

Bearing Witness through Fiction

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**Abstract:** In her article, "Bearing Witness through Fiction," Carolina Rocha explores the ways in which three Argentine writers grappled with their roles as public intellectuals and witnesses to acts of terror, undeniable violence, and human rights abuses during the most recent military dictatorship. By examining three narrative texts written from the mid-1970s to the late 1990s *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (*Strange Things Happen Here*) (1975) by Luisa Valenzuela, *La casa y el viento* (*The House and the Wind*) (1984) by Hector Tizón, and *El árbol de la gitana* (*The Tree and the Gypsy*) (1997) by Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, she argues that because of the public role assigned to writers, their accounts could not be disengaged from a tense sociopolitical reality. Hence, Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz provide a testimony of their bearing witness to the political turmoil of the late 1970s blending it with and in their fiction. Rocha focuses on the crucial role played by fictional narrative in bearing witness to catastrophic events.

**Carolina ROCHA****Bearing Witness through Fiction**

In Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* Paulina, a victim of the state-sponsored terrorism that took place during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte (1973-1990), asserts her right not only to speak, but also to revisit the trauma triggered by her torture and rape at the hands of Chilean repressors: "And I can speak -- it's been years since I murmured even a word, I haven't opened my mouth to even whisper a breath of what I'm thinking, years living in terror of my own" (37). Paulina comes to articulate the unspeakable violence perpetrated against her by overcoming the silence that made her a prisoner of her own fear. By finding the words to speak, she comes back from her self-imposed *insilio* and, in the process, regains her sense of being alive. Paulina's plight of silencing traumatic events is easily understood. As a survivor of political violence, she faced two choices: completely erasing the images of trauma through silence, or speaking of it constantly, as Primo Levi chose to do it (on this, see Agamben). If victims of human rights abuses could opt between keeping silent or speaking up, could writers who witnessed the deterioration of civil liberties resort to silence as a valid tactic for dealing with trauma? Put a different way, was it possible to write fiction disengaged from the sociopolitical reality? In this article, I explore the ways in which three Argentine writers grappled with their roles as public intellectuals and witnesses to acts of terror, undeniable violence and human rights abuses, and how this witnessing was translated into their literary works. I examine three narrative texts written from the mid 1970s to the late 1990s that bear witness, albeit to different degrees, to the events in the months immediately before and after the coup of 1976. The texts are *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (*Strange Things Happen Here*) (1975) by Luisa Valenzuela, *La casa y el viento* (*The House and the Wind*) (1984) by Hector Tizón, and *El árbol de la gitana* (*The Tree of the Gypsy*) (1997) by Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. There are several reasons for grouping these texts. First, they all depict the escalation of violence before and immediately after the *coup d'état* of 1976. Second, as works of writers who were forced into exile in the mid 1970s, they share the tension of revisiting a traumatic period of contemporary Argentine history that left indelible marks both on the lives of these authors and on the subject matter of their writings. Finally, by bearing political testimony through fiction, these works both comment on a sociopolitical reality as well as on the process of writing about an age of terror. Consequently, I discuss the strategies deployed by these authors to memorialize events and victims alike, as well as the images of the violence of the mid 1970s that are included in their narrative texts.

Before proceeding to the texts, a number of clarifications are necessary. In the first place, a brief historical background is needed. During the 1960s, the progressive Left who sought to introduce social change in Argentina and the conservative Right who wanted to maintain the *status quo* clashed over opposing directions for the country. The dissent over the path that the nation should follow spurred on a period of unrest, violence and intense politicization. Political instability was both a cause and a consequence of the two *coups d'état* that took place in less than a five-year period. In 1963 and 1966, democratically-elected authorities were ousted by military juntas who intervened in public life as a way to lead the country away from the threat of communism. During their rule, military juntas curtailed the rights of expression for the civil population. These limitations especially affected highly-politicized students and urban workers who were committed to transforming society. As students and union representatives found themselves unable to either speak about or work towards the realization of social change, they chose to go underground to weaken the power held by military authorities. This climate of tension intensified in the 1970s. Argentine historian Carlos Floria refers to this decade as "The blind years [in which] the vacillating line of ideological discourse flowed between violent revolutionary narcissism and the violent military answer" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Spanish are mine) ("Los años ciegos [en los cuales] se vierte la línea del discurso ideológico vacilante entre el narcisismo revolucionario violento y la respuesta militarizada violenta" [qtd. de Diego 15]). The failure to compromise of both leftist and right-wing militants led to a sharp division of the

