

Tortured Silence and Silenced Torture in Mario Benedetti's *Pedro y el capitán*, Ariel Dorfman's *La muerte y la doncella* and Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Paso de dos*

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Truthful words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not truthful.

— Tao Te Ching

“Por algo será.” Those who believe that the military violence in the Southern Cone during the 1970s and 80s was a necessary response to leftist militancy use this phrase to escape from the bitter truth that in its search for “subversives” the military far exceeded democratic and human bounds, and in so doing devastated the lives of many people. Unwilling to accept seemingly senseless violence by the military, “por algo será” serves to infuse meaning into the kidnappings, torture and murders (e.g., *Si se lo llevaron a Fulano, por algo será*). Yet it is not only those in favor of the military regimes who need to give meaning to the violence and horror of the years of the recent dictatorships in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. In a certain sense, those who condemn the violence also need to believe that the horror did indeed happen “for a reason,” not in a retroactive sense which implicates those persecuted as “subversives” who deserved their fate, but in a forward-looking manner that views the experience as an example and expresses a hope that the thousands of victims will not have suffered or died in vain. As the Uruguayan psychoanalyst Marcelo Viñar affirms regarding the psychological effects of political violence, it is essential to maintain “la noción de que ese dolor sirve para algo” (qtd. in Lira 98). Yet what kind of meaning can emerge from the horror of state terrorism? From the fear provoked by disappearance? From the intimate brutality of the torture chamber?

In the case of the dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, often times fictional representations of the horror provide the desired meaning for those yearning to make sense of such difficult years. Fictional representations of disappearance and torture weave painful history into meaningful story and seek through the telling to express truths about state terror.¹ Yet in a context such as the torture chamber, the path from history to story is marked with representational pitfalls. A taboo subject for those inside and outside the experience, torture proves especially difficult to articulate, and any portrayal of the event must engage the profound complexities of such a life-shattering experience. In an article exploring the practice of torture, Ñacuñán Sáez cautions, “How to explain torture without justifying it, without rationalizing it, without excusing it?” (130). Reframing Sáez’s question within a literary context, any author who takes up the mantle of truth-telling about the violence of torture faces a similar challenge: how to represent torture without justifying it, without simplifying it, without sanitizing it? – in short, how to write the story without betraying the history.

Plays about torture that explore the charged relationship between victim and victimizer walk a veritable knife’s edge between a moral imperative to condemn the practice and a dangerous tendency toward oversimplification. Given that language falls short when faced with unspeakable acts of cruelty, any rendering of trauma necessarily highlights certain aspects of the experience at the expense of others, and the ultimate meaning of a work reveals itself not only through what is expressed but also what is left unsaid. Representing the effects of torture on stage therefore becomes a very complex project of determining which aspects are portrayed and which are effectively silenced, as can be seen in three plays written during and in the aftermath of dictatorships in the Southern Cone. The first, Mario Benedetti’s *Pedro y el capitán* (1979), published at the height of the dictatorship in Uruguay, portrays the interrogation of a militant. Eduardo Pavlovsky’s controversial work *Paso de dos* (1990) details the continuing relationship between a torturer (referred to only as ÉL) and his former victim (ELLA) after the return to democracy in Argentina, while the third play, Chilean Ariel Dorfman’s *La muerte y la doncella* (1991), dramatizes the chance encounter between Paulina, a torture survivor, and Dr. Miranda, a man she suspects was her torturer.²

These works aim to call attention to the atrocities committed by the military, and this engagement with the reality of state terrorism in the Southern Cone implicates the plays in a larger ethical dilemma regarding fictional representations based on historical events. Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg addresses

this problem of ethical representation in *Beyond Terror: Gender, Narrative, Human Rights*, in the following manner: “How not to do further violence to these humans, their loved ones, or their descendants by spectacularizing, eroticizing, or otherwise *getting wrong* the representation of pain inflicted by the grave violation of human rights” (14). By analyzing several contemporary literary and cinematic representations of recent human rights abuses in places ranging from Latin America to Iraq, Goldberg outlines a possible ethic for fictional witnessing of atrocity that involves avoiding facile or generic narrative codes. By avoiding simplistic treatments of complex issues, one begins to approach an ethical representation of historical horror.

Such an ethic of representation seems especially appropriate in the case of the plays under consideration here, for all three depict the torture experience in rather unambiguously heroic terms. Each play features a victim who refuses to reveal information about his or her comrades despite suffering the most horrendous torments. In refusing to speak, the victims undermine the purported object of the practice of torture by exercising free will in the face of ostensibly complete domination, thus preserving their humanity in an inhuman situation. However, choosing to portray fictional characters who suffer torture in heroic terms risks betraying the memory of those who suffered the torments of torture in the real world.

Given the challenges of the subject matter, all three playwrights emphasize how their plays engage the difficult questions regarding torture and its aftermath. Dorfman describes his work as “llena de ambigüedad” (94), and indeed his play addresses complex questions concerning truth and justice in societies emerging from a repressive past: “¿Cómo sanar un país que ha sido traumatizado por el miedo si ese mismo miedo todavía sigue haciendo su silenciosa labor?”, “¿Podemos mantener vivo el pasado sin convertirnos en su prisionero?” (90) and perhaps most difficult of all, “¿Cómo saber si la memoria nos salva o nos engaña?” (94). Through witnessing the conversation between Paulina, Gerardo and Dr. Miranda, the spectator is reminded of the many challenges facing a post-authoritarian society of impunity, as the play explores the tricky relationship between truth, justice and vengeance. Paulina’s shifting desire throughout the play, from wanting to torture Dr. Miranda as she herself was tortured, to hoping to put him on trial (and achieve some type of justice), to simply wanting a confession, symbolizes the various compromises asked of many torture victims for whom real justice is not an option. The unresolved issues in the play itself, including Dr. Miranda’s guilt or innocence and his eventual fate, also play into the difficult issues of

truth and partial justice in Chile, for ultimately the spectator is responsible for determining Dr. Miranda's fate and implicated in the societal violence (when a large mirror is lowered into place to force theatergoers to look at themselves and the actors who are now among them). By refusing to offer easy answers to the difficult questions regarding truth, justice and vengeance, *La muerte y la doncella* indeed remains "full of ambiguity" regarding many aspects of the legacy of state terror.³

For his part, Pavlovsky insists that his intention was to explore the ambiguity of torture, stating in an interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz that "[t]he theme must be dealt with in its *complexity*" ("Dance" 71). Granted, the decision to portray a "love affair" between a torturer and his former victim explores an aspect of the legacy of torture that is generally considered unthinkable. As Estela Patricia Scipioni emphasizes in her analysis of the play, "*Paso de dos, haya o no tratado el tema [de las relaciones 'amorosas' entre víctimas y victimarios] con el conveniente miramiento, tiene el mérito de habernos obligado a meditar y discutir sobre el tema*" (279). By depicting a continuing relationship between a former victim and her captor, the play raises difficult questions regarding the relationship between power, violence and passion, thus directly confronting a taboo topic related to the torture experience.

