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Falek, Alexandra

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Forms of Memory in Recent Fictional Narratives from Uruguay: Summoning the Dictatorship in “Mnemonic Interventions”

Alexandra Falek
New York University

How do contemporary writers in Uruguay evoke the civil-military dictatorship (1973–85) in recent fictional narratives? What do these narratives indicate about the workings of memory in post-dictatorship society? This article considers these questions by analyzing three recent fictional narratives from one post-authoritarian country in which there are ongoing legal, political, and social debates about memory and cultural expression with regard to the dictatorship period. The article contributes a reflection on remembrance and recognition of the dictatorship “past” in narratives that make use of a mnemonic practice: a citation or summoning of the dictatorship that I call a “mnemonic intervention.” In this way, the narratives of the three writers I have chosen make some aspect of the dictatorship present in a specific form of memory. The narratives studied here bring together concerns that stretch from Uruguay during the dictatorship into the present. The presence of the interventions in recent Uruguayan narratives is significant in a country in which the dictatorship, and its unresolved issues, are still at the forefront of the political and social consciousness of many citizens.

This article will discuss the play *Malezas* (2006) by María Pollak, and the short stories, “El diecinueve” (1999) by Mario Benedetti, and “La abeja sobre el pétalo” (2003) by Hugo Fontana. These narratives are distinct from others about the dictatorship in that they neither totalize nor directly represent the dictatorship; nor do they overtly narrate violence, fear and other aspects of repression.¹ Rather than describing or representing the dictatorship in a realistic and documentary manner, these fictional works summon the period with a mnemonic intervention that directly cites the dictatorship. These citations conjure the

dictatorship by naming some aspect of the period in a direct reference, exposing it, making it visible. The presence and function of the mnemonic interventions illuminate continuities between the dictatorship and the present. In post-dictatorship Uruguay, closure of the events of the dictatorship has not yet been possible. While some individuals, who are responsible for political violence, repression, and human rights abuses, have been tried and convicted, critical information about the military forces' activities during the dictatorship has not yet been disclosed.²

In March 1985, Julio María Sanguinetti became president, just one year after he obtained the majority nomination for the democratic election. With his new administration, he established an official discourse based on denial and forgetting with regard to the immediate past. The administration promoted an environment of amnesia, which influenced citizens to "move forward." Eduardo Galeano commented on the generalized fear and amnesia that characterized society just after re-democratization in 1985:

El miedo de saber nos condena a la ignorancia; el miedo de hacer nos reduce a la impotencia. La dictadura militar, miedo de escuchar, miedo de decir, nos convirtió en sordomudos. Ahora la democracia, que tiene miedo de recordar, nos enferma de amnesia; pero no se necesita ser Sigmund Freud para saber que no hay alfombra que pueda ocultar la basura de la memoria. (98)

This fear of knowing, listening, and speaking had been rampant under the repressive politics of the dictatorship years. In the newly established democracy this fear was also present, as Galeano suggests above, most evidently in relation to efforts by citizens, artists, and some political activist groups to openly talk about the dictatorship and to begin to demand accountability regarding both detained and missing Uruguayans. Many attempts to bring the dictatorship into public debate were doomed to be "swept under the rug," as Galeano suggests above.

Meanwhile, as historian José Rilla notes, in the new democracy in 1985 Uruguayans had many expectations regarding democratic life and its possibilities:

Muchos incluso llegaron a pensar que con la vida democrática se resolvían muchas cosas de Uruguay. Nunca

como en 1984 tuvimos una especie de consenso tan fuerte conforme al cual había que reponer la democracia y que desde ella se podía sacar a Uruguay de la crisis. La democracia fue respuesta [. . .] pero los problemas de la vida del país están allí. (207)

Yet contrary to citizens' hopeful expectations, the reality of what the newly established democracy could change was bleak. In August 1986, Sanguinetti and his administration drafted the amnesty law that would exonerate military officers for their involvement with the dictatorship regime. Four months later, in December 1986, this amnesty law known as the *Ley de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado*—widely referred to as the Law of Impunity (*Ley de Caducidad*)—conferred impunity to military officers implicated in the dictatorship. The Armed Forces would be free from taking ownership for its crimes. Today, the Law continues to protect them from trials and from having to acknowledge their crimes.³

Benedetti's story "El diecinueve" poignantly illuminates the impunity of one former military officer and torturer who "meets" his victim twenty years after the dictatorship and says to him: "No tengo que dar explicaciones. Ni a usted ni a nadie" (51). After implementation of the Law of Impunity, concerned citizens in social and political sectors publicly denounced it, and established the National Commission Pro Referendum (*Comisión Nacional Pro Referendum*) in January 1987.⁴ Two years later, in April 1989, Uruguayans participated in a national referendum in which they could vote either to annul the Law, which would rescind the impunity granted to former repressors, or to ratify it. The months leading up to the final vote were marked by intense debates. Government officials encouraged ratification, convincing Uruguayans that sustaining the Law was the "healthiest" political strategy for the country and its citizens since it would allow everyone to "move forward." The politicians in Sanguinetti's administration insisted that the "moral well being" of the country depended on refusing to dwell on the events of the dictatorship. They warned citizens that voting to revoke the Law could result in the return to an atmosphere of repression, violence, censorship, and fear. In this environment laden with confusing messages, the majority of Uruguayans voted for ratification, indefinitely extending the Law.⁵ This vote established a legal way for the government to ensure amnesty for military

officers and to strengthen the already pervasive amnesia, described above by Galeano.