Argentine population. By 1970, the situation was so critical that even military authorities opted for changes to reduce widespread discontent. As a result, the participation of groups and parties that had been banned in previous elections was now allowed. Among the political parties that had been unable to take part in elections since 1955, the most prominent was Peronism, a party created by Juan Perón (1895-1974). The active participation of Peronism in the country's political life was realized in 1973; when a Peronist candidate won national elections, and then cleared the way for Perón to return from Spain after eighteen years of exile. Perón's return was anxiously awaited, for many political analysts thought that he, as a paternal leader, would pacify the country under his leadership. These hopes were soon dismissed when different factions waiting for Perón opened fire on each other the very day he arrived in Buenos Aires, leaving hundreds of casualties. More than any other event, this shooting incident confirmed that the escalation of violence, which had been noticeable for five years, would continue to dominate life in Argentina for years to come.

Indeed, during his third term in office, Perón, by now an elderly and seasoned political figure, called repeatedly for unity and conciliation. For instance, in a message in November 1972, he stated that his mission was "of peace and not of war" ("de paz y no de guerra" [18]). In another message in December 1972, Perón called for ending "the divisions that had so deeply hurt the country" ("las antinomias que tanto perjuicio ocasionaron al país" [31]). Finally, as he took office in June 1973, he extended an invitation "so that we begin agreeing with each other" ("para que comencemos a ponernos de acuerdo" [49]). However, despite these well-meaning intentions, Perón was unable to stop the violence coming from both the Left and the Right. One of the reasons for Perón's inability to mediate the tensions between these two groups was that by the time he came back to Argentina, both sides had created and spread discourses that revolved around the other's elimination. For the Left, the conservative Right was a handicap for better distribution of income and more social justice. For the Right, the actions of the Left corroded the order and stability of the country. Perón's declining health and subsequent death in 1974 only further intensified the level of aggression between these opposing sides. Perón was survived and replaced in office by his third wife, Isabel Martínez de Perón, who lacked the experience to manage a country rife with political divisions. On 24 March 1976, a military junta led by Jorge R. Videla ousted Isabel Perón and began immediately arresting and repressing those who were allegedly involved in "subversive activities." The military junta proceeded to implement a program to restore order by strictly regulating the behavior of Argentine citizens. As civilian authorities and leaders were replaced by military counterparts, it became apparent that the only actors in the so-called Process of National Reorganization (Proceso de Reorganización Nacional) were the member of the Armed Forces, who controlled strategic areas such as communications and governments at the city, state, and national levels. Military authorities assigned civilians the role of witnessing. As Diana Taylor states, "The eyes of the Argentine population [were] condemned to passive spectatorship" (65). For the civilian population, passive spectatorship entailed witnessing kidnappings and house searches, and noting the ubiquitous presence of Armed Forces members in different areas of civil life. The possibility of publicly voicing dissent or protesting civil rights violations was out of the question, for it would not only jeopardize individual survival, but it would also place relatives and friends at risk of becoming targets of military repression. Thus, just as Paulina in Dorfman's play, the majority of the Argentine civil population chose self-imposed silence as its survival strategy.

