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Memory and Fantasy: The Imaginative Reconstruction of a Lost Past in *Las cartas que no llegaron*

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Since the end of World War II "Holocaust literature" has generated an intense debate regarding the relationship between historical reality and its representation through fiction. One could even say that representation itself, when faced with the collective trauma of the Holocaust, entered into a profound crisis. As philosophers and thinkers of all kinds struggled to come to terms with the horrors endured by millions in Nazi concentration camps, they began to question the possibilities and limits of representation as well as the problems associated with collective and individual memory. Adorno's well-known dictum, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34), often serves as a point of departure for this discussion and has provoked different reactions from many, ranging from those who reject any artistic approach to the Holocaust to those who defend fiction as a possible means of overcoming the limits of historical representation.

Although it does not necessarily fall within the category of "Holocaust literature," the autobiographical novel *Las cartas que no llegaron* (2000)[1] by Uruguayan playwright and novelist Mauricio Rosencof can be read within the context of this debate. Rosencof is the son of Jewish parents, who emigrated from Poland in the late 1920s hoping to improve their life in Uruguay. In the 1960s, Rosencof became one of the leaders of the National Liberation Army (the so-called "Tupamaros"), an urban guerilla group that was overthrown by the Uruguayan army in 1972, leading to his arrest and subsequent imprisonment during the military dictatorship (1973–1985). In *Las cartas que no llegaron*, Rosencof tells us the story of his life, in which he confronts not only his memories of thirteen years of terror and deprivation, but also an earlier traumatic episode in his family's life—the disappearance of the relatives left behind in Poland, all of whom

were exterminated in Nazi concentration camps. The text is by no means a realistic or mimetic account of his life, but rather joins fact and fiction in such a way that they become inseparable, creating a poetic and imaginative work that enables us to rethink the relationship between history, memory, and fiction. The prominent role given to imagination and fantasy[2] in the novel suggests that facts do not necessarily speak for themselves and that the use of imagination in writing constitutes a way to possibly overcome the difficulties associated with representing traumatic events.

Without a doubt, the Holocaust constituted *the* traumatic event of the twentieth century, and it has frequently been described as an "inexpressible experience" or an event "beyond words," given that it brought forth a degree of evil and horror that was unimaginable before the era of totalitarianism. When Adorno uttered the aforementioned maxim "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," he alluded to this alleged "inexpressibility" which was understood by some theorists and critics as a kind of prohibition against art in general, suggesting that artistic representations of any event labeled as "unspeakable" would somehow constitute an ethical violation. Berel Lang,[3] for example, chose to systematically reject the possibility of artistic representations of the Holocaust, claiming that fiction is deceitful and dangerous because it tends to "twist" historical truth:

> Figurative discourse and the elaboration of figurative space obtrudes the author's voice and a range of imaginative turns and decisions on the literary subject, irrespective of that subject's character and irrespective of—indeed defying—the "facts" of that subject *which might otherwise have spoken for themselves* and which, at the very least, do not depend on the author's voice for their existence. (316, emphasis added)

Lang's idea that facts "speak for themselves" has been severely criticized by other critics and, as I will later argue, is also rejected by Rosencof whose novel makes a strong point with respect to the relationship between facts and reality, stressing that factual evidence is often entirely insufficient if one wants to comprehend a traumatic event. Likewise, in his essay "Unspeakable," Thomas Tresize carefully examines Berel Lang's idea of what constitutes an ethically acceptable representation

of the Holocaust, concluding that his attitude is excessively restrictive. Tresize argues that by focusing "on the ethical flaws of figurative discourse" Lang infers "the moral superiority of what he considers to be non-figurative representations of the Holocaust" (47), creating the impression that "the writer cannot be trusted to make an intelligent and ethically discriminating choice of figure or trope" (50).