Today, almost twenty years since the referendum, former military officials continue to deny responsibility and to withhold pertinent information with respect to the dictatorship. Many others have died (by natural death and/or suicide) literally taking with them key information that could be used to indict former repressors and locate the remains of Uruguayans still missing since the dictatorship period.⁶ While the number of Uruguayan citizens that disappeared and/or were murdered without explanations during the dictatorship is notably less than in neighboring countries under dictatorship such as Argentina and Chile,⁷ the impact of the disappearances in Uruguay has been just as significant. Confidential information about what happened to these people continues to distress the victims' friends, families, and communities. The missing persons, or *desaparecidos*, are constantly remembered and commemorated by Uruguayans who persist in their efforts to turn years of denial into recognition. After carrying the burden of the dictatorship for years, many citizens continue to demand accountability. One way of doing this is to publicly remember the "presence" of the *desaparecidos*. For example, each May 20th they are remembered in Montevideo in the March of Silence. At this march, participants utter the words "Present, always" ('Siempre presente') after the name of each *desaparecido* is read aloud. In the gesture of remembering and evoking the *desaparecidos*, citizens challenge the fact that those who are to blame for the disappearances have not yet taken ownership of their actions.

The particular transitional politics in Uruguay marked by denial and forgetting left countless issues unresolved—namely the lack of accountability and the necessity to disclose relevant information—issues that continue to foment anxieties about memory, knowledge, and the events of the dictatorship. In this context, it may not be surprising that aspects of the dictatorship period continue to surface in cultural production. In contemporary post-authoritarian societies still marked by struggles for and against sustained discussions about the authoritarian regimes—such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay in the Southern Cone region—fictional narratives that summon the dictatorship constitute a critical factor in the continued shaping of cultural memory, as well as in the legal, political, and social activity in these societies. This article deliberates one way that the resurfacing of historical events occurs in fictional narratives published

during the last eight years in Uruguay. Mnemonic interventions, as a particular form of memory, provide an important way to engage remnants of the past in the present. I have developed this concept of “mnemonic interventions” as a way of naming a phenomenon that may be found in a wide range of cultural production including film, literature, theatre, and other visual arts, in Uruguay and in other post-dictatorship societies. Let us consider the concept and significance of a mnemonic intervention more closely.

I propose “mnemonic interventions” as an analytical tool for reading certain narratives, in order to open them up to cultural analysis. I contend that because mnemonic interventions can stimulate some level of response in readers, these readers can become aware of the importance of these interventions and how they operate in their country’s cultural memory. An understanding of the concept of mnemonic interventions and the ways that they function in recent fictional narratives is crucial for broadening the established spaces for memory and knowledge of the period. The established spaces include the March of Silence, the continued publication of testimonial and scholarly narratives about the period, popular music, and other cultural production that engages the dictatorship. Mnemonic interventions, like these other spaces for memory, have a strong mnemonic utility for citizens that choose to engage them. The steady expansion of these spaces is largely a function of a lingering crisis of confidence in regard to citizens’ needs for answers and their demands for justice with respect to the dictatorship. Mnemonic interventions in some recent cultural production contribute to the possibility of a more complex understanding of the dictatorship.

A mnemonic intervention calls forth, or cites a “remain” from the dictatorship. The English word “remain” comes from the Latin “*remanere*,” from *re-* (expressing intensive force) and “*manere*” (to stay).⁸ To remain is “to continue to exist” and “to be left over after other parts have been completed, used, or dealt with.” A mnemonic intervention in the narrative cites aspects of the dictatorship that “continue to exist,” yet most of these aspects have not been “dealt with.” A mnemonic intervention draws the reader’s attention to the dictatorship, while simultaneously inviting the reader to consider remains of the dictatorship still present in contemporary society. The continuity that exists between the past and the present is inextricably linked to the remains that continue to have an effect on contemporary Uruguay, as historian Álvaro Rico suggests:

[. . .] a pesar del cambio de régimen, el autoritarismo deja efectos, secuelas, herencias, traumatismos, cuentas pendientes, que la institucionalidad democrática no solo no resuelve plenamente sino que, por el contrario, silencia y enmascara de muchas maneras, incorpora a su propia estructura legal-institucional o disemina como relacionamientos sociales, culturales y psicosociales cotidianos. El golpe de Estado y la dictadura se vuelven así el presente de la historia, el ‘ahora’ democrático. (223)

Rico articulates the way that certain “traces” of the dictatorship continue to impact multiple aspects of society.⁹ These traces include worsening economic conditions, the extant Law of Impunity, the still missing human remains of citizens that have neither been located nor identified by their surviving families, and the secretive and inaccessible official archives related to the dictatorship. In the narratives studied in this article, the traces of the dictatorship manifest themselves as remains, as aspects of the dictatorship that have not yet been resolved. Pollak, Benedetti, and Fontana inscribe these remains into their texts by means of a summons: they evoke the dictatorship, instigating remembrance as a narrative strategy akin to Andreas Huyssen’s notion that “the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory” (2).

In some ways, citation is similar to representation as a strategy that “instigates remembrance” as Huyssen suggests above, by engaging and maintaining contact with the dictatorship period. Yet conceptually, representation and citation are distinct and function differently. A citation is unlike representation in that it is not a “reproduction in some manner.”¹⁰ In this way, a mnemonic intervention does not symbolically or realistically represent (describe, narrate, or dramatize) events of the dictatorship. A citation emphasizes the idea of a summons or a mention.¹¹ A mnemonic intervention performs the functions that the definition of summoning indicates: it “requires the presence or attendance of” the dictatorship by mentioning it; it “calls into existence” and “calls forth”¹² traces of the period.

