding of Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo the focus was placed on familial ties to the detained-disappeared and the search for their whereabouts or remains, this focus was shifted with the founding of H.I.J.O.S. (*Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio*, or in English, *Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence*) in 1995. The founding of the group, initially formed exclusively by children of the detained-disappeared, gave way to a shift in the emphasis from victimhood to the revolutionary actions of their disappeared parents as well as a recognition of the plight of the thousands of exiles as victims of the state sponsored terrorism (Ros, 2012: 28).

The group H.I.J.O.S. empowered many sons and daughters of the detained-disappeared to form their own narrative and testimony distinct from those inherited by their parents; the motto of the group epitomizes this new witnessing in the appropriation of their parents disappearance: "We were born in their struggle, now they live on in ours." Although H.I.J.O.S., with their taking of a political stance and activism, perhaps became the most visible voice of the generation of the children of the disappeared, it is not, of course, the only voice. As of 2011, the association *Memoria abierta* (Open Memory) lists fifty documentaries and movies dealing specifically with the topic of sons and daughters of the disappeared, many of which are directed by children themselves, in their online catalogue ("La dictadura en el cine") under the category "The Children's Generation". According to Verena Berger, these various movies and documentaries "highlight the scope of the military's crimes by showing a plurality of intertwined testimonies, thereby producing a choral effect" (Berger *apud* Ros, 2012: 30)⁶.

⁶ We would like to highlight just a few of these films and documentaries produced by children of disappeared parents in order to show the diversity that exists: the film *Infancia clandestina* (2011) by Benjamín Ávila, which portrays the experience of growing up in hiding as a child of parents active in a guerilla group in the 1970s; the documentaries *Buscando a Víctor* (2005) by Natalia Bruchstein and *Los rubios* (2003) by Albertina Carri, both of which adopt a critical position with respect to their parents' past in the search for truth. Furthermore, there exist several films and documentaries produced by others who are not children of the disappeared which depict the forced

The children of the detained-disappeared are located at a junction of constructed identities: “the intersection of the individual and the collective,” where they contribute “to the formation of collective memory while simultaneously dealing with their own life story” (Ros, 2012: 27). At this intersection, there also exists a crossroads of testimony: the story of the disappeared parents the children may choose to tell as a witness by proxy and their own testimony of relating to the catastrophe of being a part of this collective. Furthermore, in the cases of those children of the detained-disappeared who choose to (re)present their own stories through film, documentary or literature, they assume what Ana Luengo refers to as the position of *homo agens*, an individual with a voice in the public sphere who can have some impact on the social commemoration of an event (Luengo, 2004: 22). In creating a space to share their story, children of the disappeared further the process of witnessing to directly include the viewer/reader, effectively resulting in a dialectical and “ceaseless struggle” on various levels.

As Laub reports on his work with survivors of the Shoah and their sharing of their own testimony, we can recognize three distinct levels of witnessing and apply them to the case of the generation of children of the detained-disappeared: firstly, out of catastrophe one is witness to oneself, through one’s own memories and experiences; secondly, one is witness through receiving another’s testimonies, through stories told of personal experiences and fragments; thirdly, “the process of witnessing is itself being witness” (Felman and Laub, 1992: 76). In the case of the post-generation of the disappeared, they are witnesses to their own life as “children of”; witnesses by proxy through their parents’ testimonies, often times acquired through investigation, fragments of stories from other family members, friends of their parents, etc.; and finally witnesses to the very process of sharing, telling and receiving that Laub describes as alternating “between moving closer and then retreating from the experience” (*ibid.*). Whereas Dori Laub’s work centered on the interview as the setting of sharing, we propose an understanding of the novel (or any other text) as a space that hosts the back-and-forth sharing, enabling the reader as a witness to the narrator’s testimony as well as to the reading process itself. As we intend to show below, this is, in the words of Felman, the Monument to Witnessing erected on the text which is to house, in part, what we seek to show as the working-through or mourning process.

disappearances of both those who were members of militant groups and those who were not. Perhaps the most well-known is *La noche de los lápices* (1986) by Héctor Olivera.

2. Mourning through Narratives of Absence of Meaning

2.1. The Work of Mourning and Literature

The modern understanding of the work of mourning has its origins in various texts written by Freud during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Written in 1915 and published in 1917, “Mourning and Melancholia” lays the groundwork for the psychical process which a subject in mourning must undergo, distinguishing between what is originally posited by Freud as a healthy process (mourning) and a pathological one (melancholia). Mourning occurs when the subject becomes aware of the reality of the definitive absence of the object of affection; it is important to note that even in Freud’s initial texts on the process of mourning, he proposes that the loss of an abstraction such as one’s homeland, freedom or an ideal can be likened to that of a loved one (Nuckols, 2011: 184). Upon realizing that the object of affection is absent, the libido seeks to detach itself from any connection that may still link it to the lost object, whether they be memories or any other type of emotional association, regardless of the conflictive and violent nature of this detachment. The process of mourning is carried to completion once the libido is able to dislodge itself from all attachments and then project its desire onto another object that would compensate for the original loss.

