

*2001: Argentine Narrative in the New Millennium**Jordana Blejmar and Ben Bollig*

2001 was the year of the Argentine crisis: economic collapse, political chaos, social unrest, and police repression. The events of that year stemmed from the failure of neoliberal policies first introduced by the 1976–83 dictatorship and then reinforced during the 1990s under President Carlos Menem, namely the privatization of public services, deregulation of markets, and reduction of public expenditure. Menem's administration masked growing social inequality with easy access to foreign capital and the selective modernization of the country; the gleaming offices and towers of the downtown Puerto Madero business district perhaps the most visible icon.

The literature produced in the post-crisis period turned its gaze on society as if recently discovering it (Saítta 133), depicting an urban landscape polarized between the wealth of luxury apartments and gated communities and the poverty of *cartoneros* (unofficial waste recyclers) and the recently unemployed, as illustrated for example by Aníbal Jarkowski's *El trabajo* (*Work*) or Florencia Abbate's *El grito* (*The Scream*). Two books published in 2001 also exemplify this: Sergio Raimondi's *Poesía civil* (*Civil Poetry*) – an attempt to capture in verse the sociocultural effects of a decade of neoliberalism in a provincial city (Bahía Blanca, on the Atlantic coast); and César Aira's novel *La villa* (*Shantytown*), with its exploration of shantytown life both as experienced by its wealthy and oblivious neighbors and as depicted in sensationalist media.

But if the crisis of 2001 caused a political and economic fracture with apocalyptic overtones, in literature – and in prose fiction, more specifically – it did not mean a complete break with the past or an eruption of the new, but instead the return or reformulation of the old. In spite of everything, the 2000s was a period of productivity and global acclaim for Argentina's writers, with prose works that reflect not only great social uncertainty but also cultural renewal, innovation, and solidarity.

Established writers such as César Aira, Marcelo Cohen, María Moreno, María Negroni, Carlos Gamerro, Martín Kohan, Sergio Chejfec, and Sylvia Molloy, among others, continued to produce new, critically and commercially successful works. Younger writers, born between the late 1970s and 1980s, published critically lauded and pathbreaking works. One should mention, for example, Patricio Pron, Samanta Schweblin, Leonardo Oyola, Selva Almada, Ariana Harwicz, Pedro Mairal, and Mariana Enriquez, all of whom have been nominated for or won international prizes, thanks partly to the new globalized cultural order, facilitating publishing by international conglomerates such as Penguin Random House. The success of these and other authors – including “millennial” writers such as Tamara Tenenbaum – does not come out of nowhere. It is the result of a dialogue between past and present trends, interests, and practices.

Furthermore, independent publishers such as Interzona (founded 2002), Entropía (2004), Mansalva (2005), Tamarisco (2005), Iván Rosado (2009), and Malisia (2013), where writers became also editors, sought new forms of local cooperation. The likes of Eterna Cadencia and Mar Dulce built impressive catalogues combining “forgotten” writers, such as Salvador Benesdra and Jorge Barón Biza, with contemporary voices.

The 2000s was also characterized by reinvigorated struggles for the rights of women and the LGBTQ+ community. Literature played a central role in these movements often born in precarious and vulnerable contexts, as exemplified by the activism of bestselling authors like Claudia Piñeiro, or the marathon of readings in 2015 against femicides – a tragically necessary shorthand for the murder of women for being women – in the garden of the Museo del Libro y de la Lengua in Buenos Aires.

Certain activist uses of literature and its insertion in other areas of social praxis coexisted with a search for a personal, particular voice, namely autofictions, writings of the self and stories of everyday life that Tamara Kamenszain called “inoffensive intimacies” (2016). Here the political – in contrast to its presentation in founding national texts such as Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo* or certain ambitious novels of the 1960s, such as Ernesto Sabato’s *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (*On Heroes and Tombs*), just to give one example – is stripped of its epic tones.

Thus we structure our reading of the literature of the 2000s around three key topics that emerge from this conjuncture: an aesthetic of recycling; an aesthetic of haunting; and the presence of a reinvigorated feminist gaze that marks much of the prose of the period. The first sees a reworking of forms, genres (including the *gauchesca*, or gaucho poetry), and characters all

linked to earlier depictions of the nation – in particular the “civilization–barbarism” urban–rural dichotomy sketched in *Facundo*. The second features the appearance of past ghosts – from the 1976–83 dictatorship, the Malvinas/Falklands War, or further back, the genocide against Indigenous peoples in the late nineteenth century – and more recent ones: the women, both cisgender women and *travestis*, murdered in femicides. This links to the third topic: women in post-2001 narratives are agents “moved by desire” as stated by one of the taglines of the 2015 #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less) movement, often depicted at critical moments of vulnerability, be it through violence or motherhood.

