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***LAST DAYS OF THE VICTIM:***  
**A CASE STUDY IN TRANSLATING**  
**ARGENTINE CRIME FICTION**

by

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Under the supervision of Marc Charron  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is based on the author's English translation of key passages of an Argentine crime novel: José Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima* (1979). The thesis establishes a theoretical framework revolving around the original text and its translation. This theoretical framework examines the novel's place in the history of the crime fiction genre in Argentina, translation's role in this history, the socio-political context in which the novel was created, and the linguistic, cultural, stylistic, and interpretive challenges of its translation. Most importantly, this thesis will examine how the novel can be translated for an audience who might not be aware of the socio-political situation that provides the context for a number of interpretations of this story.

## **Résumé**

Cette thèse se fonde sur la traduction anglaise effectuée par l'auteure de passages clés d'un roman policier argentin : *Últimos días de la víctima* (1979) de José Pablo Feinmann. Elle vise à établir un cadre théorique autour du texte départ et de sa traduction, en prenant en compte la situation du roman dans l'histoire du genre policier en Argentine, le rôle de la traduction à travers cette histoire, le contexte sociopolitique qui a inspiré le roman de Feinmann, ainsi que les défis linguistiques, culturels, stylistiques et interprétatifs propres à la traduction. Parmi ces défis, il sera avant tout question d'aborder la façon de traduire ce roman pour un public ne connaissant pas forcément le contexte sociopolitique qui est à l'origine de nombreuses interprétations du récit.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mysteries have always captured the imagination of people around the world. In the realm of television, Nielsen Media Research reports that ‘CSI: Crime Scene Investigation’, a series which centers on solving crimes using forensics, is the most watched non-reality TV show currently on the air. In the literary world, Agatha Christie, creator of notable detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, was the world’s most frequently translated author according to UNESCO’s 1998 World Culture Report<sup>1</sup>. Crime fiction is an important genre not only in English-speaking countries, but all around the world. In the last few decades, new crime fiction has emerged from France, Japan, Norway, and Sweden. In the case of Argentina, the genre was warmly welcomed in Spanish translation at the turn of the twentieth century and was eventually appropriated by national authors, taking on new characteristics inherent to Argentine culture.

This thesis will focus on translation and the Argentine *policial* (known in the Anglophone literary realm as detective or crime fiction), exploring translation’s role in the dissemination and popularity of the genre in Argentina, and looking at the evolution of Argentinean crime fiction. The context surrounding a specific crime novel, José Pablo Feinmann’s *Últimos días de la víctima* (1979), hereafter referred to as *Últimos*, will also be examined, especially the historical period in which the novel was written. Finally there will be an analysis of the issues surrounding the Argentine detective novel in English translation, referring specifically to sections of my own translation of the novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Over a decade later, UNESCO’s *Index Translationum* shows that Agatha Christie was recently overtaken by Walt Disney Productions as the world’s most translated author. As a side note, world renowned detective fiction writers Georges Simenon and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ranked 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> respectively.

## Context and motivation

Historically, the crime fiction genre has tended to be relegated to the periphery of the literary canon, and is often dismissed as “escapist literature” targeting the masses. It has always been hugely popular, and prominent authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Patricia Highsmith have earned a great deal of literary fame for their contributions to detective fiction. In Argentina, the genre became widely read when detective works by British and North American writers were translated into Spanish and distributed in corner stores known as *quioscos*. These works, however, originally suffered the same treatment by critics as they had in Britain and North America, and were deemed “marginal literature”. It was only half a century later, when well-known Argentine authors began appropriating the genre (including Jorge Luis Borges, arguably the most famous Argentine writer) that detective fiction began receiving any critical attention. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the genre in Argentina evolved into its own unique brand hailed by both Argentine and international critics. *Últimos* is one of these novels.

*Últimos días de la víctima*, Feinmann’s first novel, is the story of Mendizábal, a hit man in Buenos Aires hired to kill Külpe, a man about whom he knows nothing. The novel follows his actions during the week he shadows his “victim”, as little by little he becomes obsessed with discovering what Külpe has done to make him a target. The novel is written along the same lines as the hard-boiled detective fiction from North America, such as the stories of Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler. There is evidence in Feinmann’s first novel that he read these books either in Spanish translation or in their original English form.

This project intends to demonstrate that as a crime novel of the late 1970s, *Últimos* goes beyond the conventions of a standard work of this genre. A more profound reading

indeed reveals important social implications, as Feinmann's novel truly captures the essence of the times in which it takes place. The majority of the novel transpires without incident, focusing mostly on character development. Then, after the turning point near the end, the plot is filled with acts of violence as the protagonist races to find his target who has disappeared. This violence, while an effective literary strategy for capturing the reader's attention, is also reminiscent of the time in which it was written. From 1976 to 1983, Argentina was ruled by an extremely repressive military dictatorship which instilled a national program called the *Proceso de reorganización nacional* (hereafter referred to as the *Proceso*). In an attempt to solve the country's economic struggles, the military junta<sup>2</sup> killed thousands of left-wing political figures and labour organizers, not to mention students, professors, writers, and other intellectuals. In this novel, the main character's violent behaviour is without a doubt a literary manifestation of the widespread brutality and fear that had become so common in Argentina.

As a translator, it is of course crucial to have an intimate understanding of the source language and more specifically of the regional variant, especially considering that each Spanish-speaking country boasts its own unique variation. *Últimos* is written in *rioplatense* Spanish, a variant spoken in Argentina and Uruguay. Having lived in Buenos Aires for a significant amount of time, I am very familiar with this regional variant, and therefore have the linguistic experience necessary to translate such a novel. Furthermore, while the *policial* has appeared in other Hispanic countries, namely Spain, Mexico, and Cuba, the Argentine detective story represents, according to Donald Yates, the highest level of literary achievement attained by detective fiction in all Spanish America (1956:229). Argentina was

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<sup>2</sup> A "junta" is a group of military officers ruling a country after seizing power. In Argentina, this group was always made up of three officers, one from each branch of the armed forces: the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army.

also one of the earliest Latin American countries to adopt the genre, giving this type of literature many decades to evolve before the era studied in this thesis (the 1976-1983 military dictatorship).

I have already alluded to the fact that the Argentine crime novel acts as a vehicle for social commentary, especially during the repressive years of authoritarian military government rule. Crime novels from this time were chosen as the focus of this study because these texts pose a greater challenge to a translator, providing a plethora of translation problems beyond the strictly linguistic and cultural ones. I read many Argentine *policiales* from the era of the *Proceso* and was initially surprised that none of them directly involved issues of political dissent. The literary years I was researching, that is 1976 to 1983, saw the most unregulated yet wide-reaching censorship Argentina has ever known. This meant reading these works much more closely for carefully hidden ideological indicators. In the case of *Últimos*, violent scenes are used to capture the reader's attention, and it is precisely this violence that reveals the deeper meaning of the novel. This socio-political reading is problematic from a translator's point of view. There are a number of passages in the novel, or sometimes even a single word, which would automatically evoke the idea of the *Proceso* to many Argentine readers (particularly those who lived through that period in history). However, an English-speaking reader might read the same word in translation and not think anything of it. These, even if less obvious than the stylistic, linguistic and other cultural issues, represent the unique focus of my thesis.

## Objectives and scope

While there have been innumerable studies on the *policial* genre in Argentina, a few on *Últimos días de la víctima* itself<sup>3</sup>, and a handful on crime fiction in translation<sup>4</sup>, the academic community has not paid strict attention to the Argentine proponent of the genre *in translation*. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis is the first to deal specifically with this combination of topics. My objectives are many: first of all, to explore the role of translation in bringing detective fiction to Argentina and promoting its popularity; secondly, to see where the novel I have chosen to translate, *Últimos días de la víctima*, fits into the *policial* genre, and how the socio-historical context of 1979 affected its content; lastly, to analyze Feinmann's novel, to identify the reasons for translating it for an English-speaking audience, to identify any problems that arise during this process, especially those related to the rendering of the implicit socio-political references in the text, and to provide potential translation solutions of specific examples.

I understand that the scope of this project may seem quite vast as I examine the entire history of the *policial* in Argentina. However, the choice of a specific text will allow me to concentrate on one particular moment in this history, and see how that moment affected the writing process, and ideally how the novel must be translated so that the target

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<sup>3</sup> There have been references in passing to the novel within articles or books on the Argentine *novela negra* ("noir" novel) such as in José Sablich's "Contextos reales y ficcionales en la novela negra argentina de la década del '70" (1996).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Jean-Marc Gouanvic is currently researching the American crime novel in French translation. His article "Les déterminants traductifs dans les champs source et cible : le cas du roman policier traduit de l'américain en français après 1945 pour la Série noire" is set to appear in the December 2009 edition of *TTR*.

reader can detect the socio-political criticism hidden within the text, without systematically resorting to paratext<sup>5</sup>.

### **Presentation**

This thesis is comprised of three main chapters. Chapter one will develop the historical framework of the genre, looking at the role of translation at all stages of the Argentine *policia*'s development. This section will start with the British and American instigators of the genre, and identify how and when it reached Argentina, the manner in which it evolved into a unique national form, and the differences between the Argentine, British, and American varieties. This section will also deal with the place of the genre within Argentine literature to determine if it was still considered paraliterature<sup>6</sup> even after its “nationalization”. The last part of this first section will be devoted to establishing the different classifications of the genre (namely the classic mystery and hard-boiled fiction), and finally to examining the status of Argentine crime fiction in translation.

Chapter two will focus on *Últimos días de la víctima*, its author, its publication background, and where the book stands within the genre. This section will also look at the historical and political background of the period in which the novel was written, since understanding this context plays an important role in translating it. The role of censorship in Argentina will also briefly be examined in order to identify how it affected the literature of this period and the literary strategies used to conceal socio-political references. Much of the information in this section will be drawn from a first-hand source: an interview with José Pablo Feinmann himself.

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<sup>5</sup> Paratext is defined by literary theorist Gérard Genette as elements in a published work that accompany the author's text.

<sup>6</sup> Paraliterature is defined by the Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature as any work that has not been canonized by literary institutions.

The third and final chapter will no doubt be the most important part of this thesis, and the most relevant to the field of Translation Studies. In it, I will first identify the numerous reasons for translating a work like *Últimos*, and then expose the different problematic areas of translating Feinmann's first crime novel. In order to do this clearly, I have included sample passages of my own translation as an appendix (Appendix 4) to which I will refer throughout the chapter in order to highlight linguistic, cultural, stylistic, and socio-political translation challenges. I will at times turn to other translators of Latin American fiction for strategies in surmounting the translation issues inherent to this literature.

The conclusion will summarize the findings of this thesis, and identify their implications for Latin American literature in translation, especially for the Argentine crime novel. This final section will also point out the questions raised by this study, and will include my plans for the completion of the translation of *Últimos días de la víctima*.

## **1. LITERARY CONTEXT: TRANSLATION AND CRIME FICTION IN ARGENTINA**

### **1.1. The role of translation in the evolution of crime fiction in Argentina**

It goes without saying that when translating any document, it is of the utmost importance to understand the specific context from which it emerges. It is evident then that a translator should not undertake the translation of a novel without knowing where it was written, by whom, why, etc. For this reason, before beginning to translate Jose Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima*, it was imperative to examine, among other things, the literary tradition from which it stems. This chapter will focus on the history of the *policial* genre in Argentina. Although quite popular in Argentina, the genre is far from native to it. In fact, translation played a key role in its dissemination around the world. This chapter will explore not only the origins of the genre, but will also trace the importance of translation in the development and evolution of Argentine crime fiction, from the classic mystery to the hard-boiled thriller, throughout the twentieth century. It will also look at how both translations and original Argentine literary creations were received by different types of national audiences, as well as specific traits of the Argentine varieties of the genre.