In opposition to mourning is melancholia, described by Freud as a similar process in which the libido becomes aware of the loss of the love object, but is also characterized, however, by a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the capacity to love, and the inhibition of the libido’s functions. The subject directs its agony inward, undergoing a process of self-rapprochement. This inner criticism towards the ego impedes the libido from placing its desire in another object, for the id identifies the ego with the lost object, resulting in an internal violent struggle which is the fundamental process characterizing melancholia or pathological mourning (*ibid*). Despite having originally differentiated mourning and melancholia as two distinct modes of mourning, Freud revisits this distinction in 1923 in his text “The Ego and the Id,” in which he goes on to establish the basis for the formation of the Superego. In this later text, he admits to not having fully appreciated the importance of the frequency of melancholia, arriving at the conclusion that it is precisely through this impetuous process, and not in spite of it, that the id frees itself from the lost object and thus internalizes the lost object in the ego (*ibid*).

In Tammy Clewell’s article “Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud’s Psychoanalysis of Loss”, the author states that “it is only by internalizing the lost other through the work of bereaved identification [...] that one becomes a subject in the first place, [...] collapsing the strict opposition between mourning and melancholia” (Clewell, 2004: 61). In elucidating the importance of the internal violence characteristic of melancholia, coming to terms with the loss no longer implies the renouncing of the lost object and its subsequent replacement

with another, but rather the internalization of the lost object in order to identify with it and preserve it, modeling one's self on it (Nuckols, 2011: 185). Finally, Clewell points out another important fact which nuances this new understanding of the process of mourning through Freud's correspondence with the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger: "Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute" (Clewell, 2004: 61). That is to say the nature and full realization of the process of mourning is not so defined as originally set out in Freud's original concept of consolatory or compensatory mourning.

In regard to literature and the work of mourning, the idea of a consolatory or compensatory mourning process through literary creation is indeed problematic, for the idea of the literary product as a replacement deprives the original object of its uniqueness.⁷ Clewell warns us of this danger, stressing that to understand the literary product as a substitutive object raises ethical and even political suspicions (idem, 50). This therefore raises the following question: How, then, can literature function as an instrument for mourning without offering the literary product as a substitute for the loss of a loved one or an ideal? Sam Durrant poses a similar question in his book *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*: Should literature seek to do the work of psychoanalysis and transform melancholia into mourning and thus bring about closure and healing? Or should literature, instead, seek "to testify to [...] oppression by somehow transgressing the limits of their own composition?" (Durrant, 2004: 10).

Furthermore, there exists a disjunction between the mourning process for the individual and that of a collective mourning through literature, which consists of overcoming the mourning affliction through memorialization and not, in fact, through forgetting: "curing mourning through memorialization is a strange physic, since the healing power of psychic wounds is usually achieved, if it all, by forgetfulness over time" (Hartman *apud* Nuckols, 2011: 186). The task of literature in the work of mourning is, therefore, to assure memorialization through the text, enabling transmissibility through the imaginative and creative role of fiction.

In light of the aforementioned questions, we propose here an understanding of literary production as serving not as a replacement of lost individuals, stories, or testimonies, but rather as the very dwelling place for representation and an idealization of the lost object. It must be a space for an exchange of testimonies, where the reader can become witness to the very process of witnessing in order to "engender a consciousness of the unjust foundations of the present" in light of suffering, loss and injustice (Durrant, 2004: 1). Furthermore, the text must serve not as a body laid to rest, but rather as a

⁷ See Clewell's article for a more detailed analysis of the concept of consolatory mourning as applied to poetry and the poem as a substitutive object.

testimony “in remembrance of the victims of injustice” in order to “conjure the dead rather than bury them” (Durrant, 2008: 8).

2.2. Narratives of Meaning and of Absence of Meaning

In his previously cited work on identity and the figure of the detained-disappeared, Uruguayan sociologist Gabriel Gatti⁸ makes a fundamental distinction between two social narratives that are presently active. The two positions differ in their understanding and response to the absence left by the forced disappearance of thousands of individuals and forced appropriation of stolen children, which constitutes, in Gatti’s own terms, a catastrophe that destroys identity and language. It is important to point out that Gatti describes these differing narratives as two extremes of an axis on which one can locate and find within the “field of the detained-disappeared” each individual concrete case (Gatti, 2011: 34).

The author dubs the first narrative “narratives of meaning” (*narrativas del sentido*), which are ruled by the imperative of memory, to remember, and seek to return meaning to that which was originally deprived by the catastrophe. These narratives of meaning continue to be the dominant narrative and are more typical in societies in the midst of a transition between authoritarian regimes or emerging from war:

[Las narrativas del sentido] apuestan por re-unir cuerpos y nombres; por rehacer la alianza de un sujeto con las cadenas de filiación que lo hace tal; por recomponer individuos devolviendo sentido a la conexión de esas personas con sus inscripciones como miembros de un Estado (Gatti, 2011: 86).

As examples of this narrative put into practice, Gatti cites the work of professionals whom he calls “militants of meaning”: firstly, the work of archeologists who seek to return a sense of meaning to those ruinous concentration and detention camps, turning them into spaces for memory and museums; secondly, the archivists who determinedly sift through the bureaucratic paper trail of the crimes committed by the dictatorship in an attempt to piece together the fragmented documentation; thirdly, anthropologists who search for the whereabouts of disappeared bodies, linking a name with mere remains; and finally, the work of psychoanalysts who pursue balance for those subjects devastated by the trauma. For Gatti, these acts of memory, dedicated to restoring meaning in the case of deprivation, are intrinsically involved in the work of an ethical and necessary justice. Nevertheless, in

8 Gabriel Gatti himself has several family members who are detained-disappeared individuals: his father, Gerardo, was disappeared in June 1976, and his sister, Adriana, was killed in a confrontation in April 1977. As both a family member of detained-disappeared and a sociologist, Gatti writes “sociology from the stomach” and from the position of his “own shoes” (Gatti, 2011: 17-19).

spite of this, Gatti does claim that these narratives of meaning which seek to make whole that which has been broken, deprived of significance, run the risk of making exiles and political prisoners whole or even converting the detained-disappeared individual into an unblemished subject; the risk centers on the eventual ignoring or de-emphasis of the catastrophe itself (2011: 87). The previously mentioned professionals intend to use the fundamental understandings of identity (familial ties, one name linked to one body) as, in Gatti's words, the very weapon in order to regenerate meaning when the catastrophe already broke down all notions of identity. In the end, Gatti poses the fundamental question: Does the detained-disappeared individual ever really cease to be disappeared? (2011: 145).