One of the definitions of the term "unspeakable" that Tresize offers in the introduction to his essay refers to that which "may not or cannot be uttered or spoken" (39), either "because it lies outside the profane world and its language" or "because speaking it would be a profanation" (39). This seems to be the definition closest to Adorno's original idea that writing poetry after the Holocaust is "barbaric." Rather than making a prohibition against art, Adorno seems to suggest that the concentration camp experience is one that eludes artistic expression, either because there are no words to represent such evil or because the attempt to do so would violate an unwritten ethical code. Since then, a number of theorists have tried to find new angles from which to approach the problem of representation, trying to escape the risk of making absolute claims or moral prescriptions by shifting the focus from the question of *whether* to represent or *what* can be represented to *how* it is possible to talk about events such as the Holocaust within ethical and aesthetical bounds. Some have even begun to criticize the notion of "unspeakability" altogether, pointing out that by describing Auschwitz as "inexpressible" we may run the risk of converting it into a "sublime" experience, giving it an almost positive spin in the process. Giorgio Agamben, for example, though he defines Auschwitz as a unique phenomenon with respect to its magnitude (31), rejects the notion of "inexpressibility," suggesting that such a view risks bestowing an aura of mysticism on the extermination of human lives: "Decir que Auschwitz es 'indecible' o 'incomprensible' equivale a *euphēmeîn*, a adorarle en silencio, como se hace con un dios; es decir, significa, a pesar de las intenciones que puedan tenerse, contribuir a su gloria" (32).

By not offering the reader a strictly mimetic account of his life and instead emphasizing the artistic use of imagination, Rosencof's novel provides one possible answer to the question of how trauma can be represented through fictional writing. In this respect, his ideas are closely related to those expressed by Geoffrey Hartman and Jorge Semprún, two thinkers who share the view that fiction may be a

possible way out of the crisis of representation. Hartman, for example, has argued that realistic representations often fail because they tend to exceed our human capacity to comprehend and conceptualize certain traumatic events (320). In "The Book of the Destruction," he asks whether so-called unrealistic ways of representing may provide a better alternative: "In every realistic depiction of the Shoah, the more it tries to be a raw representation, the more the Why rises up like an unsweet savor. We describe but cannot explain what happened. Could 'unrealistic' depictions, then, alleviate the disparity?" (321).

The same question is asked by Semprún in *La escritura o la vida* where he argues that harshly realistic representations of radical evil risk betraying reality itself by making it seem "unbelievable" ("demasiado increíble" [198]). Thus, for Semprún (as well as for Rosencof) it is never enough to recount the facts. Instead, he insists that the excess of evil which characterizes the concentration camp experience can only be communicated "con un poco de artificio" (141); in other words, by stimulating the audience's imagination and putting reality into perspective in such a way that our mind becomes open to the unimaginable (141). In order to accomplish such a task without distorting historical truth, the artist, then, should ideally "present without representing, [. . .] show without telling" (Carroll 76). Finally, while Hartman speaks of "limits of conceptualization" (referring to our human (in)capacity to *comprehend* traumatic events), Semprún stresses that there are also limits to our ability to *empathize* with other people's suffering. The real issue for him is not "what can be told" but rather how the experience of the Holocaust can be narrated "while stimulating rather than crushing the sensitivity and imagination of one's audience" (77).

This idea of "presenting without representing" put forth by Semprún also lies at the heart of Rosencof's novel in which he aims to relate the traumatic experiences that have shaped his life without resorting to the use of uncompromising realism. When telling the readers about his encounter with terror under the Uruguayan military regime or about his relatives' experience in a Nazi concentration camp, he opts for a blend of "real" and "imagined" memories, which speak powerfully for the importance of imagination in artistic representations of traumatic events.