While self-imposed silence was undeniably problematic for the general population, it posed particularly difficult hardships for writers and intellectuals whose function was to address and interpellate audiences. What were writers' and intellectuals' newly-assigned roles under dictatorship, and how did these roles position writers and intellectuals *vis-à-vis* the civil population? To understand this complicated issue, it is illustrative to examine the dilemmas faced by Latin American intellectuals after the Cuban revolution. Claudia Gilman clearly describes the close relationship between literature and politics in the two decades after the Cuban revolution:

Throughout the sixties and seventies, politics constituted the parameters of legitimacy of textual production, and public space was the privileged area where the voice of the writer was authorized and where he became an intellectual. This conversion from writer to intellectual was the result of several processes: the domination of political progressivism in the field of the cultural elites, the generalized hypothesis of the imminence of the global revolution; the debate about the "new revolutionary subjects" that was trying to hypothesize about which new social actors would carry out society's radical transformation -- for instance, the intellectuals, the students, the youth, African descendants, and according to the different regions of Latin America, other varied figures of the "revolutionary class" (urban proletariat, rural proletariat, peasants, etc) -- and finally, the will of cultural politicization and the interest for public affairs. (my translation)

A lo largo de los años sesenta y setenta la política constituyó el parámetro de la legitimidad de la producción textual y el espacio público fue el escenario privilegiado donde se autorizó la voz del escritor, convertido así en intelectual. Esta conversión de escritor en intelectual es el resultado de varios procesos: la dominancia del progresismo político en el campo de las élites culturales; la hipótesis generalizada acerca de la inminencia de la revolución mundial; el debate sobre los "nuevos sujetos revolucionarios" que intentaba pensar qué nuevos actores sociales llevarían a cabo la transformación radical de la sociedad -- como, por ejemplo, los intelectuales, los estudiantes, los jóvenes, los negros y, según las distintas regiones de América Latina, otras diversas figuras de la "clase revolucionaria" (proletariado urbano, proletariado rural, campesinado, etc) -- la voluntad de politización cultural y el interés por los asuntos públicos. (29)

Although Gilman's remarks point to the interpellation that some writers throughout Latin America experienced, her insights can be applied to Argentine writers in general, and Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz in particular during the years before the 1976 coup. As these writers became more politicized, their sympathies increasingly lay with the plight of marginalized social actors and their struggles for greater social justice and equality of rights. Or, as the Cuban writer Ambrosio Fornet put it at that time, "everyone speaks or tries to speak the language of the Left" ("todos hablan o tratan de hablar el lenguaje de las izquierdas" [42]). Indeed, leftist ideas were not only popular among rural revolutionaries, but also among the educated middle-class. As I explain below, it was precisely the inclusion of this class that proved to be a challenge for those writers wishing to express their witnessing in their literary works.

It is helpful here to consider the role of the writer as an intellectual. Gilman traces judiciously the intellectualization of writers in the 1960s and early 1970s to Jean Paul Sartre's definition of the *intellectual engagé*. In *Qu'est-ce que c'est la littérature?*, Sartre acknowledged that writing, far from being innocent, serves an important function: depicting a specific reality so that it can be changed (17). More specifically, Sartre proposed: "Our job as a writer is to represent the world and to bear witness to it" (281) ("c'est notre tâche d'écrivains de représenter le monde et d'en témoigner" [345]). Several Argentine writers chose to do just this, witnessing and representing the times of exception in which they were living. These writers used words to represent, to denounce and to testify, all of which posed a concrete threat to the univocality sought by authoritarian governments. The ability to use writing to undermine authoritarian regimes led Argentine author and literary critic Noé Jitrik in the late 1960s to remind his fellow colleagues of the powerful quality of printed texts as a means to resist and destabilize what has been established by authoritarianism (see Gilman 164). This is precisely how the writers I selected for this article used their writings -- as a means to provide a counter-version of the univocal authoritarian discourse. What Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz needed to solve, however, was how to bear witness specifically through literary genres. These writers, to varying degrees, faced problems related to form and genre when trying to bear witness to the age of terror in which they were living. In 1970, an innovative regional genre made its appearance when Casa de las Américas acknowledged a new category in its annual literary contest: the *testimonio*. This new literary genre was ideally suited to portray the realities of Latin American countries, particularly by giving voice to those who had historically been denied access to literature. Instead of opting to replicate the *testimonio*, Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne chose to add to the discourse via a hybrid form that blended testimonial accounts with fiction and other narrative strategies. The writings of Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz selected in this piece demonstrate the tension between *testimonio* and strictly literary texts, creating a "lettered" *testimonio* blended with fiction.