The second narrative Gatti recognizes is that of "absence of meaning" (*narrativas de ausencia de sentido*); if the narratives of meaning seek to restore meaning to that which was deprived of it by violent force, the narratives of absence of meaning make explicit that the catastrophe is the only place of enunciation in which these narratives and identity can be constructed (2011: 147). Despite the fact that the catastrophe of the crimes of the dictatorship constitutes a break with identity and language itself, one must defy the verdict that the vacuous lack of a witness to horror is utterly ineffable: "los detenidos-desaparecidos [...] deben decirse y deben pensarse, pero ninguna de las dos cosas debe hacerse de cualquier manera, ni acudiendo a los lenguajes que se usen para pensar, hablar y representar cosas y fenómenos más situados y sólidos" (2011: 18). The narratives of absence of meaning recognize that the catastrophe is not only evident but that it has also given way to the construction to new worlds, identities, and languages; the catastrophe as a place has become institutionalized as a stable and even habitable place (2011: 147). Those professionals cited by Gatti as working within this narrative of absence of meaning speak from the nucleus of the tragedy, emphasizing "inquietudes nuevas, sostenidas por ideas como *resto, quiebre, ausencia, herida, llaga, deslenguaje*" (2011: 150).⁹

Furthermore, Gatti associates this narrative of absence of meaning with the generation of the children of the detained-disappeared. For many of these "post-orphans", as the author calls them, their newfound voice is often one of irreverent parody which searches not for meaning in the catastrophe, but to manage the catastrophe in itself. These elements of criticism can be seen, for example, in the tension between the aforementioned

9 Gatti cites the work of various artists as exemplifying this narrative of absence of meaning: the photography series *Ausencias* by Gustavo Germano, which calls attention to the absence of disappeared individuals by reproducing, years later, old photographs in which the disappeared individual does not appear in the new photograph; the Argentinean group of artists *Escombros, artistas de lo que queda*, who work with ruins, refuse, discarded materials, etc., to highlight the fragmented reality rendered so by the catastrophe of disappearance. See Chapter 5 in Gatti's *Identidades desaparecidas*.

inheritance of the political and social struggle of the children's generation (as evidenced in the creation of H.I.J.O.S.) and the questioning of this inheritance: "No me quería hacer cargo de esa demanda [de continuar en la militancia de mis padres desaparecidos], pero no hacerlo me parecía una traición" (2011: 193). This questioning attitude by what Gatti calls the *outsiders* or "the special ones" is a way of constructing a new testimony atop that inherited from their parents. While at times this does include the denial or the critique of one's origins, the construction of a new identity is nonetheless intrinsically connected to the original testimony:

La parodia no es burla; es un mecanismo sobre el que se conforman narrativas reflexivas sobre "Uno" y "Unos", sobre "Nosotros" y "Otros" [...] [que] pone de manifiesto esta fragilidad del mecanismo: no hay, no, una realidad *original* [...] un "hijo de" ejemplar. Toda identidad es ficción, toda identidad es trabajo de desplazamiento y modificación de los significados. (2011: 199).

For Gatti, while these new narratives do indeed assume the dominant narratives of meaning, associated with familial ties and relations, inheritance, identity etc., and recognize these themes as essential, they also recognize them as avoidable.

3. The Work of Mourning through two novels of absence of meaning

This distinction of two different narratives proposed by Gatti resonates with the previously mentioned question about literature and the work of mourning originally posed by Sam Durrant in his work on postcolonial narrative: Should literature seek to promote a healing process from mourning to overcoming? Or should literature seek to bear witness to injustice, suffering and oppression through the text, without concerning itself explicitly with the act of returning everything to how it once was? We can liken the aim of Gatti's narratives of meaning to that of mourning at the individual level: to return meaning to that which was originally lost or forcibly removed. Likewise, the narratives of absence of meaning are, in our understanding, more in tune with how literature should promote the work of mourning: to establish a space at the very center of catastrophe and loss, as a way to allow the "endless grief to overwhelm the literary work" (Durrant, 2004: 10).

Both Felix Bruzzone's *Los topos* and Mariana Eva Pérez's *Diario de una princesa montonera –110% Verdad–* can be understood as narratives of absence of meaning that can be analyzed as works that participate in act of mourning. Firstly, by way of the aforementioned Monument to Witnessing that is the novel itself, the narrators of both novels bear witness to the process of receiving the testimony of their lost family members, how they deal with said inheritance, the struggle to find their own identity. Furthermore, they give their own testimony of the search for information on their lost family members.

Finally, the homodiegetic narrators connect with the reader from the present, permitting the reader to also assume the role of witness to a testimony that does not seek to reestablish meaning, but simply to confront the past from the present from the locus of tragedy:

the novel is a private experience that makes a singular appeal to each of its readers. And this singularity of appeal is perhaps its peculiar merit, for it allows a certain mediation between the personal and the collective, the ethical and the political as the personal, to work through collective loss, the way in which one's own history, as Cathy Caruth puts it, "is never simply one's own. (Durrant, 2004: 11).