Las cartas que no llegaron is divided into three parts, each of them constitutes a different angle from which the author attempts to reclaim

a lost past, first by returning to his childhood and employing the voice and perspective of a young boy, and later through a reconstruction of the imaginary conversations he has with his father while being in solitary confinement. Throughout the text, writing and the use of fantasy in particular play a privileged role, given that the narrative constitutes an effort to reconstruct a rather "blurry" image of a past that is only partially accessible through distant and fragmented memories. Fully aware of his own lack of memories, the narrator pleads for more: "¿Y por qué te escribo hoy todo esto, Viejo?[4] No sé. Tal vez para decirte lo que me acuerdo y, más que nada, decirte lo que me acuerdo para que veas lo poco que sé, que quiero saber más, que quiero más memorias" (Rosencof 69). Thus, faced with the insufficiency of his memories, the use of his imagination becomes the only way to fill in the gaps and to "make up" for the emptiness left behind by his relatives' disappearance as well as the absence of human contact during his years in prison.

One must only look at the book's dedication in order to realize that memory plays a special role in this text. *Las cartas que no llegaron* is dedicated to Rosencof's granddaughter, Inés, specifically to her incipient memory, "tu naciente memoria" (7). Hence, the motivation behind the text becomes clear: it is meant to ensure that the family history will not be lost, that memory will be preserved, not simply because remembering those who suffered is an obligation (which is a declaration quite common in Holocaust literature), but also because sharing our family's memories strengthens our sense of who we are. In fact, the call for "more memories" in the citation above (69) and the attempt to reconstruct a lost history can be interpreted as essential steps in a search for identity which, according to Rosencof, is always rooted in our family's past.

In the first part of the novel, entitled "Días de barrio y guerra," the narrator recounts his childhood memories, among which daily life in his parents' house and the Sunday ritual of reading letters from Poland figure most prominently. As the title of the novel indicates, the letters possess a special significance, mainly because one day they stop coming, creating a void that haunts the Rosencof family for years. The most important aspect of the first part of the book is that the narrator, rather than looking back and commenting on the events as an adult, takes on the voice and perspective of a child, a procedure that can also be found in some examples of Holocaust literature (i.e., Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939–1948* or

The Painted Bird by Jerzy Kosinski). In her book *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead analyzes Wilkomirski's novel, where a child's point of view is used in order to narrate his experience during World War II. Whitehead focuses her attention on the effects that this technique has on the reader, pointing out that "the limited insight of the child creates a hiatus in the text, which relies on the knowledge or imagination of the reader to fill in the gap and make sense of the narrative" (38).

Rosencof's novel certainly challenges the reader to take on such an active role in order to reconstruct the meaning behind the innocent and naïve voice of the child. Andrea Reiter, another critic interested in the use of the child's perspective in literature dealing with traumatic experiences, suggests that the impact on the reader is especially powerful because the child's outlook tends to change our view on things we thought we understood: "It is the gaze of the child that allows us to see in a new way that which we already know" (84). In addition, the child's lack of experience often grants his/her observations a singular clarity: "In their unprejudiced and uninformed attitude, children not only notice details which escape the adult but interpret them in a way which makes them seem even more horrific" (85). Later in the same essay, Reiter points to the problems associated with memory, specifically early childhood memories which tend to be extremely fragmented and full of gaps (86).

The same problem is evident in Rosencof's text from the very first page. In part one the narrator begins his story by saying: "No puedo precisar con exactitud qué día conocí a mis padres" and then immediately adds: "Pero recuerdo—eso sí—que cuando vi a mamá por primera vez, mamá estaba en el patio" (11). Thus, the tension between remembering and not remembering, knowing and not knowing, is underlined from the start, and this same ambiguity accompanies the text until the very end. By pointing out rather than covering up his insecurity with respect to the accuracy of his memories, the author directs our attention toward the problematic nature of memory, giving more importance to the act of remembering itself than the accuracy of the facts. In this fashion, Rosencof emphasizes that the past can never be recovered "as it was" and that retelling it means converting it into fiction.