Though a mnemonic intervention may seem unimportant at first, upon closer consideration, it may generate further reflection and awareness. Its presence in a narrative illustrates the possibility for engaging the dictatorship without taking on the trauma model

commonly used to approach literature and cultural production related to the dictatorship and its repression. And its purpose is to call attention to the dictatorship, by naming it, contributing to a larger mnemonic register of the dictatorship period. Especially today, when younger Uruguayans come to learn about the dictatorship mostly through mediated memories and mediated information, mnemonic interventions are a narrative concept that presents a way into remembrance, acknowledgement, and awareness. Perhaps they may also provide stimulation for political or social action with regard to the many unsettled matters of the dictatorship period.

Pollak's *Malezas* and Benedetti's "El diecinueve" exemplify a mnemonic intervention that takes the form of a ghost. Each narrative evokes a *desaparecido* who makes his/her absence present to those who were sure they would never see or talk to the dead. Each *desaparecido* makes a spectral appearance that reminds others of his/her absence. This appearance reminds others that nobody has taken ownership for his/her disappearance. Cultural Studies scholar Jo Labanyi draws from Derrida in her discussion of ghosts in post-Franco films and novels from Spain. She observes that ghosts act "as the traces of those who have not been allowed to leave a trace (Derrida's formulation), and are by definition the victims of history who return to demand reparation" (66). While Labanyi's work examines the post-Franco period in Spain—a different context from post-dictatorship Uruguay—her discussion of ghosts in Spanish society after Franco is relevant to this examination of ghosts and remains of the dictatorship in contemporary Uruguayan society.

There are striking similarities between the transitions to democracy in Spain and in Uruguay, such as the strong rhetoric of "moving forward," and the continued absence of justice and recognition at the state level. In both countries, the newly established democratic administrations worked carefully to shirk responsibility for the crimes of the authoritarian regime, insisting on denial and forgetting rather than accountability and justice. Some of the effects that this had in each country were a rapidly decreasing perception and confidence of the country for many of its citizens, a heightened sense of a crisis of competence at the state level, and a slow, but ongoing, emergence of the unresolved issues in many realms of society.

Labanyi turns to Derrida's notion of haunting—"hauntology"—used to explore the ghostly afterlife of Marxism after the death of

Marxism.¹³ In *Specters of Marx* (1994), Derrida discusses the multiplicity and heterogeneity of what he calls the specters of Marxism that continue to haunt Europe in the present. Labanyi draws from Derrida's reading for her analysis of hauntology and ghosts in Spanish society. And I turn to both of these critical works to explore mnemonic interventions in recent narratives, as they evoke a similar notion of "ghostly afterlife." In the first two narratives studied, mnemonic interventions can be observed in the form of a ghost that makes itself present. The ghost's unsettling appearance functions as a persistent reminder of the still-unresolved issues related to the dictatorship. Labanyi writes, "Ghosts can be placated only if their presence is recognized" (71). The specter in the narratives "appears" in order to demand recognition and acceptance, making a space for itself in the present. Let us first examine a scene from María Pollak's *Malezas*:

CLARA. Hoy encontré una foto donde estamos todas, no sé exactamente de cuando es pero . . . ustedes no tenían ni seis meses.

OFELIA. Entonces es del 73.

LEA. A ver . . . pah . . . que horrible . . . parecemos los muppets . . . ¿quiénes nos sostienen?

CLARA. Mostráme . . . somos Sofía y yo . . . qué caras de susto . . .

[. . .]

SOFÍA. ¿Y ésta?

CLARA. No me digas que no reconocés a Azul . . .

SOFÍA. No, la verdad es que no me acordaba . . .

LEA. Azul . . . ¿quién es?

OFELIA. Con esta pasó algo raro.

CLARA. No es el momento de hablar de eso. (35–36)

In this scene, the women are gathered for the 80th birthday party of the family matriarch, Doña Felipa. Nobody has heard from Azul—the figure in the photograph that Sofía does not recognize—since the day she was kidnapped, thirty years ago. Sofía and Clara are Azul's first cousins; Lea and Ofelia are second cousins, from the younger generation. While Ofelia knows that "something strange happened" to Azul, Lea does not recognize her, as nobody in the family has ever spoken about her. After this conversation, Azul, who has been standing next

to her cousins (without their seeing or sensing her spectral presence), stands off to the side of the stage and begins to recount the story of what happened the night that the photograph was taken. Azul's cousin Dulce—one of only three women at the party who can “see” and “talk to” Azul—stands beside Azul, joining in with the other cousins while each woman on stage takes a turn in narrating the events of that night, each one recounting it from her point of view. That night marked the beginning of many years of silence and detachment in the family. The family would be forever distanced by what happened, by Azul's disappearance, by Uncle Ricardo's involvement in her disappearance, and by the repressive atmosphere that permeated society over the next twelve years.

Azul's spectral appearance at the party is the first time that she has “visited” her family since the night that she was kidnapped. Although her family members have never spoken about her since her disappearance, they have been affected by her absence, an uncomfortable reality that lingers obstinately like the weeds (*malezas*) that grow in Doña Felipa's garden. The night of the party Azul has “come back” after thirty years “to do” something: to see her family and to demand recognition of her family's role in her disappearance as well as their silence about it. Derrida explains that a specter comes back “to do” something: “The cadaver is perhaps not as dead, as simply dead as the conjuration tries to delude us into believing. The one who disappears appears still to be *there*, and his apparition is not nothing. It does not do nothing” (97). Azul “personifies” this specter who has returned “to do” something specific.