Finally, Benedetti asserts in the prologue to one edition of *Pedro y el capitán*, "La obra no es el enfrentamiento de un monstruo y un santo, sino de dos hombres, dos seres de carne y hueso, ambos con zonas de vulnerabilidad y de resistencia" (qtd. in Paoletti, 214). The emphasis on creating well-rounded, human characters rather than flat caricatures points to one of the key ways in which all three playwrights seek to engage the complexities of torture. Each of these dramas deliberately avoids creating a Manichaean relationship between a victimizer who embodies evil and a victim who embodies goodness. In particular, the authors reject any one-dimensional characterization of the torturers as psychopathic monsters, depicting them rather as normal, if corrupted, individuals. By portraying human torturers, these plays preserve the interpretive complexity needed in order to avoid "getting wrong" the portrayal of torture.

Benedetti's work portrays the Captain as a family man who considers his role as interrogator to be a simple job undertaken to preserve the country from a Leftist Revolution. His conversations with Pedro reveal that he is a product of his environment: through his gradual instruction in the ways of torture, acts that at first repulsed him became pleasurable. He confesses: "Las primeras torturas son horribles, casi siempre vomitaba. Pero la madrugada

en que uno deja de vomiar, ahí está perdido. Porque cuatro o cinco madrugadas después, empieza a disfrutar” (65). In a similar fashion, *La muerte y la doncella* does not paint Dr. Miranda as a monster. The audience’s first introduction to the doctor in the play reveals him to be a “good Samaritan” who stops along the highway to help Paulina’s husband Gerardo change a flat tire. After Paulina forces him to “confess” his crimes, he describes a credible transformation from a doctor whose purpose is to alleviate suffering to a man who aids in persecution and torture. Neither the Captain nor Dr. Miranda are characterized as twisted human beings who begin to find themselves in their element in the torture chamber, but rather as ordinary men who become twisted as a result of their environment.

Pavlovsky’s play *Paso de dos* also offers readers and spectators a more complicated vision of the torturer. The two participants in the torture sessions “fall in love” in spite of (or perhaps as a result of) the violent experience they share, and their relationship continues after the prisoner’s release.⁴ Although he commits some savage acts throughout the play, ÉL is not the incarnation of an inhuman torturer. He does not describe his indoctrination in the practice of torture, but ELLA even goes so far as to claim “es la distancia que nos hace reconocernos / qué misterio se cruza entre los dos / haciéndonos olvidar tanto pasado *quién sabe si somos tan diferentes / qué creció tanto entre los dos?*” (my emphasis 15), indicating the potential similarities, however disturbing, between the two. While the play explores to some extent the unique discomfort that arises from their emotionally charged relationship, the fact that the two are able to develop a certain form of loving bond implies that ÉL, like the Captain or Dr. Miranda, is not an aberration of the human race.

It is worth noting that the fictional confessions of the Captain and Dr. Miranda reflect the real-world evolution of torturers. As Edward Peters explains in his classic study of the practice of torture, “Torturers are deliberately trained in such a way as to alter their personalities, make them accept a fabricated political reality in which their victims have been set outside the pale of humanity, and sustain this illusion by both coercion and reward” (184). Pilar Calveiro, a survivor of several clandestine camps in Argentina, similarly believes that the structure of the system allowed normal men to perform barbaric acts, explaining that they were “parte de una maquinaria, construida por ellos mismos, cuyo mecanismo los llevó a una dinámica de burocratización, rutinización y naturalización de la muerte, que aparecía como un dato dentro de una planilla de oficina” (34). These descriptions of

the mechanism of torture lend further credence to the characterization of torturers presented by these playwrights.

The portrayal of the torturers as human beings rather than inhuman monsters to a certain extent prevents the comfortable distancing that could occur if the victimizer was completely barbaric, or only marginally human. Faced with brutal torments carried out by seemingly ordinary people, audience members must consider their own capacity for evil. The human characterization of the victimizer may also avoid the danger of the torturer-as-most-fascinating-character, for rather than creating a voyeuristic spectacle of a psychopathic fiend, the plays attempt to highlight the manner in which torture becomes normalized or routine.

The plays aim to dismantle the misperception of victimizers as inhuman, and this complex treatment extends to the victims as well. The victims' responses to torture and interactions with their torturers demonstrate a depth of character that to a certain extent balances the multifaceted depictions of the torturers. In the case of *Pedro y el capitán*, the play documents a gradual role reversal between the two characters. While the beginning of the play depicts the traditional power relationship of the torture chamber, with the Captain interrogating the prisoner, little by little the balance of power shifts between the two men, until Pedro begins asking the questions and the Captain responds. In his analysis of the play, Stephen Gregory observes that "what is ostensibly a confrontation between the powerful and the powerless" becomes "a verbal encounter between two parties who, if not equal, occupy positions which are to some degree flexible" (15). This flexibility reveals itself in the transformation of the forms of address employed by the protagonists. Although in their early conversations the Captain uses the informal "vos" form with the prisoner and receives the respectful "Usted" address in return, by the end of the play the officer addresses Pedro as "Usted" and accepts Pedro's reciprocal decision to employ "vos" for the Captain. Pedro moves between playing the role of prisoner and interrogator throughout the play, and in an ironic twist, the only actual "confession" extracted during the course of the play is that of the Captain. Through his penetrating questioning, Pedro forces the officer to admit not only that he is as brutally compromised in the practice of torture as those who carry out the actual torments, but that his involvement proves he has lost faith in the ideals of the nation that he is supposedly upholding. This prompts the Captain to remark bitterly to his prisoner turned interrogator that "Usted es más cruel que yo" (84). Rather than portray a passive and broken

prisoner, *Pedro y el capitán* depicts a character strong and clever enough to beat the Captain at his own game.

Similar to the way in which Pedro is able to wrest discursive control from the Captain during his sessions with the officer, in *Paso de dos*, ELLA also interrogates ÉL about their past shared experience. Throughout the entire play she is continually questioning him, demanding explanations, descriptions, answers. At the very beginning she presses him to articulate the type of conviction he had when touching her for the first time, as well as his eventual obsession with her. When he suggests that his actions had no deeper motivation than simple “ganas” she probes further: “¿Nada más que por eso, absolutamente nada más?” (11). Just as Pedro’s questions provoke the Captain to confess his painful personal history, ELLA’s questions about ÉL’s family lead to a soliloquy about a childhood incident in which his father humiliated him – as in *Pedro y el capitán*, the “confession” in this case comes from the torturer (16-17). ELLA’s dialogue even begins to resemble that of a torturer, with a series of questions that recall the torture chamber: “¿nos detenemos o continuamos? / Estás cansado. / ¿Recomenzamos o paramos aquí?” (18). Beginning to suffer under her barrage of questioning and her charge that they try to “recordar cada detalle de los acontecimientos con la misma intensidad original,” he gasps “Me falta aire” (18), in an attempt to stem the tide of her questions. But she simply twists his plea into further questions, demanding “¿Cuánto te falta, un litro, dos litros?,” continuing to mock him: “siempre has sido preciso por qué no serlo ahora?” (18). Like Pedro, ELLA turns the tables on her former captor and takes on the role of interrogator, thus demonstrating a breadth of character for this particular victim.

The complexity of the female protagonist extends to her emotional development as well, for throughout the play ELLA appears deeply conflicted regarding her relationship with ÉL. Her dialogue often alternates between a rejection of their shared violent past and an attempt to maintain the connection between them. For example, when ÉL is gasping for breath as a result of her questions, she reflects upon their relationship:

Ahora es el momento

Tal vez podamos reconstruir

las palabras nos sirven para olvidar, muchas veces hemos intentado
hablar para olvidar

¿Te acordás de aquellas largas tertulias en las que hablamos para
olvidar lo que había pasado? [...]