As narratives of absence of meaning, the narrators of both novels construct their own identities from a position that necessarily assumes the permanence of the catastrophe of the disappeared, offering a critique that transgresses the "traditional" notions associated with the generation of the children of the detained-disappeared. Such transgressive elements, which will be exhibited in more detail below in the context of each novel, consist of pushing the envelope on normative understandings which rule the narratives of meaning as explained by Gatti, such as using humor, parodying the work of human rights groups, and even extending the status of the figure of the detained-disappeared to include others, all of which are only possible thanks to the creative character innate in the creative act of fiction. By doing so, Félix Bruzzone and Mariana Eva Perez undertake what Susana Felman calls in her analysis of Albert Camus' *The Plague* a witnessing that is "not a passive function, but an *act* (an *art*) partaking of the very physicality of Resistance"; in the case of these two novels, the resistance would therefore be to resort to these traditional understandings (Felman and Laub, 1992: 109).

3. 1. *Los topos* by Félix Bruzzone

Los topos (*The Moles*), published in 2008, is the first novel by Argentinean author Félix Bruzzone. In the same year, the author also published a collection of short stories entitled *76*, which is also a work of fiction dealing with the theme of the disappeared. Born in 1976, the author himself is a child of the disappeared, with his father having been disappeared earlier that year and his mother shortly after his birth. In an interview with the Argentinean news website *Infojus*, the author highlights the idoneous nature of fiction in representing the tragedy of the detained-disappeared in Argentina during the 70s and early 80s. According to Bruzzone, for children of the disappeared there exists a lack of facts as to what happened which can only be recreated through fiction: "Hay un gran vacío alrededor.

Pero esa falta de datos servía para inventar cosas, como si fuera una plataforma literaria para construir la identidad de los personajes" (Mannarino, 2014).

As the author explains in the previously cited quote, the novel's ability to contribute to a process of mourning stems initially from its immanent nature of being able to construct a narrative where there exists an absence of information. It is on the foundations of fiction's creative nature that I propose we locate Felman and Daub's notion of a Monument to Witnessing: the autodiegetic narration from the present through a child of the detained-disappeared as narrator allows the reader to assume the position of witness to the inherited testimony (fragmented, and often times, as Bruzzone notes, lacking in detail) and the testimony of the narrator himself. Through the reading process, we, the readers, are privy to the narrator's struggle to construct his own identity as a child of disappeared parents, to the search for his lost brother and finally to his demise. With Gatti's notion of narratives of absence of meaning in mind, we propose an understanding of *Los topos* not as a novel seeking to present a fictionalized account of new or lost information to fill the void left by forced disappearance, but as a fictionalized account from within this absence, the difficulties of living with a lack of (his)stories and the final return to the place of the disappeared.

The first axis in this crossroads of testimony to which we as readers become witness through the text is centered on the narrator (whose name we never learn) and his relationship with his grandmother, Lela, who raised the narrator after the disappearance of his parents. From the very beginning of the novel, the narrator reveals how his inheritance as a child of disappeared parents and as a brother to an appropriated child defined his identity. Even as a child, the narrator reveals to us that he was conscious of what had happened to his parents and to his brother, despite his grandparents attempts to conceal certain details surrounding his parents' forced disappearance. The narrator's inherited past marked his identity regardless of his will, as is evident in the narrator's telling of an anecdote when he was young about a friend, Luis, whose mother would not let the narrator play with her son because of his parents' political activities: "la madre le decía que no me invitara más [...] y que tampoco aceptara invitaciones para ir a un lugar donde eran todos comunistas" (Bruzzone, 2008: 19)¹⁰. Living alone with his grandmother, the narrator confesses that it was as if everything revolved only around finding information about his lost brother: "era como si todas las cosas [...] dependieran de la necesidad de encontrar a mi hermano" (*LT*, 12). Lela and her grandson even go as far as to find an apartment close to the ESMA (*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*, Navy School of Mechanics), the last place Lela's daughter was alive and where her other grandson was born before being supposedly stolen

10 For the remainder of the article, we will refer to this edition of *Los topos* with the abbreviation *LT* and the page number.

and appropriated by a family with military ties. Despite the narrator's relation with his grandmother and her delusions about finding and seeing her lost grandson in the faces of strangers ("a veces hasta me daban ganas de seguir a mi abuela en su historia delirante"), he admits to never speaking about his mother (*LT*, 13).

Furthermore, the narrator explains that he never participated in the organization H.I.J.O.S.; in fact, it is his girlfriend, Romina, who begins to participate in the organization, despite not being a child of the disappeared, and even tries to convince the narrator to do so:

Yo, la verdad, nunca me había asomado a HIJOS, y la insistencia de Romina no llegaba a convencerme. Sí me atraían algunas cosas. Eso de escraches, por ejemplo, que para mí eran una forma de revancha o de justicia por mano propia, algo muy de mi interés pero que por cobardía, o idiotez, o inteligencia, nunca concretaba (*LT*, 17).

Despite the narrator's being a child of the detained-disappeared, his choice to not involve himself with the organization is puzzling for his girlfriend, Romina; she even goes as far as to suggest that making the decision to join the group would be the best present he could ever give in memory of his mother on Mother's Day.

