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This book emerges from the people who have lived these lives and their families, friends, and communities. I and the contributors thank them for sharing their experiences with us.

Finally, this book is dedicated to Robert M. Levine, whose feelings for humanity made him a most valued and now greatly missed scholar, colleague, and friend.

Poetry as a Strategy for Resistance in the Holocaust and the Southern Cone Genocides

Alicia Partnoy

I feel
in my bones
the bones
of those
who once were.
In me,
they are
skeletons,
we are
what I am,
I am
those who were
yesterday.

These lines were written in prison by Mauricio Rosencof, who spent eleven years in isolation under the military dictatorship that ruled Uruguay from 1973 to 1985.¹ Rosencof, better known as an accomplished playwright, has left us a legacy of prison poetry and some invaluable reflections on writing as a tool for resistance. He drew poignant connections between his experience and that of Holocaust victims, “(m)y paternal grandmother had been killed with an axe by the SS while refusing to turn over her two infant grandchildren. In my mother’s family, nobody survived and a number died resisting. And so whenever it was my turn to be tortured, I thought about my daughter, but also about my relatives who fell in the Warsaw ghetto or fighting with the partisans in the forests of Poland, or who perished in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz.”²

As a political prisoner of the military dictatorship that killed my closest

friends and devastated Argentina in the late 1970s, I too thought about my daughter Ruti during my years in captivity between 1977 and 1979. However, unlike Rosencof, I was not really aware of certain chapters of my family’s history: my grandfather had chosen to remain silent about his own ordeal. Not that I lacked the will and the inspiration to resist because of his silence. Anywhere I looked, brave *compañeros* were risking their lives for freedom. Movements for social change were strong in our Latin American countries and, for both Rosencof and myself, it was not our family background, but our participation in those movements that triggered torture, disappearance, and subsequent imprisonment. We are among the few to survive the genocidal extermination of political dissidents conducted by the military dictatorships in Argentina (1976–1983), Chile (1973–1990), and Uruguay (1973–1985). In our region, known as the Southern Cone, secret detention camp torturers and prison authorities drew their “inspiration” from the Nazis and from the training camps at the US-sponsored School of the Americas, based, back then, in the Panama Canal Zone. National Security and Regional Security doctrines gelled in the criminal Condor Plan, sought to install a US-supported economic and political system in our region. The supremacy of capitalism was at stake. Therefore, the “final solution,” concocted by the dictatorial regimes to safeguard that system, called for the extermination of every individual and organization suspicious of political opposition.

In June 1977, after my five-month ordeal as a “disappeared” in a place called the Little School, my grandfather Mauricio Partnoy came to the jail to visit.³ He sat on a narrow bench in front of me and just looked into my eyes with deep sadness and the deepest tenderness. He did not say a word. I held tightly his bony hand and sat there, pretending I understood. I was twenty-two. The look in his eyes haunted me until my late thirties when I found out from both my father and my uncle that the Nazis had killed my grandfather’s family. After puncturing his eardrum to avoid forceful recruitment into the Czarist army, he feared that his injury was not enough to resist the draft, and left Besaravia in his teens. He settled in Argentina. His closest relatives were spared the pogroms, but news from the Red Cross reached him after the war. They confirmed his worst fears.

In my highly politicized family, my grandfather participated in lengthy *discusiones de sobremesa* (after meal talks), where none of these events were talked about. The silence of my grandfather has puzzled me. In the United States, I learned from children of survivors that this silence is the norm rather than the exception. I also learned about the resistance movement during the Holocaust, and about the victims who had been targeted not because of their religious or cultural backgrounds, but because of their political beliefs. I learned that survivors might choose to be silent, but that too often they fail to speak out fearing nobody will listen: their voices have been shattered, their agency destroyed.