So far, I have discussed the means by which one bears witness. What remains to be examined is how witnessing affected Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz. These writers, among others, witnessed political repression and the curtailment of freedom of expression in the mid 1970s. As witnesses and free-thinking intellectuals, they felt compelled to offer political testimony of the events they saw, heard, and experienced. In this regard, witnessing was taken as a "delegative duty to record," which Elizabeth Jelin defines as a duty to remember on behalf of others (62). It was precisely this delegative duty to record through the use of the written word which eventually led the three writers selected for this study into exile. In *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* Sophia A. McClennen explains that the paradoxical relationship to language caused by exile: "Writers in exile typically are forced to leave their countries precisely because of their relationship to, and use of, language. Consequently, they see language as both a source of power and a source of pain" (3). If using language is a powerful way of creating a more open society, it may also serve to displace and marginalize dissidents in times of authoritarianism. Their duty to remember had special meaning for Valenzuela, Tizón and Dujovne Ortiz not only because as intellectuals they were more articulate and expressive, but also, and more importantly, because they saw themselves as survivors of political violence and censorship. Discussing the survivor's role Giorgio Agamben states that "the survivor's vocation is to remember; he cannot *not* remember" (26; emphasis in the original). As survivors, these writers were aware that other colleagues had not been as fortunate -- both Rodolfo Walsh and Haroldo Conti were "disappeared" by military authorities. Thus, although Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz did not witness from beginning to end the full scope of repression, owing to their decision to exile themselves the very fact that they could choose to flee made them aware that others could not. They felt that these others' experiences in the age of terror were untold and should be narrativized. This need to speak on behalf of those who perished was not easily experienced by Argentine writers; survivors of other genocides, particularly those who witnessed disappearances during the Holocaust felt the same call. For instance, Agamben cites the speaking out of Primo Levi and other Holocaust survivors, whose remembering always points to the emptiness left by silenced voices. As Agamben puts it, "They bear witness to a missing testimony" (34). In giving voice to others, Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz were forced to explain first and foremost how they survived without collaborating with the regime. They also had to portray the deterioration of life under the authoritarian regime, which led them into exile. Finally, as they reflected on the political circumstances that influenced the subject of their writings, they also asserted the importance of writing that blended fiction and reality as an attempt to resist silence. In what follows, I address the treatment of these three issues as presented in *Aquí pasan cosas raras*, *La casa y el viento*, and *El árbol de la gitana*.

Luisa Valenzuela's *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (*Strange Things Happen Here*) is a collection of short stories written before the *coup d'état* of 1976, whose impetus was a challenge by Valenzuela's daughter who dared her mother to write a book in thirty days. The short stories were written in several different coffee shops in Buenos Aires in 1974 (on this, see Bilbija's interview with Valenzuela <<http://www.luisavalenzuela.com>>). The very public space chosen by Valenzuela to pen her short stories allowed her to witness through the windows of the coffee shops the violent events that were taking place at that time. When these short stories are read together, they convey the pervasiveness of terror and the lack of security that were central features of life in the years preceding the coup. Most of the short stories speak of unexplained murders, rapes, the emergence of self, and state censorship, and above all, the propagation of fear. Their episodic and fragmented quality contributes to the sense of urgency and danger that was felt during the process of their composition. In an interview, Valenzuela admits that: "It was necessary, even at that time, to spy through the web: to talk about the dangers. But we were shocked by the triple A that was threatening to reproduce itself forever. I knew then that the only form of repossessing my reality -- in the minimum space that is given to us -- was through writing" ("Fue necesario, ya en ese entonces, espiar a través de la malla: hablar de los peligros. Pero estábamos demasiado azorados por la triple A que amenazaba espejarse al infinito.