The French historian Pierra Nora[5] was also concerned with how past events are retold, and in his famous work *Les lieux de mémoire* he differentiates memory from history, pointing out that, unlike history which is linear and focused on the "progressions and relations

between things," memory "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (9). If we accept this distinction and carry it over to Rosencof's text, we can see that the author's aim is not to offer a precisely reconstructed and linear version of his past (in other words, of history) but rather to create a kind of archive of memories, however simple or fragmented these may be. Indeed, what we find in "Días de barrio y guerra" is a multitude of recollections that are based on concrete objects, such as the radio that brought news from the war, the shoebox in which his mother kept the family pictures or the streetcar that used to pass by the house. The young boy's commentaries on these objects range from the most naïve and infantile to those that provide a glimpse of how much even a child can be aware of the anxiety reigning in his family, which can be seen in his remark about the tram, "los tranvías son una cosa espantosa porque se llevan a la gente y no se sabe dónde" (19).

In addition to the already mentioned objects, the parents' house also occupies a privileged space within the narrator's recollections. According to Nathan Wachtel's essay, "Remember and Never Forget," the home is often given an important role in Holocaust testimonies, where it represents a kind of lost paradise: "In the beginning was a familiar place: a home, a refuge, warm affectionate surroundings. This original space appears in memory as the ideal of all happiness; it is recalled with longing" (112). Though this may be true to a certain extent in Rosencof's novel (for example, the mother is lovingly associated with the patio, and the narrator recalls with nostalgia the times in which the whole family would gather around the kitchen table), the feeling of happiness and unity is overshadowed by the never-ending wait for letters that never came.

In the absence of letters or any written proof of what in fact happened, fantasy takes over, substituting for "reality" and filling the silence with the voices of those who lacked the chance to tell their story. In *Las cartas que no llegaron*, Rosencof invents letters to take the place of those that never came, imagining what might have happened, beginning with the arrival of the Gestapo in the relatives' village to the deportation to Treblinka, a Nazi concentration camp, even imagining a kind of rebellion led by the prisoners in the camp. Through these unsigned letters, inserted into the text in such a way that the distinction between reality and fantasy becomes blurred, Rosencof insists on the value of imagination, especially in the face of

evil. Thus, one of the letters states: "Porque la fantasía, ¿sabes?, es la única cualidad humana que no está sujeta a las miserias de la realidad. Como las cenizas, ¿comprendes? Porque han comenzado a acumularse grandes cantidades de cenizas" (43).

I shall briefly discuss the use of the word "cenizas" ("ashes"), in order to underline its suggestive power. There is no doubt that Rosencof chooses this word carefully with the intention of stimulating the reader's imagination and evoking (disturbing) images in our mind without having to describe anything directly. Used as a type of synecdoche, the word *cenizas* alludes to the horrors of the concentration camp without explicitly talking about them. Choosing this type of figurative speech constitutes not only an aesthetic but also an ethical decision, which places the text once again within the debate about the "inexpressibility" of the Holocaust and provides a suggestion as to how the difficulties of representation can be overcome.

Turning now to the second part of the book, entitled "La carta," we find a temporal leap in the storyline, bringing us face to face with a young man, trapped in a prison cell and desperate for human contact. As in the first part of the book, the reader is forced to take on an active role and use his/her imagination in order to fill in the gaps in the story. For example, the narrator never speaks directly of the fact that he is in prison, mentioning neither the word dictatorship nor torture, and yet, the reader is able to infer all of these things from the relatively few allusions made in the text, especially descriptions of a space where neither light nor water nor anything else necessary to ensure the survival of human life may enter: "pero mi mundo es este, de dos metros por uno, sin luz sin libro sin un rostro sin sol sin agua sin sin" (72). The entire prison experience is summarized quite effectively through the repetition of the word *sin*, suggesting that the experience of solitary confinement is primarily characterized by the absence of things or beings that make life worth living. Faced with loneliness, endless days, and the complete lack of human interaction, the imaginary conversations with his father, which the narrator reconstructs in this part of the book, become not only a way to pass the time but also a seemingly necessary task for survival. They are marked by two central themes: an obsession with his family's past and its connection to the narrator's own identity.