After a long period of skepticism about the role of politics (and literature) in social and cultural change, these trends sparked a renewal of interest in the activist uses of literature in political movements. Many characters depicted as having been born during this period even became fictional comrades in the struggles for the acquisition of certain rights regarding bodily autonomy and identity – think for example of characters such as Cabezón Camara’s China Iron; Mariana Eva Pérez’s Montonera Princess; Félix Bruzzone’s Fefe; the father and son from Enriquez’s *Nuestra parte de noche* (*Our Share of Night*); and several of Claudia Piñeiro’s characters, among others. At the same time, and perhaps as a reaction to a literature focused on a (loose) identification between characters, narrators, authors, and readers, other writers – notably Ariana Harwicz or Martín Kohan – made abject characters the protagonists of their stories and vindicated a literature that strives to be both autonomous and political at the same time. This trend is also not completely new, insofar as it echoes a certain fascination – found, for example, in the literature of both Jorge Luis Borges and Roberto Arlt – with the worlds of the wretched, the pathetic, the sordid, and the pitiful that populate both our streets and our books before and after the turn of the millennium.

### Rewriting the Nation

In post-2001 Argentina, a significant number of fictional works revisited national classics, and in particular the gauchesca, through postcolonial, post-digital, queer, or feminist eyes. In *Las aventuras de la China Iron* (*The Adventures of China Iron*) (2016), for example, Gabriela Cabezón Cámara proposes a radical rewriting of José Hernández’s nineteenth-century national epic *Martín Fierro* from a queer perspective, something that Martín Kohan had also attempted in his short homoerotic story “El amor” (“Love”) (2011). The *China* of the title is, in this reworking, not

Fierro's beloved wife but rather the woman he won in a card game. She and a Scottish woman, Liz, start a journey (and an affair) across the Pampas that will lead them to the frontier fort and *estancia* (estate) of a fictionalised José Hernández, and eventually to the indigenous *tolderías* (encampments) and "Tierra Adentro," beyond the limits of white settlement, where they reencounter their respective husbands. Fierro then confesses to China his love for his friend "el negro" Cruz, now deceased, and apologizes for mistreating her. Both women decide to stay and live in the desert, which they describe as a true paradise. In this novel, the women (captives, servants, sex workers), who in the original story appear passive, submissive, and speechless, are the ones who literally wear the trousers (Liz appears in front of Hernández cross-dressed as a man). They live and love each other freely and are more cunning than their male counterparts.

*Las aventuras de la China Iron* is a reflection on the origin of both the nation and of national literature. The "Green Tide" (named after the green handkerchiefs sported by proponents of abortion law reform) and feminist activism that have changed the landscape of Argentine politics in recent years have been accompanied by novels and fictions centered on feminist struggles and unapologetic forms of nonheteronormative love. See, for example, the work of Florencia Abbate, Cecilia Palmeiro, and Fernanda Laguna, among others.

Hernández, the national poet, is instead portrayed as a phony in the novel, a laughingstock, a thief who plagiarizes Fierro, the true "poeta del pueblo" ("poet of the people") (119). But perhaps Cabezón Cámara is the one who, strictly speaking, plays both the role of the people's poet and that of translator and *lenguaraz* (interpreter). There is also a critical reading of progress in the novel. During the journey to the *tolderías*, Liz reads Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Its solitary monster is not only someone made with the remains of dead bodies (a recycled creature himself) but also the flipside of modern British science and nineteenth-century positivism, its unwanted consequence. Like Dr. Frankenstein, Cabezón Cámara works with "los remanentes, desperdicios, restos de la literatura nacional" ("the remnants, the waste, the leftovers of national literature") (Quintana 146), and reminds us that the writing of history is not linear, it does not always advance forward, but instead takes detours and drifts, in a twisted, indeed queer way.

If *Las aventuras de la China Iron* performs a feminist reading of the most emblematic Argentine poem, Washington Cucurto (pseudonym of Santiago Vega) gives voice to other marginal figures at the outskirts of what is still perceived as "civilization": the *negros* and the *indios*. Cucurto is

renowned for his sexually provocative portrayals of the racially mixed, largely immigrant communities of popular barrios of Buenos Aires, including Constitución and Once, as well as similarly scandalous excursions into the historical novel (*1810: La Revolución de Mayo vivida por los negros* [1810: *The May Revolution as Experienced by Blacks*], 2008) and political fiction/fantasy (*Hombre de Cristina* [*Cristina's Man*], 2013). As well as rewriting national and literary history from the standpoint of the excluded, another feature of Cucurto's writing is its work with language, replete with urban, immigrant slang, and also his own restlessly playful and inventive prose, set in the world of the "yotibenco," backslang for *conventillo* or "tenement house," peopled by those who are called – and often call themselves – in the complex socioracial language of Argentina, *negros*, or "blacks."