Of the three women who are aware of Azul's presence and can “see” her—Dulce, Ducle's daughter Catalina, and Irma, the grandmother's unfriendly and straight-faced caretaker who has been part of the family since the time that Azul and Dulce were young girls—it is Irma who resists Azul the most. She knows specific details about what happened the night that Azul was kidnapped, yet she has never shared this with anybody in the family. As such, she is the first to “sense” Azul's presence, and the one who most denies it. Catalina can “see” Azul, yet she does not know her and therefore cannot “recognize” her. Irma, however, does engage Azul in a conversation just before the guests arrive. She seems nervous that Azul has appeared, telling her that it is not in Azul's best interest that she has “come back.” Azul knows Irma well, and responds, sarcastically, that actually it is not in

Irma's best interest that she has come: "No te conviene que esté aquí" (11). After a few more words and the first guest's arrival, Irma warns Azul not to enter the house. Irma strongly denies Azul's spectral presence, as she continues to deny history. She seems especially obstinate in her denial of Uncle Ricardo's complicity in Azul's disappearance, and of her knowledge of this complicity.

It is not until the third scene that Dulce "sees" Azul. The two cousins are in the backyard: Dulce has come to cut roses for her grandmother. She is surprised to see Azul, yet accepts her immediately. Within seconds they are conversing as if they have been there together forever, as if Azul had never become an unexplained absence. Dulce confesses that fourteen years ago she found Azul's diary, and that today she was going to reveal a "secret" to her cousins. She was finally going to expose the fact that Uncle Ricardo was involved in Azul's disappearance. She says to Azul, "Les voy a contar lo que dice el diario. Al fin de cuentas son nuestras primas [. . .] nuestras amigas [. . .] además, yo se los prometí" (31). Azul is quick to correct her, remarking that they "were" friends and cousins, that things are different now after so many years of denial and forgetting. Dulce gives her reasons for having taken so long to tell the cousins about the diary and the family secrets: they never got together again after Azul's disappearance, and so she had nobody to tell, and nobody to trust. She had been afraid then, and that fear had never gone away: "[. . .] sólo tenía miedo [. . .] miedo de tenerlo [. . .] miedo de mostrarlo [. . .] miedo de no tenerlo" (33). In a later scene, Catalina finds the diary and devours the pages of her aunt's reflections. When Irma sees that Catalina has the diary, she demands that Catalina give it to her; she recognizes the diary and knows its contents. Catalina refuses: "No es tuyo. Para qué lo querés? Para que no se sepan las verdades que están escritas aquí [. . .] muchas verdades" (61). Catalina knows that the "leyenda familiar" about Azul is marked more by lies than facts. Just after this quarrel between Irma and Catalina, Azul makes an "appearance" before Catalina. Yet Catalina has never met her and believes that she is a friend of Irma's.

Some of the cousins claim not to remember Azul. Others, like Ofelia and Lea, were very young when she disappeared. None of them have acknowledged what happened to her. Dulce welcomes and accepts her, recognizing her spectral presence. She is ready to talk about what happened, ready to live with this ghost. Her acceptance

is similar to Derrida's proposal to keep ghosts close, and allow them to come back. He writes that "one must not chase away" or forget what he calls "untimely specters" because forgetfulness, he writes, "will engender new ghosts" (87). Irma, on the contrary, shuts Azul out as something frightening, and tries to forget her. She cannot tolerate Azul's spectral presence. For her, Azul is an obstinate memory that continually resurfaces, a nuisance that will not go away. Irma opens herself to Derrida's idea of the engendering of new ghosts: the more she attempts to deny Azul's spectral presence by pushing her away, the more forcefully Azul returns.

Like Azul, who is unrelenting, the weeds that Irma cannot eliminate grow back every morning, a bit taller than the morning before. It is worth noting that there is a particularly obstinate patch of weeds that grows just above the pit where Azul's friend Roberto used to hide arms during the dictatorship. Azul tells Catalina about Irma's futile struggle to do away with the weeds: "Todas las noches corta las malezas [. . .] y todas las mañanas las encuentra crecidas, para ella es un misterio" (60). Like the weeds highlighted in the title, Azul persistently leaves a "trace" of herself: she makes room for herself in the present and permits her cousins to have their space as well, with or without her, aware of the fact that they may never ask more questions about her or their family's involvement in her disappearance. Azul allows the living, her family members, to have their space in the present. She does not insist, and she does not make demands, as the ghost in Benedetti's story "El diecinueve" does. Azul leaves her cousins "in peace," even though they refuse to recognize their past. Yet she does not go away, but instead makes a space for herself in the present too.

Malezas is one of the most recent—and one of the few—theatrical performances written in Uruguay to evoke the dictatorship period and its impacts on families, society and daily life, thirty years after the return to democracy.¹⁴ One possible reading posed by the play is that it speaks to the unresolved issues related to the dictatorship that continue to linger in contemporary society. It calls spectators' attention to the still-uncertain status of disappeared Uruguayans, and to the continued denial and injustice with regards to the dictatorship. Azul's spectral presence forces Irma to acknowledge the continuity between the dictatorship and what Rico calls the democratic "now." It forces Irma to recall the events of the past, to remember the night of Azul's disappearance, and to recognize that her disappearance still

has a significant impact on the family, despite a general desire to leave the “past” behind.

Pollak’s recent play is similar to Benedetti’s story “El diecinueve” in that it is a reminder and a commemoration of still-unaccounted-for Uruguayans, and still-unrecognized crimes. Diecinueve (in “El diecinueve”) and Azul (in *Malezas*) are ghosts that have “come back” for the first time after more than twenty years. Both narratives communicate a critique of the still extant Law of Impunity. In both narratives, a mnemonic intervention is present in the form of a ghost. Pollak and Benedetti conjure specters from the dictatorship, situating the interventions in an environment of anxiety in the present. The specters in both narratives have come back “to do” something: they desire a space for themselves in the present and stress the impossibility of bringing about a definitive “end” to the dictatorship. In order to carry out these objectives, Diecinueve and Azul make a spectral appearance, breaking through the surface of the narrative in a mnemonic intervention, demanding acknowledgement from those they have come to visit and addressing the unfinished business.

