

When the dead call the alive: memory as ethical commitment / Quando os mortos convocam os vivos: a memória como compromisso ético

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Received: May 26th, 2020. **Approved:** June, 06th, 2020.

How to cite this article:

COELHO, Lilian Reichert. When the dead call the alive: memory as ethical commitment. *Revista Letras Raras*, Campina Grande, v. 9, n. 2, p. 133-157, jun. 2020

ABSTRACT

The text presents a reading of the contemporary novel *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva / The spirit of my parents continues to rise in the rain* (2011), by Argentine writer Patricio Pron, based on the hypothesis that the narrator-character assumes an ethical commitment to the father's generation, who fought against the dictatorship, and with his own generation. The adopted perspective establishes relationships between knowing and narrating, between the legitimate but mute witness, who is the father, and the inheritance that consigns the word to the son, which requires a committed writing from the heir as maintenance of memory in a disenchanted world. The question of memory is addressed by reading the main procedures employed by the narrator, which involve the construction of a series of parallels and the simulation of a police story to represent his search for the truth, which can only be achieved by the organization bequeathed by the father in the form of an archive composed of materials from non-literary and distinct textualities: journalistic texts, photographs, advertisements, notes. In addition to the question of memory, the topic of violence is addressed in terms of the common, banal crime of the present time, articulating it with the disappearance of people during the Argentine dictatorship and the trauma generated by the survivors. Such articulation results in the narrator's argument that the two generations were defeated, since the contradictions between permanences and social and historical transformations prove the perpetuation of fear as a form of oppression.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Literature; Memory; Ethic; Dictatorship.

RESUMO

O texto apresenta uma leitura do romance contemporâneo *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva* (2011), do escritor argentino Patricio Pron, a partir da hipótese de que o narrador-personagem assume um compromisso ético com a geração do pai, que lutou contra a ditadura, e com sua própria geração. A perspectiva adotada estabelece relações entre o conhecer e o narrar, entre a testemunha legítima, mas muda, que é o pai, e a herança que consigna a palavra ao filho, o que exige uma escrita comprometida do herdeiro como manutenção da memória num mundo desencantado. A questão da memória é abordada pela leitura dos principais procedimentos

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 <http://dx.doi.org/10.35572/rlr.v9i2.1744>

empregados pelo narrador, que envolvem a construção de uma série de paralelismos e a simulação de uma história policial para representar seu processo de busca pela verdade, que só pode ser atingida pela organização legada pelo pai na forma de um arquivo composto por materiais de textualidades não-literárias e distintas: textos jornalísticos, fotografias, anúncios, anotações. Além da questão da memória, aborda-se o tema da violência no que diz respeito ao crime comum, banal, do tempo presente, articulando-o ao desaparecimento de pessoas durante a ditadura argentina e ao trauma gerado nos sobreviventes. Tal articulação resulta no argumento do narrador de que as duas gerações foram derrotadas, já que as contradições entre permanências e transformações sociais e históricas comprovam a perpetuação do medo como forma de opressão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Literatura Contemporânea; Memória; Ética; Ditadura.*

“[...] but then I thought that I hadn't really fought, and that no one of my generation had fought; something or someone had already inflicted a defeat on us, and we were either filling our faces or taking medicine or wasting our time in a thousand and one ways trying to reach an ending that might be unworthy, but it would certainly be liberating. Nobody fought, we all lost and almost nobody stayed true to what they believed, whatever it was, I thought; my father's generation was different, but, again, there was something about this difference that was also a meeting point, a thread that crossed the ages and united us despite everything, and it was amazingly Argentine: the feeling of being united in defeat, parents and children. (PRON, 2018, p. 31).

1 Introduction

The epigraph, in a way, condenses the entire book by Patricio Pron, but what does it mean to say parents and children are united in defeat? One keeps the memory of the utopia lost in the silence of the victims, as a witness to the horror; another discards memory in a hopeless world. And the word also unites them: one is a journalist; another, writer. One stayed in the country for which he fought and lost; the other left behind a past that he only knows from the glimpses of memory that he refuses. One seeks justice; the other seeks to know his own father. One anchors his life in a hospital bed; the other barely sustains itself in a personal search. One adapts to defeat and remorse; another initially tries to cling only to the present and is convinced that he is committed to avoid forgetting.

In *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva/The spirit of my parents continues to rise in the rain* (2011), by the Argentine writer living in Spain Patricio Pron, the connection between present and past, literature and history, aesthetics and politics, is established through an archive, at the same time unusual and banal. It is a folder in which the ailing father had stored newspaper clippings about a crime: the disappearance of a man from his hometown. The father's

interest in the subject, as an organizing obsession, arouses the son's curiosity, who many years ago decided to live far from his family.

As in contemporary Brazilian literature, in the Argentine context, the theme of the civil-military dictatorship (1976-1983) has been mobilized by the children of militants and the disappeared, as La Haije (2015) points out. The traumatic past is triggered by the second generation, often without the intention of representing the past by recreating scenes of violence with and taken by the State. Decades later, these narratives highlight the subjective consequences of personal and collective trauma, proposing a refusal to forget.

In Pron's book, the narrator-son discovers that the "institutional policy for the disappearance of people" (CALVEIRO, 2013, p. 39) of the dictatorship reverberates directly in his family to the present, having permeated and even conditioned his whole life without that he noticed. The pervasiveness of the dictatorship in subjective life is manifested by the tense relationship with the father and the decision to remove the son, who also opted for the refusal of the past, calling for the continuous use of remedies that cloud his memory. Until the forced return to the father's house.

Throughout the narrative, which summon up in its own way elements of detective stories, the findings derived from the reading of the legacy file by the father also result in the imperative to be assumed as a child, legitimate father's heir and also the memory, which is personal and collective. During the search, the narrator-character will have the opportunity to change his point of view about his parents and about himself as someone of the new generation who assumes himself as a descendant and a debtor of the previous one.