#### **1.1.1. Origins of crime fiction**

First and foremost, an initial definition of crime fiction may be in order as a point of departure, even though the genre changes significantly depending on the time and place in which it was written. Traditionally, a narrative of this kind begins with the discovery of a mysterious crime, be it a robbery, a kidnapping, or a murder, then relates the story of its investigation. The protagonist is generally a detective who uses his or her highly developed intellect to discover the perpetrator of this crime, hence the alternative denomination of the

genre, detective literature<sup>7</sup>. Of course, there are many varieties which diverge from this general definition, and these will also be examined in this chapter.

There is much debate over the origins of crime fiction. Some go so far as to say that the classic mystery themes first appeared in the works of the ancient Greeks, for example, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, where an enigma is presented and must be resolved. Others say that the first mystery was "The Three Apples", one of the tales narrated by Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights*. Most, however, agree that the true father of crime fiction is Edgar Allan Poe. His short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", about a man named Auguste Dupin who ingeniously solves the mysterious murder of two women in a room locked from the inside, is often considered the first detective story, even though the notion of a "detective" did not exist at the time. In fact, in this story, Auguste Dupin takes an interest in the case out of mere curiosity. This story paved the way for future detective stories, with Dupin serving as a model for the likes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. Not only did Poe create a new stock character, he also established the elements constituting a new narrative formula: a case with no apparent explanation, superficial clues pointing to a false suspect, observation and astute reasoning of the detective character, and the unforeseen solution discovered effortlessly by the protagonist. These narrative characteristics combined to form the detective fiction genre. This type of literature became quite popular in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his developments in and contributions to the genre, including the epitome of the literary detective character, Sherlock Holmes, who first appeared in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet*, as well as his friend, Dr. Watson, who also became a stock character of the genre. A

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<sup>7</sup> Other variants of the genre's name include the mystery, the enigma, the problem novel, and the whodunit.

similar affinity for the genre was occurring in France, where Émile Gaboriau is credited as the father of the *roman policier*, as well as a strong influence of Conan Doyle's writing. Gaboriau's detective character was a police officer named Monsieur Lecoq who first appeared in *L'Affaire Lerouge* (1866). Like Holmes, he also used his astute deductive reasoning to solve crimes, though these were of a more realistic nature than the elaborate crimes invented by Conan Doyle. Gaboriau gained international fame in the 1860s and 70s as his work was translated into many languages such as Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Turkish, and Chinese, but was quickly overshadowed when Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes appeared.

Gaston Leroux was another important French crime writer, though he is perhaps most famous to Anglophones as the creator of the original *Phantom of the Opera* (1909). His detective novels, including *Le mystère de la chambre jaune* (1907), featured amateur detective Joseph Rouletabille. Due to their influence on the genre, these contributions by French authors would be just as important to Argentine detective literature as the British models.

Back in the U.K., the classic detective story put forward by Conan Doyle peaked in popularity in the years between the two World Wars, a time when readers craved escape from the social, political, and economic realities of their daily lives. G.K. Chesterton, a contemporary of Conan Doyle, contributed to detective fiction by adding a religious overtone with the detective character Father Brown. It was also around this time that Agatha Christie began writing her famous mysteries investigated by the charming Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, or by the elderly yet astute Miss Marple. As mentioned previously, Christie is one of the most translated authors in the world. Other notable twentieth-century authors of the classic detective novel are S.S. Van Dine (American; pseudonym of Willard Huntington

Wright and creator of the detective Philo Vance), Dorothy L. Sayers (British; creator of Lord Peter Windey, amateur detective), Ellery Queen (pseudonym of American cousins Frederic Dannay, and Manfred B. Lee, who wrote supposedly autobiographical mystery novels about a protagonist named Ellery Queen), and Georges Simenon (Francophone Belgian, creator of detective Commissaire Maigret). All these authors would cross the equator and reach Argentina after being translated into Spanish, where they would take on a renewed popularity.

### **1.1.2. Argentine origins of detective fiction and the importance of translation**

Even before translations of European detective texts arrived in Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century, the region was already dabbling in the genre. Luis V. Varela wrote *La huella del crimen* in 1877, citing Gaboriau as an important influence. Paul Groussac, who was born in France and moved to Argentina at the age of eighteen, wrote “La pesquisa”, originally published with the title “El candado de oro”, in 1884, and Eduardo L. Holmberg penned “La bolsa de huesos” in 1896. Although these works were each author’s only contribution to detective fiction, many consider them to be the precursors of Argentine crime fiction since each tells the story of a murder and the detective heading the investigation. In *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, Amelia Simpson maintains that it is clear from the similarities in characters and plot formulas that these authors were familiar with the European detective models of the late nineteenth century (1990:30). What is not clear is whether they read these European texts in the original languages or the translations in Spanish. In all probability, they were familiar enough with English or French to be able to read the literature being produced in Europe in its original language. All the same, when tracing the history of the *novela policial* in Argentina, one must necessarily trace its

translation history, since the *policial* is by no means a *criollo* (i.e. pertaining to Argentina) literary form. Poe's stories were published in Buenos Aires in Spanish translation in 1884, which along with Varela and Groussac's Argentine contributions, marked detective fiction's arrival in Argentina. Carlos Olivera's 1884 translation of Poe was the first of many Spanish translations of the detective fiction works from the Northern Hemisphere, which sparked the popularity of the genre shortly before the turn of the twentieth century in Argentina, where they were referred to as *novelas problemas*, *novelas de enigma*, or *novelas detectivesca*.

From 1896 to 1940, translations of works by the likes of Poe, Gaboriau, Conan Doyle, Leroux, Christie, and Van Dine, circulated widely around the country. It is surprising how quickly these authors' new stories were often translated into Spanish. For example, Leroux's *Le mystère de la chambre jaune* was published in the Buenos Aires daily newspaper *La Nación* in 1908, only a year after it appeared in France. It is interesting to note that while there were many Spanish translations of detective fiction in Argentina during those years, there were still very few works written in this style. One exception was "El triple robo de Bellamore" written in 1903 by Horacio Quiroga, a Uruguayan writer who lived most of his life in Argentina, famous for his short stories and stories for children.

Although few Argentine authors were writing in this new genre at the turn of the century, translations of Poe, Conan Doyle, Gaboriau and Leroux were circulating in various forms. Publishing houses in Buenos Aires, upon noticing the interest in the genre, began sporadically including translations of European detective fiction in a few of their "colecciones de quiosco" (series of inexpensive books sold at corner stores). Certain magazines, such as *Vea y Lea* and *Leoplan*, also published these translations, often in parts in order to entice the reader to buy the next edition. The translations also began circulating

as *folletines* (inexpensive magazines not sold in serial form). As they were inexpensive, these distribution formats allowed the detective genre to reach a wide range of readers. None of these forms was generally considered “highbrow” literature, but rather directed towards the general reading public, hence the *policial*’s categorization as popular literature, a topic which will be discussed further on in the chapter.

By the 1930s, classic detective fiction had become quite widespread in Argentina, and the demand became so great that Argentine authors started creating their own detective stories in larger numbers. In 1932, the first full-length detective novel, *El enigma de la calle Arco*, by Sauli Lostal<sup>8</sup>, was published. This “locked-room” mystery, often cited as the first great Argentine detective novel (Saítta 2004:121) was published in serial form<sup>9</sup> in the newspaper *Crítica*. Lostal’s novel successfully captures the local *porteño* (pertaining to the inhabitants of Buenos Aires) experience, particularly in the language, using a very colloquial tone, including *lunfardo* (Buenos Aires slang) terms. Interestingly enough, the editor of *Crítica*’s literary supplement was none other than Jorge Luis Borges, who would prove to be a very important figure in the development of the detective genre in Argentina. In the thirties, Argentine publishing houses began devoting entire series to the detective genre. For example, Editorial Tor started publishing *Magazine Sexton Blake* in 1929, which included adventure as well as detective stories. Editorial Tor also sold *Colección Misterio* in *quioscos* in 1931. This decade also saw the appearance of Editorial Molino’s *El Vengador* series and Biblioteca Oro’s *Colección Amarilla*, which only published classic British detective fiction

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<sup>8</sup> The identity of this author is a mystery in itself, since the name Sauli Lostal is a pseudonym. The novel and name were first accredited to Luis Diéguez, a journalist at the newspaper *Crítica*. Later, a controversy was sparked when it was conjectured that Sauli Lostal was in fact Jorge Luis Borges. Debates about Lostal’s true identity continue to this day. See chapter on the author in Lockhart’s *Latin American Mystery Writers* (2004).

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Conan Doyle’s mysteries were released in the same serial format in Great Britain four decades earlier.

in translation. All these collections appeared in paperback format and were sold at very low prices in kiosks and newspaper stands, and were not generally the type of book that could be found in book stores.

The forties saw an even wider circulation of classic detective literature in Argentina, which resulted in a larger audience. Consequently, more Argentine authors began writing in the genre. For example, in 1941, two authors who had started publishing detective stories in the thirties released their most famous *policiales* in the newspaper *La Nación*. These were Enrique Anderson Imbert's *Las maravillosas deducciones del detective Gamboa* and Leonardo Castellani's stories from *Las nueve muertes del padre Metri*. Both these authors would continue to write *policiales*, and both above-mentioned works became Argentine classics.

In 1940, Diego Keltíber (pseudonym of Abel Mateo) wrote *Con la guadaña al hombre*, "the first authentic major work of detective fiction to be written by an Argentine" (Simpson 1990:34), which follows the traditional formula of the European varieties of the genre (i.e. elaborate plotline, and an amateur sleuth who uses deductive reasoning to solve the crime). Mateo's novel marks a change in target audience. Up until now, these detective stories had been marketed for the general reading public and were motivated by commercial incentives rather than literary ones. *Con la guadaña* projects a more sophisticated image of the genre, and is intended to be a form of amusement for the cultured reader by making the process of deduction an intellectual game.

Mateo's novel was not the only catalyst for this trend. Jorge Luis Borges also proved to be a very important figure in the Argentine appropriation of the detective genre. In 1941, he took the detective story to a new level by adding a metaphysical twist to his short story

“La muerte y la brújula”. This *cuento* features a detective who, while investigating three related murders, gets drawn into a deadly labyrinthical game set for him by his criminal nemesis. The story was highly acclaimed by the literary elite, and would inspire countless Latin American authors, including José Pablo Feinmann. “La muerte y la brújula” also sparked a creative surge in the genre by other literary greats such as Leonardo Castellani, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, and Manuel Peyrou. With their contributions, the forties became a “Golden Age” for detective fiction in the Rio de la Plata, as more and more writers tried their hand at producing innovative and perplexing stories. Ten of these stories were collected in Rodolfo Walsh’s *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* (1953), which includes short detective stories by Borges, H. Bustos Domecq (a pseudonym used by collaborators Borges and Bioy Casares), Manuel Peyrou, and Walsh himself. This important collection marked the first anthology of short *policiales* written exclusively by Argentine national authors.

In 1945, Borges and Bioy Casares, both well-known writers at this point, founded the *El Séptimo Círculo* collection, published by Emecé. This publication generally featured classic detective stories, and reached a very large readership, most probably due to the literary prestige of the writers in charge of the collection. The series was so successful that it continued to be published until 1983, long after Borges stepped down as director. *El Séptimo Círculo* introduced Argentine readers who were not yet familiar with the genre (i.e. those who did not buy the paperbacks at kiosks) to the great writers of nearly all variants of the genre. Some authors were not included because Borges always made it quite clear that he was partial to the more “intellectual” classic detective works in the style of Conan Doyle or Chesterton. This resulted in a deliberate exclusion of a new type of detective fiction called

the *novela dura* or *negra*, which started in North America as the hard-boiled or noir novel and made its appearance in Argentina in the 1950s.

### 1.1.3. The hard-boiled novel/the *novela negra*

In a conference given at the Universidad de Belgrano in 1979, Borges lamented the fact that “[a]ctualmente, el género policial ha decaído mucho en Estados Unidos. El género policial es [ahora] realista, de violencia, un género de violencias sexuales también. En todo caso, ha desaparecido. Se ha olvidado el origen intelectual del relato policial” (79).