One could call Cabezón's and Cucurto's writing an "aesthetic of recycling," echoing one of the emblems – together with the "asambleas barriales" ("citizens' assemblies"), the roadblock protests, and the end of dollar–peso parity – of 2001, namely the practice of the cartoneros and their transformation of remnants, waste, and rubbish into new valuable material. The cartonero/a, often carrying a family by horse-drawn transport, a figure thought long extinct (Laera 48), is indeed associated with ideas of precariousness and inequality, but also with cooperativism and creativity, all of them key attributes in the production, circulation, and debates of post-crisis Argentine literature. Pablo Katchadjian, with his *El Martín Fierro ordenado alfabéticamente* (*Martín Fierro in Alphabetical Order*) (2007), also formally experiments with the *gauchesca*, literally rearranging the poem's verses and words in alphabetical order, to a disconcertingly poetic effect. Similarly, Michel Nieva's *¿Sueñan los gauchoídes con nandúes eléctricos?* (*Do Gauchoídes Dream of Electric Rheas?*) (2013), five interrelated and highly self-referential tales, is an impressive blend of cyberpunk and gaucho literature, a twist on the legacy of Borges as read by Osvaldo Lamborghini, whose own ruthless violation of the Argentine canon is cited throughout. Nieva's work is constantly, weirdly inventive, stomach-churningly violent, and often funny.

Some contemporary novels also revisit and refashion other key genres of nineteenth-century Argentina, such as the epistolary novel or travel literature. Such are the genres that inspired Carlos Gamerro in *La jaula de los onas* (*The Onas and Their Cage*) (2021), an exploration of an understudied episode of Argentine national history, namely the lives of the Selk'nam, or Ona people, abducted by European "men of science" in South America, shipped to France for the Paris Exposition of 1889, and displayed in a cage, as barbarians for their supposedly civilized and paying spectators. Elsa

Drucaroff has reworked both the historical novel and romantic fiction for a feminist, regionalist vision of the war against Spanish colonialism; similar reimaginings of the literary past can be found in the work of María Rosa Lojo.

We find another reflection on the new operations of the civilization–barbarism dichotomy in so-called “small-town” or “provincial” literature, a strong trend in post-2001 narrative (De Leone 2016). One of the most thought-provoking writers within this tendency is Selva Almada, born in Entre Ríos in 1973. Almada’s world is taciturn and violent, and she has spoken openly of the influence on her work of Alberto Laiseca, whose own fiction is characterized by its unsparing gaze at everyday cruelty. In Almada, the prose is appropriately sparse and vernacular, often using young first-person narrators. In *El viento que arrasa* (*The Wind That Lays Waste*) (2012), a preacher and his daughter are driving through el Chaco province when their car breaks down. A mechanic and his son then stop to help them. The preacher takes the opportunity to try to convert them, a gesture that reminds us of what the Spanish conquistadores did with the Indigenous when they arrived on the continent. *Ladrilleros* (*Brickmakers*) (2013), meanwhile, is a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*, but with a love affair between two young men, set against a backdrop of grudges and unspoken desire in small-town rural Argentina.

This is a world also explored by Luciano Lamberti, originally a poet, from Córdoba, in his collection *El asesino de chanchos* (*The Murderer of Pigs*) (2010). Lamberti’s writing is set on the edge of the edge – not only provincial but also featuring marginal characters and news stories forgotten within a week – except by the protagonists. It is not an attractive universe, marked as it is by racism and paranoia in the suburbs and provinces. The collection of short stories, *222 patitos* (2004, 2015) by Federico Falco, also from Córdoba, is again notable for the provincial, rural settings. In this book, youthful desire meets misunderstood religiosity (“El pelo de la Virgen” [“The Virgin’s Hair”]) and there are fantasies that would not be out of place in a García Márquez story (“Historia del Ave Fénix” [“Story of the Phoenix”]). Here Falco also displays the extraordinary ability to tell a whole life story in fable-like synthesis (“Un hombre feliz” [“A Happy Man”], “Ada”). The “pueblo de provincial” is further found in many other novels of the period, such as *Adentro tampoco hay luz* (*Inside There’s No Light Either*) (Sucari, 2017), *Inclúyanme afuera* (*Include Me Out*) (Cristoff, 2016), *La descomposición* (*The Decomposition*) (Ronsino, 2007), *Mi vida en Huel* (*My Life in Huel*) (Bizzio, 2014), or Falco’s own beautifully observed *Los llanos* (*The Plains*) (2020).