This leads to reflections of an ethical nature, even though the conscience won by his personal search does not become political action. Unless literature is understood as the only possible action for these heirs, the indirect victims of the dictatorship's violence. By consigning to the son, who accepts to write about the past of these others (of the father, the mother and their friends), the literary word claims the place of the vindicating memory.

In this work, we develop a reflection on the trajectory of the incorporation of this ethical commitment that summons the narrator-character, by glimpsing continuities between the past and the present with regard to the continuity of violence and the feeling of defeat that is imprinted on an entire collective. Also inevitable, when dealing with Pron's book, to highlight the relationship between multiple textualities, since the whole search for the character and his discoveries

occur, predominantly, from the archive composed of newspaper clippings and photographs organized by his father.

2 The discovery of inheritance

In *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva / The spirit of my parents continues to rise in the rain* (2011), the Argentine writer Patricio Pron narrates, in four parts divided into chapters (or numbered paragraphs, according to França, 2018, p. 57) and an epilogue, the reluctant return of a son to his native country after eight years, upon receiving the news that the father is hospitalized in serious condition. The year is 2008.

After arriving from Germany, moved by nostalgia and the certainty that his father is on his deathbed and that he will soon receive the bad news, the narrator of *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva / The Spirit of My Parents continues to rise in the rain*, roams the rooms of the family home in search of memories fogged by the various types of distance (physical and emotional) and medicines. In her father's office, he finds clipped folders, which he flips through without interest. As he reads, he is taken by the desire to understand the reasons that led his father to keep so many journalistic stories about the same and banal event that occurred in his father's hometown, where the family used to spend the holidays: the disappearance of a man named Alberto Burdisso.

It is in the weak light that penetrates the father's cold office that the narrator perceives the pile of folders, which he carelessly opens and vacuums without expectations, until he finds

[...] the reproduction of an old photograph, enlarged until the faces have turned into dots. He appeared my father, although, of course, it was not just my father, but the person he was before I knew: He had long hair, wore sideburns and holding a guitar; beside his was a young woman with long, flowing hair, with an expression of surprising seriousness and a look that seemed to say that she had no time to lose, because she had more important things to do than stand still for a photograph, she needed to fight and die young. I thought: I know that face, but after reading the materials that my father had gathered in that folder, I realized that I didn't actually know him, that I had never seen that face and that I would rather go on without having seen or known anything about the person who was behind that face, in addition to not knowing anything about my father's last weeks, because you don't always want to know certain things, since what you know becomes yours, and there are certain things that you would never want to have. (PRON, 2018, p. 42)

This is how commitment is established, an ethical relationship that is strengthened as the narrative progresses: what the narrator comes to possess is a knowledge about the secret envisaged during childhood about the father's story, assuming as a mission to write as a way of knowing the father and take responsibility as part of a collectivity, which is explicitly stated in the Epilogue: “[...] the task of discovering who were the ones who came before us, which is the theme of this book [...]” (PRON, 2018, p. 157). Something even stronger than the family drama ties past and present, dead and alive, the collective and the individual:

[...] and that fact was that he had inserted Alicia into politics without knowing that what he was doing would cost this woman's life, and that it would cost him decades of fear and regret, and that all of this would have effects on me, many years later. As I tried to leave behind the photographs I had just seen, I realized for the first time that all of us, children of young people in the 1970s, would have to unravel our parents' past as if we were detectives [...]. (PRON, 2018, p. 113-4)

In this falsely detective task, the son-narrator guides his search for the father and the truth from the organization, in a narrative logic, of a set of materials of different textualities already composed by the father's organizing gesture in the form of an archive: articles, reports, photos, notes, ads.

Surprised by the father's interest in a crime, the son sees the opportunity to understand something about the father, and in the process, envisions a method of survival for both. In this sense, in this book, narrating is equivalent to communicating knowledge, therefore, an ethical commitment to others who may be in a situation of ignorance or amnesia. For the father, even without intention, organizing was equivalent to building a file to donate this knowledge, which is accompanied by stories of concrete lives. Hence the image of the puzzle evoked by the narrator: the inherited file is organized in such a way that it is enough for the heir to awaken and insert the pieces in the right place.

The first person narration and informations coinciding with biographical elements of the writer and his family refer to questions about autobiography, self-fiction or testimony. However, in this work, we choose not to engage in quarrels of this nature, because I believe that the book has much more to say. In any case, we ratify Dosse's word (2009, p. 229), when stating that “The current times are more sensitive to the manifestations of singularity, which legitimize not only the resumption of interest in biography but the transformation of gender in a more reflective”.

Patricio Pron operates a relevant critical shift by refusing to testify, even the legitimate second-generation testimony, by choosing to focus on what escapes the framework (Cf. BUTLER, 2015). By adhering to the singular, to the narrative of individual life, at the most family, it exposes the symbiosis between the individual and the collective and, mainly, the permanence of fear and violence, unveiling the illusions of an entire system, not just of the discourse official, but also from what flows from the neoliberal framework that, in the narrator's claims, imposed the definitive defeat on the generation of young people who fought against the dictatorship and its atrocities survived.

Against the false promises of neoliberal prosperity and happiness, fiction rises as the possibility of revealing information dispersed in different places (in the interdiscourse), contributing not only to individualize, but also to build the victim, displacing her from the muteness to which they are the dead are relegated. However, this is no longer a narrative of denunciation confronting the official narrative, whose framework is guided by forgetfulness. In *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva / The spirit of my parents continues to rise in the rain* there is not even a complete history of the past to be reported, which is worse than the complaint, since Alicia's disappearance at the age of 31 remains obscured by doubts, trauma and revolt.