According to Borges, the “deterioration” of the genre was due to a completely new style of detective fiction: the hard-boiled novel, which had slowly been gaining popularity in Argentina since the 1940s.

The hard-boiled genre made its appearance in the 1920s in American pulp magazines, the most well-known being *Black Mask*. A U.S. literary reaction to the mainly upper-class characters, the conventional formulas, and the “soft” treatment of crime in the British detective novels, the hard-boiled style<sup>10</sup> brought the action from the library of a British country home into the dark and dodgy streets of large American cities. This genre explored the shady underworld of gangsters and other dangerous criminals. It also introduced new stock characters such as the “tough-guy” private eye and the femme fatale. The hard-boiled genre also brought about the professionalization of the detective. The protagonist, instead of being an upper-class intellectual aficionado solving the crime through deductive reasoning, was now a tough, womanizing private eye, who was not afraid of getting his hands dirty and putting himself in the line of fire. These new hard-boiled stories

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<sup>10</sup> The word “hard-boiled” conjures the image of egg whose yoke is tough, just like the protagonists of these novels.

no longer centred on just one crime, or used a crime as the point of departure as in their classic counterparts, but instead recounted a series of connected crimes, some of which involved or even incriminated the protagonist. In these works, the goal was not to solve the mystery, but to bring down the “bad guy” and see that in one form or another, and often not in the expected and conventional way, justice prevailed.

Many experts credit Ernest Hemingway as the founding father of the hard-boiled genre with his story “The Assassins” (1922). The hard-boiled novel was popularized by Dashiell Hammett with *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). In the latter, Hammett introduced the character of Sam Spade, private eye, later immortalized by Humphrey Bogart in the 1941 film adaptation of the novel. Bogart also portrayed another great hard-boiled detective: Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe from such novels as *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Both these literary private eyes drink, smoke, swear, and womanize, and often turn to unconventional methods to get the information they need.

In order to understand this shift to a more violent and sex-filled detective novel, one only needs to think of the social context from which it emerged: the introduction of Prohibition in 1920, the rise of gangsterism, the economic crash of 1929, the Great Depression of the thirties, etc. Hard-boiled authors captured the darkness of this era using realism to describe the commonplace nature of crime, the corruption of justice, and the driving force of money. As a result, their texts became vehicles for social criticism, with each crime serving as a literary reflection of society.

Other important authors of the hard-boiled genre include James M. Cain who penned *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934); Horace McCoy; David Goodis who wrote “Dark

Passage” (1946) which was made into a film the following year starring (again) Humphrey Bogart; Peter Cheyney, a British writer who created the detective Lemmy Caution; James Hadley Chase, pseudonym of British author René Brabazon Raymond; Ross MacDonald, creator of another famous hard-boiled detective Lew Archer and pseudonym of Canadian writer Kenneth Millar; and Mickey Spillane whose books featured detective Mike Hammer.

Hard-boiled fiction reached Europe from North America and began distribution in 1945 thanks to Marcel Duhamel’s famous *Série noire*, a collection of American hard-boiled works translated into French (often by Duhamel himself) and published by Gallimard in France. The *Série noire* featured authors such as Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Horace McCoy, William R. Burnett, Ed McBain, Chester Himes, David Goodis, and Jim Thompson. It did not take very long for the series to influence French authors, and Serge Arcouët’s *La mort et l’ange* was published in the *Série noire* in 1948. Arcouët used an Americanized pseudonym (Terry Stewart), as did most French authors who were published as part of this collection. This trend would also be popular with Argentine authors of the same genre.

Mempo Giardinelli, author of many hard-boiled *cuentos* set in the Chaco province of Argentina, proposes that “the evolution of Latin American detective fiction has historically marched in close step with North American literature” (qtd. in Lockhart 2004:xxvi). This statement is certainly true of hard-boiled fiction. However, it is only in passing that Giardinelli mentions that this evolution in Latin America relied heavily on translators. As with its classic predecessor, the hard-boiled novel was often translated into Spanish quickly and cheaply for mass distribution in kiosks and newspaper stands (an equivalent point of sale to its American counterpart published in pulp magazines). These paperback editions

began circulating in the forties and carried on into the fifties. As with the classic detective works, they were grouped and translated by publishing houses which created collections specifically for this new genre. These included *Cobalto*, *Débora*, *Pandora* and *Linterna* published by Editorial Malinca, as well as *Rastros* and *Pistas* by Editorial Acme, all of which showcased an eclectic variety of classic and hard-boiled, Argentine and foreign authors. Besides these kiosk series, the *Serie Naranja* by Hachette (the same publisher who would distribute José Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima* a few decades later) was of utmost importance in the rise of the *novela dura*<sup>11</sup>, publishing both national and international works.

Due to the rising popularity of this genre, publishers were desperate to meet the market demand for the *novela negra*. But for this they needed English to Spanish translators for these works which were produced in English at an alarming rate. Who then were these translators? Interestingly enough, some of them did not fit the typical image of “the invisible translator”<sup>12</sup>. In fact, many of them would go on to become quite successful. One such translator was Eduardo Goligorsky, a very important figure in the *policial* literary realm in Argentina, translating about 50 hard-boiled works in the fifties for series like *Rastros*, including novels by Chandler, Hammett, and Goodis. This translation work inspired him to write upwards of 20 *policiales* in the style of Spillane using the English pseudonym James Alistair, among others. In 1975, he was awarded a prize in the “Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales” contest organized by the magazine *Siete días* for his short crime story entitled “Órden jerárquico”.

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<sup>11</sup> “*Novela dura*” and “*novela negra*” are used interchangeably in Spanish to denote the hard-boiled novel. These terms clearly show the influence of both English and French sources (the hard-boiled novel and *roman noir*).

<sup>12</sup> In the traditional sense of the term, as in a translator whose name is unknown and who is not recognized for his/her work.

Rodolfo Walsh, editor of *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* (1953), was also a prolific translator of both classic mysteries and hard-boiled works. He contributed a large number of translations and adaptations of English detective stories in the forties and fifties to the magazine *Leoplán* and Hachette's *Serie Naranja*. In an article on this translator, Silvia B. Adoue notes that many scholars claim that translating works by the likes of Poe and Conan Doyle inspired Walsh to become a writer himself (2005:n. pag.). In fact, Walsh wrote renowned short stories such as "Variaciones en rojo", "Nota al pie", and "Esa mujer", all of which show a clear influence of the *policial*. Walsh went on to become a journalist, and is best known for his *Operación masacre* (1957), a non-fiction crime novel which preceded Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966).

Thanks to the work of these translators and others like them, the genre found a perfect niche in the Argentine literary market. There are a number of reasons for this. For one thing, these stories were action-packed and highly entertaining. But more importantly, hard-boiled fiction was perfectly in line with the Argentine collective imagination. As opposed to the classic detective story, which makes no mention of real-world issues (such as social unrest and unstable politics), the hard-boiled story is a much more welcome environment for reflection on events outside the literary realm, providing a more critical view of reality. The hard-boiled story turns to realism, taking its inspiration from the real world, and is used as a venue for social criticism. The American hard-boiled novel emerged from urban spaces where politicians and the police were allied with the criminals themselves, where justice was no longer a reality, and where, due to a series of world events, it was no longer safe. The translations of this literature were an instant hit in Argentina in the fifties, where political, social, and economic instability were very present, given the

turbulent socio-political situation at the time (see Section 2.5.1). Argentines read these translations to momentarily escape the corruption and chaos of their own country, and might have felt reassurance knowing that even the idealized United States had its darker side.

In the sixties, the popularity of the hard-boiled genre waned. However, in the seventies, Argentina saw an interesting trend: young writers incorporating elements of the hard-boiled genre into their novels. These were authors who grew up reading the translations of Hammett and Chandler in the *quiosco* collections, and who now used their own writing as a cathartic release of political criticism. The seventies mark a particularly dark moment in Argentine history. As José Pablo Feinmann himself explains, in Argentina, “existen claros condicionamientos sociopolíticos para la aparición de esta variedad...sobre todo, [el] clima de terror instaurado por un Estado al margen de la ley” (qtd. in Lagmanovich 2001:50). In the seventies, Argentina was on the brink of a civil war due to extreme acts of violence by left-wing guerrilla groups and right-wing paramilitary groups. In March of 1976, a military government ousted the democratically-elected president and instilled a repressive regime called the *Proceso de reorganización nacional* in an attempt to regain social and economic stability. This process was upheld with brute force and mass violence, kidnapping, torturing, and murdering any opponent, which included left-wing thinkers, activists, academics, students, and their families. The *Proceso* also attempted to control all forms of communication, including literature. Censorship was at its height in the late seventies, so writers had to be extremely careful what they wrote for fear of exile or death at the hands of the military junta. It was during this repressive period that a handful of Argentine writers turned to the *novela dura*, a genre which could potentially house their socio-political views, using a variety of literary strategies to express their disapproval of what was happening

around them. These writers and their *dura*-inspired works included Osvaldo Soriano's *Triste, solitario y final* (1975), in which Chandler's Philip Marlowe is the protagonist; Juan Carlos Martini's *El agua en los pulmones* (1973) and *Los asesinos las prefieren rubias* (1974); Pablo Urbanyi's *Un revólver para Mack* (1974); Manuel Puig's *The Buenos Aires Affair* (1973); Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980); and of course, José Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima* (1979).

There are numerous reasons for the Argentine appropriation of the *novela dura* in the seventies. These reasons are discussed by Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge Rivera in their work on crime fiction in Argentina, *Asesinos de papel*, and include nostalgia for the genres of the past, pressure from the popularity of the genre in other media such as television and the movies, a renewed acknowledgment of its literary merit, but also a “creciente intensificación de la violencia como signo visible en el contexto sociopolítico del país” (1977:45). The above-mentioned hard-boiled authors observed the violence occurring in Argentina and channeled their reactions into their literary creations. The hard-boiled genre, with its penchant for violence, provided the perfect cover from censorship. Even to this day, authors in post-dictatorship Argentina continue to write using the *dura* model<sup>13</sup>. Thus, although hard-boiled fiction was frowned upon by Borges and the literati of Buenos Aires, it eventually surmounted this disapproval and became accepted by literary critics both nationally and internationally, becoming wholly appropriated into the Argentine literary canon.

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<sup>13</sup> These authors include Martín Caparrós, Miriam Laurini, Jorge Manzur, Monica Plöese, Syria Poletti, Juan Sasturain, and Sergio Sinay.

## **1.2. General characteristics of the Argentine *policial***

As outlined in the previous section, apart from a few examples, crime fiction in Argentina was originally limited to translations of British and North American works. However, there came a point when Argentine authors began experimenting with the new genre, sometimes mimicking the original formula exactly, other times adding new elements. This section will explore these new characteristics of the *policial* in Argentina, as well as its status with popular readership and literary critics at its different stages.

### **1.2.1. Status of crime fiction in Argentina**

In general, crime fiction tends to be classified as marginal literature, along with other “lesser” genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and romance. This kind of literature is also often referred to as “lowbrow” literature, in that it is usually written to the lowest common denominator for the purpose of superficial entertainment, and is generally excluded from the literary canon.

When the translations of detective fiction were first distributed in Argentina during the forties, literary critics were divided between those in favour and those opposed to the genre entering the literary canon. Many Argentine authors and critics saw the *policial* as marginal literature, dismissing it as “popular” literature. In his doctoral thesis on the Argentine detective story, Yates describes the genre from their point of view as “no longer literature, but reading matter provided for the mass audience” (1961:83). This was primarily due to the forms in which it was sold: the low-quality paperbacks or the inexpensive magazines sold at the corner kiosks. To these dissenters of the genre, the quality of the printed form in a way determined the audience, and this was reason enough to disregard the genre. Another element that determined the status of these books was the quality of the

translation, upon which American mystery writer and translator of Borges Anthony Boucher commented as follows: “there is little or no incentive, [in Latin America], for hack writing. The pure hack will probably pick up as much money translating (or mistranslating) French or English works as he could from his own efforts” (1947:2106). This comment raises two interesting points. The first point is the quality of the translations, or sometimes the lack thereof. Although some translations of the European classic detective works were quite good, they were most often done hastily. This contributed to the genre being disdained by the literati, many of whom were able to compare the translations with their originals. The second point of interest is the distinction brought up by Boucher between “hack writing” and literature. The works mentioned in this thesis are examples of literature, most importantly because they do not use the formulaic structure used by hack writers. In fact, most of them do not follow many conventions of the genre at all.