As previously mentioned, the group H.I.J.O.S. greatly advanced the visibility of those directly affected by the forced disappearance of thousands. Nevertheless, this gave way to an understanding that the oppression suffered was first and foremost a problem left for direct family members of the disappeared, thus resulting in a disjunction between those who were victims of state terrorism and those who were not. The narrator's decision not to join the organization as explained through the text, and his girlfriend's decision to join after establishing a relationship with him, brings attention to this divide between direct victims and those not directly affected (Ros, 2014: 10). Additionally, the question of blood relations to the disappeared and the decision to participate in political organizations is examined with an ironic tone in the narrator's comment about one of Romina's friends, Ludo, whose aunt had been disappeared in another city, and how they should create more groups called SOBRINOS and NUERAS (NEPHEWS and DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW) (*LT*, 18).

The moment of Lela's death represents a break in the inherited identity for the narrator and it is only in this moment that the narrator begins to construct his own story and his own search for his past. After his grandmother's death, the narrator returns to his childhood home, which means a return in order to recover lost things, one step back but necessary in order to move forward: "volver allá iba a significar la recuperación de muchas cosas, algo fundamental para seguir avanzando" (*LT*, 39). It is during this time that Maira,

(a transvestite prostitute, who, as the narrator later discovers, is also a child of disappeared parents as well as a double agent who obtains information from the police about ex-torturers and ex-murders from the dictatorship in order to track them down and murder them) disappears (or is disappeared). At first, the narrator likens his search for Maira's whereabouts as one and the same as his grandmother's lifelong search for his brother supposedly born while his mother was detained:

Mientras buscaba a Maira, además, empecé a sentir la necesidad de confirmar u olvidar para siempre la versión de Lela sobre mi supuesto hermano nacido en cautiverio, *como si las dos búsquedas tuvieran algo en común, como si fueran parte de una misma cosa o como si fuera, en realidad, lo mismo*. Al principio, por ese motivo, me arrepentí de haberme mudado. Pero después pensé que por algo lo había hecho y que *mi búsqueda, distinta a la de Lela, no tenía por qué necesitar de un lugar para vivir cerca de la ESMA (LT, 41; the emphasis is mine)*.

For the narrator, the love that he has developed for Maira and the decision to search for her constitute an affirmation of his own future and a negation of his past: "A veces [...] me preguntaba si seguir a Maira no era una forma de evitar las averigaciones sobre mi hermano. ¿Qué era primero, salvar el amor o el pasado?" (LT, 47). The narrator is caught here at a crossroads between past and present.

After discovering more information about Maira (that she was born in captivity and also believed that she had a lost sibling, and that she worked as an informant for the police and gathered information in order to kill ex-torturers from the dictatorship), he begins to suspect that perhaps Maira is his lost brother, essentially converting his lost past into the very search for his future. For the narrator, Maira has become what he calls a "post-postdisappeared person": "los desaparecidos que venían después de los que habían desaparecido durante la dictadura y después de los desaparecidos sociales que vinieron más adelante" (LT, 80). This new positioning on behalf of the narrator with respect to Maira (which the narrator calls a "rebirth") and his fruitless search for her in Buenos Aires and even in her own (now abandoned) house represent a sort of liminal state between past and present. This transitional state for the narrator culminates in a series of unfortunate events (the construction workers hired to renovate his house decide to take over the house; his car, documents, and wallet are all stolen as well) that eventually push the narrator to make the decision to flee to the south of Argentina, to Bariloche.

The escape to Bariloche is what divides the novel into two different chapters; the first being the narrator's connection to the past, the inherited past of his parents that has conditioned his entire life, and the second being the assumption of his own search, the

beginning of the creation of his own testimony, in search of his ex-girlfriend Romina, in search of Maira. During his work as a construction worker on a hotel, he meets *el Alemán* (the German), the man in charge of the construction, who brags about picking up transvestite prostitutes and having sex with them, beating them, torturing them, explaining that is not always about sex: “uno puede matar a travestis a cuchilladas, hacerlos desaparecer, enamorarse” (*LT*, 117). The narrator, of course, is reminded of Maira and believes he can find her through *el Alemán*. He decides to assume the identity of a transvestite, lure *el Alemán*, make him fall in love with him and then pay for all that he has done to others, paralleling (and carrying on) the work Maira did in searching for ex-military torturers and murderers from the dictatorship. For the narrator, carrying out this plan is to come closer to the truth about his own family, his own identity, that of his father and that of his brother, of Maira: “el primer paso hacia el hallazgo de mi verdad familiar y de todas las verdades posibles” (*LT*, 143).

After assuming a new identity and receiving advice from Mica, another transvestite, he is able to meet with *el Alemán*, describing the hate he wanted to feel for him, a new hate, a hate not inherited from anyone. During his several encounters with *el Alemán*, however, the narrator begins to develop a relationship with him, to become attached to him, and soon his hate for him dissipates. The narrator assumes the role of the older sibling as well as that of the father to the disappeared Maira, and yet *el Alemán* also begins to fulfill the role of dominant lover as well as father: “yo era el hermano mayor y el padre, yo era mi propio padre y, a la vez, el Alemán era como un padre, alguien que hasta ahora era puro amor, pura bondad, belleza absoluta, y solo había que darle tiempo para que mostrara toda la fuerza de su autoridad” (*TL*, 155). Despite *el Alemán*'s generosity towards the narrator, taking him in, providing for him, caring for him, the narrator soon becomes victim to his benefactor's violent and aggressive bouts and also discovers *el Alemán*'s collection of photographs of mutilated, abused and murdered transvestites. Only then does the narrator reawaken to his original plan of taking revenge for the disappearance of Maira, yet he is unable to carry out the plan due to an injury.