What is presented is a narrative that defends the “duty of memory” (Cf. NORA, 1993; Cf. GUAZZELLI, 2010) of those who stood before those who perished unjustly in an exceptional regime. As Felman (2014, p. 44) points out, “history is like this, far beyond official narratives, a mnemonic persistent and recurring claim that the dead address to the living, whose responsibility is not only to remember the dead, but to protect them against be appropriated incorrectly.” Or to be forgotten by the incessant reproduction of fear and, consequently, of silence, equating the living and the dead, as the narrator discovers: “[...] I did not know, yet, however, that my father knew fear much better than I thought, that my father had lived with him and fought against him and, like everyone else, he had lost this battle of a silent war, which was his and his generation's” (PRON, 2018, p. 19)

In the case of Latin American dictatorships, the State has developed instruments to force forgetfulness about the accountability of crimes committed by its agents. Even in Argentina, which we Brazilians often tend to consider as an example of good practices with regard to “memory policies”, the payment of cash compensation was adopted as an attempt to silence survivors and their families. Not to mention laws and other unfair “reparation” devices. The book Pron allows glimpse the argument that true justice has not

been done, or in relation to the dead, not in the respect to the survivors and their trauma. According to many interpretations in the area of the Right to Memory and Truth,

Justice (re) claimed by the victim is not established with the procedural act of punishing the guilty; the injustice suffered is not restored with the restoration of order. Its denied otherness is the ethical-epistemological perspective that must serve as a hermeneutical reference to define the sense of justice. Fair is to return the dignity denied to the wronged, justice is to recognize and restore the victim's humiliated otherness. The cry of the wronged person is not a secondary reference of the procedure, it is a historical challenge and a universal criterion to define justice. (RUIZ, 2007, p. 33)

Although, in fact, it is possible to recognize an effort to defend that there is continuity between past and present due to the permanence of the dictatorship and the flaws in settling accounts with the dead, we believe that this is not exclusively a matter of continuity, as Pron executes an important shift on the thematic of violence. It is a criticism not only of the “disappearing power” (Cf. CALVEIRO, 2013) of the Argentine dictatorship, but the violence imposed by neoliberalism, which not only impoverishes life in terms of the material conditions of existence, but rots human relationships, making others seen as obstacles to an end.

While Alicia was disappeared by the dictatorial state and its agents, decades later her brother Alberto was murdered for the greed of people who intended to steal from him the few assets acquired with the compensation money paid by the state precisely for formally acknowledging her disappearance and death. It is worth noting that the notion of disappearance used here is anchored in the field of law, for which:

Specifically, the use of the expression “forced disappearance of people” has spread in international law from the thousands of cases of kidnapping, murder and concealment of the corpses of political dissidents contrary to the dictatorial regimes in Latin America. One of the first international registrations of the term is in Resolution 33/173, of the UN General Assembly (1978). (TOSI; ALBURQUERQUE E SILVA, 2014, p. 74)

While leafing through the articles organized by his father about Alberto's disappearance, the narrator realizes that: “Once again, the keyword here was 'disappearance', repeated in one way or another in all articles, as if it was an insignia funeral in the lapel of all the invalid and unhappy in Argentina.” (PRON, 2018, p. 66). At this point in the narrative, the narrator and,

consequently, the reader, does not yet know about Alicia, but he launches the idea that there is something more than Alberto's disappearance to arouse his father's interest and action, which not only cuts the newspapers, but writes articles about the crime, searches alone for Alberto in places despised by the police investigation and participates in the funeral.

One of the procedures used by the narrator to interweave the present and the past is the use of parallelisms (Cf. BERNARDI, 2015), mainly between the disappearances of brothers Alberto and Alicia, in totally different, though related times and contexts. At the end of the excerpt below, it is noted that the narrator establishes an impossible and unlikely merger between the past and the present:

That's it, I thought, interrupting my reading; this is the reason why my father had decided to gather all this information, because of a symmetry: a man disappears, before him a woman disappeared, both are brothers and my father may have known both, and could not prevent the disappearance of any of them. But how could my father have prevented these disappearances? How could he find that, with what kind of power did my father intend to prevent these disappearances, he, who was dying in a hospital bed while I read all this? (PRON, 2018, p. 76)

Another parallel is the fact that they are father and son men of speech: a journalist; another, a writer, which makes a lot of difference. Even though he is a fictional author, the narrator does not feel authorized to tell the story of Alicia or his father, both for not knowing and for respecting the lack of the obligatory consignment of the word, since the father is speechless, "dying", in bed from hospital. "Since the testimony cannot simply be replaced, repeated or reported by another without thereby losing its function as a testimony, the witness's burden - despite its alignment with other witnesses - is radically unique, non-interchangeable and a burden lonely." (Felman, 2000, p. 15).

Only the father, therefore, would have the authority to narrate, but he is prevented. Or he might not want to, since he never did, although he mentioned the desire to write a novel. The son has the aporia of inheritance and interdiction, since he is not the survivor, he does not write under the dangers of death or under the persecution of ghosts. Thus, only what can be narrated is its search and the result of the indexes it finds. The only information he knows to be true relates to the disappearances and murders of Alberto and Alicia for having found the concrete remains left by his father, documents that testify to his existence and his violent and unjust deaths. And, in a foggy way, of the father's participation.