In Benedetti’s story, Diecinueve is the specter of a *desaparecido* who, like Azul, performs the above-discussed functions of a citation: he “requires the presence” of the dictatorship, directly mentioning it, “calling it into existence,” and “calling forth” himself as an absent person. “El diecinueve” imparts awareness of a particular aspect of the dictatorship, drawing the reader’s attention to the trans-national collaboration between dictatorial regimes—Plan Condor—in the Southern Cone region. It tells the story of Farías, a Uruguayan military officer, torturer and death flight operator during the dictatorship, and Diecinueve, an Argentine citizen and supposed “subversive” militant during the same period. Farías and Diecinueve have a face-to-face encounter at Farías’s home, where he has been living “in peace” despite the crimes he committed years before. Diecinueve does not have a proper name other than the number assigned to him before he was thrown to his death from a plane—like many Argentine and Uruguayan citizens during the dictatorships—into the Río de la Plata, the river that forms part of the border between Argentina and Uruguay.

Farías desperately wants to believe that Diecinueve is just a ghost in his imagination, a ghost that has appeared to cause trouble, and therefore must be avoided and denied. However, Diecinueve insists

that he is not a ghost, and that against all odds, he survived the fall from the plane that was meant to kill him. His appearance, breaking the surface of Farías's present, demands acknowledgement. His presence guarantees that Farías will remember Diecinueve and all of his other victims "que aún no contrajeron el vicio de resucitar" (50) as Diecinueve sarcastically says to Farías. Diecinueve wanders into the narrative and into the life of his former torturer. He has appeared in order "to do" something: he wants Farías to "see" him and to remember him. Diecinueve has come back to remind Farías that he is still "there" and that Farías must accept him and admit his presence: "Sólo quería que me viera," (50) he says to Farías. He also wants Farías's family to "see" him. Diecinueve promises to not tell them who he "really" is, yet he knows that their "seeing" him will further confirm the "reality" of his presence. Farías tries to keep his calm and "invites" Diecinueve into his house, introducing him as a friend. Meanwhile Farías continues to convince himself that Diecinueve is just a ghost. Did he really not drown in the river with the others? "Esto no puede ser," thinks Farías (50), his shock evident as he introduces this ghost "friend" from his dark past to his wife and children.

Shortly after, Farías escorts Diecinueve to the front gate and breaks into tears, clearly shaken by his unexpected "visitor." Suddenly he stops sobbing, as if attempting to disallow this moment. He shouts, "¡Sos un fantasma! ¡Un fantasma! ¡Eso es lo que sos!" (53). But these words do not make Diecinueve go away. Instead he answers: "Por supuesto muchacho" (now putting aside any hint of respect by using the informal *tú* form), "Soy un fantasma. Al fin me has convencido. Ahora limpiáte los mocos y andá a llorar en el hombro de tu mujercita. Pero a ella no le digas que soy un fantasma, porque no te lo va a creer" (53). Now that Farías's wife has also "seen" Diecinueve, Farías can no longer believe nor deny Diecinueve as a ghost, he will have to respond to Diecinueve and to what Derrida describes as a ghost's "demands that one take its times and its history into consideration" (101). Farías cannot comprehend Diecinueve's appearance: he is from "the past" and should not have a space in the present; he should not be "allowed" to come back. Yet insisting on his presence is the work that Diecinueve has come to do. By making a space for himself in the present, he forces Farías to remember, and to "deal with" him again.

After so many years of denial and silence, Farías is deeply unsettled by Diecinueve's sudden "appearance." Diecinueve's visit—distressing

for Farías—summons the dictatorship period in the present, making it “visible” for Farías. Diecinueve’s presence reminds Farías of his still denied responsibility for past crimes; it interrupts Farías’s pleasant and unremorseful life of contemptible impunity. Yet, as Derrida writes, “the more life there is, the graver the specter of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it” (109). Diecinueve’s appearance, or “imposition” as Derrida states, is both “grave” and “heavy” for Farías. What he most loathes is Diecinueve’s demand that he “answer” for his past crimes. Diecinueve expects acknowledgement from Farías, who now has to “answer for the dead, to respond to the dead,” as Derrida writes. Diecinueve is an interruption in Farías’s life. Like Azul in *Malezas*, Diecinueve is a specter that summons the dictatorship, stimulating remembrance and acknowledgement as a remain that persists in being. Like Irma in *Malezas*, Farías rejects Diecinueve, trying to absolutely avoid and to refuse this ghost who has wandered back into his life. After so many years of impunity, forgetfulness and denial, Farías, like Irma in *Malezas*, has opened himself to Derrida’s idea of “engendering new ghosts” (87). The more Farías tries to deny Diecinueve by pushing him away, the more likely other specters from his dark past will also make themselves present.

As we have seen, a mnemonic intervention can take the form of a specter—as in *Malezas* and “El diecinueve”—that functions as a trigger, making what remains of the dictatorship visible for both protagonists in the narrative and for readers. An intervention can also take the form of a direct reference to some aspect of the dictatorship—a quick and direct summons of a name, place, date, or other detail unambiguously linked to the period—as illustrated in Fontana’s short story “La abeja sobre el pétalo.”

In the first pages of this story, a supposedly “objective” narrator directs the reader’s attention toward Miguel, descriptions of his small town, and its inhabitants. He does not name “exciting” things. Instead, he narrates the predictable characteristics that are the lifeline of the town, such as the weekly dances in the main plaza. Four pages into the story, Miguel says, “Cualquiera hubiera dicho que los bailes de la plaza no se iban a terminar nunca, pero nunca es un adverbio de tiempo y el tiempo es equívoco” (54). By using the imperfect, “no se iban,” with the infinitive, “a terminar,” Miguel insinuates the probability of a future action, emphasizing that at one time nobody in town thought that anything could disrupt the

regularity of these dances. By using this grammatical construction, he intimates that the dances are indeed about to come to an end. Even this seemingly unchangeable weekly dance was about to undergo a major transformation in ways that nobody could have expected. He remembers a particular dance: “Un domingo de diciembre de 1971, algunas semanas después de que el presidente Jorge Pacheco Areco pasara por el pueblo en plena campaña electoral, hubo un baile organizado por un grupo de jóvenes que se reunían semanalmente en el salón parroquial” (54). Miguel’s memory of this dance conjures up a specific event that took place on a particular Sunday in 1971.