Intentábamos olvidar lo que había crecido entre nosotros [...]

de eso se trata
 de reconstruir todo
 el misterio de cada acontecimiento al detalle
 ¿Se puede hablar de todo esto acaso? [...]
 Ahora sí estamos juntos, ¿cuántos con la cabeza en el barro?
 sin poder respirar
 cuerpos desnudos, mutilados, ahora sí estamos juntos
 ahora sí, ahora sí.
 Podemos recordar juntos, ¿estás de acuerdo? (19)

The progression from attempting to forget what had happened, to attempting to forget what had grown between them, to meditating upon other nameless, faceless victims, to ultimately hoping to remember, reflects the protagonist's discomfort with her connection to ÉL. In particular, the juxtaposition of their continuing relationship ("ahora sí estamos juntos") with those whose lives ended in the torture chamber ("¿cuántos con la cabeza en el barro?") highlights the violence and tension at the root of their relationship. While at some moments she appears to reject him completely, remembering the violence and the horror, at others she offers reflections such as "qué raro espacio habremos inventado / que a veces no puedo dejar de hablarte a pesar mío..." (25). The conflicting emotions experienced by ELLA as she alternately participates in and struggles against this sexual relationship with the man who, through exercising complete control over her in the torture chamber, became obsessed with possessing her, do indeed depict a complexity of character for the female protagonist.⁵

While Pedro and ELLA resemble their captors through their questioning, and ELLA struggles with conflicting emotions regarding her experience, Paulina's character development also reflects the complexity of her situation. In the first place, by taking Dr. Miranda prisoner, she crosses the line between victim and victimizer, mistreating him as she herself was mistreated. She ties him up and gags him and even forces a "confession" from him. Although she stops short of subjecting him to more horrific physical abuses such as rape, she does consider this possibility, toying with the idea of using Gerardo or a broomstick to do the job. Well aware of the limits of her power, she constantly reminds her husband of the shortcomings of the country's Truth Commission and its inability to satisfactorily resolve the plight of torture victims who survived their ordeals. The climactic confrontation between Paulina and her possible torturer ends with her aiming a gun at Dr. Miranda, threatening to kill him if he does not express contrition for his actions. Throughout the

play Paulina moves between the role of victim and victimizer, alternately expressing aggression and despair as she faces her extraordinarily complex situation as a victim of violence with no legal recourse.

All three plays thus demonstrate a multifaceted nature for the tortured as well as the torturer. By highlighting the slippage between victim and victimizer and focusing on the mental struggles of the victims as they confront their ambiguous situations, the works question the seemingly clear-cut positions of power and therefore respond to the complexities of torture and its aftermath. Nevertheless, despite the efforts by the playwrights to present a more complicated vision of the torturer and his victim, they fall short on one critical level. Although the torturers in these works are not monsters, and the victims are portrayed in all their humanity to the extent that they may take on aspects of their antagonists' behavior or face profound internal struggles, one facet of the victims' character is never questioned: their complete silence under torture. The three victims categorically refuse to offer any information to their captors that would betray their comrades, even when subjected to the most brutal torments, and their implacable silence converts them into "idealized" victims.

Both Paulina and ELLA refuse to speak under torture, and *La muerte y la doncella* and *Paso de dos* emphasize the force of their silence. Paulina crows to Dr. Miranda that "De Gerardo usted no sabe nada...Quiero decir que nunca supo. Yo nunca solté el nombre" (42). Not only did this heroic gesture protect her lover's life, it ultimately furthered his career, for she recognizes that had she mentioned his name he would never have achieved his position as a member of the commission established to investigate the military dictatorship's crimes. Paulina's silence in the torture chamber is also explicitly contrasted with Gerardo's weakness: while she remained loyal to him, he betrayed Paulina with another woman. As Paulina pointedly remarks, "Mientras yo te defendí, mientras tu nombre no salió de mi boca" (66), thus directly contrasting her loyal silence with his infidelity. Furthermore, the fact that Gerardo's defense for his transgression is "por Dios, yo también soy humano" (66) implies that Paulina's resistance under torture is somehow more than human.

ELLA's silence is similarly powerful in *Paso de dos*, for it serves to infuriate her interrogator and represents her ultimate triumph. ÉL recalls, "Por qué siempre evasiones *ganando en tu silencio* / yo quisiera que pudieras gritar todas las verdades" (my emphasis 26). ELLA clearly holds a power over ÉL through her refusal to provide answers, as can be seen when ÉL despair-

ingly states, “Te llegué a pedir que inventaras nombres que sólo necesitaba un nombre para que dijese algo...lo importante llegó a ser que jugaras a que cedías” (27). ELLA’s silence continues to gain importance throughout the play, as ÉL draws a parallel between her previous silence in the torture chamber and her current refusal to name him and grant him an identity. “No hablabas antes y no querés nombrarme ahora,” he declares, shortly before the end of the play (26). In the final, climactic scene, ÉL is standing at attention in the muddy pit where he has “disappeared” his victim/lover, but her bodiless voice proclaims: “Me voy a quedar en silencio. Mi silencio es tu prisión [...]. No te voy a hacer HÉROE nunca / vas a seguir encerrado en mi silencio / No te voy a nombrar...” (29). Throughout the play, ELLA uses silence as her weapon; by refusing to offer information during the torture sessions and further refusing to denounce him as a torturer and allow him the “fame” of proclaiming his deeds to others, the play suggests that her silence holds tremendous power. Because neither Paulina nor ELLA confesses under torture, they subvert the expected role of torture victims and become heroic agents instead of passive prisoners.⁶

Given the ambiguities explored in both *Paso de dos* y *La muerte y la doncella* and the range of emotions exhibited by both victims, it seems especially surprising that their behavior under torture remains unambiguously laudable. Paulina demonstrates the potential to commit torture, murder and vigilante justice, while ELLA works through the extraordinarily complex ramifications of her continued relationship with her torturer, yet they both categorically refuse to betray their comrades. *La muerte y la doncella* fails to resolve many of the ambiguities regarding the fate of Dr. Miranda and the appropriate balance between truth and justice in a climate of impunity, choosing not to let the spectator off the hook. Meanwhile, *Paso de dos* explores the taboo surrounding relationships between victims and victimizers. Yet in both cases, such uncertainties do not extend to Paulina and ELLA’s behavior under torture, as they unequivocally remain “ideal” victims who did not give any information away.

The case of *Pedro y el capitán* is even more compelling, for the full extent of the prisoner’s power hinges upon his implacable silence. His resolve stands out from the opening scene, for the stage directions repeat variations of phrases, such as “PEDRO guarda silencio,” and “Silencio de PEDRO” (12-13), when the Captain interrogates him. At the end of the scene the prisoner incorporates a mute gesture, “La capucha de PEDRO se mueve negativamente” (21), indicating his decision to remain quiet. In subsequent

encounters with the Captain, Pedro breaks the complete muteness and begins to converse with his interrogator, but he remains firm in his decision not to betray his comrades – a silence that is maintained throughout the entire play.