From this, it is almost needless to say that one of the most important parallelisms of the narrative is that of the search. And there are two: one reveals the loss of childhood friend Alicia, by the narrator's father, and the search for the remission of guilt for her own survival; the other points to the uncertain future of the new generations incarnated by the son's decision, until then alien to the history of the family and the country. The son-narrator shows repudiation for the country of origin, employing a "we" that encompasses the brothers, but also, it can be said, constitutes a generational plural, referring to the entire second post-dictatorship generation:

[...] those provinces where my father took us in the hope that we would find in them a beauty that was intangible to me, always trying to make sense of those symbols that we had learned in a school that had not yet got rid of a dictatorship whose values continued to perpetuate. [...] a round badge and a sky-blue and white flag that we knew well because it was supposed to be our flag, even though we had seen it so many times in circumstances that were not really ours and were completely out of our control, circumstances that we didn't have or wanted to have anything to do with: a dictatorship, a soccer World Cup, a war, a handful of failed democratic governments that only served to distribute injustice in the name of all of us and the country that my father and many others believed that it was, that it had to be, mine and that of my brothers. (PRON, 2018, p. 15)

Despite the marked parallelism with regard to the search theme, the excerpt above demonstrates a cross-sectional understanding of the country between generations. In addition to this, there is another relevant difference in the two searches. While the father is an arcontic organizer (Cf. DERRIDA, 2001; FRANCE, 2018), the son-narrator adopts the indicative method (Cf. GINZBURG, 2007, 143-179) in his search, looking for (apparently) insignificant details in a answer that may correspond to the truth.

The character-narrator finds clues to the truth in newspaper clippings that refer to a trivial crime exploited in a sensationalist manner by various media in the regional press, with an emphasis on a news website called *El Trébol digital*. The clippings were collected by the father and gathered together with enlarged photographs and notes about something that the narrator is unaware of. As he relates the information and approaches the truth, he discovers, above all, the importance of the inseparable relationship between individual / family life and social life, individual trauma and collective trauma. And he also discovers that the father's ethical movement was guided by an action whose results show: 1. that everyone has importance and that, for the life of one, it is possible to talk about the life of everyone and, therefore, for the death of one, everyone loses his humanity a little; 2. that evil persists in this same ending the dictatorship and acquires

new forms in a society that did not become better, further underlining the feeling of defeat so insistently stated by the narrator.

Against all this, there is only the possibility of redemption for safeguarding the rights to justice and the truth through memory, which can only be accomplished, in *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva / The spirit of my parents continues to rise in the rain*, by restoring the “memory of the defeated”, “Of the signifier of forgetfulness” (Cf. REYES MATE, 2005), “considering the witness the concrete of the violation that is beyond historical time”. And, in this book, the restoration of memory involves a previous movement of the child, who assumes the need to know, to get closer to the truth, which means fighting against one's own trauma and the will to forget. This was a recurring practice in several countries that went through periods of repression in the “transition” to democracy. In any case, literature imposes itself as a place of resistance, as highlighted by Sarlo when addressing the relationship between literature and memory:

The texts exist. I am not only referring to strongly referential speeches, such as the report of the National Commission for the Rights of the Person and the record of the trials. There are novels, poems, testimonies, more distant formations. They are obstacles raised against the invitation to forget, against its possibility or imposition; stubbornly oppose the hypocrisy of an amnesic reconciliation. (SARLO, 2005, p. 32)

In this sense, to tell how he went from self - inflicted oblivion to compromised memory, the son-narrator, out of ethical duty, assumes that he needs to narrate the path taken until he reaches something that brings him closer to the family and historical truth. For this, he must build his voice as legitimate, position himself as a participant, to some degree, in the father's history and trauma, embodying the “transubjective effects of trauma” (Cf. SILVA FILHO; OLIVEIRA, 2014). In this sense, the narrator makes a decision that allows him to deviate from memorialism, which, would inevitably bring him to the problem of the representation of the other, always an obstacle in the approach of experiences of situations and contexts of repression. The main controversy is that he is not the father nor can he take his place; although he was born and lived during the time of the argentine dictatorship, he makes it clear that he was not the one who fought.

Somehow, it is clear that the narrator beckons to memorialism, but does not stage it, as his performance is banned. He knows that he cannot speak for his father and mother, much less for Alicia, whose disappearance guides his father's search, even though he knows her dead,

murdered. What the narrator can do is just remember and remind, in the sense attributed by Ricœur (2007, p. 71): "Remembering is not only welcoming, receiving an image of the past, but also seeking it, 'doing' something".

What can be the way out, then? As a writer, he remains to write. The narrator appeals to suspense in an attempt to establish his father as a detective journalist and himself as the privileged reader of the father's search. With this, he builds a parallelism with the reader of the book itself, creating the sensation that he discovers the information at the same time as the reader. He achieves this by the repeated claim of lack of memory by the recurrent use of strong medicines prescribed by the psychiatrist. This consists of another parallelism, as it recalls the father's lack of memory, whose truthfulness, he had always suspected, as if the father acted out the frequent forgetfulness to keep himself tied to the past and not participate in the family's daily life. As for the son, he uses the remedies to deliberately forget the traumatic past, which he manages to do precisely because he is not the survivor, the direct witness.

The artifice used for all this is to create a pastiche of police history, which the narrator himself vehemently states is not the appropriate genre to tell the story of the Argentine dictatorship. He avoids building a detective novel following the rules of the genre, just alluding to him for the reproduction of the sensational police, sensationalist stories, of the brown press in the countryside about Alberto's disappearance and death collected by his father and arranged in chronological order in the folder, as well note France (2018). It is worth mentioning that the texts are not only reproduced, but commented on and criticized by the narrator, who thus establishes a critique of the status of journalism as a characteristic historically self-attributed by this type of discourse and social practice, which would differentiate it from fiction.

I dare say that, perhaps, there is a criticism of any discourse intended to build truth. Not in the sense of promoting total relativization, but in defending the idea that the truth is in the articulation between individual stories, concrete life experiences, and the historical facts that concern everyone.