One last reason detective fiction was not originally deemed “literature” was due to the fact that it was read in order to escape the daily troubles of the real world. Escapist literature by definition makes no mention of any events outside of the fictional realm. The appeal of this brand of fiction to common readers is that it is easy to read. One may argue that in classic detective fiction, the reader must think critically in order to understand how the detective was able to solve the mystery. However, in most of these works, the author carefully summarizes the protagonist’s deductive reasoning that leads to the resolution of the story, usually in a dialogue where the detective explains his train of thought to his trusty sidekick. In Argentina, these classic detective works in translation also represented a form of escapist literature. Rodolfo Walsh explained that “[e]l interés por las novelas policiales...alcanzó su culminación durante la dictadura, cuando no se podía leer ni escribir

otra cosa” (qtd. in Yates 1961:77). During this 1955-1958 dictatorship, the government restricted what could and could not be published. Literature at this time could not make mention of the political situation in the country, and readers often turned to popular escapist literature like the *policiales* since they were among the only types of literature available.

Meanwhile, detractors of detective fiction had their opposition, and that opposition was Borges. He took a liking to the works of Poe, Chesterton and Conan Doyle right away. During the thirties, he wrote two essays on G.K. Chesterton and detective fiction, prompting more interest from academic and literary circles. The great literary circle of the time consisted of writers of the literary magazine *Sur*, founded in 1931 by Victoria Ocampo. Well-known authors such as Borges, Silvina Ocampo (Victoria’s sister), Bioy Casares (Silvina’s husband), and Ernesto Sábato were all collaborators of this magazine, and as the literary elite of the country, this group held a lot of cultural power.

The essays by Borges, as well as his previously mentioned short crime stories, certainly represented an upward movement of the status of crime fiction. In *Asesinos de papel*, Argentine author Ricardo Piglia is quoted as saying:

...en las reglas del policial clásico el grupo *Sur* encontraba ciertos elementos que confirmaban su concepción de la literatura – y no sólo de la literatura –: el fetiche de la inteligencia pura que valoraba sobre todo la omnipotencia del pensamiento y la lógica imbatible de los personajes encargados de proteger la vida burguesa. (Lafforgue and Rivera 1977:63)

With the support of Borges and the *Sur* authors, detective fiction in Argentina began receiving more critical attention. Borges’ detective works can be interpreted as a sort of intellectual game for the well-educated upper class. He used the classic formula, but applied a typical “borgesian” twist, for example, a deeper psychological examination of a character or a metaphysical ending, both uncommon features in classic detective literature. The

innovative nature of detective stories by Borges, Bioy Casares, Peyrou, and other authors from the early forties explain why Donald Yates calls the early forties the “Golden Age” of Argentine detective fiction.

The late forties brought on the decline of the classic detective genre. Perhaps the novelty of the “fresh” genre wore off for these prominent authors, or perhaps they were frustrated by the increasing number of “hack” authors (those quickly producing sub-standard crime fiction following a plot formula to make money). As Boucher wrote, there was also no incentive to write original detective works, since “[r]oyalties [were] small or non-existent, and the competition of pirated non-royalty translations [from English was] overwhelming” (1947:2106). Most importantly, Argentina’s elite lost interest in the detective story, and without their critical and literary support, the *policial* was relegated once again to the status of popular fiction. At this point, it was the publishers who chose what would be released and what would not, and what the readers wanted. They demanded that the stories written in Argentina resemble their English counterparts as much as possible. According to Yates, by telling the “commercial” detective story writers what to write, the publishers thus controlled the development of the commercial Argentine crime novel (1961:39).

Paradoxically, while Borges helped raise the status of the classic detective story, he was part of the reason the hard-boiled novel was not well-received by the authors of *Sur* magazine. They much preferred the intellectual and “civilized” aspects of the classic detective works (as noted above by Piglia), to the violent and “primitive” hard-boiled variety. Amelia Simpson notes that the latter was originally “perceived as an attack on an ideology of literature maintained by the elite who favored the gentility...of the classics” (1990:46). Given their position in the Argentine literary institution, the *Sur* group’s opinion

of the hard-boiled genre was quite influential. This genre, as the classic detective genre before it, was disdained as popular literature.

If Borges saved the reputation of classic detective fiction, it was Ricardo Piglia who showed Argentina the literary merit of the *novela dura*. In 1968, he initiated the *Serie Negra*, a collection of North American hard-boiled works, carefully translated into Spanish, and published by Tiempo Contemporaneo. This collection, which published stories by Hammett, Chandler, Goodis, McCoy, etc., proved to be very important as it took the *novela dura* from the kiosks to the bookstores, increasing its readership by expanding its distribution. Because of its availability in respected bookstores, the *novela dura* surmounted its previous reputation, and began receiving critical attention. In the introduction to the series, Piglia highlights the fact that the *novela dura* did not evolve from the classic detective works, but rather from the “thriller” tradition<sup>14</sup> (1979:11). In this sense, the two genres cannot and should not be compared. According to Lafforgue and Rivera, this introduction contributed to Piglia’s *Serie Negra* being considered the “reivindicación del género [negro]” (1977:41).

Due to the *novela negra*’s expanded readership, more authors began experimenting with the genre, which explains the notable increase in hard-boiled novels published in Argentina at the beginning of the seventies (see Appendix 1). These novels were certainly more than “popular literature”. Authors like Soriano, Martini, Puig, and Feinmann were not writing only for entertainment’s sake: most importantly, their works made an ideological statement. The detective novel had certainly come a long way since its first appearance at

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<sup>14</sup> As opposed to classic detective fiction, the thriller does not begin with a crime to be solved, but rather is built on a crime that will eventually happen. The main character is usually involved in preventing the crime, and generally triumphs over the “bad guy”. This genre is action-packed and very suspenseful. From it stem the genres of spy fiction and hard-boiled fiction.

the turn of the twentieth century. It was now a respected genre, fully appropriated in the Argentine canon. But how exactly did it make that jump? The typical characteristics of Argentina's crime fiction will now be examined.

### **1.2.2. Characteristics of Argentine detective literature**

Ever since Argentines began writing in their new-found detective genre, there have been few examples of works written exactly like their English counterparts. From the beginning, Argentines made their own modifications in order to make the genre more pertinent to an Argentine audience. Some authors took the classic formula and added their own personal touches, while others tried something completely different. Argentine authors adopted the genre for their own personal literary intentions, whether to satirize or make a social statement.

In 1941, Borges penned the detective stories *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodí*, which he co-wrote with Adolfo Bioy Casares using the pseudonym H. Bustos Domecq. In this work, the eponymous protagonist ingeniously solves crimes from the confines of his jail cell. Borges and Bioy Casares introduced a novel aspect to the Argentine detective story that can be seen even in the protagonist's name: parody. Parodí (the character) is a satiric representation of the great detectives of English literature, in that he is the epitome of an armchair detective, since he literally cannot leave the room yet still manages to solve the crimes presented to him by his clients. The meetings between Parodí and his clients, where the crimes are recounted, provide the authors with opportunities to satirize the language and habits of the *porteño* lower class. In this subtle ridiculing of the working class in their literature, Borges and Bioy Casares show their anti-Peronism. Perón's electoral platform was supported by the working class because it vowed to protect the rights of the proletariat.

This, however, would disrupt the social order, especially the upper class to which the *Parodi* authors belonged. Borges himself said that detective fiction “está salvando el orden en una época de desorden” (1979:80). For this reason, they used satire to express their disapproval of the populist movement and the “disorder” it caused. Besides the parodic instances, both Borges’ and Bioy Casares’ individual contributions to detective fiction have been described by Simpson as “playful, but at the same time complex and sophisticated, metafictional” variants of the Argentine *policial* (1990:40).

One basic yet significant difference between the classic crime stories from the turn of the twentieth century and the *policiales* written in Argentina is the role of (in)justice. As a rule, in the classic detective fiction by Conan Doyle or Chesterton, justice is served in the end: the criminal is caught and order is restored. This simply does not occur in the Argentine detective literature. Perhaps due to the country’s tumultuous socio-political history, the people of Argentina have a skewed concept of justice. Yates writes that “one cannot help but observe how frequently justice is not served[...]how the criminal more often than not either escapes retribution for his crime or has the penalty for the misdeed administered by forces beyond the scope of the formal police and judicial bodies” (1961:67). In Argentina, the police never represented the hand of justice, but rather the long arm of the military, notorious for human rights violations. Even to this day, Argentines have a distinct reaction to the police. In an article on Argentine literature appearing in *La Nación*, Guillermo Piro, translator, describes it anecdotally: “Si yo estoy en una sala de conferencias con otras 100 personas y entre un policía, algo pasa. La gente se siente molesta y tiene la sensación de que algo raro pasa” (qtd. in Pikielny 2004:5). For his part, Mexican critic and journalist Carlos Monsiváis argues that Latin Americans “don’t have any detective literature because we

don't have any faith in justice" (qtd. in Simpson 1990:21). While claiming that Latin America has no detective literature is obviously false, Monsiváis does have a valid point. Argentines have no faith in the justice system, so the classic detective works which end with the police capturing the criminal seem unrealistic and artificial. Argentines cannot easily relate to this type of literature, hence the obvious anti-judicial attitude in their detective works. In fact, the term "*policial*" is a misnomer, as many Argentine detective works make no mention of police, and when they do, it is usually a negative or derogatory reference.

Another important aspect of the Argentine *policial* is the setting of these stories. One would expect that Argentine authors would set their stories in a local and familiar setting, but this was not always the case, and in fact, in the early days, most authors chose more exotic settings for their detective stories, following the classic model. These authors wanted to create an environment that would seem exotic to the Argentine reader, as a way of mimicking the European models of the genre that were so popular in translation. Even important writers like Borges set their stories in far-away cities. Also, this exoticism of Argentine detective works was not limited to the settings in which they took place, but extended to the characters that populated them. Argentine writer Abel Mateo commented that a "detective que se llame Rodríguez 'no funciona' para el lector; si se apellida Wesley, 'funciona' perfectamente bien" (qtd. in Yates 1961:37). This tendency for mimicry of classic models was so widespread that many Argentine authors felt that true Argentine detective fiction did not yet exist<sup>15</sup>. The foreignness of these works was further intensified by authors using English-sounding pseudonyms. This was a visible trend in works written by French writers for Duhamel's *Série noire*, but Argentine authors also resorted to this

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter III of Donald Yates' Doctoral Dissertation (*The Argentine Detective Story*, 1961) for more on this topic.

alternate identity. This shows not only a certain “identity crisis” of authors writing in a genre they still felt was not their own, but also that this is what the readers wanted. Setting these stories in an Anglo-Saxon environment, with English-speaking characters, and signing off with an anglicized pen name was, according to Yates, a “sound business maneuver” (1961:36) and ensured the book would sell.

In the early fifties, this trend was reversed as authors began setting their detective works in local settings and putting their own names on the covers. This represented a certain appropriation of the genre, as authors finally accepted detective fiction as their own. In his study, Yates identifies 1953 as the pivotal year where 91% of the detective works produced were set in an Argentine locale. In the same year, Rodolfo Walsh released his collection *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, confirming in the preface that “se admite ya la posibilidad de que Buenos Aires sea el escenario de una aventura policial. Cambio que puede juzgarse severamente a la luz de una crítica de las costumbres” (1953:8).