Finally the narrator reveals everything to *el Alemán*: he is searching for Maira and suspects that they could be brothers, or half-brothers. *El Alemán* promises the narrator that together they will find those responsible for Maira's disappearance, and that they will both live together in their house in the woods. *El Alemán* also reveals that the narrator actually reminds him of Maira, that he even looks like her. Unaware of who *el Alemán* really is, whether he was the one responsible for Maira's disappearance, he nevertheless remains with his captor, who promises to pay for surgery for his leg and for him to get breast implants; the narrator even confesses he began to see *el Alemán* as his father. In the end, with his new identity fully assumed, he looks at himself in the mirror and confesses that at times he

believes that it is no longer himself who is there living in the cabin with *el Alemán*, but Maira herself: "por un momento pienso que la que está ahí no soy yo, que es Maira" (*LT*, 189).

He effectively takes the place of the disappeared Maira, uniting himself with her and with his disappeared brother, *becoming a disappeared person himself*. Through the first person narration, the narrator speaks to the reader from the very place of the disappeared, creating in the novel a testimony that reflects the very limbo of the figure of the detained-disappeared: "un espacio de inestabilidad perpetua, una suerte de *limbo permanente*" (Gatti, 2011: 63). The reader is thus able to bear witness to a narrative that in a way broadens the definition of the detained-disappeared to include the reader's own narrator, which constitutes a sort of parody of the traditional understanding of the filial relationships which defined those affected by forced disappearance; Gatti describes Bruzzone's novel as a parody applied not only to the figure of the disappeared, but rather as a parody of themselves, to those "children of" whose identities were always originally forced. This expansion in the understanding of who is a disappeared individual, this redrawing of the boundaries of community, whose success "is measured precisely by its failure to complete itself, its capacity to remain perpetually open to the difference of the other, to the possibility of different others and not yet imagined modes of being" (Durrant, 2004: 111). This construction of a new identity, of a widened community that is anchored in the figure of the post-disappeared, permits the narrator in his own testimony to search for that which was lost as well as the reader to bear witness to "losses that exceed the proportions of the individual subject" (2004: 11).

And yet, the narrator's acceptance to live with *el Alemán* means for the narrator the cessation of all searches, the very ones which gave meaning to life, first in the search for his lost brother which defined his life with his grandmother, and secondly, the search for Maira upon which he began to construct his own history. Ana Ros explains that the uncomfortable, sudden close to the novel poses a question for the postgenocidal society as to their own concessions, negotiations, resignations and transformations (Ros, 2014: 14). It addresses the individual reader "both in his or her singularity and as a member of wider communities" to remember through the text, reminding us that "the possibility of a just future lies in our ability to live in remembrance of the victims of injustice" (Durrant, 2004: 8-9).

It is precisely through the creation of Bruzzone's fictional narrator that the reader, disconnected in space and time, is confronted with the sudden end and permanence of forced disappearance. Whereas the laudable work of those professionals of narratives of meaning as set out by Gatti seek to return meaning to that which lacks it, in the case of *Los topos*, we, as readers, become witnesses to the detained-disappeared's never-ending state of

absence. We are reminded through the narrator's abandoned search for Maira, his assumption of her identity as prisoner of a torturer that the detained-disappeared are continuously being disappeared. The novel is thus converted into a Monument of Witnessing, to which we as readers can ceaselessly turn in order to remember, which is the very essence of the mourning process through art.

3.2. *Diario de una princesa montonera –110% Verdad–*

Published in 2012, Mariana Eva Pérez's novel *Diario de una princesa montonera –110% Verdad–* (*Diary of a Montonero¹¹ Princess –110% True–*) has its origins in a blog started by the author in 2009 and is an exercise in autofiction that questions the role that fiction can play in the construction of an intimate testimony such as a diary¹². The daughter of disappeared parents, as well as the sister to a child born to their detained mother who was later stolen and placed with a different family, Pérez's novel reads as a personal diary or blog, just as the title implies, composed of personal anecdotes, dreams, fragments from personal e-mails, conversations, poems, etc., whose narrator at times addresses the reader directly. Just as we established Bruzzone's *Los topos* as a novel influenced by the social narratives of absence of meaning, Pérez's novel also can be located within this context. Marked by a sharp, sarcastic tone and at times a lack of political correctness, Pérez's narrator is critical of human rights organizations, Argentinean politics, friends and family members, as well as herself. And yet, despite the humor and critiques, the narrator has inherited her parents' struggle as her own, as demonstrated through her activism and participation in various human rights groups and acts of commemoration in the novel.

The narrator also speaks from a crossroads of testimony: firstly, the fragmented stories of her parents which she endlessly tries to reconstruct through stories from her grandparents, photographs, and anecdotes from her parents' former comrades; secondly, her own testimony as a daughter of the disappeared, her search for any information about her parents, her dealing with finding her stolen brother, the construction of her own identity, and her political activism. This junction of stories becomes evident in the title of the novel itself: the narrator accepts with pride (and humor) the title of Montonero Princess,

11 Here "Montonero" refers to the Argentinean leftist Peronist urban guerilla active during the 1960s and 1970s, Movimiento Peronista Montonero, to which both Mariana Eva Pérez's and her narrator's parents belonged.