Supe entonces que la única manera de volver a apropiarme de mi realidad -- en el mínimo espacio que se nos es concedido -- era a través de la escritura" (5). Consequently, Valenzuela created a textual universe where it was possible to bear witness in an age of terror. Her fiction is populated by characters who experience her same sense of confusion, disbelief, and fear. The feeling of perplexity is a common element in the short stories when strange events take place. There are new social actors responsible for unleashing violence that the narrator is unable to identify. These characters either repress unaware citizens, or provoke fear and tension. Like the narrator, victimized characters are unable to read the causes of violence or to imagine the consequences of previously innocent acts that are now being taken as "subversive." This confusion of roles and identities is evident in "Love of Animals" ("Amor por los animales") where the whimsical car chase of two male characters hoping to approach another driver turns into an interrogation. The characters who initiated the car chase are asked about the origins of arms found in the trunk of the car that they were following and the driver's plans of attack. Thus, a seemingly innocent prank becomes a nightmarish episode where everything is read according to the political circumstances of the country. To narrate unimaginable events that allude to violence like the one mentioned above while also preserving the rules of fiction, Valenzuela employs several strategies. First, she uses irony and black humor, possibly to distance herself from a reality that otherwise would have been too overwhelming to portray. Nonetheless, the link to reality remains strong, as the present is the predominant tense used in these short stories. The deployment of present tense reinforces the location of the narrators who, as bystanders, witness acts of violence. Just like a video camera, Valenzuela records in her fiction what is heard, seen, or read, in an effort to prove that, indeed, strange things happened as she was writing.

Interestingly, the immediacy of the present tense denies the witness/writer the opportunity of separating from, and critically assessing, the implications of the widespread violence. The confession of one character explains precisely this inability to reflect on the unfortunate events narrated: "At times when everything is clear, all sorts of questions can be asked, but in moments like this the mere fact of still being alive condenses everything that is askable and diminishes its value" (Valenzuela 13) ("En épocas de claridad pueden hacerse todo tipo de preguntas, pero en momentos como éste el solo hecho de seguir vivo ya condensa todo lo preguntable y lo desvirtúa" [Valenzuela 13]). Here, the task of surviving appears as a priority to which witnesses need to attend, delaying – if necessary – reflection on the scope of the incidents witnessed. The narrator's survival allows her to perform the delegative duty to record by providing continuity to the documenting of a reality that, had it been not disguised as fiction, may very well have been left unwritten. Nonetheless, writing about violence under the circumstances described above, defied the official control sought by those who were intent on imposing silence. The public space, where writing was being attempted, had to be abandoned for a safer, more private environment where recording/writing could be performed. In this movement, the witnessing/writing became even more subversive and unofficial. Taylor also links interiority to subversion: "Opposed to the interiority associated with subversion, the military represented itself as all surface: unequivocally masculine, aggressively visible, identifiable by their uniforms, ubiquitous, on parade for all the world to see" (67). What is relevant in this passage is the differentiation between a strategy of visibility used by those in power and the invisible and silent resistance of those under surveillance. The narrator's passage from a public space to an inner one occurs in "The Place of Its Quietude" ("El lugar de su quietud") the last short story of the collection. Because of its strategic location, this short story can be taken as a testament to the events witnessed by the author. In studying this text, Joanne Carol Salts has noted that, "the protagonist's stance, which is a part of the story, is that of the writer of the book who stands back from the work itself, commenting upon the conditions under which the stories were produced" (25). The conditions of production in an age of terror deeply impacted the subject matter of the short stories as well as the writer's decision to go into hiding, to disguise personal information and to silence the space where the texts were produced.