Thus, contemporary Argentine literature oscillates between regionalism and cosmopolitanism, the global and the local, the national and the provincial. Each fiction provides its own answer to the still relevant questions of what a national literature is, and what genres, languages, topics, and spaces define “argentinidad.” Many events, and even some characters, are realist and believable. Yet, the temporality of small towns in the fictions of, for example, Almada, Falco, Ronsino (in particular his “Pampas Trilogy” of novels), Lamberti, Carlos Busqued (*Bajo este sol tremendo* [*Under This Tremendous Sun*], 2009), or the English-language work of the Argentine Hernán Díaz (*In the Distance*) (2017) suggests a reading of the present where the past, and its literature, returns, in estranged and often spectral and fantastic ways.

### Ghost Stories

It is this haunted and anachronistic temporality that also defines a particular type of “narrative of the dictatorship” in the new millennium, one that takes the form of a psychological thriller with a plot of intergenerational historical transmission. Take, for example, Félix Bruzzone’s *Los topos* (2008) or Mariana Eva Pérez’s *Diario de una princesa montonera* (*Montonera Princess Diary*) (2012), both autofictions populated by sons and daughters of the disappeared of the 1970s who act as detectives investigating the lives of their parents – in increasingly bizarre fashion in Bruzzone’s case. Leopoldo Brizuela’s *Una misma noche* (*On a Similar Night*) (2012), for example, revisits the dictatorship from the point of view of a young bystander who only later understands his family’s complicity. At the same time, these “children” refuse to be only “secondary characters” (Zambra 2012) in their stories, a (witnessing) role that they often played in the literature of previous decades.

Other fictions of the period resort to terror to explore the limits of the human in both the perpetrators and the victims of the dictatorship and other moments of political terror. Since the 1990s Argentine literature has imagined the ordinary lives of those who committed monstrous crimes, from *Villa* (1995) by Luis Guzmán to *Dos veces junio* (*Twice June*) (2002) and *Confesión* (*Confession*) (2020), both by Martín Kohan. More recently, the (implicitly) political terror of, for example, *La casa de los eucaliptus* (*Eucalyptus House*) (2017), some of the stories of *Seres queridos*, by Vera Giaconí (*Nearest and Dearest*) (2017), *La condición animal* (*The Animal Condition*) (2016) by Valeria Correa Fiz, Agustina Bazterrica’s chilling novel of state-sponsored cannibalism *Cadáver exquisito* (*Exquisite Corpse*)

*Tender is the Flesh*) (2018), and especially the fiction of Mariana Enriquez has used the uncertainty of disappearance, the clandestine nature of the crimes, and the haunting presence of the unburied bodies as a starting point for narratives that challenge the perception of reality in post-dictatorship and post-crisis Argentina.

A case in point is Enriquez's *Nuestra parte de noche* (Premio Herralde, 2019 and Premio de la Crítica, 2020), a sprawling saga mixing Argentine history and gothic fantasy over multiple generations of a powerful and well-connected family of mediums and mystics. Enriquez uses period details and shifting narrative points of view to tell a story at once implausible and utterly believable, while also channeling the young adult tradition: *Stranger Things*, Pratchett and Gaiman's *Good Omens*, or the works of Stephen King. In *Los espantos: Estética y política en la postdictadura* (*The Terrors: Aesthetics and Politics in the Post-Dictatorship*) (2016), Silvia Schwarzböck argues that one must understand the years of state terror through aesthetics and, more precisely, through the genre of horror: "una estética protoexplícita, no una estética de lo irrepresentable, de lo indecible, o del silencio" ("a proto-explicit aesthetic, not an aesthetic of the unrepresentable, the unsayable, or of silence") (23). For Schwarzböck "los espantos" – the frights, or terrors – can be seen even in daylight, when they appear in front of our eyes, even when no one is looking at them. It is their appearance, and not their absence – their weirdness rather than their eeriness, to use Mark Fisher's terms (2016) – that produces terror and above all paranoia.

It is not just the dictatorship's spectres who stubbornly return in the present, but also the "missing" and invisible subjects expelled by society through a brutal exercise of social Darwinism. In Enriquez's "El chico sucio" ("The Dirty Kid"), a short story from *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego* (*Things We Lost in the Fire*) (2016), there is an effort to explain with conspiracy theories – satanism, narco-mafias – the reality of thousands of children in Argentina living and dying in total destitution. Enriquez returns to key motifs in gothic literature – the haunted mansion, vampirism, flip sides to modernity and progress – and adapts them to the edges of Buenos Aires (Constitución) to address the marginal and spectral life of a child who sells religious stickers in the subway and spends his nights on the cold and inhospitable streets with his drug-addicted mother (a sort of "living dead" of the *conurbano*).