His summons of this dance is significant for three reasons. First, it was the last dance that was held in town before the *Golpe* in 1973. Second, the dance took place after Pacheco Areco had been to town at the height of his electoral campaign. Readers may recognize the name Pacheco Areco, a household name during the years leading up to the dictatorship.¹⁵ Miguel then describes the delightful environment of the dance: the music, the musicians, and the foxtrot, two-step, waltzes, and slow songs that the couples danced. These details establish both the familiarity and the importance of the dances. Finally, he names a third matter related to the dance, the reference point in his memory to a major disruption in his personal life: it was just before or perhaps right after that dance that the horrifying rumor—that his parents were siblings—began to spread. He does not remember exactly when the rumor began, but his memory of this shocking rumor, an abrupt change in his previously uneventful life, is unmistakably linked to this last dance before the *Golpe*.

His memories of this dance function as a catalyst for recollecting other drastic events that occur in the town during this same period. Many things begin to change just after the dance: “Tuvieron lugar otros hechos, acaso mínimos, insignificantes, que mi memoria no ha retenido por debilidad o desidia” (56). Miguel narrates three events that he remembers from this turbulent period, two of which are discussed here. As each one transpires, news and rumors about them travel quickly from one neighbor to the next. The town’s inhabitants seem unprepared to react or respond to these unprecedented events. As a result, a general environment of fear, confusion, and widely spread rumors settles into daily life. Each event that Miguel narrates is a mnemonic intervention in that it cites a specific aspect of the changing social environment before and during the dictatorship.

The first event is the day that Eloísa gives birth to a baby with two heads. This shocks the town for two reasons. First, everybody thought that Eloísa, who had moved to the town in her forties, was “destinada a la más injusta soltería” (56); nobody ever expected that she would have a baby. Second, the town’s inhabitants have never witnessed or heard of a birth of such an anomalous creature. The rumors begin to fly: “La noticia corrió como reguero de pólvora,” says Miguel, and this monstrous birth shocks the town, dominating all conversations: “La pobre Eloísa tuvo un niño con dos cabezas fue lo único que se escuchó por días y días en todos lugares del pueblo” (56). People stop in the middle of the street to talk about what has happened, just to say it out loud. Some people even empathize with Eloísa’s bad luck: “aquella desdichada mujer no se merecía semejante suerte” (57). But in the end, Miguel remembers, everybody was overtaken by so much fear that there was little space to have compassion for Eloísa. The town’s inhabitants had to take care of themselves and their families first. They had to contain their own fears and circumstances, afraid to talk to the neighbors yet desperate to understand what was occurring in their town.

Miguel transmits this atmosphere of disbelief, confusion and fear by means of recounting this event that so radically upset life in this small town. Not only is this birth upsetting to Eloísa, her neighbors, and the rest of the town’s inhabitants, but it even manages to upset the normal activity within the church. When Eloísa decides that she wants to baptize the baby, the priest is not sure whether he must perform the baptism once or twice. After all, the baby has two heads. He must ask for advice from the archbishop, who tells him to consult a book published in Palermo in 1745, hoping to clarify the procedures for such an exceptional circumstance. But the baby dies before there is time for even one baptism. The perplexity amongst the clergy resembles the general puzzlement of the town’s inhabitants. And not only does this event bewilder the town’s inhabitants and the church, but journalists also come from the capital city to report on the birth of Eloísa’s two-headed baby. Even Pipo Mancera, a well-known television broadcaster at the time, sends telegrams from Buenos Aires asking permission to come with his team to shoot for the next edition of *Sábados Circulares*, a popular television program aired on Saturdays. Everybody seems intrigued yet disgusted. While they want to get close and to understand what has happened, they are uncomfortable

with the strangeness of the situation. Unusual events have begun to transpire in this quiet and-uneventful-place, forever agitating the calm tediousness that previously characterized life in this town.

Two weeks after Eloisa gives birth to her monstrous baby, María Elvira delivers Siamese twins. Like Miguel's memory of the impact of the two-headed baby, this memory conjures up a specific event that takes place after the last dance. The memory corresponds to another phenomenal occurrence. María Elvira's Siamese twins are unlike all others: one is born sitting right on top of the other. Like Eloísa's two-headed baby, María Elvira's babies do not survive very long. Both mothers must bury their babies within the first month of life. Miguel refers to the birth of the Siamese twins as a "live metaphor" of the times: "Una metáfora viva, casi una denuncia para tiempos convulsos en los que la gente iba presa y era torturada hasta la muerte por cualquier irreverencia" (57). Here Miguel cites the dictatorship by both criticizing and naming the imprisonment and torture carried out by the military. This second unparalleled occurrence that has shocked his town again echoes the repressive and violent atmosphere of the country under dictatorship. People in town are surprised to learn about these perplexing events (Eloísa's two-headed son and María Elvira's twins) just as Uruguayan citizens are surprised to learn about the imprisonment, torture, disappearance, and death organized by the military regime. As noted earlier, the news of the Siamese twins, like all news during this period: "corrió como reguero de pólvora" (58). Miguel repeats this comment frequently, and in each repetition, the image of the quickly spreading rumors gains intensity.