My work as a human rights activist, an educator, a poet, and a survivor has been to highlight the victims' resistance to silence. Carefully avoiding oversimplifications that would trivialize both the Holocaust experience and the Latin American genocides, I explore the similarities between Holocaust literature and the testimonial texts produced by victims of the Southern Cone dictatorships. Scholars in my field and Latin American literature have gone as far as to deny such similarities. From their perspective, Holocaust testimonies emphasize the destruction while their Latin American counterparts focus on the politization of the witness and the process of raising consciousness. I believe that the failure to see how Holocaust writings share those very same features with Latin American testimonial texts stems from neglecting the study of the literature produced in the ghettos and concentration camps. There, as well as in the Southern Cone prisons and torture centers, writing has contributed to preserving victims' moral and emotional integrity. Writing, and – for the purpose of this particular study – poetry, have helped victims recover their voices, fragmented by the pain of torture, and have served as instruments to chronicle those events for future generations.

Drawing from both my experience as a disappeared poet and from Frieda Aaron's *Bearing the Unbearable. Yiddish and Polish Poetry in the Ghettos and Concentration Camps*, I reached the conclusion that testimonial poetry in both situations was frequently born from the impulse of easing the pain of others as one of the ways to mitigate the poet's own pain.⁴ Those writings were nourished by the notion that the only way to survive morally and politically was to construct a discourse of solidarity against the messianic discourse of power generated by the Nazis and the Latin American dictators. Once the poems are rescued and disseminated, they move their readers to act on behalf of the victims, thus continuing the labor of resistance initiated *in situ*, when the crimes were taking place.

Although writing the pain is a powerful resistance strategy, poetry produced under such extreme circumstances is seldom self-referential; it tends to avoid references to the act of writing. Therefore, the writers' motivations and possible perceptions of writing as a tool for resistance are rarely, if ever, discussed in the poems. However, if the authors survive and publish their work, they will preface it with helpful reflections, mostly for the benefit of readers who did not endure the same torments. The Uruguayan poet Miguel Angel Olivera recorded his torture sessions in poems that were smuggled out of prison. He wrote in the prologue to *Los que no mueren en la cama – Poética de la tortura* (Those Who Don't Die in Bed – The Poetics of Torture), "I introduced a concept . . . applied by the victims of the concentration and extermination camps in the Second World War. It involved bearing testimony of how they lived and how they suffered; to write it down and whenever they could, to get it

outside of the prison and hide it in a million and one ways, so that one day, when the horror came to an end, some of these testimonies patiently left by the victims as if sowing the seeds of future, would be known, and the barbaric cruelties will be documented so they would never happen again."⁵

While Latin American survivors like Olivera, Rosencof, and myself see obvious connections between testimonial writing in the Southern Cone and that of the Holocaust, scholars of Latin American testimonial texts tend to highlight the differences between the two cultural productions. Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney posit that Holocaust literature focuses on destruction while testimonial writing in the Americas highlights the consciousness-raising process that the witness embraces when telling his or her stories. In their article, "Voices of the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America," they state, "As for Holocaust testimonies they are characterized by a shocking laying bare of the traumatic tortures and killings inflicted by imperial powers, be they Nazi Germany or American atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Most of the Holocaust documentaries differ by not emphasizing the learning process and the politization, or what Paulo Freire has called "*conscientização*" which makes Central American testimonials so significant and so different."⁶

I am convinced that this failure to see Holocaust survivors' texts as consciousness-raising tools is grounded in the types of texts whose study has been privileged in the US, that is, written and oral testimonies produced in this country, often through an interviewer.⁷

If we examine the background and agendas of interviewers it becomes apparent that in Latin America they tend to be left-wing intellectuals who support social change, whereas US documentary producers and interviewers are at the center of the political spectrum, have no interest in highlighting the victims' political participation in the Communist Party and other resistance organizations, and generally stress ethnic or individual moral values over political considerations. Consequently, Holocaust testimonial works privileged in this country are presented from a depoliticized standpoint, whereas Latin American testimonial texts produce the opposite effect. However, when the reader is confronted with works produced within the ghettos and concentration camps, as opposed to post-factum works filtered through an interviewer, the political intention of the testimonial witness, Freire's *conscientização*, is apparent.