An example of the mistrust of journalism and official speeches in general is explained in the excerpt below, which can also be read as critical of the sensationalism of the digital newspaper *El Trébol* (which is the name of the city where the crime occurs) and the construction of lies and illusions, including the use of statistics, which, in general, in journalism, are seen as chancellors of an unquestionable truth. After Alberto's disappearance, the newspaper

publishes an opinion poll on what would have happened to him, which is contested by the narrator:

In fact, if we add the percentages mentioned above, the result is 99.99%. The remaining 0.01%, which is missing or was a statistical error, seems to take the place of the missing person; it seems that it is representing what cannot be said, which cannot even be named: all possible explanations of the disappearance that the research writers failed to mention [...] (PRON, 2018, p. 57)

In the sequence, he lists the other probable “forgotten” explanations, already stating that they would be improbable or false, confirming the lack of rigor and the lack of commitment of the press in dealing with the crime.

The atmosphere of police history is maintained throughout Chapter II, which is the most extensive of the four that make up *My parents' spirit continues to rise in the rain*. The son-narrator assumes himself as a detective since the beginning of the narrative, when he affirms: “Children are the detectives that parents throw into the world so that one day they can return and tell them their story and, thus, they can understand themselves over there.” (PRON, 2018, p. 10). Then, at the end of the same paragraph, he disqualifies the proposal itself, establishing the atmosphere of mystery that permeates the narrative: “Children are the parents' policemen, but I don't like policemen. They never got along with my family.”

Ahead, he repeats the idea that there is a mystery to be solved from the disappearance of a nobody, the “faulkneriano idiot” Alberto Burdisso, his father's countryman, but of whom he had never heard: “[...] I was thinking that the mystery was twofold: on the one hand, the particular circumstances of Burdisso's death, on the other, the reasons that had led my father to go after him, as if this search could unravel a greater mystery, buried more deeply in reality.” (PRON, 2018, p. 72-3). With that, it manages to sustain the reader's interest.

The use of pastiche and not the representation of the detective novel is justified by the narrator himself, who says that he refuses the legitimacy of this type of genre to address the issue for ethical reasons, implying another that is not limited to the father, but expands to the collective:

[...] I realized for the first time that all of us, children of young people in the 1970s, would have to unravel our parents' past as if we were detectives, and that our discoveries would be too much like a detective novel that we would rather never have bought. , but I also realized that there was no way to tell their story in the style of the police genre or, to be more precise, that to tell it

in this way would be to betray their intentions and their struggles, since narrating their story as if it were a story detective would only contribute to ratify the existence of a gender system, that is, a convention, and that this would be to betray their efforts, which tried to challenge these conventions, both social conventions and their pale reflections in the literature. (PRON, 2018, p. 113-4).

In a text that addresses Brazilian literary productions published since 1980, Wander Miranda finds the intense use of pastiches and, underlining the strong appeal of the detective novel, he highlights something that seems to me associated with what Patricio Pron does in the book under study here: "Tributary to the plot common to this type of novel, it is the narrative itself, however, which undergoes an investigation and places itself as an object of investigation. [...] The reader is now the privileged focus of attention, when sharing with the detective a common task, expressed by the 'suspensive' situation in which the two are placed in front of the puzzle that must be deciphered." (MIRANDA, 2010, p 114).

And the reader follows the discoveries of the son-narrator, who from the reader demands not only attention to the unfolding of the plot, but also wit to realize that he insists on his memory failures to alert him that he himself may be in the same condition, which that is: that of not knowing or, worse, that of conniving with the programmed forgetfulness about the collective past. The permanence of the terrible past in the present is condensed in the juxtaposition that undoes the parallelism between father and son: when imagining how the novel that the father would have liked to have written would be, the narrator synthesizes the narrative itself, always neglecting attachment to any gender or convention:

Brief, made of fragments, with gaps where my father did not want or could not remember anything, made of symmetries - stories duplicating themselves incessantly, like a paint stain on folded paper countless times, a simple theme repeated continuously as in a symphony or in an idiot's monologue - and sadder than Father's Day in an orphanage. (PRON, 2018, p. 108).

3 Writing as an ethical commitment: from self to us

In the nonfiction text "Every word knows something about the vicious circle", which is in the collection *Always the same snow and always the same uncle* (2012), the German writer Herta Müller addresses the power of words in situations of repression using a phrase every day during the dictatorship Romanian (1974 - 1989) the mother asked him before leaving: "You got a handkerchief?". The word handkerchief, context and affections build a counter-hegemonic

image in relation to the unrepresentable of a terrible experience like the dictatorship. From this and the reading of so many other narratives about periods of exception, I constructed the research question that moves this text: in what ways can insignificant details function as political devices in narratives about periods of repression?

From the life stories of survivors of any order (first or second degree, reported in first person by the witness or by the mediation of a narrator), I ask how “insignificant details” can indicate a “poiesis of politics” (Cf. RANCIÈRE , 2012)? In this sense, what matters is a poetics of detail, of what could be relegated to a past to be overcome (as many negationist speeches want and even as demonstrated by the “transitional justice” of dictatorships for supposedly democratic societies), but that insists on its relevance due to the narrative effort, thus, the literature presents itself as a place of survival, of the future, understood as “present in the immediate present and not constituted as future” (Cf. BOURDIEU, 2001, p. 257).

In the case of Pron's narrative , the father is not only in the past, but in the present, even though silent. And the ethical commitment is precisely the bond established between the dying person and the writer: what can no longer act, not even speak, depends on the son, who takes on the task of telling a story that he does not yet know, except for a few clues left by this other who turns out to be so mysterious. The father's commitment to Alicia and to an ideal, albeit frustrated, defeated by history, establishes itself as an inheritance that the son initially denies to, little by little, notice that he has no option. It is only to the narrative of this process of knowledge that we have access, as if another book constituted a promise. It is important to note that the father is not mute just because he is in the hospital, but because he signed the pact of silence for those who went through a situation of horror so extreme and so traumatic that they cannot represent it:

Silences are also the children and fruits of horror, which leaves many visible marks, but invisible ones are disproportionately greater. Silence has color, it smells, it has sounds. It just cannot have a voice, because once the voice is the winner, the pacts will be broken. And the pacts have enormous strength. The first that needs to be broken in order for speech to be possible, is the pact made between the person himself and his pain. Once this pact is broken, the person authorizes himself to speak about the horror, but this only happens in due time, when the losses are less than the benefits generated by speech. (RUBERT, 2014, p. 288-9).