Walsh’s comment points out yet another common trait of the Argentine *policial*: social criticism. Although classic British detective fiction tended towards evasive literature, avoiding references to actual people or events, in Argentina, the genre has always been a vehicle for socio-political commentary, with authors quick to point out the shortcomings of their society. For example, as mentioned, Borges and Bioy Casares used their detective works in part to denounce the new social order instilled by Perón’s rise to power. In these works, their view of Perón’s policies is clear.

After the fall of the military dictatorship of the fifties, during which almost nothing could be written about the political situation, there was a marked increase in reading about politics and social issues. With Frondizi’s democratic government in place in 1958,

according to Yates, “the loosening of the restrictions on the Argentine press and the subsequent overflowing of a great dammed-up flood of political comment turned a large part of the detective fiction audience (a good part of the mass audience, that is) to other subjects” (1961:77-78). This explains the decline of the classic detective novel in Argentina, but during this decline, the interest in the *novela negra* was growing. Some who grew up reading newspapers and magazines filled with the social and political commentary mentioned by Yates became writers who would incorporate this national interest into their literature. Under the cover of the violence-filled *novela negra*, Argentine authors in the early seventies expressed their dissatisfaction and fear of the turn their society had taken, a society where the fight between the left and right spilled blood all over the country, even before the 1976 military coup. With the appropriated hard-boiled novel, the *policial* continued to be a vehicle for social and political commentary. Before and after the 1976-1983 dictatorship, these references were more evident, such as in Sergio Sinay’s *Ni un dólar partido por la mitad* (1975) or Piglia’s *Prisión perpetua* (1988). However, during the dictatorship, when authors had to be more wary of censorship, their social and political comments needed to be very subtle.

To help get political messages across through their literary works, these Argentine *novela negra* authors used elements of realism reminiscent of the American hard-boiled models<sup>16</sup>. One characteristic of this American genre that was perfectly suited to the

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<sup>16</sup> Realism was also a literary characteristic typical of post-Boom writers, and a trait that went hand-in-hand with social observation. Post-Boom authors grew up in the 40s, 50s, and 60s reading works from what is considered the Latin American Boom. The Boom is known for the rise of the “*novela nueva*” which boasted innovative and experimental modernist literary techniques made popular by the likes of Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez. Many of the novels from the post-Boom movement use realism as a reaction against the fantastic and magical interpretations and radical questioning of reality of the works written during the Boom, and are often politically oriented. The post-Boom began in the mid-70s, and *Últimos* could certainly be considered a post-Boom work.

Argentine collective imagination was that of sexism. In the American models by Hammett and Chandler, women, although often major characters, were generally treated as objects by the protagonists. In a country where “machismo” was rampant and deeply engrained in the culture, this model was easily adopted by Argentine writers. Many of the characters within their *novelas negras* tend to be disrespectful towards women, with some (including Feinmann’s protagonist) resorting to using considerable violence against them.

This violent content of the American hard-boiled novel was another element which transferred easily to Argentine writing. By the seventies, the country’s politics had been unstable for decades, alternating between elected government and military dictatorship, intersected by coups. Living in a country notorious for corruption, Argentines could relate all too well to the material in these hard-boiled novels. Since the sixties, left-wing intellectuals and academics often disappeared, and violence in the streets was now commonplace. Violence was a pillar of the *novela dura* with which Argentine readers could identify, and perhaps this in part explains the success of the genre in Argentina.

With all the changes the Argentine *policial* has experienced, it is interesting to note that throughout the decades of its development, it has retained a number of these characteristics. As we have seen, the Argentine *policial* represented the perfect vehicle for what the authors wanted to communicate to their readers, implicitly or explicitly, whether it was mockery, social commentary or political criticism.

### **1.3. Argentine crime fiction in translation**

Just as the British and American models before it, Argentine detective fiction has certainly surmounted geographical borders and spread to other parts of the world through its translation into many foreign languages. Thanks to his literary status, Borges’ contributions

to the genre have certainly been translated into a large number of languages, including English. Some of the other early Argentine detective works have also been translated. For example, Manuel Peyrou's *El estruendo de las rosas* was translated by Donald Yates in 1972. Yates was a key figure in bringing Latin American detective stories to English-speaking readers. In 1972 he also released the first collection of Spanish American detective stories in English translation entitled *Latin Blood; The Best Crime and Detective Stories of South America*. This anthology includes a few works by Borges (including one as H. Bustos Domecq), a story by Peyrou, another by Enrique Anderson Imbert, and finally one by Rodolfo Walsh. Beyond these examples, the translation into English of the early Argentine crime writers is sporadic.

The majority of the Argentine *novelas negras* of the seventies and eighties already mentioned have been translated, mostly into English, but also into other languages. Daniel Balderston translated Piglia's *Respiración artificial* in 1994, and in 2002 it was translated into German. Nick Caistor translated two of Osvaldo Soriano's crime novels, *No habrá más penas ni olvido* and *Cuarteles de invierno*, and they have also been translated into languages such as French, Polish, Italian, and even Persian. Suzanne Jill Levine translated Manuel Puig's *The Buenos Aires Affair* in 1976, only two years after the original was published. It has since been translated into French, Portuguese, Dutch, and Japanese. *Un revólver para Mack* by Pablo Urbanyi has yet to be translated into English, but was translated into French by Jean Potvin in 1992. None of Juan Carlos Martini's hard-boiled-influenced works have been translated into English. However, his *El cerco* (1977) has been translated into French<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 2 for a list of selected Argentine *novelas negras* from the military dictatorship and their translations.

Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima* has been translated into French, Italian, and Turkish, but has yet to be published in English. When I asked him about this phenomenon, the author said “no tengo nada traducido en Estados Unidos. Nada, nada, nada. Ninguno de mis libros. Creo que Estados Unidos funciona con un tapón. Ellos mismos lo dicen. Se publican a ellos” (Feinmann 2009a). In order to translate his novel as “faithfully” as possible, every possible aspect had to be researched. While this first chapter examined the question of genre, the following chapter will focus more specifically on the novel and its author, examining its place within the literary framework discussed above. Lastly, it will explore the role of the socio-political events conditioning the novel's creation.

## 2. EXAMINING ÚLTIMOS DÍAS DE LA VÍCTIMA

The purpose of this chapter is to better contextualize José Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima*. This chapter will summarize the story, place it within the literary context established in the previous chapter, provide a biography of the author, and finally, study the novel's ties with the socio-historical context of 1979, the year in which it was written. All of these aspects are pieces of a puzzle which a literary translator gathers and puts together in order to better understand and translate the novel in question.

### 2.1. The origins of the novel

*Últimos días de la víctima* drew its inspiration from a personal and a national crisis. Both the author and the country were experiencing critical moments in their history. In 1975, José Pablo Feinmann was content with his life. He had a promising career as a writer of articles on philosophy and Argentine history, was preparing to write his first novel, and was in a fairly comfortable economic position. But at the young age of 32, he was diagnosed with cancer. This shattered his view of life. Feinmann himself explains that before the diagnosis:

Tenía una concepción kantiana de la vida. Uno constituye el objeto que va a ser tu vida. La vas haciendo, la vas formando. Por eso tenía una poderosa sensación de construirme autónomamente, de ser el autor de mi historia...[Después] pasé a ser el autor de mi historia al padeciente de mi historia. Y allí yo me sentía totalmente atacado por los demonios de la exterioridad...[Fue] un cambio tremendo. (2009a)

Thus Feinmann discovered what he has coined “las trampas de la vida” (*ibid.*). To his great surprise, he realized that he was not in control of his own life as he had always thought, but that there were external forces which could exert their power at any time and

take away his life and sense of control. It was this new perspective on life that prompted Feinmann to put together ideas for his first novel.

While Feinmann was in this frame of mind, a military coup to remove Isabel Martínez de Perón<sup>18</sup> as President was imminent. The entire country was in a state of unrest: the extreme leftwing Montoneros group posed a constant threat to the now right-leaning peronist government. As a result, Martínez de Perón made agreements with the army to use whatever force necessary to annihilate the radicals. These agreements ultimately empowered the military to remove the Presidenta herself from office, and thus began the repressive *Proceso de reorganización nacional* in 1976. At this point, the military expanded its range of targets to include union leaders, activists, academics, and students. Many writers, for example Manuel Puig and Osvaldo Soriano, fled the country to escape the merciless torture, killings, or “disappearances” of those who showed leftist tendencies. Feinmann, however, was not able to leave, and feared being targeted by the military:

en el '78, yo estaba como un sobreviviente acá en plena dictadura. No debía estar acá. Yo tendría que haberme ido. No porque estuviera en la guerrilla, no, había sido profesor de filosofía y había escrito muchas cosas. Y bueno, acá te mataban por cualquier cosa...estaba fichado.  
(Feinmann 2009a)

He knew he should go into exile, but because he was ill and needed constant medical attention, Feinmann was not able to leave the country like many of his contemporaries. Furthermore, because of his political leanings, he felt he was “fichado”<sup>19</sup>. He was trapped in a country ruled by fear. His world was torn apart by both personal and political events, and these were the conditions that produced *Últimos*.

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<sup>18</sup> Juan Domingo Perón’s widow who became President after his death in 1974.

<sup>19</sup> This term literally means to have a police file opened or to have a record, but during the military dictatorship, it took on a much more frightening implication. “Estar fichado” meant that the person in question was a prime target for the junta to arrest, torture, “disappear”, or kill.

## 2.2. The novel

*Últimos días de la víctima* tells the story of Mendizábal, an aging professional hit man. It begins in the Buenos Aires office of “el hombre importante” who pays him to eliminate a man named Külpe. Mendizábal begins the hunt right away, waiting outside Külpe’s home, noting the hours he comes and goes and with whom, and taking pictures of his target. His methods are unorthodox. He takes his time, getting to know everything about his victims, their habits, their vices, etc. Because of all this he gets superior results. This is why he works for himself, and doesn’t take orders from anybody, unless it is accompanied by a handsome amount of money. As an independent contractor, he shares many traits with the private eyes of the American hard-boiled novels, such as Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. But instead of solving crimes, his goal is to masterfully kill his target, leaving no trace of foul-play. He is the best at what he does, and he knows it. However, because of his odd methods and excellent remuneration, he is not well-liked by many who also kill for a living. One such example is Peña, “el hombre importante’s” right-hand man, who candidly tells Mendizábal that he disapproves of his methods and wants to see him out of the game. He resents the fact that Mendizábal gets the best jobs, that is, the ones with the highest pay. Mendizábal does not let the resentment and jealousy of others stand in his way. He continues to stalk his victim, renting a room in the boarding house across the street from Külpe’s apartment, enlarging his photos and pasting them all over his walls. He continues to delay killing him, wanting to know more about him. He obsessively attempts to discover what he has done to warrant being killed. With most of his previous victims, it had been obvious why they should be eliminated. Külpe, however, is different. He seems harmless to Mendizábal, even after days of following his every move. Every day, Külpe leaves his house

around noon, heading to the Barrancas de Belgrano park where he meets a woman named Amanda, with whom he seems to have just ended a relationship, and a little boy named Sergio, whom Mendizábal originally suspects to be their son. After this meeting, which usually ends with the woman looking very upset, Külpe catches a bus heading downtown. One day, Mendizábal follows him and discovers that he goes to a lottery retailer. At night, Külpe regularly goes to a nightclub to meet a woman named Cecilia, who is most likely a prostitute, though this is never made explicit. Most nights, the pair goes back to his place where they share a drink then close the blinds, leaving their actions to Mendizábal's imagination. Nothing observed by the hit man satisfies his quest to discover why Külpe must be killed. For this reason, he continues to postpone the event, in order to find the missing piece of the puzzle.