To the multiple examples discussed by Aaron in her book, I would like to add a jewel of resistance literature, a poetry collection published by the Museum of Tolerance and produced in 1996 by the French Consulate in Los Angeles. *The Enduring Spirit: Art of the Holocaust* includes poetry and drawings created within concentration camps by French citizens.⁸ Although the book's preface downplays the fact that members of the resis-

tance movement produced most of the works, the poems and illustrations are a carefully organized exercise in solidarity and political consciousness raising.

Even when most readily-available texts focus on the post-traumatic experience, we must be alert to signs of the trait highlighted by Terrence Des Pres when he argues that, "the will to bear witness, oral and written, was the primary incentive to survival for many camp inmates who have subsequently become the self-appointed historians of the Holocaust."⁹ For Des Pres, the urge to testify implies an appropriation of reality, an act to recover agency. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire states that, "A deepened consciousness of their situation leads men to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel in control."¹⁰

One could argue, as George Yúdice does, that the testimony of the Holocaust experience "destroys any rational basis for understanding" and focuses on the passage from life to death, whereas in Latin American testimonial texts, the life of the witness "has undergone irreversible changes" but "is in the process of reconstruction and the testimonial mode is precisely one of the privileged vehicles for that reconstruction."¹¹

It is true that we find in most Holocaust testimonies widely disseminated and studied in the US, an unquestionable element of desperation, of fatalism in the face of a reality beyond control and impossible to transform.¹² However, a wide range of testimonial works, including poetry produced in ghettos and concentration camps, were conceived as instruments to preserve the victim's moral and emotional integrity while the crimes were perpetrated upon them. In that sense they are similar to most Latin American testimonial texts. In the words of Frieda Aaron: "Literature produced in the ghettos and concentration camps may not reflect the dramatic or tragic irony exemplified in *post factum* writing."

Aaron, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto and several Nazi concentration camps, analyzes in her book *Bearing the Unbearable* "the impact of the immediacy of Holocaust experience as a formative influence on perception, response, and literary imagination."¹³ Working with an extensive corpus of poetry written in Yiddish and Polish, Aaron concentrates on subjects that are also at the core of testimonial poetry produced in Latin America: moral, political and even armed resistance, solidarity, the protection of *all* collective cultural creation, and the need to testify for the future, to set a historical record that would prevent the same atrocities from happening again.

The absence of self-referentiality observed in Southern Cone testimonial poetry is shared by the corpus examined by Aaron. Poets Abraham Sutzkever and Władysław Szlengel are as exceptional in this respect as Miguel Angel Olivera in South America.¹⁴ The three refer in their work

to writing about pain. In Sutzkever's "Chant of a Jewish Poet in 1943" the poet asks "Am I singing for corpses, am I singing for crows?"¹⁵ The answer stresses the need for poetry in order to construct a discourse of solidarity that transcends the borders of the destroyed ghetto and outweighs sorrow: "Be open, my heart! And know that the hollowed hours/Sprout forth in the thoughts of posterity/ . . . /And sing from swamps, and sing from netherworlds,/ . . . /So that your voice will be heard by the skeleton like/brothers, the burning ghetto and the people beyond the seas."¹⁶

The desire of the victimized poet to project a prophetic verse toward the future and toward people "overseas" illustrates his need to testify. The lyric speaker summons his own heart to sing its testimonial song. Psychologist Dori Laub discusses this device, the use of an "internal interlocutor," as a strategy that allows the witness to accept himself as such. "The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as witness: reconstitutes the internal 'thou,' and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself."¹⁷

The liberating role of testimonial literature is addressed by Chilean political prisoner Arinda Ojeda in "Barco anclado" (Anchored Boat), "I write, because that is/my small space for freedom/and my wish to write to you/is an invitation to share it."¹⁸ Ojeda, who spent several years in isolation after her detention in 1981, offers us another rare example of self-referentiality, this time in the form of an "*ars poetica*." Her reader, not a prisoner, is deprived of something that the victim, on the other hand, treasures, "the wealth to conquer/a small space of freedom/through every written line."¹⁹ Ojeda is no longer addressing an internal interlocutor: the reader participates in building a discourse of solidarity, a task that has been initiated by the victim who is therefore empowered in a process that helps her regain agency.