12 In his article "Hijismo y alienación", Rogelio Demarchi makes an astute observation about the novel and its autofictional character, stating that he understands the author's choice of autofiction to be a political, more than esthetic decision, in order to emit truth from the unexpected place of fiction, rather than to provoke in the reader a sense of bewilderment and skepticism brought on by the author and narrator sharing the same name. (Demarchi, 2012).

inherited from her parents, as monarchical titles are, without regard to the child's own will. Furthermore, the narrator applies the title to other daughters of the disappeared, calling them “orphan princesses”, as well as using the affectionate/humorous term *hiji* to refer to any children with disappeared parents.¹³ The collision of these two testimonies is what constitutes in Pérez's narrator “un lenguaje que muestre, al tiempo, el propio desgarro y la mirada (distanziata) que se le aplica; esto es, se trata de mostrar que uno ocupa, al tiempo, una posición precaria y una posición gozosa” (Gatti, 2011: 154). Thus, the narrator finds herself with a legacy bestowed upon her about which there exists an utter lack of details, the trauma of growing up as an orphan with this inheritance and the decision to carry on with her parent's struggle, as well as establishing her own identity and network of friend, colleagues, and comrades who also share in this experience. The narrator reflects this unusual position in commenting how both she and her father were raised by the same woman, how they are like siblings, and yet they are father and daughter: “Tenemos los mismo padres y nos llevamos igual: bien con Argentina y mal con José. Somos como hermanos. Pero también es mi papa, me cambia los pañales y me da el postrecito” (Pérez, 2012: 24)¹⁴.

The diary or blog becomes the very space to host the narrator's thoughts and dreams about the clashes between these two testimonies. For example, the narrator relates a dream she had just before leaving for an international conference in Algeria on the figure of the detained-disappeared individual in which she is serving in an armed militant group: “Estoy militando en una organización armada. Milito porque mis padres desaparecidos militaban” (*DPM*: 116). The narrator has, in a way, assumed the struggle of her parents, albeit in another way, although here in the dream, her militant work appears more like that of her parents. In another oneiric diary entry, the narrator describes a nightly meeting of friends who are witness to the apparition of a pregnant disappeared woman's ghost, who expresses her desire that her children, those gathered that night, would continue with their struggle (*DPM*, 124). Furthermore, the joining of two lives, two paths and the tension this can produce within oneself and others who find themselves in similar situations can be seen in an entry written by the narrator entitled “La hiji modelo” (The kiddie model), in which the narrator asks herself what ever became of that daughter of the disappeared who was a model, and who in an interview confessed to not sharing the political struggle of her parents (*DPM*: 175).

13 Here the word *hiji* is a sort of diminutive of the word *hijo* or *hija*, whose translation would be something like “kiddie” or “kiddo”.

14 For the remainder of the article, we will refer to this edition of *Diario de una princesa montonera* with the abbreviation *DPM* and the page number.

The narrator also reveals the internal strife that stems from the construction of her own identity, of wanting to distance herself from the world of political activism and struggle, even if momentarily, and the “testimonial duty” as she calls it, to relate her experiences. After a long stay abroad in Europe, the narrator recounts how an ex-colleague from a human rights group from which the narrator was kicked out calls her, and how the narrator is reluctant to tell her that *les droits de l’homme* are no longer her thing (DPM: 10). And yet, only a few entries later, the narrator tells of her opening her new blog, and how the *temita*¹⁵ followed her during her stay in Europe and impeding her writing about other things. Despite her trying to escape if only for a short time from “the issue”, she ultimately cannot, for she has already adopted it as her own struggle:

Me cansé de luchar: hay cosas que quieren ser contadas [...] el deber testimonial me llama. Primo Levi, ¡Allá vamos! [...] miento cuando digo que los *droits de l’homme* no son más lo mío y en la formulación de esa frase que quiere ser provocativa está la mentira, porque justamente los *Droits de l’Homme* sí son lo mío ahora. (DPM: 12).

The final results of this internal tension is, in the words of the narrator, a jet-set princess who fights for truth and justice, and at the same time accumulates frequent flyer miles.

As readers, we are witness not only to the complications of relating one’s story from the junction of two competing testimonies, but also to the very search for truth about her parents and stolen brother the narrator has dedicated her life to. Throughout the novel, there are several entries about the narrator’s participation in ceremonies commemorating the disappeared, plaques and tiles, e-mail exchanges between other children of disappeared parents, ex-comrades of her parents, all of which add to the narrator’s search, although it can only ever be a fragmented truth. This becomes evident in the narrator’s entry that reproduces an e-mail exchange between herself and an organizer of a commemoration event who needed information about the narrator’s parents; the line reproduced from the supposed e-mail is juxtaposed with the added thoughts of the narrator as she wrote the e-mail:

¿Necesitan alguna información más? (*Yo sí, yo toda, no se me pasa, necesito saber qué les hicieron, dónde, cuándo, no tanto quiénes, ellos no me importan,*

15 The narrator uses the word *temita*, the diminutive from the Spanish *tema*, meaning “issue” or “topic”, to refer to the entire topic of forced disappearance during the military dictatorship. It is important to note that the use of the diminutive adds to the word a connotation of tiredness or surfeit.

pero mis viejos sí, cada cosa que les pasó, todo, aunque sea terrible, aunque no duerma Nunca Más, porque si no lo sé, si nadie lo sabe, están tan pero tan solo en su no-muerte.(DPM:33).

And even in the accumulation of fragmented information via her parents' ex-comrades, these third-party testimonies also at times raise even more questions, such as the different *noms de guerre* by which the narrator's father, José, was known to his different companions: "*Matías o Aníbal. Ni siquiera otra identidad, ¡otras dos identidades! [...] mi imagen de vos se compone de miles de vidrios fragmentados*" (DPM: 25).