Enriquez's nouvelle *Chicos que vuelven* (*Kids Returning*, with a plot similar to the 2004 French film *Les Revenants*) is also a story of "forgotten" children, in this case those disappeared in unclear circumstances, many

from the working classes, and who mysteriously *reappear* at the same age as when they were last seen. The parents first receive them with enthusiasm, but later they try to give them back, increasingly scared and horrified, claiming that they are not their children but rather doubles or impostors. Toward the end of the story the returnees gather around a pink house (perhaps a reminder of the presidential residence), disturbing and frightening members of Argentine society, who would rather never look back.

What also returns, in another group of fictions published after 2001, is a certain obsession with the idea of the future that had dominated the twentieth century (Berardi Badiou). This is not surprising if we remember that the beginning of the new millennium was marked by many discussions of the possible end of the world. However, the future presented by these stories is not a distant time but instead is close to our present, a future that has somehow already arrived. Let us consider, for example, Lucila Grossman's *Mapas terminales* (*Terminal Maps*) or the hypersurveilled and panoptic relationships of *Kentukis* (2018), by Samantha Schwebelin, a *Black Mirror*-esque novel about a brand of virtual pets (a sort of lifesize Tamagotchi) controlled by real people, a fiction that raises questions about new forms of voyeurism and violence in the digital environment, the blurring of the private and the public, and the limits of the (post) human.

Alongside versions of speculative and science fiction, in recent years Argentine literature has also turned to thrillers and the horror genre to address another type of systematic violence, namely that of femicides. In *Cometierra* (*Earth-eater*) (2019), the impressive first novel by Dolores Reyes, a girl possesses the disturbing ability to receive visions from the uncomfortable dead – women (and some men) – by eating the soil that they have touched in life. The novel is dedicated to two real victims of femicide and offers a new and troubling perspective on these crimes. If earlier books have already dealt with gender violence – notably the nonfictions *Chicas muertas* (*Dead Girls*) (2015) by Selva Almada and *La oscuridad dentro de mí* by Osvaldo Aguirre (*The Darkness Inside Me*) (2018), or the crime novel *Entre hombres* (*Between Men*) (2001) by Germán Maggiori – in *Cometierra* these murders are now seen and told from the eyes of a child of one of those victims, an aspect that connects this story with narratives of the dictatorship written or protagonized by children of the disappeared or those who grew up during the dictatorship.

In all these fictions, victims of past and present violence cohabit today, reminding us that we live in a complex, anachronistic, and open time. Literature becomes, then, a place of experimentation if not to conjure those fractured and spectral temporalities then at least to make some sense of them.

### Mothers (Once Again)

In implicit dialogue with the narrative of Almada and Reyes, among others, is the literature of Camilia Sosa Villada. Family tragedies that are in turn social dramas, often taking place in marginal places such as “el conurbano” around Buenos Aires’ forgotten towns, or poor neighbourhoods in the city, and the consequence of a patriarchal society that is only recently starting to question its own bases, are at the heart of Sosa Villada’s celebrated auto-fiction, *Las malas* (*Bad Girls/The Queens of Sarmiento Park*) (2019). Like *Cometierra*, *Las malas* interweaves passages of extreme violence toward women with fantastic elements, in this case characters and scenes taken from legends and urban myths. Loosely based on Sosa Villada’s life as a travesti sex worker in Córdoba, *Las malas* is part fairy tale, part Bildungsroman, and part autobiography. Sosa Villada’s writing has been compared to that of Carson McCullers and Lucia Berlin, but it is perhaps more accurately affiliated with the literature of Argentine writers and trans/travesti activists such as Marlene Wayar, Lohana Berkins, Naty Menstrual, and Susy Shock, all of them authors of an ever-growing corpus of so-called travesti or trans Argentine literature (Gigena 2020).

*Las malas* is also an unconventional portrayal of motherhood centered on the taboo figure of the “transvestite mother” – embodied here by the character Tía Encarna, who adopts a baby abandoned in the park where she and her fellow sex workers seek clients – and challenging the bourgeois idea that “madre hay una sola” (“you only have one mother”). It offers a story with some very precise spatiotemporal coordinates: Mina Clavero; Córdoba city; the year in which Cris Miró (the “Evita de las travestis”) first appeared on Argentine television; the fall of former president Fernando de la Rúa; and evidently autobiographical marks of the author (the narrator is called Camila and she is from the province of Córdoba). At the same time, Sosa Villada’s writing constantly frustrates the expectations of the reader by placing the characters in the cyclical time of myth and fable. The members of this gang seem like distant descendants of Romulus and Remus, orphans more comfortable around forest creatures than humans. There are also echoes of indigenous myth (La Difunta Correa), the fairy tale (what is La

Tía Encarna but a local incarnation of the Good Fairy?), and even of the horror genre.