As in some of the poetry produced in ghettos and concentration camps during the Holocaust, the poet's intention to chronicle the atrocities as a defense against oblivion is present in the works of Latin America's victims. Another Chilean political prisoner, Ignacio Vidaurrázaga wrote, "We will be chroniclers/we will be present/describing, recording/what we will not forget."²⁰ The same approach is taken by Uruguayan poet Miguel Angel Olivera in his poem "Ciclo de la palabra" (Cycle of the Word), "to rediscover oneself/ . . . a spokesperson/a witness as far as it is possible . . ."²¹

Striking and significant as these examples are, most of the poetry produced in the ghettos and concentration camps, in South American jails, and at the homes and literature workshops attended by the relatives of the disappeared, does not respond to an initial impulse to testify "outwards." The immediate role of testimonial poems is to contribute to survival in the most basic and raw of its meanings, that is, to empower the victim so he can make it to the next day, the next hour. Paradoxically,

even those poems that refer to the act of bearing testimony, are initially a tool to reconstruct the moral integrity of the victims, constantly thrashed by their tormentors. Subject to isolation and to permanent physical and psychological punishment, deprived of their place in history, the victims reconstruct their identity writing poetry that links them to those willing to hear their testimony.

In short, the construction of the discourse of solidarity in testimonial poetry collections originates in the initial action of the victimized poet who writes to resist his or her spiritual annihilation. The first reader is more likely to be another victim. Poetry written in concentration and torture camps is therefore conceived, as Aaron has brilliantly observed, “less as a means of self-expression than as succor, a vehicle of mitigating daily disasters.”²² This intention explains the lack of self-referentiality in most testimonial poetry produced while its author is being tormented.

To “mitigate” those daily disasters, the prisoners attempt to recreate the elements of everyday life that help them maintain a sense of normality amidst our alienated daily life. I recall that even in the Little School, blind-folded, hands tied, under the constant vigilance of guards, I would exchange ironic comments and silly jokes with Zulma Izurieta, my best friend from college who was later executed by the army. Laughter, humor, irony, helped both of us deal with the cruelty of the situation.

Likewise, parodic poetry amuses and therefore contributes to preserve the prisoner’s psychological integrity. Olivera recounts, “Many of these minute daily life details have gone unrecorded. Not everything was dramatic; there was joking, satire and above all, a concerted effort to fuel resistance, to uplift our spirits . . .”²³ Aaron calls these writings “poetry of humble fact,” and reminds the reader of the famous Rubinsztajn, clown of the Warsaw Ghetto, who would stand on the streets of the ghetto reciting his comic stanzas.²⁴ In one of the harshest prisons during Argentina’s dictatorship, the inmates rejoiced listening to “Las diez décimas del Tenemismo” (Ten Stanzas to Tenemismo).²⁵ This short excerpt clearly exemplifies the use of irony, while showing in a very dramatic light the switch from parody to the painfully pathetic effect the stanzas produce on the reader once they are removed from their initial context:

Sports are prohibited
 same with radio and TV,
 with books and the heating plate:
 as they have come they have left.
 This is really bloody awful
 and it gets worse every day
 and there are those who, insane,
 in their maddest delirium
 tell us: “Soon, very soon,
 the prison system will break.”

Neither the warm Spring sun
 shining on plazas and gardens
 Nor the scent of jasmine
 Neither the sight of first roses
 Nor the sweet swinging of hips
 Along the finest of streets
 Not even one of these things
 Do I like I swear as much
 as looking at this thick wall
 from my lousy prison hole.²⁶

When a poem that was written to “mitigate everyday disasters” emerges from its original context transformed into a testimony for the outside world, explanations abound and prologues elaborate on the ancillary nature of the works. In his preface to *Los que no mueren en la cama*, Olivera explains, “in my case, the insignificant little verse, the humble poetic form and my will to embark on the small but difficult act of writing, to transfer my thoughts and ideas to the page, gave me strength, kept me trained and alert, helped me endure the pain.”²⁷

Victimized poets write for everyday survival. In confinement, poetry is an instrument to provoke laughter, raise morale, exorcise pain, and exercise the intellect. Poetry’s immediate function is then to help the authors recover their integrity as human beings in control of their history, individuals who belong to a world community that will in the future listen to their account of atrocities. Therefore, this profoundly testimonial poetry works at several levels building a discourse of solidarity inside the ghetto, the concentration camp or the prison, and afterwards, amidst the human rights movement.