The more Pedro resists the increasingly brutal torments, the more the Captain loses his arrogant countenance, and the stronger the prisoner's silence becomes. The officer proves incapable of comprehending Pedro's unrelenting refusal to speak; perhaps, one suspects, because he values the power of speech so much. He is proud of his eloquence and believes himself superior to those who carry out physical torture, commenting that "La picana puede ser manejada por cualquiera, pero para manejar el argumento hay que tener otro nivel" (42). Faced with a silence that becomes more and more inexplicable, the Captain feels the need to fill the discursive spaces left by Pedro, and a great portion of the second and third acts of the play resemble an act of confession on the Captain's part.

The latent power of the prisoner's silence also suggests itself through the exegesis of his name. The fact that he has a proper name, Pedro, rather than a word that describes his function (comparable to "the Captain") begs consideration. While this technique serves to highlight his individual worth – he is not a nameless prisoner – the particular name chosen amplifies the understanding of power relations in the play, for "Pedro," as opposed to other possible names, is an anagram for "poder." Just as the play demonstrates how power relations that at first glance appear to be obvious (the Captain controls the prisoner's voice) are not quite so clear-cut, the slight shifting of letters in Pedro's name reveals his power, a strength that becomes more and more evident as the play progresses and he begins to extract words from the Captain. During an extended soliloquy in the second act, the Captain confesses the reason behind his growing discomfort with Pedro's silence, revealing that he can find "una sola justificación por lo que hago: lograr que el detenido hable" (42). Nevertheless, the Captain insists that in order to consider himself different from the torturers he characterizes as "casi inhumanos" (14), the methods for extracting information must be successful. Pedro's stubborn refusal to speak becomes powerful because it forces the Captain to recognize the futility or meaninglessness of torture. No longer a means to an end, torture has become an end in itself, and this disconcerting fact, the Captain suggests, is unbearable.

Pedro's name also introduces a religious aspect to the play, as his namesake represents the rock upon which the Christian Church was founded. Jesus's declaration to Peter "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I

will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18) indicates that the prisoner’s name represents spiritual strength against evil forces. Pedro’s forceful refusal to name his comrades also implies strong associations with martyrdom, and the prisoner’s willingness to sacrifice himself for a greater cause resembles the action of what Herbert Lindenberger terms “martyr plays” in his study *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality*. The author explains, “The martyr play, whether about a saint, a monarch, or simply some exemplary individual, can never completely escape being an imitation of Christ” (45), and indeed, many elements of Benedetti’s play serve to draw a parallel between Pedro and the paradigmatic savior of mankind. In the opening act, the Captain introduces religious imagery when he threatens that the torturers will break every part of Pedro’s being, including “la aureola de santito que alguna vez quisiste usar pero te queda grande” (37). Nevertheless, although Pedro’s body is completely destroyed during the torture sessions that culminate in his death, he ultimately finds relief on a spiritual, rather than physical, plane – ironically, the one aspect that is not broken and grows stronger throughout the play is precisely his “saintly air.” In keeping with the tenets of Christianity, the body proves a provisional (mortal) vessel that houses the eternal (immortal) soul, and the more Pedro’s body deteriorates, the stronger he becomes spiritually.

Pedro’s resemblance to Christ becomes more evident as the play progresses. By the third act, when the physical ravages of torture have taken a terrible toll on Pedro’s body, he declares he has already left the physical world and is “*técnicamente* muerto” (52), thereby liberated from the concerns of the material world. He even refers to his situation in terms that recall Christ’s suffering, as he explains that the desire to live “es siempre una tentación peligrosa. En cambio, la tentación se acaba cuando uno sabe que está muerto” (53). Once Pedro resists the temptation to live, his physical pain recedes and he calmly accepts his fate. Like Jesus, Pedro chooses to accept his suffering and inevitable death, because he knows his eventual triumph lies in the memory of his martyrdom. In his final monologue, directed toward his wife, Pedro begs her to tell their son that “con mi muerte no lo agredo sino que, a mi modo, trato de salvarlo” (88), further evidence that the greatness of his cause surpasses earthly concerns. Finally, when the Captain appeals to Pedro in the final scene as someone who is “capaz de querer a la gente, de sufrir por la gente, de morir por la gente” (90), one notes an obvious comparison between this victim of the dictatorship and Jesus Christ, a relationship that is supported by the visual arrangement of the scene. In the

stage directions, “Las luces iluminan el rostro de PEDRO. El CAPITÁN, de rodillas, queda en la sombra” (91), conjuring up images of religious iconography, with Pedro bathed in a divine light, his torturer kneeling at his side begging for forgiveness. Although on one level Pedro may “torture” the Captain through his interrogation, by the end of the play he has become an almost divine victim.

As opposed to *Paso de dos* and *La muerte y la doncella*, which both seek to a certain extent to explore some of the fundamental ambiguities related to torture, *Pedro y el capitán* remains the least ambiguous of the three plays due to its central emphasis on Pedro’s powerful silence. Although Benedetti states that his play is not a confrontation between a monster and a tyrant, his work most closely resembles the decidedly unambiguous martyr play and its counterpart, the “tyrant play,” for, as Lindenberger observes, by their nature “tyrant and martyr plays tend to cultivate as little ambiguity as their audiences – or the writers’ artistic consciences – will let them get away with” (40). All three playwrights take pains to avoid the simple dichotomy between “monster/tyrant” and “saint/martyr,” recognizing that such terms “are much too absolute...for a work which cultivates the subtle shading of its characters” (39), yet they only appear to fully question or develop one half of the dichotomy. The authors go to great lengths to break down the tyrant’s side of the dualism in order to prove that torturers are not inhuman monsters, but the victims retain an almost divine aura. Despite the complexities demonstrated in some aspects of their behavior, in the final analysis their categorical refusal to speak under torture precludes the “subtle shading” of these characters.

The reluctance to portray the ambiguity of the victim’s behavior under torture risks converting him or her into a one-dimensional symbol of resistance rather than a well-rounded human character. As Lindenberger explains, “although they may begin by showing common human weaknesses, martyrs by their very nature are heroes whom the audience must come to recognize as superhuman” (48), an especially ironic situation given the extent to which the torturers are shown as complex individuals, characterized as all too human.⁷ After all, it is just as dangerous to portray victims as heroes as it is to portray torturers as monsters. Given that one of the reasons for portraying the torturer as human rather than monstrous is to avoid creating a play in which the torturer is the most interesting character, the contrast between a well-rounded victimizer and a somewhat flat victim serves to undermine this important goal, as the torturers may inadvertently end up being the most

fascinating character simply by virtue of appearing more human. In other words, in order to avoid a dichotomy between a human torture victim and an inhuman (monstrous) torturer, the plays risk portraying a contrast between a human torturer and an inhuman (saintly) victim. Neither of these dogmatic portrayals does justice to the memory of those who suffered torture, for they fail to fully acknowledge the complexities of the practice of torture.⁸

Just as it is important to recognize that the characterization of the torturers as normal people twisted as the result of their training remains an accurate reflection of the development of victimizers, it is equally important to understand that the ideal, martyr-like image of a torture victim presented to varying degrees in *Pedro y el capitán*, *Paso de dos* and *La muerte y la doncella* differs radically from the experience of torture as described in numerous survivor testimonies. Many first-person accounts compiled in the Argentine document *Nunca Más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP) and its counterpart *Uruguay Nunca Más* indicate that more often than not those subjected to torture did indeed provide information. The Chilean Luz Arce's aptly titled testimony, *El infierno*, similarly documents her personal story of torture and "betrayal." This is not to say that there are no examples of victims who withstood torture. As Mario Villani notes regarding his experience in numerous clandestine detention centers in Argentina, "There were people in the camps who gave out no information whatsoever, collaborated not at all after hideous prolonged physical torment" (qtd. in Feitlowitz, *Lexicon* 76). Similar testimonies can be found for Uruguay and Chile. Others died in the torture chambers before revealing any information. Nevertheless, judging by the sheer number of testimonies in the Argentine and Uruguayan reports of or about people who broke under torture, such incredible resistance was apparently the exception rather than the rule.