Toward the end of the novel it is suggested to us that the whole story is in fact the product of a child's imagination: "Cuando logramos entrar vemos al niño tallando en madera los animales que hemos sido: mujeres pájaros, mujeres lobos, mujeres tristes, mujeres valientes, toda nuestra mitología tallada en esas estatuillas que el niño crea en su reclusión" ("When we managed to get in we saw the boy carving out of wood all the animals that we'd been: bird-women, wolf-women, sad women, brave women, all our mythology carved in those statuettes that the boy makes while hiding away") (208). Camila Sosa Villada not only inaugurates a new way of writing about transvestites, fed in turn by a strong tradition of *literatura travesti*. She also proposes a conception of literature based on a *trans* ethic: "Mi primer acto oficial de travestismo fue escribir" ("My first official act of transvestism was to write") (10). If transvestite women are contemptuously described as fakes and impostors, Sosa Villada makes an emblem of such dismissals by proposing that all writing is in a certain way a form of transvestism, and all transvestism is, in turn, a form of nudity and vulnerability.

*Las malas* echoes and refashions many literary genres, including Latin American transvestite chronicles (think here, for example, of the Chilean Pedro Lemebel's writing), fairy tales, the horror story and also "narratives of motherhood," or "la serie de las madres," as Nora Domínguez (2017) calls a series of fictions and writings with a long tradition in Argentine history, from Esteban Echeverría's *La cautiva* (*The Captive Woman*) (1837) to stories about the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and tales of Eva Perón as the mother of the nation. The women of *Las malas* have a strongly maternal instinct ("Nadie en este mundo ha dormido nunca realmente si una travesti no le ha cantado una canción de cuna" ["No one on earth has really slept if they haven't had a travesti sing them a lullaby"]) (25). At the same time, they also need nurses (*nodrizas*, or wet nurses, is the word chosen by Sosa Villada, with all its echoes of fairy tales), who take care of them and help them sleep.

But it is perhaps France-based Ariana Harwicz, mentioned at the start of the chapter, who provides the most disturbing portraits of motherhood in her highly original and experimental writing. Her *Matate, amor* (*Die My Love*) (2017) was Booker International long-listed and has been translated into several languages. Harwicz's novels feature characters on the edge, in altered mental states, socially withdrawn, and/or dealing with relationship breakdown. Young writers such as Leila Sucari have also explored the

nonidealised, contradictory experiences of motherhood. As in Harwicz's novels, Sucari's *Fugaz (Fleeting)* (2019) depicts the estranged relationship of a mother and her (infant) son. The novel begins with a brutal sentence – “La primera vez que lo vi me dio asco” (“The first time I saw him [or it] I felt sick”) (15) – that destabilizes, from the outset, many naive myths about motherhood. We might cite also the short stories of Magalí Etchebarne (*Los mejores días [The Best Days]*, 2019) in this regard.

Lucila Grossman's humorous novella *Mapas terminales* (2017) takes the estrangement between mother and child even further. Partly a diary of a female drug addict, partly conspiracy novel and “trash science fiction,” as defined by María Moreno, it tells the story of a woman who gives birth to a sort of alien with whom she communicates only through her computer, and is populated by characters that are “drogonés transhumanes que vagabundean no muy lejos de sus guaridas, celular y SUBE en mano, post-guerrilleros anti-analógicos” (“nomad druggies wandering not very far from their dens, cellphone and travel card in hand, post-guerrillas, anti-analogue”) (Moreno, back cover). The book has echoes of William S. Burroughs, David Lynch, and the Beat generation but is also replete with references to tango, Argentine locations and brands, and a distinctly *porteño* turn of phrase. *Mapas terminales* has connections with a long tradition of fantastic literature in Argentina – Silvina Ocampo, Julio Cortázar, et al. – and at the same time it recycles topics and above all a language, now contaminated with all the expressions, temporalities, and rhythms of digital technologies and social media.

### Conclusion

The stories addressed in this chapter explore the other side of modernity but also the still latent legacy of the greatest Argentine tragedy, its unfinished nature. We find the return of the traumatic past in the narratives of the dictatorship of the previous decade. But if, as Idelber Avelar (2000) and Tulio Halperín Donghi (1998) point out, many of the fictions published during the 1980s and 1990s were mostly allegorical narratives where, for example, the Juan Manuel Rosas era was read as a cipher for more recent dictatorial terror, in the post-2001 fictions the past does not return in allegories but rather in palimpsests and montages (à la Walter Benjamin or Georges Didi-Huberman), made of heterogeneous temporalities – a way of understanding literature as a mosaic of scraps, leftovers, and residues.