The intention of bearing witness in spite of repression and censorship and the reflection on writing in the age of terror are also evident in Héctor Tizón's *La casa y el viento*. This novel thematizes the process of going into exile in response to the fact that the country was in the hands of "violent people and murderers" ("violentos y asesinos" [9]). Before leaving, the narrator visits the places where he had spent certain parts of his life or which are significant to him so as to imprint these places in his memory. For Sandra Lorenzano, this journey is foundational because the narrator attempts to map out "his own emotional cartography" ("su propia cartografía afectiva" [176]). During this last journey, the narrator experiences a wave of insecurity and is forced to keep his thoughts to himself, for it is unclear who is collaborating with the regime and acting as informant. Stylistically, this self-censorship is represented by short dialogues that are constantly replaced by the narrator's thoughts, which provide a testimony of the climate of control, oppression and surveillance in the late 1970s. Writing is made possible by the narrator's first-hand knowledge as a witness to and participant in the events he narrates. The images he collects in rural northeast Argentina not only sustain him in his exile, but are also vestiges that survive even in the face of violence and oblivion. They rescue both the people whose lives have largely been ignored by central authorities, as well as key episodes for the local community that were beginning to fade in people's memories. Hence, the novel represents an archive that preserves the narrator's and others' feelings and experiences. To emphasize the veracity of the subject at hand, the narrator uses the present tense, as if the events were still taking place. In this way, the images remain uncontaminated by the passage of time, which may distort and render less trustworthy what was seen. Although the narrator's status as an educated member of the community may complicate his gathering of *testimonios*, his belonging to the local group makes him a natural spokesman.

Recognized as a part of the group because of his interest in rescuing events, stories and famous people of the past, the narrator collects a varied assortment of oral histories, but unable to make sense of them, he engages the reader in helping him decipher the past. By tracing the connections to a present that is seen as unstable due to political persecution, the narrator appears aware of the daunting task in which he is involved. A persistent question in the text is how to depict reality when one is immersed in a search for answers. The following passage illustrates this quest for an elusive and straightforward depiction of what he witnesses: "even though nothing I saw or heard during this journey helped me to uncover any trace, I continued because I knew that to call reality only that which we see is also a form of madness" ("aunque nada de lo que ví o escuché durante el camino me ayudaba a descubrir algún indicio, seguí adelante, porque sabía que llamar realidad sólo a lo que vemos es también una forma de locura" [37]). The narrator of *La casa y el viento* carries out the delegative duty to record in the name of those illiterate others he visits and encounters. To do this, the written text preserves anonymous or collectively-authored oral stories that seek to resist the winds of history. What the narrator has mainly witnessed and recorded are stories of destitution: the loss of the narrator's home and place due to political violence, the loss of communal traditions and the disappearance of human beings who faded into oblivion. In this regard, oblivion can be understood as another facet of the violence imposed on the indigenous and rural communities of northern Argentina; the modernizing project, based on foreign models, "forgot" the inhabitants of Salta by excluding them of the official narratives. If oblivion is represented as the wind that erases traces of the past -- the stories, customs and lives of this region that have not been properly recorded and salvaged, and have thus "disappeared" -- memory is depicted as the light produced by the narrator's saved images. The last section of the novel "Desde lejos" articulates the narrator's intention of resisting censorship not only as an individual endeavor, but also as a duty to maintain the ties that bind him to his community. In an interview with Rhonda Dahl Buchanan, Tizón explained that the "wind represents the impetus, the movement of history that sometimes threatens to destroy the house and leave man exposed, forsaken, alone, destroyed" ("El viento representa el impulso, el vaivén de la historia que, a veces



amenaza con arrasar la casa y dejar al hombre a la intemperie, desamparado, solo, o destruido" [40]).