From this derives the consignment of speech to the son who, in any case, will not be able to construct a representation of evil. The process of knowledge that the narrator and we as

readers go through has a political trait built without the need / possibility of the image of the catastrophe, without the explicit representation of evil, but revealed by minimal, but strong, indices of what was left, as demonstrated Rancière in the text “The intolerable image” , published in the book *The emancipated spectator* (2010). He also discusses this in the text “If the unrepresentable exists”, published in the book *O destino das imagens* (2012). Although Rancière is dealing with photographic, cinematographic images and artistic installations, I see no problem in taking him as a reference in this discussion because in these texts, and even in others, he argues that, at least since the 18th century, we have been living under the regime aesthetic of the arts, whose deepest roots are in literary realism, which caused the overthrow of the representative system based on “ similarity”.

Rancière rises up against a powerful aspect that gained much prominence after the Second World War, from which it is analyzed that, after the horrors of the Holocaust, some themes and experiences would be unrepresentable by language. For him, what happens is that the unrepresentability of certain themes is regulated by what he calls the representative regime of the arts. Outside it, in the aesthetic regime, there would be no limits, as there is no proper form and forms inappropriate to a theme, whatever it may be. Its paradigm is Flaubert who, in the author's opinion, put everything on the same plane, big and small, important events and episodes without meaning, men and things. Everything leveled, therefore, equally representable.

I believe that the detail can function as a device of the politician for the ability to rise up against power, building images and narratives alternative to official representatives, in the sense of a counter-power that favors the permanence of memory against the politics of oblivion. And what seems more alternative to the official information regime whose objective is to disseminate images that make society insensitive to death and to the responsibility of those who hold power are the narratives that singulars lives, supplanting statistics. In *Facing the Pain of Others* (2003), by Susan Sontag, and in *Quadros de Guerra - when is life subject to mourning?* (2015), by Judith Butler, a common question: what we see in general about wars (and we can extend them to dictatorships and to all systems of oppression) are anonymous multitudes, anonymous bodies without the capacity to assume the right to public speak. They are nameless beings, without individual history. (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 143)

A political attitude in the arts, then, would be much more the quest for questioning the redistribution of the elements of representation, causing the change of places and the calculation of bodies. With this, Rancière proposes to shift the question of the intolerable: for him, the

problem is not whether or not to show the horrors suffered by the victims, but to make one think of the construction of the victim as an element of a certain distribution of the visible. This means that “the treatment of the intolerable is a matter of visibility device” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 149) which is, of course, a political device.

Although Rancière is arguing about the production and circulation of images, I believe in the possibility of relating his proposal to fiction narratives centered on direct and indirect testimonies (mediated, as identified by Seligmann -Silva, 2005), even biased by horror experiences as those that allude to Latin American dictatorships.

And, here, in the study of Pron's book , a cut is already evident: the ethical (self) interpellation, that is, the establishment of an effort by the narrator directed to another, not to the exposure of himself as a personal inscription of the survivor, because it lacks the necessary legitimacy, as the narrator himself makes a point of punctuating. On the relationship among the individual and the historical and the violence committed in the past that is perpetuated in the present, the narrator ponders:

This crime, any crime, has an individual, private aspect, but it also has a social aspect; the first concerns only the victims and their close relatives, but the second concerns all of us and is the reason why justice is needed to intervene on our behalf, on behalf of a collective whose rules have been tested by individual crime and, in the impossibility of repairing the first, he strives to contain the second, with a force that, at least in theory, does not emanate from an individual subject or from a social class, but from a collective, hurt even more while standing. (PRON, 2018, p. 95).

In the relation among ethics, aesthetics and politics established by Pron , the detail constitutes the inheritance and establishes the “duty of memory” , showing itself through the descriptions of the photographs and the reproduction of journalistic texts in full, according to the material organized by the father, the true survivor, the legitimate bearer of the “vocation of memory” (Cf. AGAMBEN, 2008), which cannot be avoided to remember. In the book, narrating an individual story is equivalent to narrating the collective story. About this, Silva Filho (2008, p. 173) comments that

[...] the act of recovering a memory means bringing into the presente, the past that was absent (forgotten), being that: It is in the cultivation and rescue of this and all the stories denied by the merciless advance of civilization that one can be capable of becoming more human, of being indignant with injustices again and of not forgetting the barbarism that lurks behind every scene of everyday life.

4 Perpetuation of fear and transformations of violence

In addition to the disappearance and the death of Alicia perpetrated by the state and guilt assumed by the narrator's father for life, an aspect worthy of note in *O espíritos dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva / the spirit of my parents continues to rise in the rain* refers to contradictory movement between permanence and transformation of the violence, imputing to the despair of the local people (El Trébol) humanity and absence of it.

Although there is no representation of the violence that Alicia had been a victim of during the dictatorship, with the exception of a single excerpt from a statement by the police officer who accompanied the girl in prison, what happens to her brother Alberto is described in detail by the mediation of the journalistic speech. The narrator despises journalism, albeit to a certain extent, because his father is a journalist and the texts in the digital newspaper are what allow him to build the pastiche of police romance.