Crucially, these montages often juxtapose discourses, images, and languages taken from other disciplines and media. For the influential critic

Josefina Ludmer, who passed away in 2016, in her much cited survey of contemporary Latin American fiction (2010), the literature of the 2000s is thus “post-autonomous” in its attitude to language and nation: “Muchas escrituras de los 2000 atraviesan la frontera de la literatura (los parámetros que de definen qué es la literatura) y quedan afuera y adentro, como en posición diaspórica: afuera pero atrapadas en su interior. Como si estuvieran en ‘éxodo’” (“Much writing of the 2000s crosses the border of literature (the parameters that define what is literature) and is left inside and outside, in a diasporic position: outside but trapped in its interior. As if they were part of an ‘exodus’”) (150). These diasporic texts, Ludmer argues, cannot be read just using literary categories (author, style, meaning, etc.), and it is not even clear, or matters that much, whether they are strictly speaking literature at all, as they often acquire the form of testimony, autobiography, chronicle, and even ethnography. Similarly, Florencia Garramuño (2015) claims that one specificity of contemporary art and literature in Argentina is precisely its lack of specificity, its intermedial and impure nature: literature outside literature or literature in crisis. With reference to the work of Tamara Kamenszain, Félix Bruzzone, and others, Garramuño argues that theirs are texts difficult to categorize, with blurry borders and animated by an intense nomadism and flexibility. For Garramuño, this impurity has the advantage of creating expanded communities, beyond the homogeneous identification demanded by a particular genre or discipline.

One pertinent example would be the work of María Gainza, also a writer and art critic. *El nervio óptico* (*Optic Nerve*) (2014) is a collection of short stories each revolving around an artwork, including Cándido López’s battle scenes from the nineteenth-century War of the Triple Alliance (which pitted Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay against Paraguay) and more recent works by Mark Rothko. The artwork is the focus or leitmotif while the novel also examines the professional world of art. Beauty and money collide, often with unsavoury effects. Gainza displays a wryly critical gaze combined with admiration for the works, often brought to life through her ekphrastic prose. The works of María Moreno, Julián López, Mauro Libertella, Lola Arias, Camila Fabbri, Romina Paula, and many others are also, in one way or another, postautonomous and impure, located at the borders of literature that have in common a will to rewrite the past but also to question and ultimately intervene in the present.

These fictions are also autonomous in another sense. They contribute to visualizing key struggles of the post-crisis era – the legalization of abortion, the new trials of crimes against humanity, the fight for an inclusive form of

Spanish, punishment for those responsible for femicides, and so on – but do not renounce their right to explore abject, and even degenerate, characters, emotions, and points of views.

### Works Cited

- Abbate, Florencia. *El grito*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2004.
- Aguirre, Osvaldo. *La oscuridad dentro de mí*. Buenos Aires: Gárgola, 2018.
- Aira, César. *La villa*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2001.
- Almada, Selva. *Chicas muertas*. Buenos Aires: Random House, 2015.
- Ladrilleros*. Buenos Aires: Mardulce, 2013.
- El viento que arrasa*. Buenos Aires: Mardulce, 2012.
- Arnés, Laura A., Nora Domínguez, and María José Punte, eds., *Historia feminista de la literatura argentina*. Buenos Aires: Eduvin, 2019.
- Avelar, Idelber. *Alegorías de la derrota: La ficción postdictatorial y el trabajo de duelo*. Santiago: Cuarto propio, 2000.
- Badiou, Alain. *The Century*. London: Polity Press, 2005.
- Barón Biza, Jorge. *El desierto y su semilla*. Buenos Aires: Simurg, 1999.
- Bazterrica, Agustina. *Cadáver exquisito*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2018.
- Benedra, Salvador. *El traductor*. Buenos Aires: De la Flor, 1998.
- Berardi, 'Biffo' Franco. *After the Future*. Stirling: AK Press, 2011.
- Bizzio, Sergio. *Mi vida en Huel*. Buenos Aires: Random House, 2016.
- Rabia*. Buenos Aires: Interzona, 2005.
- Bruzzone, Félix. *Los topos*. Buenos Aires: Mondadori, 2008.
- Cabezón Cámara, Gabriela. *Las aventuras de la China Iron*. Buenos Aires: Mondadori, 2017.
- Correa Fiz, Valeria. *La condición animal*. Madrid: Páginas de Espuma, 2016.
- Cristoff, María Sonia. *Inclúyanme afuera*. Ciudad Real: El pelegrino, 2016.
- Cucurto, Washington. *1810: La revolución de Mayo vivida por los negros*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2008.
- Hombre de Cristina*. Bahía Blanca: VOX, 2013.
- De Leone, Lucía. "Imaginaciones rurales argentinas: El campo como zona de cruce en expresiones artísticas contemporáneas." *Cuadernos de literatura* 40 (2016): 181–203.
- Díaz, Hernán. *In the Distance*. New York: Coffee House Press, 2017.
- Domínguez, Nora. *De dónde vienen los niños: Maternidad y escritura en la cultura argentina*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2017.
- Drucaroff, Elsa. *Conspiración contra Güemes*. Buenos Aires: Marea, 2014.
- La patria de las mujeres*. Buenos Aires: Marea, 2014.
- Enriquez, Mariana. *Chicos que vuelven*. Buenos Aires: Eduvim, 2010.
- Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2016.
- Nuestra parte de noche*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2019.
- Etchebarne, Magalí. *Los mejores días*, Barcelona: Las afueras, 2019.
- Falco, Federico. *222 patitos y otros cuentos*. Buenos Aires: Eterna cadencia, 2004