While the idea of maintaining complete silence during torture may have been an admirable goal for the members of guerrilla groups, the very structure of these organizations suggested that those captured would offer information to their interrogators.⁹ The majority of these urban guerrilla movements adopted the *foco* structure outlined by Ernesto "Che" Guevara in his well-known treatise *La guerra de las guerrillas* (1960), in which a small group of fighters work to spark the revolution by multiplying in number and spreading throughout the countryside. Keeping sensitive information safe within the fragmented structure of the *foco* was a top concern, and members were encouraged to maintain strict secrecy. While Guevara cites such reticence

as a necessary means of combating enemy infiltration, it was also invaluable in case members were captured and subjected to torture. According to James Kohl and John Litt in their 1974 study *Urban Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America*, during the frequent clashes between the militants in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina and their respective governmental forces during the 1960s and early 1970s, "It is the torture of prisoners... that provides the most important source of information for the authorities" (21). The advantage of the cell structure becomes readily apparent if captured militants are unable to provide complete information to their captors regarding the movement's leaders, positions or future attacks, as "there is no guarantee that any given individual will bear up under the strains of the struggle, especially if torture is introduced" (22-23). Members of the Montoneros and the MIR were trained to make decisions regarding how much torture they could tolerate, and the very structure of these guerrilla movements into *focos* ensured that no one member could bring down the entire organization even if the military managed to extract all the information they possessed.¹⁰

Accounts of "confessions," "betrayals" and collaborations, along with the *foco* structure of guerrilla movements, would suggest that, in contrast to the fictional torture victims seen in the plays under consideration, many prisoners spoke when subjected to torture. The discrepancy might not be so important were it not for the historically accurate portrayals of the torturers themselves. The plays represent the banality of evil played out in the South American context, thereby forcing spectators to consider their own potential for violence. If anybody can be instructed in the practices of disappearance employed by the military, if torture can become routine, then everybody is implicated as a potential victimizer. Consequently, the state terror becomes much more threatening – the practices of state terrorism could happen to anyone, and they could happen again.¹¹ Meanwhile, the idealized behavior of the torture victim is harder to accept. Not anybody can withstand the torments of the torture chamber, and to imply that such heroic behavior is normal or constitutes any type of real power discourages the spectator from examining the uncomfortable realities of torture in the real world. The plays thus offer a terrifying view of the very real possibilities of state terror, while diminishing the real-world characteristics and implications of the practice of torture.

Despite these challenges, the theatrical representation of the silent torture victim is quite common, as Severino Albuquerque notes in his *Violent Acts: A Study of Contemporary Latin American Theatre*. His consideration of torture plays in the chapter "Representing the Unrepresentable" reveals

how the prisoner's refusal to confess becomes a source of power over the torturer. While his analysis centers on the way in which the "unrepresentable" act of torture is made visible on stage through the interplay of verbal and nonverbal languages of violence, the numerous plays that he cites, including *Pedro y el capitán* and many others written under military rule in Brazil and Argentina, all conform to a greater or lesser extent to the mythology of the stubbornly silent torture victim in Latin American theater.¹² The prevalence of such characterizations of the victims reinforces the wide scope of this discourse of the torture victim as silent hero.¹³ Given the symbolic power of silence in the torture chamber, small wonder that those who attempt to tackle the difficult task of dramatizing such a shattering experience employ the victim's stubborn silence as a cornerstone of their representations, for it allows for a conscious choice – the decision not to speak – to emerge as a heroic symbol of humanity amid the brutal attempts to break down the individual through torture.

Nevertheless, the idealized portrayal of torture victims upholds several dangerous misconceptions regarding the practice of torture: the concept of torture as an information-gathering device, and the characterization of torture victim's speech as a betrayal. In the first case, the fundamental structure of torture the plays present – with violence inflicted as a simple means to gather information – differs greatly from the reality of the practice. As Elaine Scarry reminds us in her fine study *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, the description of torture as a method for "information-gathering" is a calculated fiction designed to legitimize the infliction of pain in the extraction of information (29). While the military justified the use of torture by claiming that inflicting a limited quantity of pain would prevent greater injury (the rationale behind the oft-cited example of a captured terrorist who knows the location of a bomb that is about to kill many innocent people), the reality of the situation rarely, if ever, matched such hypothetical urgency.¹⁴

The absurdity of justifying torture as a method of gathering information is painfully illustrated by the significant number of survivors who testify to torture sessions absent of any interrogation, or questions concerning activities about which they had no knowledge. Many accounts in the Argentine and Uruguayan reports detail brutal torture sessions that are seemingly unrelated to information gathering of any kind, either because the victim has no knowledge that would allow him or her to answer the questions posed, or because he or she is subjected to torture without any type of interrogation at all. Such testimonials belie the classification of torture as a pure "informa-

tion-gathering” device and seem to support Scarry’s assertion that torture is in fact a practice designed to transform the prisoner’s pain into the torturer’s power. Scarry explains the mechanism of this procedure by describing how torture values form over content: “while the content of the prisoner’s answer is only sometimes important to the regime, the form of the answer, the fact of his answering, is always crucial” (29), as seen in the Captain’s desperate attempts to extract some form of confession from Pedro. In other words, the utterances emitted during torture may bear little if any resemblance to usable information, but they serve rather to demonstrate how torture destroys both language and the self. When the prisoner’s world is reduced to his or her immediate pain, his or her voice has been completely co-opted by the repressive regime.

While Scarry and DuBois emphasize that torture is ridiculous in its claim to discover truth, Ñacuñán Sáez asserts that the sense of “painful absurdity” so often associated with torture “does not arise from the inability of torture to produce truth, but rather from its consistent disregard for it” (132). In “Torture: A Discourse on Practice,” he analyzes the testimony of an Argentine victim who, as a direct result of false information given by a woman under torture, was kidnapped, tortured and interrogated about his participation in the “*cope de rim*,” an event about which he had no knowledge.¹⁵ Taking issue with Scarry’s claim that torture separates the individual from the ability to produce meaning, Sáez counters that the woman’s confession ultimately implicated the victim, among fifty others. He describes the confession, noting that “*although it is not accurate*, it does make sense, it does convey a message, it does after all have a political effect. Pain has forced her to give concrete (but false) names, exact (but random) addresses, precise (but distorted) information” (138). According to Sáez, the pain inflicted by torture “does not break down a pre-existing subject. It does something more and something less than that: paradoxically, it produces the subject as already (or still) absent” (138). Pain becomes what he calls the “transcendental signifier” (139) and causes the victim to supply *any* information at all, regardless of its “truth,” in order to stop the torment. Thus while Scarry perceives torture as transporting the victim outside the realm of truth, Sáez maintains that “torture blurs the line between truth and falsehood. It makes them equivalent and equally useful from a political point of view: truth is used to suppress specific enemies, blunders to spread intimidation” (139).