The internal struggle stemming from this conflict of identities within the narrator is given a dwelling place in the diary/novel (what we have hitherto called the Monument to Witnessing). The writing of the diary allows the narrator to pour into it everything she battles with inside: the narrator writes "que me bendigan todos [los dioses] y cada uno, que me ayuden a escribir hasta quedarme vacía y limpia y nueva" (DPM: 17). The diary, and thus the novel, becomes a receptacle for all thoughts and criticisms, from the narrator's difficult relationship with her stolen, appropriated, and newly found brother to confessing that while she was younger she revered her disappeared parents while at the same time intimately feared their return (DPM, 28). The narrator even addresses her readers directly ("¿Es Verdad o es Hipérbole? Lo dejo a tu criterio, lector"), beseeching them to help her in the eternal exercise of remembering: "Para no olvidarme, lo escribo en el blog, que es como pedirle a un grupo de desconocidos que me hagan recordar" (DPM: 27; 31).

This transmitting of personal testimony, of sharing ideas and experiences, through the diary, and thus through the novel, becomes possible through the very act of fictionalization. Just as Félix Bruzzone pointed out in the previously cited interview, the very lack of details and truth surrounding these narrators' parents' stories is what serves to create a literary platform for the construction of identities and stories. This very idea is echoed by the narrator in *Diario de una princesa montonera* when, while at a trial for war criminals of the dictatorship, she recounts asking herself about the lost short stories from the Argentinean writer Rodolfo Walsh who was also disappeared in March of 1977: "me pregunto cómo serían los cuentos de Rodolfo Walsh que robaron de su casa al día siguiente de matarlo y que ya nadie podrá leer" (DPM: 39). Fiction enables the author to invent and recreate from the emptiness and ask the question "What could have been?" In the case of *Diario de una princesa montonera*, Perez resorts to fiction to add possible missing pieces of information to her personal testimony of being a child of the disappeared, resulting in a liberating flexibility that permits the questioning of traditional ways of speaking about the disappeared:

yo identifico el testimonio, por lo menos en la manera en que está estructurado en la Argentina, con algo que te encorseta muy fuertemente: tiene un orden para contra la historia, hay determinadas palabras para usar [...] quería renunciar a la legitimidad que tengo como testigo para contar esa historia [...] no me interesaba esa vía. La voz testimonial es muy especial, la palabra “testimonial” está muy asociada a la verdad, como si la única forma de hablar de estos temas es que la historia la cuente el protagonista (Wajszczuk, 2012).

Perez embraces the freedom inherent in fiction that permits a plurality of stories, even stories which wear the guise of testimony. The author’s position is evidenced in the title, “110 % True”; that is, what her narrator has to transmit to the reader is so utterly true that it exceeds mathematical possibilities.

Thus, in the case of these two novels, the narrators are the ones who give their testimony which is, nonetheless, a fictionalized testimony, which precisely equips the authors with the tools to confront the difficulties of representation in the face of the catastrophe. As the narrator of *Diario* writes, in an allusion to the celebrated quote attributed to Eva Perón: “Volví y soy ficciones”,¹⁶ fictions which permit the reader to participate in the narrator’s testimony of being a child of the disappeared and in their never-ending search for their lost family members.

4. Conclusions

Tammy Clewell’s warning about the dangers of interpreting the literary product as a substitutive object in the process of mourning and Laub’s understanding of the Shoah as an event without a witness go hand in hand with Adorno’s dictum about writing poetry after Auschwitz. Yet, as Gatti reminds us, the emptiness produced by catastrophe is, nonetheless, habitable and narratable. Our understanding of the role of literature in the process of mourning is not to present a substitute for that which has been lost, nor is it to grant meaning or significance to that which has been deprived of it; in other words, the job of literature is not to carry out mourning with the ends of achieving a cure, but rather to preserve the very act of mourning through the literary product, to bear witness to suffering and injustice through the Monument to Witnessing.

When a catastrophe such as the mass forced disappearance of thousands of individuals is carried out, it necessarily creates a vacuum, literally engulfing bodies, histories into oblivion. Thus, as we approach the void and are faced with the vastness of the lack of

16 The original quote, “Volveré y seré millones” (“I shall return and I will be millones”), has been replaced with “Volví y soy ficciones” (“I have returned and I am fictions”).

testimony and the destruction of language itself, we are forced to innovate new ways of bearing witness to the lack thereof. Herein lies the work of mourning through literature: to transmit a message from the very place of tragedy. Mariana Eva Pérez echoes this imperative to speak, but from within the catastrophe, in the choice to end her novel with an alternative version of the Montoneros' *cri de guerre*: "Ficción o Muerte" (Fiction or Death).

In the face of the catastrophe of the detained-disappeared, both Félix Bruzzone and Mariana Eva Pérez opt for fiction over death. Through the fictional testimony of their narrators, both invite the reader to approach the lacuna of tragedy and become a participant in the witnessing process. In the case of *Los topos*, it transgresses many of our stereotypes and concepts of the children of the disappeared and how they see themselves and then extends the status of the detained-disappeared to include Maira and then finally the narrator himself, ultimately permitting the reader to become witness to the never-ending status of the disappeared. In *Diario de una princesa montonera*, the reader is privy to the narrator's intimate thoughts, her search to reconstruct her parents' testimony, their suffering, and how this affects the narrator in her search for own identity.

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