There are so many rumors about the grotesque births in this town that the news eventually reaches the capital city: "[. . .] llegaron al despacho del presidente Juan María Bordaberry, el sucesor de Jorge Pacheco Areco" (58). Again, Miguel directly cites the dictatorship, here by naming Bordaberry, who executed the *Golpe* in 1973, and again, Pacheco Areco. One of Bordaberry's advisors encourages him to "make an appearance" in this previously uneventful town, as the situation in the country is rapidly worsening due to "la crisis institucional, pedidos de renuncia, subversión, aumento de pobreza, prolegómenos del golpe de Estado" (58). Miguel's memory of María Elvira's twins—and all of the memories that he conjures up related to this turbulent period—corresponds to the rapidly deteriorating social and political situation in his town and in his country. Up to this point,

he has evoked numerous aspects of the dictatorship without describing or representing it realistically. He summons the dictatorship, names the problems, and then continues where he had left off.

He moves on to narrate the third incident that categorically shakes his town: the day that the recently arrived soldiers run over a pig that has the face of a little girl. He cites the dictatorship by naming the new and now indefinite presence of the soldiers in town, their inexplicable actions, and the seemingly uncontrollable freedom with which they carry out their “business.” And then he explains that what came next: “*llegó el olvido*” (59). On a literal level it is not hard to imagine how these events have both paralyzed and disturbed the town. The oblivion that Miguel names also refers to the denial and forgetting, or amnesia, so actively encouraged by Sanguinetti’s government just after re-democratization, which intended to move the country forward after so many years of violence and repression.

For Miguel and the other astounded inhabitants in town, the period during which these unprecedented events take place seems endless. And then finally, in one more unexpected turn in the narrative, Miguel informs readers of his complicity in the bizarre events. Nobody had ever suspected that Miguel—or anybody in particular—would take ownership for these occurrences that so drastically disturbed the town. Miguel has kept silent for ten years, never once admitting responsibility or disclosing information with respect to the events. He has refused to recognize his involvement, living unbothered amongst his neighbors. Rather than publicly acknowledging responsibility, Miguel “*cundió el silencio durante años*” (59). His silence echoes the prolonged silence of former repressors and collaborators of the dictatorship in Uruguay.

What might we think about Fontana’s fascination with physical defects and “monstrous” deformities in the story? Not only do these peculiar creatures have physical defects, they all die prematurely. We can read the physical defects as a metaphor for the dangers and social crisis brought on by the state imposed by violence and repression. The dictatorship regime caused distortions and deformities, among citizens, among families, among communities, and within the nation as a whole. Momentous changes have profoundly and permanently shocked Miguel’s small town, greatly disrupting its routine activities and social structures. The uncanny events do not reproduce the dictatorship period, yet they directly cite it, as with

Miguel's naming of Bordaberry and Pacheco Areco. While some readers may not recognize the allegory of the aspects of the dictatorship and the transition, readers from Uruguay will be aware of this implicit association made identifiable by Fontana. The story has its strongest impact by citing the dictatorship in mnemonic interventions, that is, by making aspects, memories, and information of the dictatorship present and "visible."

Malezas, "El diecinueve," and "La abeja sobre el pétalo" illustrate the shifts in form, perspective, and content of literary narratives that engage the dictatorship since re-democratization. Many early post-dictatorship narratives made use of the explicit mode of direct representation by realistically describing the everyday fear, loss, violence, and repression common during the dictatorship.¹⁶ Like other cultural works, literary narratives will continue to evolve as new political and legal decisions take effect in Uruguay, and as the disclosure of information regarding the dictatorship continues.¹⁷ These three recent narratives in which readers can observe mnemonic interventions contribute to an ongoing insistence on disclosure and investigation. For Uruguayans that do not have personal memories of the dictatorship and that learn about this period through mediated information, fictional narratives that cite the dictatorship by means of mnemonic interventions provide an accessible space for memory and awareness. This is not to say that the interventions will provide readers with personal memories if they do not already have them, as this is an impossible endeavor. Rather, the interventions contribute to a mnemonic register, to an evolving cultural memory, by imparting information, awareness, and fictionalized memories in the narratives. Mnemonic interventions bring readers into direct contact with the dictatorship. Perhaps readers of these narratives do not expect to come upon this kind of reference, as they might expect in a testimonial narrative. Perhaps readers may not know what "to do" with this reference, or mnemonic intervention, should they decide "to do" anything with it at all. The ways that readers respond to these narratives will vary according to their relationship to the dictatorship, and they will also have important implications for how they think about the dictatorship in the present, a constantly evolving process.

Since the return to democracy in Uruguay, there has been an ongoing debate regarding the ways that citizens remember and discuss the dictatorship in the public sphere. Some people concur with the need

for continued debates and inquiries about the dictatorship. They seek to maintain remembrance and awareness of the period, demanding the disclosure of classified information. They argue that it is not yet possible to relegate the dictatorship to the past (in the sense of Derrida's notion of hauntology as the past that is not and yet is there). Others are resolute in their appeals to leave discussions about the dictatorship behind. This polarization is especially relevant among younger Uruguayans born in the aftermath of the dictatorship, some of whom know little about this period. The narratives studied have a mnemonic utility: we can consider their social value in the ways that they provide a significant source of cultural memory. What is important is the presence of the mnemonic interventions in the narratives, as they offer a space for readers to engage, on some level, the dictatorship and its critical presence in contemporary life.

Notes

1. Many of the first post-dictatorship works published in the late 1980s and during the 1990s were based on the personal testimonies of first hand and secondary accounts of torture, and detention. I include only a few here: Fernando Butazzoni, *El tigre y la nieve* (Barcelona: Virus, 1986); Carlos Martínez Moreno, *El color que el infierno me escondiera* (Mexico: Nueva Imagen, 1981); Mauricio Rosencof, *Conversaciones con la alpargata* (Montevideo: Arca, 1985); Mauricio Rosencof and Fernández Huidobro, *Memorias de Calabazo* (Montevideo: Tae, 1987).