In an attempt to find more clues about his victim, Mendizábal often slips into Külpe's apartment while he is absent. There he examines the glasses used by the couple, putting his lips to Cecilia's lipstick stains, and sitting on the bed where they spent the night. He leaves a mark of his visit, a precise cigarette burn at the bottom of a curtain, hoping that Külpe will see it and know he is being watched. In one visit, he even tries on one of Külpe's suits. His actions show that Mendizábal intends to replace Külpe after his death, in particular in his relationships with Cecilia, Amanda, and Sergio. These visits to the apartment, marked by an underlying erotic element, also show the reader just how lonely the protagonist is. When he gets back to the boarding house across the street, he puts the pictures of Külpe up on the wall and scrutinizes them, as if the pictures will give him more insight into the man he has been hired to kill. Külpe's identity is the great mystery which is never truly explained, and this is one of the reasons the novel is categorized as a *policial*.

One week after Mendizábal is given the assignment, “el hombre importante” and Peña inform him that the matter has become more pressing and the job needs to be carried out immediately. Mendizábal promises to complete his task that very night. Unfortunately, he finds out that his good friend (and perhaps his only friend) “El Gato Funes” has died. He spends the night making the funeral arrangements, and vows to get Külpe the next day. The next morning, he is shocked to discover that Külpe has abandoned his apartment and cannot be found. He hunts down all the people connected with him and tries to force them to tell him where Külpe has gone. He beats Cecilia to a pulp, leaving her for dead, attacks a young man working in the lottery office, and kills the bartender and the owner of the nightclub. He is then called into the office of “el hombre importante” where Peña is in charge while his boss is on vacation. Peña informs him that because he has failed in his mission, his services are no longer required, and consequently he will not be hired by them again. Peña tells him that he will do everything in his power to ensure that he never works again.

Dejected, Mendizábal is returning to the boarding house to pack his things when he sees a light on across the street at Külpe’s. Upon entering the apartment, he is absolutely shocked to see photos of himself all over the room. Then someone comes in behind him. It is Külpe, and he is pointing a gun at him. The tables have turned and the hunter becomes the hunted. Saying the very same words that Mendizábal himself had meticulously rehearsed for this final moment, Külpe shoots him.

On the final page, Mendizábal’s landlady reports him missing, saying that he was a very good tenant who kept his room spotless, except for a single cigarette burn at the bottom of a curtain.

*Últimos días de la víctima* was published in Buenos Aires in December of 1979, at the height of the violence and repression of the dictatorship. The publisher, Colihue, a branch of the larger Hachette group, printed 2,000 copies, which was a fairly standard print run for the time. The novel was quite well received by the readers<sup>20</sup>. One reader was of particular importance. His name was Adolfo Aristarain, and he was one of Argentina's most well-known movie directors at the time. In 1981, he directed *Tiempo de revancha*, a movie where a mute protagonist serves as an extended metaphor for a silenced country during the dictatorship. Feinmann was thrilled when Aristarain approached him in this same year and asked if he would write a screenplay for *Últimos*. In April 1982, just days before the onset of the Falklands War, *Últimos* was released in theatres. "Allí me volví famoso," he says (Feinmann 2009a). The movie did extremely well and was even submitted as a selection for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film<sup>21</sup>. The story was so popular that it was brought to the film screen twice more after that: in 1988 by director Hector Olivera and again in 1994 by French director Bruno Gantillon. It is evident that this story spoke to people and remained pertinent at other moments in history and even in other parts of the world.

As mentioned previously, *Últimos* has been translated into a variety of other languages. It was first translated into French by Françoise Campo-Timal in 1991, published by Albin Michel as part of its *Spécial Policier* collection, and republished in 1993 in the popular Le Livre de Poche collection. It was quite well received in France, with one

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Maria Julia Bertotto, a *porteña* costume and set designer, absolutely loved the book, and wanted to see it adapted for the cinema. She looked up Feinmann and established contact with him. They met August 8, 1980, and have been a couple ever since.

<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, it was not nominated by the Academy. It did, however, win eight prizes during various Latin American film awards ceremonies, including the 1983 Silver Condor for Best Original Screenplay from the Asociación de Críticos Cinematográficos de Argentina, and the Best Screenplay award for Feinmann at the 1982 MystFest (an Italian mystery film festival).

favourable review in *Magazine littéraire* saying “il reste d’abord et avant tout un formidable suspense et il fait partie de ces policiers qu’on lit sans presque jamais lever les yeux et qui, de nos jours, sont devenus des denrées rares” (Lous 1991:93). In 1993, a translation by Olivo Bin was published in Italian by Feltrinelli. It was most recently translated into Turkish by Hüseyin Boysan in 1996<sup>22</sup>. To date, it has not been published in English translation.

### **2.3. The author**

José Pablo Feinmann was born in 1943 in Buenos Aires. First and foremost, he is a philosopher, having studied and taught philosophy at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. At the same time, he has always taken great interest in studying the collective memory of his country, often linking the two themes in his work as a writer. When it comes to national politics, he considers himself left-wing, and condemns the use of violence in any situation. In his youth, he read *Das Kapital*, and agreed with Marx’ communist reasoning. Feinmann grew up supporting Perón and everything he stood for, and even wrote articles advocating *peronismo* in the early seventies. He also wrote anonymous pamphlets for leftist militant organizations supporting Socialism, when these forms of communication were common. It is for this reason that when the extreme right-wing military came into power in 1976, he was concerned for his well-being. All around him, intellectuals were being killed or “disappeared” for writing their opinions. He was worried that the openly left-wing articles he had written years before would be used against him, and this is why he feared he was “fichado”. A sufferer of an obsessive-compulsive disorder (Feinmann 2009a), Feinmann went back and reread everything he had ever written over and over again:

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<sup>22</sup> For bibliographical information of these translations, see Appendix 2.

“Yo tenía que determinar a lo largo del día si era culpable o no. Si me iban a buscar los militares o no. Entonces para determinar eso, leía lo que había escrito yo y lo memorizaba. No se podía desprender de eso, lo tenía que volver a leer, y volver a leer. Y después leía los discursos de los militares que también los memorizaba. Pero nunca estaba seguro de haberlo memorizado bien. O sea que volvía otra vez, y volvía otra vez. Bueno, es la compulsión y la obsesión. Eso es el infierno.” (*ibid.*)

Aside from contributing to his paranoia, Feinmann’s obsessive-compulsive tendencies worked their way into his first novel in the form of its protagonist, who demonstrates the same sort of obsessive behaviours. Mendizábal’s obsession with Külpe, his compulsion to know everything about him before killing him, follow him everywhere, take so many pictures of him then scour them for clues, and put time and energy into thinking of the final words he will speak to Külpe; these are all literary representations of the author’s frustration with his own disorder. Feinmann admits that “está muy enfermo el personaje. Bueno, yo estaba muy enfermo. Así que se ve que puse mucho en mi personaje” (*ibid.*).

Though Feinmann’s paranoia about the military was well-founded, the junta never sought him out. He co-owned a business with his brother at the time, buying and selling copper, and perhaps this commercial role protected him during the dictatorship, allowing him to continue to write. He used this medium as a creative outlet for expressing his frustrations and concerns regarding the state of his country. Following *Últimos*, his next novel was another *policial*-esque story entitled *Ni el tiro del final* (1981), which contained hidden political criticism. This story was so popular that Feinmann also adapted it as a screenplay. The movie adaptation, *Love Walked In*, was released in 1997 as a U.S.-Argentina co-production starring Dennis Leary. Feinmann continued to use the *policial* (mostly the hard-boiled variety) as his genre *par excellence* for examining Argentine society. His third *policial*-inspired novel is *El cadáver imposible* (1992), which centers on

the hideous crimes committed by a young girl, a story that also doubles as a metaphor of the country's violent society. Feinmann's final *policial*, *Los crímenes de Van Gogh* (1994), is a departure from the previous three in that it is a parody. In this story, a bored production assistant becomes a serial killer in order to create authentic material for a movie script. This novel also differs from the previous three in that it contains not one, but two detective figures: a private investigator and a police detective. These elements of the *policial* combine with Feinmann's astute observations of the Argentine society of the 1990s to create a humorous yet critical novel.

Though a good portion of Feinmann's novels fall under the category of *policial*, they are certainly not restricted to that genre. *La astucia de la razón* (1990) and *La crítica de las armas* (2003) both feature a character named Pablo Epstein, who Feinmann openly acknowledges is a literary representation of himself. Both these novels explore different philosophical explanations of existence, from Marx to Sartre, to try to make sense of "las trampas de la vida" in the protagonist's life, as well as in the collective identity of Argentina. *La sombra de Heidegger* (2005) completes the trilogy with the previous two novels. It tells the story of a pupil of Heidegger who moves to Argentina during the rise of Nazism. This novel blends philosophy, fiction, and real historical figures and events. *El ejército de ceniza* (1994) and *El mandato* (2000) are also works of historical fiction that use different periods in Argentine history as the backdrop for the storyline, more specifically, the conflict between gauchos and soldiers of the 1800s, and Uriburu's 1930 coup, the first Argentine military dictatorship of the twentieth century, respectively. Earlier this year, Feinmann's tenth novel, another example of historical fiction, was released in bookstores across Argentina. *Timote* is a series of conversations between the montonero Fernando Abal

Medino and former president General Aramburu. Both characters are based on actual historical figures involved in one of Argentina's most important and dramatic historical events<sup>23</sup>. The novel surprised critics and readers alike. Like *Últimos*, it does not explicitly judge the characters, and makes the reader reconsider his or her original prejudices by showing the other side of the story. In *Últimos* as well, the reader is caught in the dichotomy between good and bad, because the author deftly highlights the expansive grey areas in between. On the one hand, Mendizábal kills in cold blood if the price is right, yet throughout the novel, readers are shown his more fragile side. For example, we see his generosity towards his old friend "El Gato Funes", for whom he continues to search for a prosthetic leg which will not hurt him, ordering them from as far away as England. This humanization of the character, propelled by the narrator recounting Mendizábal's point of view, pushes the reader to re-evaluate the initial assessment of the protagonist. This non-judgmental attitude towards what is traditionally considered "the other" (for example, an assassin, a Nazi, or a political extremist) is a common characteristic of Feinmann's writing.

Apart from these ten novels, Feinmann has also written many important essays on philosophy as well as Argentine politics, history, literature, and society. For example, in 2003 he published *La sangre derramada* about political violence in Argentina and around the world at different periods in history. In 2006 and 2007, he published a series of philosophical essays in the newspaper *Página/12*, which were collected in a book entitled *La filosofía y el barro de la historia* the following year. The newspaper series was so popular that *Página/12* had to double the original number of installments. Feinmann's popularity soared when he began hosting a weekly television program called *Filosofía aquí y ahora*.

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<sup>23</sup> General Aramburu was kidnapped by the Montoneros May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1970, and shot in the town of Timote four days later. This represented the first violent action taken by the Montoneros in opposition to the extreme right.

Both the television show and the essays in *Página/12* were didactic in nature, but their popularity was perhaps due to the fact that it began with the fundamentals, which ensured that anyone interested in the subject, regardless of their previous knowledge, could understand<sup>24</sup>.

*Filosofía aquí y ahora* marked Feinmann's first television appearance, but he had already been working behind the scenes in both film and television for 25 years. To date, he has written over fifteen screenplays and two plays for the stage. It is apparent that Feinmann has very close ties with the worlds of theatre, film, and television, and this is evidenced further by his novels and essays which have so easily transferred into these media<sup>25</sup>.

#### **2.4. The literary context**

*Últimos días de la víctima* is preceded by two epigraphs: one by Borges (“Después, muy cuidadosamente, hizo fuego”) and one by Hammett (“Estaba parado en el umbral del living-room, con un revólver en la mano”). These epigraphs evoke two of Feinmann's literary inspirations in writing this novel and can be used in part as markers placing the novel within two literary traditions. The quotation by Borges is the final line of “La muerte y la brújula”, his most famous detective short story. The similarity in the short story's ending and the conclusion of Feinmann's novel is clear. Both end with a twist where the “detective” figure becomes the victim. The similarities with Borges' contributions to the *policial* genre can also be seen in the metaphysical questions raised throughout the narrative, as well as certain themes normally attributed to Borges, for example “the other” or “the double”.