Sáez is correct. The words uttered during torture do indeed possess a meaning that has measurable effects in the world outside the torture chamber.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on the real-world consequences of information extracted during torture risks leaving the burden of responsibility with the victim; after all, his or her words provoke such terrifying consequences.¹⁶ Yet the key element of the torture victim's speech is not the meaning of the words themselves (in the sense of their real-world application), but the responsibility for that meaning. The words screamed out during a torture session may indeed mean something, but is the victim who produces the words from the depths of his or her pain responsible for that meaning? And who is in a position to judge?

At issue is the tricky relationship between torture, "confession," and "betrayal." As Scarry observes: "[t]here is not only among torturers but among people appalled by acts of torture and sympathetic to those hurt, a covert disdain for confession" (29). Yet the very confession extracted during torture is, in Scarry's estimation, mistakenly considered a "betrayal." Her intricate analysis of torture makes it clear that such intense physical pain destroys an individual's relation to the world, explaining that this destruction is "experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as a body swelling to fill the entire universe" (35). When the victims' world becomes pain, or, conversely, when their pain becomes their world, any true "confession" is impossible, because "[o]ne cannot betray or be false to something that has ceased to exist" (30).¹⁷ While these words still do have some type of "meaning" in the larger political context, in the intimately brutal space of the torture chamber, they are released from their referent and cannot be viewed as a simple act of betrayal. According to Scarry, the fact that those who inflict, experience or witness torture (through testimony) are still able to place the burden of responsibility on the victim is proof of torture's ability not only to completely destroy a victim and his or her world, but also to cover its tracks and create a reading of the event that allows those who practice torture to elide the moral responsibility for their actions and blame the victim for the consequences.

Testimonial evidence about the myriad responses to torture, coupled with critical analysis of its structure and meaning, stand as a testament to the issue's complexity. Faced with such a difficult subject, one must consider the elements of torture that the playwrights choose to address and those they "silence." The portrayal of a victim who is able to exercise a clear choice between remaining "loyal" to an exterior world that is arguably rendered absent through torture and "betraying" that world and its inhabitants, converts the experience of torture into a very manageable world of clear choices between "good" and

“bad” and subsequently forces the victim to choose between being a “hero” or a “traitor.” Too often the “choices” offered those subjected to torture are not nearly so straightforward. One survivor of one of Argentina’s clandestine detention centers tells the tale of a man who broke under torture and offered information to his captors. But when they asked for more, he refused, even when they threatened to kill both him and his mother. His torturers eventually kill them both, causing the survivor who told the tale to challenge: “So here’s the question...under torture he cracked, but given a free choice he gave up his life. Is he a hero? A traitor?” (qtd. in Feitlowitz, *Lexicon* 67). Luz Arce’s story is equally poignant, as she believes she is forced to “choose” between sacrificing her son or collaborating with her captors. These examples, far from illustrating a clear demarcation between heroes and traitors, highlight the desperate ambiguities involved in such systematic violence.

By choosing not to address such difficult issues regarding torture and betrayal, the plays confine this crucial aspect of the practice of torture to the fictional realm. Diana Taylor warns us of the possible consequences of such dogmatic representations of human brutality in *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America*: “Along with the (false) element of choice enter notions of responsibility: if the victim *chooses* to suffer rather than answer or ‘confess,’ we (as spectators) are relieved of the moral responsibility of interfering with that choice. Good audiences stay in their seats and let the actors fight it out” (111). All three plays invite, encourage or even force contemplation of some very difficult issues regarding torture, truth, justice and forgiveness in authoritarian and post-authoritarian societies: the average person’s capacity for evil, the line between justice and revenge, and the nature of relationships developed in the torture chamber. However, when it comes to perhaps the most difficult aspect of torture – its capacity to completely devastate a human being and his or her world – the plays retreat to the safety of uncomplicated, silent torture victims. The victim’s fictional silence reveals a more disturbing silence on the part of the playwrights regarding pain and “betrayal”: the torture victim may be given leave to resemble a torturer, but never a traitor.

The divergence between the testimonial reality of torture and the fictional characterization of its victims – between the stated goals of the playwrights to explore the complexities of torture and the actual impact of their work – suggests that the writers may unconsciously share a “covert disdain” for confession. Indeed, there exists in Argentina a stigma surrounding survivors of clandestine detention centers – just as “por algo será” can

be used to justify the military violence, some human rights activists similarly condemn those who came out alive as traitors or collaborators (e.g. *si sobrevivió, fue por algo*). In *Traiciones: la figura del traidor en los relatos acerca de los sobrevivientes de la represión*, Ana Longoni explores the phenomenon that “mientras los desaparecidos son considerados mártires y héroes, los sobrevivientes son estigmatizados como traidores” (14). Through examining several testimonial novels that emerged out of the military dictatorship, Longoni reveals how writers persist in portraying survivors as traitors, and she wonders to what extent such representations may contribute to the perpetuation of this societal stigma. In the case of the plays under consideration in this article, while they may expose certain taboos surrounding the torture experience, they unwittingly reveal a profoundly disturbing reluctance to engage the uncomfortable reality of how torture can destroy body and mind, as well as an unwillingness to question the misconceived relationship between torture and betrayal.

The decision to afford fictional victims clear choices between loyalty and betrayal allows them to preserve their dignity and demonstrate some form of resistance within the insular space of the performance. On another, infinitely more unpleasant level, it serves to justify the practice of torture. Categorizing torture as a tactic of interrogation risks normalizing a practice that is barbarous and inhuman by preserving the burden of responsibility upon the victim. Fictional portrayals that pretend the victim can and should retain their agency may even indicate the degree to which the language of the oppressor has been internalized by the oppressed (or those who speak for them) rather than providing an effective model for representing torture. Paradoxically, these plays reproduce the very structure of torture they aim to condemn, for the victims’ fictional suffering in the space of the performance, like its counterpart in the real world, is ultimately denied as soul shattering pain and read as power.¹⁸

To return to the question posed at the beginning of this study, then: How does one *represent* torture without justifying, rationalizing, or excusing it? Debates regarding the circulation of images from Abu Ghraib prison and the justification of torture in the “war on terror” underscore the importance of an ethics of representation. As Elizabeth Dauphinée argues regarding the use of photographs from Abu Ghraib by human rights activists, “there is no ethically pure way to circulate those images,” for they remain within the “economy of violence” in which they were produced (149; 150). Her article “The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery” explores

the “irresolvable ethical dilemma” posed by the use of violent imagery, despite the good intentions by those who show the photos. Because the use of the images always ends up somehow explaining the violence (either condemning or excusing it), Dauphinée notes that refusing to reproduce them represents an ethics in itself, thereby suggesting that silence is a viable alternative, perhaps the lesser of two evils (148-50). This ethical dilemma of how (or whether) to represent torture naturally extends into the fictional realm. Indeed, portraying torture appears to involve an inescapable paradox. On the one hand, attempts to create a strong fictional torture victim accept information-gathering as the central premise for torture, thereby justifying the practice and disregarding the suffering of real victims. On the other, an attempt to do otherwise and engage the incredibly difficult issue of “betrayal” denies the “sacrifice” of the victims of torture, and prevents any hope from emerging out of the horror. Just as the torturers and those who tacitly condone torture need to believe that such actions are justified (“*por* algo será”), those who attempt to honor the legacy of the victims also need to find meaning out of the horror (“*para* algo será”).