The feeling of defeat that the narrator points out throughout the narrative reinforces that the State establishes the people as an enemy and subdues them in a dictatorship. And it goes further: he points out that, today, in the contemporary world, the legacy of violence remains, in an individualistic society in which everyone is a potential enemy of everyone. For this, he emphasizes the futile motive of the crime, emphasizing the figure of Alberto: "Once again: who would think of killing a kind of Faulknerian idiot who has nowhere to fall dead, moreover, in a city where his disappearance would be immediately noticed, in a city where many would know who Burdisso was, what he did and who was with him in his last hours?" (PRON, 2018, p. 79).

In addition to the crime and the disclosure about the consequences of the police investigation, what the narrator highlights most of the text is the change in the speeches, concerns and demands of the local population. Out of solidarity and touched by the disappearance of their fellow citizens, the inhabitants of El Trébol begin to reveal fears that they may be future victims. The content of the speeches and the fear that emerges from them goes far beyond the crime of which Alberto had been a victim. After all, there was a whole premeditation to steal the money he had received as compensation for the disappearance of Sister Alicia.

Therefore, it seems to be a crime that was motivated by a large sum of money, considering the social condition of those involved. Why, then, does a crowd feel vulnerable? France argues that

Proposing an anachronistic juxtaposition, *El espíritu de mis padres ...* engenders a relationship between the different disappearances, presented as a practice in Argentina, shows an implacable continuity of violence in the country and, why not?, in so many others, neighbors, who lived similar exceptional experiences. (2008, p. 65)

I understand that the dynamics of violence in this concerns not just a matter of continuity, but also the considerable social and human transformations, one time, at present, are not (only) state officials the enemies of the people, but neighbors or criminals who meddle in city life.

As in a David Lynch film, under the layer of normality and warmth of everyday life in a small country town, an enemy lives in the shadows. The sequence of publications in the newspaper draws the attention of the narrator: in the first article, of June 4, 2008, the title was "The mysterious case of a missing citizen" (PRON, 2018, p. 46-7). In the days that followed, an article on the idyllic history of *El Trébol*, on whose leaves the father had made a point of writing down corrections; an annoyed advertisement from Alberto's friends; other articles are cited, of which one stands out, which ends as follows: "We, the citizens of *El Trébol*, demand an explanation or an answer to a mystery that we cannot ignore [...], because that could happen to all of us." (*El Trébol Digital*, June 9, 2008). (PRON, 2018, p. 56)

Regarding the text published on June 11, the narrator notes: "In this article, it can be seen for the first time that the Burdisso case had ceased to be a police issue - regrettable, yes, confusing, yes, but also quite childish - to become a kind of imprecise threat, but one that affects the collective." (PRON, 2018, p. 59).

With all this, the atmosphere of mystery remains, with the narrator showing himself attentive to the clues left by his father. This is also an interesting procedure for the narrator: with the establishment of doubt about something that transcends Alberto's sad story, he ceases to be the main character, his image becomes more and more rarefied and he remains in the place of John nobody until the mystery of this disappearance and death is completely revealed, giving way to what is really important: father's search for Alicia's destiny.

At this point, too, the missing person was no longer the cause of concern for the inhabitants of the city and, instead, in the place left by the missing person, what emerged was a collective fear, the fear that the case would repeat itself and, in a certain way, the fear of losing the almost proverbial tranquility of *El Trébol*. At this point, it can be said, there was an inevitable transition from the individual victim to the collective victim [...]. (PRON, 2018, p. 60).

For your father, only Alicia's bad luck mattered. The son, on the other hand, sees something wrong that may be, who knows, generalized. The atmosphere of revolt in the city intensifies and seems excessive, with protests in the streets, advertisements in the newspaper, letters from readers, a new opinion poll. The newspaper seems to encourage confusion, but the narrator sticks to the perception of the feeling of fear of a strange and unnamed “omnipresent and widespread threat” (PRON, 2018, p. 66), noting that the locals

[...] they stopped asking Burdisso for 'justice' and started demanding it for themselves and their families. Nobody wanted what happened to Burdisso to happen to him, yet nobody knew at that moment what had actually happened to him and nobody wondered why it happened to him and not to someone else, to some of the people who exorcised their fear with a demonstration and a petition. (PRON, 2018, p. 66).

When the situation gets more complicated to the police, drawing the attention of newspapers in larger municipalities in the region, such as the one where the father worked, the crime is finally elucidated, as it is practical to happen when the police are facing great commotions and see their prestige threatened. A body was found eight kilometers from the city. The narrator accompanies the photographs that accompany the news, highlighting Alberto's loneliness after being brutally murdered and, in a way, the lack of interest of the people who so claimed the solution of the case:

The last photograph, which broke the apparent chronological sequence of the images in the report, showed the coffin before being transported to the truck; it was on the floor, which was broken with large, dark pieces of hardened earth, and there was no one beside it: the coffin was completely alone. (PRON, 2018, p. 69-70).

It is in reading the article about Alberto's burial that the great revelation for the narrator occurs, which identifies the father in one of the newspaper photographs giving a speech of farewell to the deceased:

And then there was one last photograph of the event, and when I saw it, I was perplexed and confused, as if I had just seen the silhouette of a dead man who comes down the road with the red and hellish sunset behind him. He was my father, as I had seen him in the hospital, in his last years, bald, with a white beard on his thin face [...] (p. 74). And I looked at my father and could

not understand what he was doing there, talking in that cemetery on a cold afternoon, an afternoon when the living and the dead should be sheltered, in the refuge of their homes or their tombs and in resigned comfort from memory. (PRON, 2018, p. 75)

It is in the article dated June 21, 2008 of the newspaper *El Trébol Digital* that the revelation actually occurs. The writer mentions his father: “There, 'Chacho' Pron [,] with affectionate and heartfelt words, he also remembered Alicia Burdisso, Alberto's sister [,] who disappeared a [sic] June 21, 1976 during the process [sic] military [,] in the province of Tucumán'.” (PRON, 2018, p. 76). This is the first mention of Alicia. Ahead, on the last sheet of the folder, the son finds the complete notes of the father's speech.