Regardless of these similarities, *Últimos* has little to do with the classic detective genre

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<sup>24</sup> The show has its own mini website (<http://www.encuentro.gov.ar/MiniSite.aspx?id=100>) which includes a forum where anyone can discuss previous episodes or debate broader philosophical questions.

<sup>25</sup> The film rights for Feinmann's latest novel *Timote* have already been sold to Adolfo Aristarain. Feinmann will no doubt begin working on the screenplay shortly.

which Borges openly advocated. This is evident even in the structure of Feinmann's novel. *Últimos* differs from most classic detective fiction in that it does not begin with a crime, centre on solving the mystery of the crime, or end with the explanation and tying up of loose ends. Feinmann's novel begins with the identification of a crime that has not yet happened but which will be carried out by the protagonist. However, the reader follows the story with immense anticipation of this crime which in the end never occurs, or at least not as the reader expects. Herein lies the necessary element of suspense. Tzvetan Todorov describes the suspense process of hard-boiled novels as a movement "from cause to effect: we are first shown the causes, the initial *données*... and our interest is sustained by the expectation of what will happen" (1977:47). The reader knows from the first pages of *Últimos* that a murder will occur, and throughout the rest of the novel, the reader waits for the moment when Mendizábal will kill Külpe. The entire narrative is built upon this future act. Suspense also builds in the moments when the narrative foreshadows the ending, and the reader senses, if only for a moment, that Mendizábal might become the victim. These moments are typical in hard-boiled novels, which use this literary strategy to grip and maintain the reader's interest.

The epigraph by Hammett at the beginning of *Últimos* is an obvious acknowledgment of the influence of the hard-boiled tradition. The misogynist treatment of women, the excessive violence, and the corruption are all direct nods to the American genre. The detached, cynical, short style is also reminiscent of this literature (see Section 3.2.4.). Realism, another typical trait of the *duro* works, is also present in the novel. The action in *Últimos* takes place in actual Buenos Aires landmarks in the neighbourhood of Belgrano and downtown. This realism immediately draws in readers who are familiar with Buenos Aires,

as they can identify with the setting and have a clear mental image of the events in the narrative, even though they are fictional. The description of actual places certainly adds to the realism that is so typical of the genre and makes the narrative more “verosímil”, that is, realistic or plausible. There are also paratextual elements that immediately identify the novel as a hard-boiled work. For example, the cover of the newest edition of *Últimos* by Seix Barral (2006) shows the profile of a typical *film noir* private eye from the forties, smoking a cigarette, wearing a shirt and tie, a trench coat, and a fedora<sup>26</sup>. His face is worn, hardened, yet alert. This portrait could be the cover of any hard-boiled novel, and this first visual impression of the book instantly places it within the genre.

The protagonist is also a point in common with other hard-boiled works. Mendizábal shares many characteristics with private detectives Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. They are all solitary figures who are extremely confident in their skills, whether their line of work is solving crimes or carrying out assassinations. They are loners in both their personal and professional lives. None are married (though Spade is a notorious womanizer) and they all work alone. Not only are they lone businessmen, but as private agents they answer to no one but themselves, and they always get the job done, often using surprising and unorthodox methods. The detectives follow a personal “code of ethics” that does not always coincide with the law. Despite a high body count, Hammett and Chandler’s novels generally end with the protagonist doing the “right thing”, even if it means giving up something dear to them<sup>27</sup>.

One main difference between the American protagonists and Mendizábal is that unlike Spade and Marlowe, Mendizábal is not a detective. In this “*policial*”, there are no

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<sup>26</sup> Also, this figure’s shadow is projected onto a red background. The colour red immediately conjures the idea of an imminent death, while the shadow could easily represent the “other” figure, in this case, Kúlpe.

<sup>27</sup> In Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade must turn in Brigid O’Shaughnessy to the police. Although he is romantically involved with her, she killed his partner, and justice must be served.

detectives, and no police, mainly because there is no official crime. The police only make an appearance in the novel during a flashback where they are chasing Mendizábal and his friend “El Gato”, and again when they shoot the latter and leave him for dead. In an article in which he clearly links the socio-political situation of his country and the Argentine *novela negra*, Feinmann explains that this negative depiction of the police is to be expected in a nation where “la policía, lejos de representar la imagen de la Justicia, representa la imagen del terror” (1991:145). The only “authority” is “el hombre importante”<sup>28</sup>, and halfway through the novel he is replaced by Peña, who says his boss is on a much-needed vacation. This could very well be a metaphor for the anonymous face of authority, especially considering that in Argentina, the person in power changed incessantly throughout the seventies and eighties<sup>29</sup>, but the repression and fear were constant. The lack of police in the novel is compensated by Mendizábal as a *parapolicial*<sup>30</sup> figure. The protagonist is proud of remaining outside the system, yet ultimately having control. As the narrator explains, “*Un instrumento*, a Mendizábal le gustaba definirse así. Lo hacía sentirse puro, incontaminado, ajeno a las pasiones de los demás. Y eficaz.” (Feinmann 2006:54). Because he is outside the system, he can go about his business in an “untraditional” yet efficient manner, as opposed to the men working directly under “el hombre importante” who just get the job done quickly, “una carnicería barata”, as Mendizábal explains to Peña (*ibid.*:43).

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<sup>28</sup> “El hombre importante” is reminiscent of Hammett’s “The Old Man” from *Red Harvest*: “The Old Man was the manager of the Continental’s San Francisco branch. He was also known as Pontius Pilate, because he smiled pleasantly when he sent us out to be crucified on suicidal jobs. He was a gentle, polite, elderly person with no more warmth in him than a hangman’s rope. The Agency wits said he could spit icicles in July.” (Hammett 1999:102)

<sup>29</sup> During the military dictatorship, there were a total of four *de facto* presidents, all generals from the Armed Forces.

<sup>30</sup> There is no word for *parapolicial* in English, as the concept does not necessarily exist in North America or the UK, though it is similar to “paramilitary”. Essentially, it is a figure or group of people who function as an organism parallel to the police and who work towards a common goal. In Latin America, the word evokes individuals who carry out political murders.

Besides Mendizábal's role as a hit man as opposed to a detective, the end of the story is also uncharacteristic of detective fiction, classic or hard-boiled, in that the mystery is not resolved. In a classic detective novel, things generally return to the way they were at the beginning. According to Simpson, Feinmann subverts this convention by defying "reader expectations based on familiarity with those formulas, replacing the reassuring solution with a disturbing one" (1990:218). In *Últimos*, not only are the mysteries of the story not settled, but the ending only raises more questions. Did Külpe know that Mendizábal was following him all along? Did Peña hire Külpe to kill Mendizábal as revenge because he was given the high-paying jobs? Are Mendizábal and Külpe the same person? Was Amanda involved in setting up Mendizábal? These unanswered questions ensure that the readers will continue to think about the story long after they have finished reading it. This in fact goes against what Ernest Mandel, a Marxist political theorist, once wrote about crime stories: "when you read them, you don't think about anything else; when you finish one, you don't think about it again" (1984:vi). Mandel's statement certainly does not apply to *Últimos*, and in this sense, the novel is not a typical *policial* because it contains more than the average crime novel read to leisurely pass the time. Todorov observed that "detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not detective fiction" (1977:43). By this definition, *Últimos* has surpassed average detective fiction and ascended into the realm of literature, because it uses crime fiction only as a point of departure, and develops it by integrating a deeply philosophical and critical turn. Whether he did so consciously or not<sup>31</sup>, Feinmann subverted the typical *policial* conventions as discussed above, and created a work that was "much more" than escapist

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<sup>31</sup> In fact, he says that while he was writing *Últimos*, "no tenía la menor idea de que estaba escribiendo un *policial*" (qtd. in Frieria 2007:n. pag.)

literature. At the same time, he was not the only one to do this. In fact, most Argentine *policiales* written during the seventies are not “purely” detective novels. Before *Últimos* was published, Osvaldo Soriano wrote *No habrá más penas ni olvido*. It tells a story set in the small town of Colonia Vela about a confrontation between left- and right-wing political bosses that escalates to the point of a minor civil war. The novel was written in 1979 while Soriano was in self-imposed exile, and as a result, it was not published in Argentina until 1983, following the country’s return to a democratic system. Though it is categorized in Argentina as a *policial* because of its structure, it is also a political satire criticizing the extreme right, which is why it was not allowed to be published during the military dictatorship. On the other hand, Piglia’s *Respiración artificial* was published in Argentina during this period, a year after *Últimos*. This novel also incorporates a loose *policial* structure to examine the country’s repressed existence. These authors did not write traditional *policiales*, and only used the genre as a point of departure, or only used certain aspects of the genre in order to house social commentary. Feinmann was not the only author who needed to write cathartically to cope with the situation surrounding him, since all these novels contain a politically-charged message. In fact, *Últimos* has many of these messages. However, in order to understand them (and, ultimately, to translate them), two things are necessary. The first is the ability to read critically to find the hidden meaning, since censorship prevented authors from publishing any open political criticism. The other important element is a basic understanding of the country's socio-political history in order to decode the underlying message of these *policiales* written during the dictatorship. For this reason, the next section will explain the socio-political situation of Argentina prior to and during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship.

## 2.5. The socio-historical context

### 2.5.1. Brief overview of events preceding the 1976-1983 military dictatorship

When asked what it was like to live in Argentina during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, José Pablo Feinmann replied “para entender esto, te vas a tener que meter en el infierno de la Juventud Peronista” (2009a). Although Peronism is one of the key factors in the national conflict which started long before 1976, the topic would be too extensive for the confines of these pages, as it would require tracing much of Argentina’s twentieth century history. Nonetheless, a brief overview of the events leading up to the coup d’état on March 24, 1976 is necessary.

Juan Domingo Perón was first elected as president in 1946 after promising to devote himself to developing economic independence and social justice, particularly for the working class. Perón was re-elected for a second term in 1951; however in 1954, he suffered a detrimental political blow when he lost the support of the Catholic Church after proposing to legalize divorce. A military coup backed by a Nationalist Catholic group deposed Perón in 1955 and sent him into exile, citing a national economic crisis as grounds. During his exile, the ex-president became an idealized figure in Argentina. In his absence, resistance groups were formed, such as the *Juventud Peronista* (JP), who fought for the fall of the military government and Perón’s return to office. The most extreme was a guerrilla group known as the Montoneros. To curb the militant activities of the Montoneros, an extreme right-wing paramilitary group was created called the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*, otherwise known as the “Triple A”.

Perón returned to Argentina in June of 1973 and was re-elected for a third term in October with his new wife<sup>32</sup> Isabel Martínez de Perón as his vice president. After nearly two decades of waiting for the return of the idealized president, many Argentines were disappointed when Perón did not correspond with the mythical figure that had developed in the Argentine collective imagination. During this last term, his policies tended to lean more to the right, and the left-wing guerrilla groups reacted to this with increased violence. As a result, the violent activities of the Triple A also increased, and Argentina found itself on the brink of a civil war. Perón died in 1974, and his widow became president. Isabel Perón was unable to keep the peace due to the mounting violence of the Montoneros and the Triple A. In 1976, she was officially deposed and arrested, and the *Proceso de reorganización nacional* began.

### **2.5.2. The 1976-1983 military dictatorship**

The civilian repression imposed by the military started years before the 1976 coup. The Triple A began its “reign of terror” in 1970, and the number of assassinations and disappearances of left-wing Argentines increased year after year. This number peaked in 1976<sup>33</sup> (see Appendix 3), the year the military junta took power. In order to see the root of these violent acts, it is important to understand the ideology behind “the dirty war”. The military government’s mandate was named the *Proceso de reorganización nacional* because, according to Andrés Avellaneda’s detailed work examining Argentine censorial discourse<sup>34</sup>, the junta wanted to restore Argentina to a “legitimate” state, free of

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<sup>32</sup> Perón was also married to María Eva Duarte de Perón, also known as Evita. She died of cancer in 1952 at the age of 33.