2. Former dictator Juan María Bordaberry and his chancellor Juan Carlos Blanco were tried and imprisoned in 2006, finally convicted for the deaths of politicians Zelmar Michelini and Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz; as well as former *Tupamaros*, Rosario Barredo and William Whitelaw, who were all killed in Buenos Aires as part of Plan Condor. The *Tupamaros* [Tupamaro National Liberation Movement] was a guerilla organization in Uruguay in the late 1960s. Bordaberry served a short prison sentence (seventy-two days) beginning in November 2006, in Central Prison No. 10 in Montevideo, before he was permitted to move to his son's property in Carrasco (one of Montevideo's wealthiest suburbs) due to poor health conditions. Prior to this last conviction, eight former military and police officers active during the dictatorship were prosecuted in September 2005, and related to the disappearance of Adalberto Soba, another Uruguayan who was "disappeared" in Buenos Aires in 1976.

3. Under Article 4 of the Law of Impunity, investigating what happened to detained and disappeared Uruguayans in Argentina is allowed. Although it

is only since Tabaré Vázquez announced in 2005 that he intended to enforce Article 4 that these investigations have been under way. To date, this has permitted the re-examination of the case of the assassinations of Michelini, Gutiérrez Ruiz, and Soba in Buenos Aires. The incarceration of Bordaberry and Blanco in 2006 is one example of this category of investigation.

4. They secured the 600,000 signatures required to call a referendum in which citizens would be able to vote to annul or to ratify the Law.

5. The referendum was ratified with the Yellow vote, indefinitely preserving the Law of Impunity. There was an impressively high turnout of voters (84.7 percent), yet 56.6 percent ratified the Law of Impunity. In Montevideo, 56.6 percent of the voters voted Green against ratification, but it was not enough to carry the rest of the country. Historian Benjamin Nahum notes in *Breve historia del Uruguay independiente* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1999) that voters from the interior provinces—who had suffered less repression during the dictatorship than those living in Montevideo, and who greatly feared any kind of military backlash—overwhelmingly voted Yellow. Luis Roniger discusses the details of the Law of Impunity and the referendum in Luis Roniger, “Olvido, memoria colectiva e identidades: Uruguay en el contexto del Cono Sur,” *La imposibilidad del olvido: Recorridos de la memoria en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay*, comp. Bruno Gruppó and Patricia Flier (La Plata: Ediciones al Margen, 2001) 151–78.

6. For example, the remains of communist militant Ubagesner Chaves Sosa were “found,” identified, and buried in the Cemetery del Buceo in Montevideo in 2006. It should not be overlooked that recent developments and “new” information such as the “discovery,” or acknowledgment, of human remains of a number of *desaparecidos* has caused a flurry of new investigations of the dictatorship period. In March 2006 human rights groups demanded the need to challenge the unconstitutionality of the Law of Impunity. This claim of unconstitutionality argues that it violates the republican principles of the separation of the three powers of State, giving the government the power to make the decisions regarding judicial cases of this nature. See “*Debate de ciernes: interpretativa de la Ley de Caducidad o su derogación*,” *La República* 1 March 2006.

7. Approximate numbers of disappeared persons suggest 210 in Uruguay, 30,000 in Argentina, and 11,000 in Chile.

8. “remain, *n.*” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989.

9. Translation is my own. Rico suggests that two of the effects that are resulting from the dynamics of social and political authoritarianism from 1967 to 1984 are: 1) the violation of human rights due to institutional impunity, which has affected the ways in which Uruguayans relate to each other and to the institutions in society; and 2) the effects of state terrorism and systematic torture, which has caused the devaluation of life and of the

integrity of the human body, where the devaluation and disintegration has moved to micro-social levels, private and intimate, affecting unprotected citizens most aversely.

10. “representation, *n.*” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989.

11. “citation, *n.*” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. Definitions include: 1) the written form of summons, or the document containing it; 2) a summons; 3) enumeration, recital, mention.

12. “summon, *v.*” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989.

13. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

14. *Kiev*, written by Sergio Blanco and directed by Mario Ferreira is a more recent play about the dictatorship, performed in 2007 by the *Comedia Nacional* in Montevideo.

15. Areco was elected president in 1971 and implemented the beginnings of the political, economic, and social repression that was solidified with the *Golpe*.

16. An example of this kind of realistic representation is the intensely descriptive novel *El tigre y la nieve* (1985) by Fernando Butazzoni. This novel narrates the tragic story of a young Uruguayan woman who is kidnapped along with her political militant boyfriend in Argentina, taken to a detention camp in Córdoba, tortured, and freed only after assenting to a relationship with the camp’s director. See Note 1 for more examples.

17. Two important political changes have been, Tabare Vázquez becoming the first leftist party *Frente Amplio* president and the recent decision to remunerate former political exiles as well as former political prisoners, who were imprisoned for a significant amount of years during the dictatorship. With regard to the disclosure of “new” information: When Uruguayans voted in the referendum in 1989, they did not know—as they now do—many details about the crimes committed by the military and police. For example, Uruguayans now know about the death flights operated by the Argentine and Uruguayan military, in which leftist, and citizens considered to be a “subversive” threat to the dictatorial regime were pushed to their death in the *Río de la Plata*. And they, also, now know about Plan Condor in which dictators from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay collaborated together, sharing intelligence in their efforts to rid their countries of the supposed dissident guerillas. Bordaberry and Blanco’s recent imprisonment was the result of this “new” information. See Note 2.

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