Even with the resolution of the crime, some regional newspapers continue to deal with it, establishing other relationships, which, at the same time, explains and expands the mystery, as they mention the compensation, received by Alberto in 2005, and investigate the recent history of the city, marked by the rapid growth of prostitutes, the trafficking of women, crimes of various kinds committed by a network of foreign bandits, including those who allied themselves to kill Alberto. With this, the narrator inscribes, albeit timidly, in the narrative, a problem that is very contemporary: the violence in the peripheries of contemporary Latin American democratic and neoliberal societies, with structural unemployment and the retreat of the State as guarantor of well-being to be social. As Bauman and Donskis refer, it is a world of precariousness, which is to say, a world of existential uncertainty that causes moral insensitivity:

All of us [and why not say the inhabitants of El Trébol], individuals by decree of destiny, seem to be abandoned to our own resources, woefully inadequate for the grand tasks we are already faced with, as well as for the even more terrifying tasks to which we are faced. We suspect that we will be exposed unless we find a way to avoid them. At the bottom of all the crises that abound today is the crisis of the agencies and the instruments of effective action. And its derivative, the embarrassing, degrading and exasperating feeling of having been sentenced to loneliness in the face of common dangers. (BAUMAN; DONSKIS, 2014, p. 74-5)

Like Alberto's lonely coffin, everyone fears the dangers of a world that has changed very quickly, including the “plague of loneliness” in the list of fears that daily assault people on the peripheries of the world. Still, according to the authors cited: “[...] we are condemned to confront our fears individually and to develop our own stratagems and subterfuges to counter them,

because the fears common to all do not result in a common interest and a common cause, just as they are not based on a stimulus to join forces." (BAUMAN; DONSKIS, 2014, p. 98).

It is important to point out all this because the symmetries between the disappearance and death of Alberto and Alicia are drastically broken, revealing to be only a ruse of the narrator and his pastiche of detective novel. The argument about the permanence of violence as a residual feature of the Argentine dictatorship vanishes: now, the State has given up its liberal task which, contradictorily, culminated in excrescences such as the dictatorships of the 1960-1970 in Latin America, with its colonialist history founded undeniably in violence that has perpetuated since the European invasion. So, if I can advocate for the continuity argument, it would be this atavistic violence.

Despite this, forms of violence are dynamized with society, and, in the contemporary context, there is no need for physical coercion in certain environments, as neoliberalism triumphed after the defeats inflicted on dissidents as the narrator's father. At least this is the reading that comes from Pron's book, marked by a strong defeatist feeling.

Even awakened by the father's guilty relationship over Alicia's death, the narrator does not seem entirely convinced that the previous generation fought and gave their lives for something that was really worthwhile. A certain skepticism runs through the narration and remains until the end, especially with regard to the country: "[...] although circumstances forced me to return, I did not return to the country that my parents wanted that I loved, and that it was called Argentina, but an imaginary country, for which they had fought and which never really existed." (PRON, 2018, p. 131).

The ethical commitment is established between people and not with the country, with the nation. This fight is already lost. Despite all this, the narrator understands that he will not be able to escape his heritage, which consists of a "political task, one of the few that could have any relevance for my generation, who believed in the liberal project that threw a great part of Argentines into misery during the decade 1990 [...]" (PRON, 2018, p. 147).

In the end, about to leave again, he asks his mother about his father's search for Alicia. The mother shies away, talking about the father: "Your father does not regret having fought this war; he only regrets losing, said my mother." (PRON, 2018, p. 150). Then, he explains the father's resentment at the loss of young people who did not have the opportunity to live what they could have lived because of an inglorious struggle that they were unable to win. "Your

father would like to not be one of the few who survived, because a survivor is the loneliest person in the world [...]” (PRON, 2018, p. 151).

5 To the future

Surviving has different meanings for the father and the narrator-son, as well as the search for each character, as I tried to show. The father survives the disease and the collective history survives the lack of individual memory. The search theme and the narrator’s option for the indicative method, acting as a specimen and detective, are structurally constructed by the narrator in the form of small chapters or numbered paragraphs, which simulates an accelerated rhythm for reading, stimulating the adherence of the reader by the police officer. It only simulates, because the detective novel is called less by respect for gender than by a climate of mystery necessary for the possible representation that soon dissolves and, at the same time, in a certain way, since many necessary information are of exclusive possession from the father, who remains involuntarily speechless until the end. “But perhaps its most important legacy has always been a case to be resolved” (BERNARDI, 2015, s / p).

The method is materialized in the narrative by the details; the insignificant details that lead to the truth are in news stories, in photographs, in notes, materialities that make the literary text hybrid. Although organized in the file by the father, the truth is scattered and depends on someone wanting to find it. It cannot be directly transmitted. The legacy left by the father, still alive, consists of a set of “documentary” texts (Cf. KLEIN, 2018), some even poorly elaborated (as the narrator’s corrections demonstrate), but it is what is there to attest to something about the truth.

The descriptions of photographs and their interpretation by the narrator constitute the most poetic and sentimental moments of the narrative and the alternation with the narration of the journalistic stories and the little that happens to the son waiting for news from the father helps to keep the pace of reading with dynamics, since, in fact, very little happens, as it is a waiting time. The important actions are all in the past, they cannot be reversed. And, mainly, there is no revealing personal report or testimony, because the father has not overcome the traumatic past, therefore, he cannot testify.

Dialogues are rare, although several voices are on the scene (Cf. LA HAIJE, 2015, p. 114). The narrator is almost always lonely in his search, immersed in his own thoughts and

memories, even if they are not so reliable until he makes the decisions to get rid of the medicines and to assume the personal, generational and political commitment to write about what comes to know and what remains to be known. This lack points to other actions, who knows, for a new book. Certainly to the future.

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