This poem written by Mauricio Rosencof and tapped on the wall – via Morse telegraphic code as a birthday present to his prison neighbor of ten years, dramatically illustrates the solidarity impulse at work.²⁸

And were this my last,
 Threadbare yet whole poem,

 just
 a word
 I would write:
 Compañero.²⁹

I have chosen to retain the word “compañero” in Spanish since many US English speakers understand that it means companion in the struggle and in life, as “comrade/camarada” would do for those active in the Communist Party. However, both terms (compañero and camarada) stress the privileging of the collective experience over the individual drama. According to Aaron, “Although by no means all, much of this

poetry eschews the narrow concerns of private struggles and subordinates them to the problems facing the community.”³⁰ This focus on the collective that is naturally shared with the first reader, the prison inmate, is one of the most moving features of testimonial poetry. When the poems are taken out of their first environment and published, prefaces often refer to this trait as indicators of the “triumph of the human spirit.”

A clear example of the nature of prefaces can be seen in this enlightening introduction to the poetry anthology *Desde la cárcel* (From Prison).

But the prisoner’s humanity survives . . . by a miracle of which only humankind is capable: the miracle of solidarity, of love that connects those who suffer together down to their roots; . . . and along with the miracle of brotherhood, comes that of the written or graphic expression. Pencil and paper are the tools of dignity and integrity . . . They confirm the existence of the power, targeted for destruction by the jailers, to speak out, to elaborate from the bottom of one’s own truth and with the strength born from an appreciation of life, a message to the rest of humankind, perpetuated forever on a piece of paper.³¹

The author of this preface, identified only as “a former Argentinean political prisoner,” explains the dynamics behind building a discourse of solidarity within the prison and subsequently widens its reach to add the “rest of mankind.” That presumably includes us, the new ideal readers for these texts.

Similar concepts preface the Uruguayan anthology, *Escritos de la cárcel* (Prison Writings).

The creative impulse allowed even the most tormented of victims under the most critical circumstances to create and memorize a few verses, to find a sheet – even a tiny cigarette paper leaf, and a bit of pencil lead and write a sentence, a page, a story . . . or just a word to break the isolation, the seclusion, the marginalization imposed by the forces of prepotency and terror. Today we recover those works so they do not remain lost back in time, so that they may be testimonies to that historical period, so that you may access them, pick them up, make them yours to share, so they may belong to everyone. In a jail for political prisoners the protagonist is the entire people and its cultural products will belong to the collective realm.³²

While the Nazi regime and the Latin American dictatorships conducted their genocides, they built a Messianic discourse of power. We have observed in this array of works written under terror, that the most effective tool to resist that destruction is the construction of a discourse of solidarity inside the torture and death camps. When the poems born to mitigate the pain of others as a way of soothing the poet’s anguish survive and are collected in testimonial books, the building process continues, seeking the readers’ support and essentially continuing the resistance

work started by the victims while the crimes were committed. If the victimized poet survives, she never ceases to tell her story, a collective one. In the words of Dori Laub,

This imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory and speech. The pressure thus continues unremittingly, and if we are not trustworthy or adequate, the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues.³³

As a survivor of the Argentine secret detention camps, I believe that the only way to tell the story so that it neither consumes the life of the witness nor is perceived by her as a futile, desperate act, is to tell it within the context of the discourse of solidarity. Such a discourse will continue its building process in every interaction with our multiple readers, multiple realities, multiple texts, and will in turn trigger countless acts of resistance to state terrorism.

Yet, there are those, like my grandfather, who chose not to tell. When my father informed him of my disappearance at the hands of the army, he sighed and uttered, “Why our family again?” Our family is large indeed: it includes the oppressed of the world, the persecuted, those massacred because of their political and religious beliefs. My mother, Raquel Partnoy, feels that those connections nurture her art and writings. Her series of paintings, “Surviving Genocide,” comes to mind. She traces her cultural roots back to her Jewish identity. I, however, choose not to focus on my Jewishness.