- Los llanos*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2020.
- Fisher, Mark. *The Weird and the Eerie*. London: Repeater, 2016.
- Gainza, María. *El nervio óptico*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2014.
- Gamerro, Carlos. *La jaula de los onas*. Buenos Aires: Anagrama, 2021.
- Garramuño, Florencia. *Mundos en común: Ensayos sobre la inespecificidad en el arte*. Buenos Aires: FCE, 2015.
- Giaconi, Vera. *Seres queridos*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2017.
- Gigena, Daniel. "Escrituras trans y travestis." *Perfil* (2010). [www.perfil.com/noticias/cultura/escrituras-trans-y-travestis.phtml](http://www.perfil.com/noticias/cultura/escrituras-trans-y-travestis.phtml), accessed 14 February 2021.
- Grossman, Lucila. *Mapas terminales*. Buenos Aires: Marciana, 2017.
- Gusmán, Luis. *Villa*. Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 1995.
- Halperín Donghi, Tulio. "Argentina's Unmastered Past." *Latin American Research Review* 23.2 (1998): 3–24.
- Harwicz, Ariana. *Matate, amor*. Buenos Aires: Mardulce, 2012.
- Jarkowski, Aníbal. *El trabajo*. Buenos Aires: Tusquets, 2007.
- Kamenszain, Tamara. *Intimidades inofensivas*. Buenos Aires: Eterna cadencia, 2016.
- Kohan, Martín. *Ciencias morales*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007.
- Confesión*, Barcelona: Tusquets, 2020.
- Cuerpo a tierra*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2011.
- Laera, Alejandra. *Ficciones del dinero: Argentina 1890–2001*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001.
- Lamberti, Luciano. *El asesino de chanchos*. Buenos Aires: Tamarisco, 2010.
- La masacre de Kruguer*. Buenos Aires: Random House, 2019.
- López, Julián. *Una muchacha muy bella*. Buenos Aires: Eterna cadencia, 2013.
- Lojo, María Rosa, and Roberto L. Elissaldo. *Historias ocultas de la Recoleta*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1999.
- Ludmer, Josefina. *Aquí América latina: Una especulación*. Buenos Aires: Eterna cadencia, 2010.
- Maggiore, Germán. *Entre hombres*. Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2001.
- Nieva, Michel. *¿Sueñan los gauchoides con ñandúes eléctricos?* Buenos Aires: Santiago Arcos, 2000.
- Paula, Romina. *¿Vos me querés a mí?* Buenos Aires: Entropía, 2005.
- Perez, Mariana Eva. *Diario de una princesa montonera: 110% verdad*. Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012.
- Piñero, Claudia. *Las viudas de los jueves*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2005.
- Quintana, Isabel. "Lo residual como gesto crítico: Un porvenir de los restos." *Historia feminista de la literatura argentina: En la intemperie. Poéticas de la fragilidad y la revuelta*, ed. Laura A. Arnés, Lucía De Leone, and María José Punte, 492–500. Buenos Aires: Eduvin, 2020.
- Raimondi, Sergio. *Poesía Civil*. Bahía Blanca: Vox, 2001.
- Reyes, Dolores. *Cometierra*. Buenos Aires: Sigilo, 2019.
- Ronsino, Hernán. *La descomposición*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2007.
- Saítta, Sylvia. "En torno al 2001 en la narrativa argentina." *Literatura y Lingüística* 29 (2013): 131–48.

- Schwarzböck, Silvia. *Los espantos: Estética y postdictadura*. Buenos Aires: Los Cuarenta Ríos, 2016.
- Schweblin, Samanta. *Distancia de rescate*. Buenos Aires: Random House, 2014.  
*Kentukis*. Buenos Aires: Random House, 2018.
- Sosa Villada, Camila. *Las malas*. Buenos Aires: Tusquets, 2019.
- Sucari, Leila. *Adentro tampoco hay luz*. Buenos Aires: Tusquets, 2017.  
*Fugaz*. Buenos Aires: Tusquets, 2019.
- Zambra, Alejandro. *Formas de volver a casa*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2012.