Protective narratives that assign heroic meaning to trauma stem from the commonplace human tendency to want to find meaning out of desperate situations. As Taylor explains, however, “[t]he violence at work in genocide and other kinds of victimization is difficult if not impossible to represent; it works on the real rather than the symbolic order. It does not *mean* or *signify* anything else” (*Crisis* 123). Attempts to form horrific events into coherent and heroic narratives can therefore be as dangerous as they are noble, for they take a real person’s inexpressible pain and convert it into a simplistic, easily digestible story. Tales of triumph emerging from trauma offer comforting words which, citing Lawrence Langer’s critique of some Holocaust fiction, “make us feel better,” but consequently do not “help us *see* better” (12). Yet choosing to see clearly can be too much to bear. Is it too terrifying to postulate that torture does indeed destroy humanity, and any attempts to discover positive interpretations of such systematic brutality are hollow and false? Hopeful portrayals of horrific events ultimately mask a fear that were we to look carefully for the “real” meaning of such experiences, we would discover that such meaning proves intangible, nonexistent or beyond our comprehension, thus rendering us truly powerless in the face of radical evil.

Of course one could easily argue that fictional representations create spaces where historical truths can be suspended or set aside. Playwrights, after all, have the right to portray history not as it *actually* happened but as

it *should* have happened. However, is the purpose of such representations to honor the victims of such a life-shattering experience, to bear honest witness to their trauma, or to portray a more palatable version of torture, one more suited to those who remain outside the experience? In the end, heroic tales of torture provide an additional burden for victims who lived to tell the tale, compounding the brutal physical victimization with the psychological blow that anything less than martyrdom constitutes a failure or betrayal.

There are no easy answers to the ethical dilemma of representing the torture experience. In search of a possible path through the representational minefield, one can turn to “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” by Jorge Luis Borges, a tale that features an incomprehensible novel. In most fiction, characters make one decision at the expense of all others, and yet in this paradoxical text, each time a character faces a situation in which he is obliged to make a choice (to kill or to be killed, to speak or to keep silent), the character chooses every possibility. The result is a labyrinthine, contradictory novel, impossible to comprehend in all its complexity. But such decisions are not limited to the fictional sphere. Authors make similar choices when deciding what to write. By choosing one particular plot twist or characterization, many possible alternatives are effectively silenced. Spectacles of torture that allow easy, satisfying or comfortable interpretations of heroism and betrayal let the spectator off the hook. They sanitize the experience instead of forcing those faced with the act of witnessing the drama to consider uncomfortable issues regarding their own attitudes, especially toward the relationship between torture and betrayal or the acceptability of the violence portrayed. The experience of torture involves a labyrinth of conflicting motivations and jumbled utterances, all played out through a prism of unspeakable pain. To portray it in all its complexity, one risks creating a confused tale, impossible to comprehend, or a tale that proves too difficult to accept – the horrifying legacy of radical evil. Yet the alternative would seem to be a dangerous silencing of some of the most difficult and crucial aspects of the experience. In the search for a representation of torture that honors the victims and bears witness to their trauma, we must not forget that the price of coherence is always a silenced story.

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Notes

¹ While some people might claim that fictional accounts by definition betray the truth of an experience, many authors and critics recognize that a representation need not be “realistic” in order to portray an event “realistically,” especially one that is marked by profound trauma. Given the apparent inability of mimetic representation to penetrate the core of a traumatic experience, it is not surprising that many look to fiction to provide truth. With regard to literary production after the Holocaust, for example, in “The Representation of Limits,” Berel Lang asserts, “[t]he factual claim is entailed in imaginative representation that the facts *do not* speak for themselves,” and that the author’s figurative manipulations actually represent the historical subject “more compellingly or effectively – in the end, more truly – than would be the case without them” (317, in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution.”* Ed. Saul Friedlander. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992: 300-17). The facts, therefore, do not always point to the truth.

² Recognizing that the dictatorships and their practices of torture differed among the three countries represented in these plays, because this article explores the more universal aspects of torture and repression, rather than the specific way in which it was employed in each country, I have chosen to examine these plays in conjunction.

³ Roman Polanski’s film version of *Death and the Maiden* eliminates many of the unresolved issues in the play, for not only is Dr. Miranda unquestionably guilty, but he offers a true confession at the end of the film and is definitely alive in the final scene. The audience watching the movie is therefore spared many of the uncomfortable considerations raised by the play’s performance.

⁴ The “love affair” between a torturer and a former victim raises numerous psychological issues that lie outside the scope of this article. For an excellent consideration of the subject, see Diana Taylor’s treatment of Pavlovsky’s play in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s ‘Dirty War.’* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997), Marguerite Feitlowitz’s “A Dance of Death: Eduardo Pavlovsky’s *Paso de dos.*” (*The Drama Review.* 35:2 (1991): 60-73) or Estela Patricia Scipioni’s analysis in *Torturadores, apropiadores y asesinos: El terrorismo de estado en la obra dramática de Eduardo Pavlovsky* (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2000).

⁵ The ambiguities regarding ELLA’s position are even clearer in the performance, as the actress portraying ELLA (Susy Evans, Pavlovsky’s wife) alternates between resisting and willingly participating in the sexual acts with ÉL. “I react differently each time,” Evans states. “Sometimes it’s erotic, sometimes it’s torture [...]. What I never forget is that I’m going to die, that these are the last moments I have with him. And I don’t want to die, I want to keep being with him” (qtd. in Feitlowitz, “Dance,” 69-70).

⁶ While ELLA’s silence in the torture chamber is unambiguously heroic, it must be noted that her final “powerful” silence – her refusal to name ÉL as a “hero” is not quite so clear-cut. Both the director Laura Yusem and the playwright insist that the work portrays a positive, empowering vision of the legacy of the so-called “Dirty War” in Argentina. Nevertheless, faced with the critic Marguerite Feitlowitz’s suggestion that “the death seems real, her ‘triumph’ a literary conceit” (“Dance” 67), Yusem emphasizes the importance of ELLA’s voice living on as a testimony to her unbroken spirit. Paradoxically, then, this final silence can be interpreted at one and the same time as a powerful affirmation of the individual’s free will or as proof of her complete disappearance. On the one hand, ELLA’s decision to remain silent and not grant ÉL an identity through her words can be viewed as a ringing condemnation of the public’s perverse fascination with violence (her refusal to label him either a torturer or a hero prevents him from capitalizing on his past); yet on the other, this silence means her experience, like that of many other *desaparecidos*, will be condemned to oblivion.

⁷ The different eras in which the plays were written can help explain the symbolic portrayal of Pedro as a divine martyr. The shift seen in *Pedro y el capitán* from verisimilitude to the realm of the more obviously symbolic is better understood as a metaphor for the eventual (inevitable) triumph of the oppressed over the oppressive regime that held sway at the time of writing. Written in a decidedly less

optimistic era, *Paso de dos* and *La muerte y la doncella* do not focus on the triumphant martyrdom of a victim but rather on certain complexities of the relationship between victim and victimizer. As Lindenberger explains, “with the emergence of the antihero, martyrdom has come to lose that heroic quality which had once given it dignity or made it seem at least a worthwhile way of dying” (51). Although Dorfman and Pavlovsky’s victims may lack the divine aura of the central characters of “martyr plays,” they do exhibit the stubborn, heroic silence of Pedro.