When feminist scholar Myrna Goldenberg befriended me and supported my writings fifteen years ago, she was doing pioneer work by finding relevant connections between my experiences in Argentina and those of Holocaust survivors. However, she did not ask me to discuss my Jewish identity. It was not necessary. We all know that for the Nazis, for the perpetrators of the pogroms that destroyed my grandparents’ families and forced the four of them into exile, my last name would have sufficed to target me. It would have been enough to observe the way I lean on the trunk of my family tree, not with the anxiety the shipwrecked embraces a life board, but with the serene demeanor of she who knows that this tree is part and parcel of the woods she calls her history.

Acknowledgments

This chapter originally appeared in Spanish as part of my dissertation, *The Discourse of Solidarity in Testimonial “Poemarios” from Argentina, Chile and*

Uruguay. *El discurso de la solidaridad en los poemarios testimoniales de Argentina, Chile y Uruguay* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1997). My gratitude to Mario Rojas for his feedback and support while writing it, to Myrna Goldenberg and Jan Hokenson for encouraging me to explore the connections between the Holocaust and the Latin American experience, and to Amanda Hussey and Shonda Buchanan for their help in the translation process.

Notes

- 1 Mauricio Rosencof, "On Suffering, Song, and White Horses," in Saúl Sosnowski and Louise Popkin, eds, *Repression, Exile, and Democracy – Uruguayan Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 130. "Siento/en mis huesos/los huesos/de aquellos/que fueron./En mí/esqueletos/son, /somos/lo que soy,/soy/los que ayet/fueron."
- 2 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 3 As one of the few lucky survivors, I have discussed my experiences as a "disappeared" – somebody kidnapped by the authorities, kept in a secret detention center, tortured, eventually killed and whose body is never returned to the family – in *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1986). Thirty thousand Argentines, including about five hundred children, were assassinated this way.
- 4 Frieda Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable. Yiddish and Polish Poetry in the Ghettos and Concentration Camps* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).
- 5 Miguel Angel Olivera, *Los que no mueren en la cama. Poética de la tortura* (Montevideo: CIC, 1988), 8.
- 6 Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney, "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 70 (1991): 9.
- 7 The authors refer to concepts in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970). Freire's validation of the experience of those marginalized by society, and his embracing witness storytelling as a way of articulating political awareness, are at the roots of the vast production of testimonial texts in Latin America. Although both the scope and forms of these texts are diverse, most critics have in mind the book by Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú. An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (New York: Verso, 1984).
- 8 The book, subtitled "Literary and Artistic Practices in the Concentration Camps in Europe During World War II," was published in conjunction with an exhibit of the drawings at the Museum of Tolerance. Veronique Alemany-Dessaint from the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Reims and Jane Tessa Ten Rink, Curator of Temporary Exhibits at the Museum of Tolerance, curated the show, and Anne Leroy-Saltzman designed the book. The limited distribution of this poetry collection, and the fact that it was an effort mostly funded and generated by Europeans, highlights my previous observations on material widely available in the US.
- 9 Barbara Foley, "Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Testimony and Mimesis in Holocaust Narratives," *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982): 334.
- 10 Freire, *Pedagogy*, 73.
- 11 George Yúdice, "Testimonio y concientización," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 36 (1992): 214 (author's translation).
- 12 Elie Wiesel's *Night* (New York: Bantam, 1986) comes to mind as the paradigmatic text, while the astonishing work of Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz. True Tales from a Grotesque Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) is a book remarkable for highlighting not only the destruction, but also the spirit of resistance among inmates, but which sadly remains largely ignored.
- 13 Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, 2.
- 14 The work of Paul Celan is another exception. Shoshana Felman has made an in-depth analysis of his testimonial poetry, written after the poet's experience in Nazi forced labor camps where his parents were exterminated. Shosana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 25–42.
- 15 Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, 78.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 17 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 85.
- 18 "Escribo porque ese es/mi pequeño espacio de libertad,/y al querer escribirte/te estoy ofreciendo compartirlo." Arinda Ojeda, *Mi rebeldía es vivir* (Santiago: Ediciones Literatura Alternativa, 1988), 19, from "Barco anclado."
- 19 "la riqueza de ir conquistando/un pequeño espacio de libertad/en cada línea . . ." Ojeda, "Barco anclado," 19.
- 20 "Seremos cronistas/estaremos presentes/describiendo en acta/lo que no olvidaremos." Ignacio Vidaurrázaga, *Se vive para darse* (Santiago: Ediciones Literatura Alternativa, 1987), 17, from the poem "Tu Frente" (Your Forehead), dedicated to Nelson Herrera, who was killed by a bullet to his forehead in a "staged/fake" confrontation with the army.
- 21 "uno se redescubre/ . . . vocero/testigo hasta que pueda . . ." Olivera, *Los que no mueren*, 47.
- 22 Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, 3.
- 23 Olivera, *Los que no mueren*, 11.
- 24 Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, 98.
- 25 Presos Políticos Argentinos, *Desde la cárcel* (Mexico: CADHU and other Human Rights Organizations, 1981). In the Coronda prison in Santa Fe province, "Tenemismo" was a tongue-in-cheek philosophical approach to life that painted the future of the prisoners in the gloomiest tones.
- 26 "Los deportes están prohibidos/la radio, el televisor, los libros, el calentador/por donde entraron se han ido/esto está más bien jodido y empeora cada día,/y hay quienes en su insania/y en sus delirios más locos/nos dicen: - Ya falta poco/se quebró la taquería./Ni el sol de la primavera/en las plazas y jardines/ni el olor de los jazmines/ni el de las rosas primeras/ni el vaivén de las caderas/en las calles primorosas/no ninguna de esas cosas/me gusta se lo aseguro/como mirar ese muro/desde esta celda piojosa." Presos, *Desde la cárcel*, 95.
- 27 "En mi caso, el insignificante versito, la humilde formita poética y el montar y realizar la pequeña pero difícil acción de escribir, de pasar a la hojilla lo pensado, lo elaborado mentalmente, me fortaleció, me mantuvo entrenado y