Throughout this section of the novel, Mauricio continually "converses" with his father about the past, trying on the one hand to

imagine his parents' life in Poland before their emigration and on the other hand to reconstruct an obviously crucial moment in his childhood: The day "the letter" arrived, a document presumably containing notification of the relatives' death, though its content is never actually revealed to us. The narrative returns to this moment again and again, implying that the arrival of this letter constituted a turning point in the life of the Rosencof family, stealing their last hope with respect to their relatives' survival. The silence surrounding this only "real" letter in the novel forms a stark contrast with the imagined letters of part one, emphasizing once more the role of imagination in the novel as well as the author's determination not to tell that which may exceed the reader's limits of conceptualization and empathy.

In order to fully understand the obsession with an inaccessible past I will establish a connection between the narrator's attempt to reconstruct the past through memory and to establish an identity that is rooted in family history. As I carefully examine the text it is possible to see that Mauricio appears to have gone through a twofold identity crisis in his life. First of all, it is evident that Mauricio has always felt distanced from the rest of his family. Being the only member of the family to be born in Uruguay, he does not share the same attachment to Poland, for example. In addition, he is more comfortable with Spanish than Yiddish (69) and prefers the Tango over traditional Jewish songs (60). The split in identity is emphasized through the use of two different names: Moishe, the Jewish name he associates with his childhood, and Mauricio, his preferred choice as an adult. The sense of estrangement becomes stronger after the death of his older brother, whom he adored and who served as a kind of "bridge" between Mauricio's world and that of his parents. In response to the loss of her first-born son, their mother distances herself emotionally from Mauricio, producing feelings of inferiority, guilt and separation at the same time.

The second aspect of the crisis has to do with the narrator's experience in prison and points to the idea that an encounter with radical evil tends to threaten even the very core of humanity—our identity. The gravity of the situation becomes apparent when Mauricio describes the first time his father was allowed to visit him after his arrest, an especially memorable moment because his father does not recognize him: "el teniente dijo 'acá está su hijo, tiene diez minutos,' y vos me miraste y lo miraste y dijiste 'él no es mi hijo, ¿dónde está mi hijo?'" (63).

This double identity crisis, then, can be seen as the reason why Mauricio goes in search of his family's roots; it is a quest that will later lead him to Poland in order to explore his origins and to visit the concentration camp in which his relatives died. His fixation with the past implies hope—the desire to find his own lost identity through the act of remembering and coming to know his family history. However, his trip to Treblinka leads him to a conclusion that may surprise us: The camp, which has been converted into a museum, does not bring him any closer to his lost relatives. It seems that the public act of commemoration fails:

> 'Aquí sí', me dije, 'en esta guía encontraré mi nombre,' y afirmé los pies en la tierra maldita bendecida por tantos que la anduvieron, y entré a mirar y leer me-ti-cu-lo-sa-men-te valija por valija, esas donde guardaron brochas, blusas y sandalias [. . .] y te lo juro, Viejo, las miré una por una, una por una, y nada, allí no estaban, allí no estábamos, ni en esa guía, mi viejo, estábamos vos y yo. (110–111)

Mauricio's experience in the museum brings to mind James Young's work on the problem of memorializing the Holocaust. As Anne Whitehead points out, Young has been able to show that "the gathering of fragments is central to the process of Holocaust memorialisation, particularly in Poland" (60). According to Whitehead, Young recognizes a fascination with and even fetishisation of the remaining objects and indicates that Holocaust museums tend to display them as if "the debris of history" could serve as "an encounter with history itself" (52). The problem is that the object's power or ability to signal beyond itself is gravely overestimated:

> For, by themselves, these remnants rise in a macabre dance of memorial ghosts. Armless sleeves, eyeless lenses, headless caps, footless shoes: victims are known only by their absence, by the moment of their destruction. [. . .] For when the memory of a people and its past are reduced to the bits and rags of their belongings, memory of life itself is lost. (Young 132)

For Mauricio, this means that the only thing that can (re)connect him with his past (and help him find himself) are his own personal memories of which he desperately wants more, recognizing their insufficiency and pleading with his father for more knowledge about the past. In the process of searching for family ties, he comes to yet another unforeseen conclusion—the realization that it is his own encounter with terror that helps him identify with his parents' suffering and thus brings him closer to them. This new awareness is apparent in the following paragraph where Mauricio remembers his thoughts the moment in which the fateful letter arrived:

> Y yo estaba ahí, papá, y no estaba. No estaba ni en tus ojos ni en los de mamá. No estaba cuando hablaban en yiddish, bajito, intenso, rápido, entrecortado; no estaba. Era algo que estaba ahí, aislado por ondas de una intensidad que no me llegaban, estaba del lado de afuera, papá, ahí pasaba algo y yo no estaba y estaba ahí. *Ahora sí. Ahora sí, papá. Estoy ahí.* (82, emphasis added)

This discovery leads us to the third part of the novel, "Días sin tiempo," in which the boundaries between reality and imagination begin to dissolve completely as we read about a fantastic reunion between the narrator and his father. The chapter begins with the mention of a mysterious word, uttered by his father in an unknown language, "un idioma insólito, inexistente, alguna lengua muerta" (117), which Mauricio receives through what appears to have been a dream. Though it is never actually pronounced in the text, this word forms the very center of the story, a focal point to which the narrator returns again and again. Admitting that he does not know how to pronounce it, Mauricio nevertheless understands the word's meaning and feels that, for the first time, he and his father share a common language, a language belonging to those who disappeared from this earth long ago. The utterance of this word can be seen as a new beginning: As it is passed down from father to son it renews the bond between them and constitutes at the same time an act of resistance by establishing communication in a place where human contact is not allowed, a place of absolute silence: "En este territorio reina el silencio, infinito, tanto que cuando se apagan las voces exteriores [. . .] uno acá, atento, puede percibir la actividad ruidosa de las arañas" (122).

These are in fact the two main ideas of "Días sin tiempo:" On the one hand there is an emphasis on the need for human communication, particularly under inhumane circumstances, and on the other hand, an affirmation that resistance is made possible through communication and fantasy. The passing down of an enigmatic word from father to son, an expression that only the two of them can understand, can certainly be seen as a form of resistance, especially in a place where words are strictly prohibited: "[. . .] hablar, lo que se dice hablar, con nadie, eso de 'buen día,' 'cómo anda,' 'qué hay de Nuevo,' nada. Las palabras estaban herméticamente prohibidas, para siempre" (162–163). It is not a coincidence, then, that the other two occurrences in which the word is spoken are also moments of defiance. In the first example, Mauricio mutters the word while a soldier is pointing a gun at his head (131), and the second time he secretly communicates it to the prisoner in the neighboring cell, using a type of Morse code that they invented. This second instance is where, without stating the word, its meaning is finally revealed to us. It means: "Moishe, qué hacés ahí parado, sentate, comé" (165). In other words, the mysterious "palabra" is a welcoming gesture, an invitation to share the food and closeness in the family's home (Lespada 100). It is an ordinary gesture made under extraordinary circumstances, and herein lies its significance. Mauricio is comforted knowing that, even though the word might never again be spoken, its existence continues (165), overcoming the barriers put up to prevent human contact and communication. It is possible to see the act of writing this very novel as an extension of the word, a victory of communication over silence, as well as a continuation of the family ties, even as father and son have become separated by death: "Todo esto es muy loco, Viejo. Porque fijate que hoy, para poder contarte lo que te cuento, a vos, que ya no estás o que estás donde esto no me lo oís o tal vez sí, tengo que contarte lo que se ha dado en llamar el entorno, mirá bien, 'entorno,' donde fue oída, por mí, la Palabra" (161).