⁸ Idelbar Avelar has criticized this particular aspect of Dorfman and Polanski’s film collaboration of *Death and the Maiden* in his “Five Theses on Torture.” Paulina is “a hysteric,” and Gerardo’s inability to believe in his wife’s story makes him “almost mentally retarded,” meaning that “[t]he only one of Dorfman’s gallery of characters who is not pathological, the only one who is rationally credible, the only one who reasons and is plausible, then, is the torturer” (265) (*Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 10.3 (2001): 253-71). I would submit that the problems with the characterization in the film extend to the play as well, although the preservation of the ambiguities regarding the play’s conclusion serve to temper somewhat the extreme caricatures Avelar criticizes in the film.

⁹ It should be noted that there exists a discrepancy as to the number of detained-disappeared who were directly connected to the Montoneros. While *Nunca Más* and testimonies such as Jacobo Timerman’s *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* refer to large numbers of relative innocents who found themselves in the camps, Calveiro asserts that “La población masiva de los campos estaba conformada por militantes de las organizaciones armadas, por sus periferias, por activistas políticas de la izquierda en general, por activistas sindicales, y por miembros de los grupos de derechos humanos” (italics in original, 44). She does acknowledge that the hunt for “subversives” extended to family members and friends of suspected militants, and argues that while the number of casual victims might have been relatively small when compared to political prisoners, the mere existence of this category served to disseminate terror through Argentine society (45). In Argentina, there has been a general tendency to publicly minimize the involvement of the *desaparecidos* in militant movements, in order to dismantle the theory of the *dos demonios*, and this may help to explain the discrepancy.

¹⁰ Mario Firmenich, the former leader of the Montoneros in Argentina, has stated that because one could never know whether a person would talk or not under torture, cyanide tablets were distributed to key members of the organization so they would have the option to kill themselves rather than be subjected to torture. This issue actually became a source of contention among the militants, as at first only a limited few were granted the privilege to choose their own fate, and eventually the practice was expanded to include all members (*Historia argentina 1976-1983: procesos socioeconómicos, políticos y culturales*). In the case of Luz Arce in Chile, she was expected to withstand torture for a specified amount of time, until she could be fairly certain that key members of her organization had gone underground. It is only after she estimates that breaking her silence will do no harm to her comrades that she raises her finger to indicate to her interrogators that she is ready to talk and proclaims, “Mi nombre es Luz Arce” (58).

¹¹ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of the essay for calling my attention to these threatening implications of portraying the torturer as all-too-human.

¹² On one end of the spectrum are works such as Jorge Andrade’s *Milagre na cela* (*Miracle in a Prison Cell*, 1977), which moves beyond the suggested spirituality of Benedetti’s play to depict the divine martyrdom of a nun who steadfastly refuses to grant her tormentors any type of victory, whatever the personal physical cost. Augusto Boal’s *Torquemada* (1971) includes a striking scene in which seven sons are tortured consecutively in front of their mother, in order to discover the location of a resistance leader. In each case, their mother exhorts them to stay firm in their silence, believing they should die for the cause rather than reveal any information. The other plays Albuquerque examines similarly represent the interaction between interrogator (torturer) and victim as a continual battle of wills to elicit a “confession,” depicting the frustration of the victimizers or the strength of the victim. Of all the works under consideration in Albuquerque’s chapter, only one, Oduvaldo Vianna Filho’s *Papa Highirte* (1968), mentions a victim who “broke” under torture, yet even in this case the torturers are “exasperated by their victim’s tenacity” (Albuquerque 186).

¹³ The fictional portrayal of heroic torture victims is not limited to Latin America. As Darius Rejali explains in “Whom Do You Trust? What Do You Count On?,” most torture narratives emphasize resistance rather than betrayal, and fictional works such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well as nonfiction accounts such as Jean Amery’s *At The Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* remain the exception for their description of utter and complete betrayal. (*On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and Our Future*. Eds. Abbott Gleason, Jack Goldsmith, and Martha Craven Nussbaum. Princeton: NJ: Princeton, UP, 2005. 155-79).

¹⁴ The “ticking time bomb” argument remains quite prevalent in more recent debates regarding the use of torture in the United States’ “war on terror.” Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz has argued that since torture is (and will continue to be) practiced, it should be regulated in some way. He suggests issuing some type of “torture warrant” only in such instances where the infliction of pain on a limited number of individuals (the terrorist and the ticking time bomb) would prevent the suffering of many (“Tortured Reasoning” in *Torture: A Collection*. Ed. Sanford Levinson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 257-80). In “Five Errors in the Reasoning of Alan Dershowitz,” Scarry’s response in the same volume (pp. 281-90), she counters that “An accurate understanding of torture cannot – in my view – be arrived at through the ticking time bomb argument, which (quite apart from what any one advocate may intend) opportunistically provides a flexible legal shield whose outcome is a systematic defense of torture” (281). Recognizing the prevalence of such arguments in the post 9/11/01 world, she notes that one must always respond to the hypothetical case of the ticking time bomb, “even though the arguments (both for and against it) provide a false location for achieving a genuine understanding of torture” (281). I agree with Scarry’s characterization of the ticking time bomb argument as at best insufficient for understanding the practice of torture and at worst a dangerous justification for its practice.

¹⁵ See the CONADEP report from Argentina, p. 35.

¹⁶ Sáez does address the issue of responsibility in his essay, noting that according to the CONADEP report the woman “cannot be held responsible for her mistakes because she is no longer herself” (138).

¹⁷ Avelar takes issue with Scarry’s characterization of torture as unmaking the world in his “Five Theses on Torture,” arguing that “Scarry’s thesis presupposes that what is destroyed by torture – ‘civilization’, ‘world’ – is somehow completely uncontaminated by torture itself” (259). Nevertheless, the central thrust of Scarry’s argument, that in the torture chamber the victim loses all connection to exterior referents, remains sound whether those exterior referents stand completely outside of the torture experience or are somehow implicated by it.

¹⁸ Although *Paso de dos* and *La muerte y la doncella* have drawn criticism for their treatment of gender, these plays have not received as much attention for the way in which they tacitly uphold the justification of torture (for a complete discussion of gender and power in the plays, see in particular Feitlowitz’s “A Dance of Death: Eduardo Pavlovsky’s *Paso de dos*,” Taylor’s treatment of Pavlovsky’s play in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s ‘Dirty War’*, and Amalia Gladhart’s critique of *La muerte y la doncella* in *The Leper in Blue: Coercive Performance and the Contemporary Latin American Theater* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 2000). However, in the case of *Pedro y el Capitán*, it must be noted that several critics take issue with Benedetti’s portrayal of the torture experience. Gladhart affirms that “[i]n recreating the interrogation scene, a drama may fall into the trap of repeating, unquestioningly, the state’s justification of torture. This is to some degree the case in Benedetti’s *Pedro y el Capitán*...” (165). Gregory similarly argues that the play, “in order to demonstrate the superiority of humanitarian empathy... finds itself having to manipulate the relationship of torturer and tortured into an extended session between therapist and patient, thus betraying the reality of what it purports to interpret by turning it into something else” (2). Luys Díez is similarly critical of the manner in which Benedetti’s play makes torture more “literary” and thus more palatable to the spectator in his “Un festival para Nueva York: Teatro Popular Latinoamericano” (*Latin American Theatre Review*. 14.2 (1981): 71-77).

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