- alerta, me ayudó a bancar lo que estaba soportando.” Olivera, *Los que no mueren*, 13.
- 28 Rosencof, “On Suffering,” 124.
- 29 “Y si este fuera/mi ultimo poema,/ . . . /raído pero entero,/tan sólo/una palabra/escribiría:/Compañero.” Rosencof, *Conversaciones*, 70.
- 30 Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, 20.
- 31 “Pero la humanidad del preso sobrevive . . . por un milagro del que solamente son capaces los hombres: el milagro de la solidaridad, del amor que enlaza hasta las raíces a quienes sufren juntos . . . Y junto con el milagro fraterno, el de la expresión escrita o gráfica. El lápiz y el papel son las herramientas de la dignidad y de la integridad . . . Afirman la vigencia de esa facultad que es, precisamente, la que sobre todo se quiere destruir: la de decir, la de elaborar desde el fondo de las verdades propias y con todo el vigor del aprecio por la vida, algo para comunicar al resto de los hombres, fijado para siempre en un trozo del papel.” Presos, *Desde la cárcel*, 6.
- 32 “El impulso creativo permitió que el hombre más verdugueado y en la condición más crítica consiguiera concebir y memorizar unos versos, hacerse de una hoja – una hojilla de fumar apenas – y un pedazo de grafo para escribir una frase, una página, un cuento . . . una palabra siquiera para romper la incomunicación, el encierro, el marginamiento impuesto por la fuerza de la prepotencia y el terror . . . Hoy vamos rescatando todo eso del paso del tiempo para que sea testimonio de esa etapa histórica vivida, para que ustedes lo conozcan, lo recojan, lo hagan suyo y lo compartan, para que sea de todos, se socialice porque en la cárcel política el protagonista es el pueblo preso y el destino de la creación canera es la colectivización popular.” Centro de Integración Cultural, *Escritos de la cárcel. La expresión poética de los presos políticos*, vol.1 (Montevideo: Centro de Integración Cultural, 1986), 8.
- 33 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 70.

The Contributors



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