For Mauricio the word is a messenger of hope and courage, a way to experience intimacy in the midst of suffering and human deprivation. The novel, thus, ends on a positive note, affirming that love and communication cannot be eliminated, no matter what external limitations are imposed on them. Rosencof indicates that in a world of wars and terror, humanity manages to preserve itself through memory and through "the word," in this case by writing letters that

were never sent: his relatives' and his own. Mauricio finally realizes that even defeat can be turned into victory if one has the courage to tell his story: "Fuerza, mi Viejo. Cuando uno cuenta los naufragios es porque no se ahogó" (145).

The author's decision to include photos at the end of the novel, alongside epigraphs from the text, stresses once more the complex relationship between memory and testimony, reality and fiction. It is clear that the photos no longer form part of an exterior "reality" outside of the text but rather constitute an integral part of a novel seeking to stress its own fictitious quality by intertwining "real" and "imagined" events. For Rosencof, our ability to use our imagination serves not only as a way to overcome the limits of our memory, it also becomes a means of survival in times of intolerable solitude, and it can be used as an act of resistance against totalitarian regimes that strive to eliminate any form of human communication.

In conclusion, *Las cartas que no llegaron* can be seen as a text that provides a response to the crisis of representation and the strained relationship between historical reality and fiction. It presents an alternative to strictly mimetic accounts of personal (or collective) trauma by foregrounding the possibilities of fiction and demonstrating that stimulating the reader's imagination (for example, through the use of the child's voice or fantastic encounters) can be as effective, and perhaps even more powerful than offering realistic depictions of torture and suffering. If Rosencof were to debate Berel Lang, he surely would not only reject the idea that "facts can speak for themselves," but also question whether "reality" is about facts at all. His novel suggests that writing a personal history has little to do with reporting "what happened" and much to do with imagining and reconstructing that which is unknown, and which belongs to the realm of hope and fantasy. Rosencof shows that memories, though fragmented and insufficient, are the key to understanding one's past and one's identity, and that, paradoxically, our imagination can be a powerful tool in the struggle to cope with an unimaginably cruel reality. So, if he were asked to respond to Adorno's dictum, Rosencof might just suggest that "after Auschwitz, the use of fantasy has become absolutely indispensable."

Notes

1. The novel was written and published many years after Uruguay's transition to democracy in the mid 1980s.

2. The use of the word "fantasy" may be seen as problematic since it is a term which generates a wide range of interpretations and is used in a variety of fields, including psychoanalysis, literature, and film. However, in this article the words "imagination" and "fantasy" are used interchangeably to refer to things or events which are not based on concrete reality but which exist only in the narrator's imagination. His fantasies help him cope with the absence of human contact as well as his limited memories.

3. Berel Lang is a philosopher who has written numerous works on the interpretation of the Holocaust, including *Writing and the Holocaust*, *Post-Holocaust: Interpretation, Misinterpretation, and the Claims of History*, and *Holocaust Representation: Art Within the Limits of History and Ethics*.

4. Use of the appellative "Viejo" is not a rare occurrence in countries such as Argentina or Uruguay where young people use it to refer to or address their father. In general, the word does not have a negative connotation.

5. Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* is a multiple volume collaborative project consisting of 132 articles published between 1981 and 1992, a shorter version of which was later translated into English as *Realms of Memory*. He coined the term "sites of memory" which has become widely used in the field of memory studies. Nora's goal was to study the construction of the French past in a manner more appropriate to the postmodern climate of the 1980s, not by focusing only on historically important events and their causes and effects (which is commonly done in linear historical narratives), but rather by turning his attention to what he regards as the most outstanding (physical and symbolical) sites of the French past. These include such divergent entities as museums and monuments, dictionaries, people, and battles.

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