Published in 1997, *El árbol de la gitana* shares with the previous works studied here its depiction of life under the dictatorship, the explanation of the writer/narrator's survival and writing as a way to bear political testimony. *El árbol de la gitana* was written during Dujovne Ortiz's exile and is centered on the narrator's exilic ancestors; thus, it is a text that reflects on the de-territorialized lives of those subjected both to *insilio* (inner exile) and *exilio* (exile). The exploration of the narrator's wandering ancestry has a parallel in the author's life. The movement between familial and personal history is visible in the alternation of chapters written in the third and first person. This use of two narrating voices simultaneously allows a fictional voice to narrate the lives of Dujovne Ortiz's forebears and an autobiographical one to provide testimony to the events that led the author into exile. *El árbol de la gitana* starts with the narrator's perception of the end of life as she knows it at that moment. When she arrives at work one day in 1976, she finds the building of the newspaper company where she worked surrounded by tanks. She quickly realizes that some of her colleagues have disappeared, others have fled, and yet others "they have a ghostly air" ("tienen aire fantasmal" [16]) due to the tensions generated by fear and censorship. These ghostly figures, the *Muselmann*, also found in Holocaust writing, describe those who gave up hope and no longer had an impulse towards life (see Agamben 41). In *El árbol de la gitana*, they act as a projection of the silent existence the narrator may lead if she decides to remain in her country and repress her opinions because of fear. By choosing to depart, the narrator is able to bear witness to the conditions that led her to exile. Exile keeps the narrator alive and keeps her in the world of the living. Like *Aquí pasan cosas raras* and *La casa y el viento*, *El árbol de la gitana* constitutes, then, the reflection of a survivor. The community that Dujovne Ortiz rescues from oblivion is made up of the members of her family. Her personal memories allow her to revisit other instances of authoritarianism, such as her father's imprisonment in a Patagonian jail because of his political activism. Dujovne Ortiz links this episode to the scene of repression that she herself experienced in order to analyze the multiple responsibilities and multi-faceted causes for the violence unleashed in Argentina during the twentieth century. In this way, the narrator is presented not only as a survivor of the most recent dictatorial period of violence, but also as a survivor of other occasions of state-sponsored violence repressing dissident opinions. Contrary to Valenzuela's short stories and Tizon's novel, *El árbol de la gitana* offers a counter narrative that examines how the diverse groups that make up the Argentine population today fared during different periods of Argentine history. Dujovne Ortiz includes Indians, nineteenth-century immigrants, landed elites of the provinces, twentieth-century Jewish immigrants, and women. Their stories are narrated through the voice of the narrator's alter ego, a gypsy who travels in time and space to retrieve these yet un-narrated stories in an effort to provide a more complete account of the past than the one that has been presented by official history. Nonetheless, the deployment of a carefree gypsy serves to locate these stories in the realm of fiction and to parody closed versions of the past. In addition, Dujovne Ortiz carries out the delegative duty to speak on behalf of others who have resisted political oppression and opposition or have been denied a proper place in history. As I have discussed elsewhere (see Rocha, "Resisting from the Margins"), Dujovne Ortiz "rescues" her own mother, who was an active feminist militant and prolific literary critic, and her father, who was an important Marxist organizer during the first decades of the twentieth century. Dujovne Ortiz focuses on the lives of her parents as a way to bear witness not only to their accomplishments, but also to their marginal position in Argentina's political and literary history due to their gender, nationality and political beliefs. Both of Dujovne Ortiz's parents are part of the "other" histories that before *El árbol de la gitana*, had been unwritten.

To conclude, it is important to keep in mind that during Argentina's most recent dictatorship, active witnessing meant more than looking at staged violence; active witnessing meant saving images of the tragic incidents so as to tell them on behalf of those who did not survive. By presenting these accounts, Valenzuela, Tizón, and Dujovne Ortiz provide alternative views of the most recent age of ter-

ror. The medium chosen by these writers to present a political testimony that challenged the silence sought by the military was a blend of fiction and what was witnessed that added to the collection of buried voices that were, nevertheless, finding their way to the surface.

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