<sup>33</sup> For an in-depth investigation of “los desaparecidos” written after the military dictatorship, see CONADEP’s (Comisión nacional sobre la desaparición de personas) *Nunca Más* (1984).

<sup>34</sup> In *Censura, autoritarismo, y cultura*, Avellaneda creates a corpus made up of decrees, laws, legal rulings, and governmental declarations referring to the government’s control of culture in Argentina from 1960 to

communists, patriotic, yet with strong international capitalist ties; in essence, a traditional Western Catholic nation (1986:20). It vowed to preserve the country's morality in all aspects of society: sexual orientation, religion, the family, etc. Many who were found to be "immoral" in these respects were considered subversive, and were exiled or sent off to detention centres where they were tortured and often murdered. Those who never came back are referred to as "los desaparecidos". In an article on Argentine cultural resistance between 1976 and 1983, Latin American Studies scholar Francine Masiello explains that the *Proceso* "fue concebido para eliminar la resistencia popular...y intentó invalidar la producción intelectual...considerando a los pensadores como subversivos potenciales" (1987:12). This removal of subversive individuals had the ultimate goal of homogenizing society, and any dissident voice, or any voice that did not belong, was quickly silenced. In this sense, the government was fighting an ideological war<sup>35</sup>. Many Argentines responded to the political situation by going into exile, and as a result the government "cleansed" the country of many of its intellectuals, journalists, writers, students, teachers, and labourers who criticized its actions or showed leftist tendencies.

These end-justifies-the-means acts of extreme violence had profound effects on all aspects of Argentine life. The media reported murders and disappearances on a daily basis. Argentina became a society based on and driven by fear due to the terror instilled in many of its citizens by the random acts of violence occurring across the country. The unsystematic nature of the government's aggressive practices in the name of national security was meant to keep them fearful, obedient, and silent. Freedom of speech became a thing of the past, as

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1983. These documents are taken from sources such as official national and municipal bulletins and newspapers.

<sup>35</sup> For this reason, it is often called "la guerra sucia", although it cannot technically be considered a war. Since the number of deaths on the two sides was so uneven, the murders ordered by the military junta during that period have been called "genocide" by an Argentine court of law ("Condenaron" 2006: n. pag.).

the government controlled most of the national media, using the press to instill a sense of national values, or as they called them, “valores nuestros” (qtd. in Avellaneda 1986:24). Because the military’s authoritarian discourse was released by the government in a range of forms, including official notices, advisories, articles in the national media, and advertisements, this discourse was widespread and highly visible. It was, in essence, propaganda. In his work on Argentine literature from the dictatorship years, José García-Romeu notes that “La redondance est l’arme de la propagande. La continuité du discours permet d’imprégner la société d’une parole univoque, intériorisée et acceptée comme unique vérité d’autant plus facilement qu’elle est répétée à satiété” (2005:29). The effectiveness of this propaganda lay in its repetition and, as a result, in the fact that citizens internalized it. This internalization of “valores nuestros” explains the fear instilled in its citizens, particularly those working in the field of culture. Besides left-wing groups and individuals, culture and the arts were also among the government’s targets, since they were considered particularly vulnerable to ideological penetration in the form of songs, movies, folklore, literature, theatre, etc. As quoted in Avellaneda’s work, just months after the coup, the new government released a statement saying “No se permitirá la acción disolvente y antinacional en la cultura, en los medios de comunicación...” (1986:26). Under the guise of an “estrategia global contra la subversión” (*ibid.*: 27), the government kept a close eye on all these cultural forms, using censorship to eliminate any criticism.

### **2.5.3. Censorship and its impacts on Argentine literature**

Censorship began in Argentina long before the 1976 military coup. It was first used by the 1943 military government, then only a few years later by Perón to silence the opposition during his presidential mandate. Throughout the second half of the twentieth

century, censorship practices in Argentina varied, but remained a mechanism of control for the authorities. In the sixties, for example, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* was banned, and its Spanish translator (Silvina Ocampo) and publisher were tried in court. By the time of the *Proceso*, censorship of cultural products was in full effect. However, this was not an organized censor like that of Franco's Spain, which had a central censorship office with established practices and criteria. Censorship in Argentina was much less systematic. In fact, any level or department of the government could impose a ban which would be announced by an official decree that prevented material from being published or distributed. Avellaneda notes that these haphazard conditions "deja la prohibición...al arbitrio personal del funcionario, abre las puertas al exceso protegido por al anonimato administrativo" (1986:50). The lack of censorial criteria meant that censorship was random and even contradictory at times. Certain cultural productions were prohibited, while others which contained more "immoral" content passed by the government unnoticed.

The authoritarian discourse justified censorship by explaining that its goal was to protect the defenseless from exposure to immorality, as shown in Avellaneda's work (1986:52). This work also examines how the discourse described an ideological war between "us" and "the enemy", and how "the enemy" seemed to be particularly prevalent in the cultural domain. In August of 1977, the government claimed that many cultural productions (for example, songs, literature, and theatrical works) promoted:

"el relajamiento de las costumbres, el abandono de la práctica de hábitos morales, la familiarización con el ejercicio de la violencia como única forma de lograr propósitos ya sean ellos aviesos o justos, el desmembramiento de instituciones sociales rectoras como familia, iglesia, autoridad constituida, etc." (qtd. in Avellaneda 1986:25).

Authors became wary of this culture-targeting censorship, and many left the country to protect their own artistic freedom. For those who stayed behind, many chose silence as the only way to survive the dictatorship.

Aside from the governmental literature released in bulletins and newspapers, other types of texts emerged, retaliating against this repressive discourse and seeking to expose the truth behind it. This alternative discourse was produced by artists who had left the country, as well as those who stayed behind. They incorporated the violence they had seen and heard about into their art, some trying to make sense of it, others simply denouncing it. Their writing represented a revolt against the silence imposed upon them by the military government. However, because of the censorial power to potentially prevent any work from being published, not to mention the immediate threat the author faced if the work written was found to be “subversive”<sup>36</sup>, authors who used their art as an outlet had to censor their own work while writing it. Like many other Argentines, these authors internalized the official discourse which dictated what they could and could not write. For example, Feinmann internalized this official discourse when he read government documents over and over to see if he might be “fichado”. This widespread self-censorship in Argentina was a result of the arbitrary nature of government-imposed censorship. In an article on Argentine censorship, Jean Graham-Jones, an expert in the field of Argentine theatre, offers an alternative to self-censorship in the notion of “counter-censorial strategies” which she observes were used in “resisting works with strong socio-political messages” (2001:601). While self-censorship can be seen as a passive reaction to the military dictatorship’s censorship, the use of counter-censorial strategies indicates an author’s more active response

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Rodolfo Walsh openly denounced the military repression in his *Carta abierta a la junta militar*. As a result, he was murdered by the junta in 1977.

to it. These strategies of resistance rely on literary mechanisms such as irony, allusion, parody, double entendres, metaphors, and analogy to express and conceal an ideological message. These are prevalent in many of the Argentine *policiales* of the seventies and eighties.

In the case of the *novela dura*, it was at times chosen by Argentine authors during the dictatorship because the violent and dangerous societies described in works of this genre corresponded perfectly to Argentine society between 1976 and 1983. For this reason, Argentine authors could use this genre to comment upon, and often criticize their country's violent and repressive socio-political situation within their literary works. Quite often, the government never made the connection that the violence in these works was veiled criticism since it is an established characteristic inherent to the hard-boiled genre. As a result, many of these works were published in their original form. The notoriously violent nature of the *policial* was not the only convenient cover for criticism; the language also served this purpose. Language use was often a topic of discussion in censorial discourse (i.e. documents released by the military government regarding censorship). According to Avellaneda, the discourse demonstrates that “el uso del lenguaje se convierte en un foco de atención privilegiada al otorgársele la palabra el rango de instrumento más eficiente del plan de la cultura enemiga” (1986:26). The military government was suspicious of the language in literature because words or idiomatic expressions could take on new hidden meanings. Modern Argentine *policiales* were often able to avoid linguistic censorship by maintaining the cut-and-dry style and simple and straightforward language typical of the hard-boiled genre (see Section 3.2.4 for examples). This seemingly transparent language perhaps explains why so many *policiales* commenting on the military dictatorship, such as

*Últimos*, were allowed to be published during those repressive years<sup>37</sup>. Given these convenient stylistic and linguistic attributes of the genre for authors who wanted to express political messages but avoid censorship, choosing the hard-boiled genre was in itself a counter-censorial strategy.

#### **2.4.4. A socio-political reading of *Últimos días de la víctima***

*Últimos días de la víctima* was certainly one of the novels that implicitly commented on the repressive military government. Because the story is about a hit man who kills for money, the plot escapes any direct political association on the surface, but there are certainly allusions, described by the author as “muy deliberada” (Feinmann 2009a), to the social context of the time. These allusions, as well as other counter-censorial strategies, are used to criticize the military government and the violent society it had created.

The use of metaphors is one counter-censorial strategy in *Últimos* that is manifested through the prominent themes of power and control. Throughout the story, Mendizábal attempts to control and dominate his victim. This is why he follows Külpe and learns his schedules, taking note of the places and people he visits, to the point where Mendizábal begins to visit them as well. The photos taken of Külpe are also a symbol of control. When Mendizábal takes his picture and then enlarges it, the narrator explains that Mendizábal feels “dominado por un profundo sentimiento de poder” (Feinmann 2006:25). Mendizábal’s sense of power stems from his perceived control over Külpe. Together, these references to power and control form an analogy, with Mendizábal representing the military junta that tried to control Argentine society by eliminating subversive individuals, represented by Külpe.

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<sup>37</sup> Chapter three will show that words did in fact acquire new meanings, as feared by the government, and contributed to the anti-political messages within the literature, a point that is extremely important from a translation perspective.

Mendizábal is a *parapolicial* figure, “la figura más temida [en Argentina]” (Feinmann 2009a), and a role generally associated with the military junta. As mentioned in the previous section, the authoritarian discourse clearly established a division between “us” and “the enemy”. The junta sought to rid the country of its communist enemies, just as Mendizábal must eliminate his victim. Therefore, the “us against them” distinction can also be seen in the Mendizábal/Külpe relation. However, in the final scene, when Mendizábal discovers his victim’s wall covered in pictures of himself, this “us against them” distinction is blurred, and even reversed. When Külpe kills Mendizábal, it is an analogy for the victims turning against the government. This final analogy implies a powerful allegorical warning message to the junta: in the end, it is the victims who will triumph. In this light, Mendizábal’s death acts as the author’s cathartic literary response to living in a country he feels is governed by injustice, and the allegory is another example of the type of counter-censorial strategies he resorted to in *Últimos*.

These socio-political metaphors and analogies run throughout the entire novel, and the link with the military dictatorship is often only evident to critical readers, that is, individuals who are actively engaged in looking for the implicit meaning(s) in the novel. The hints to social criticism can easily be overlooked if the reader is not reading the text analytically, and this perhaps proved to be beneficial, since the novel was successfully published at the end of 1979, when censorship in Argentina was at its height. Three years later, when *Últimos* was released as a major motion picture, visual references to the military dictatorship were added. In 1982, a government official still screened new movies before they were released, cutting out parts that were deemed “unsuitable” for an Argentine audience. Aristarain’s adaptation came out in theatres across the country, so it would seem

that the official did not find any reason to censor it<sup>38</sup>. However, the movie contained many visual clues to the political criticism of the story. For example, when Mendizábal goes to see “el hombre importante”, the sign on the front gate he enters says “Zona militar”, and Peña is dressed in a uniform and has a buzz cut, which immediately evokes the image of the military. These types of visual clues emphasized the political reading that was more subtle in the novel<sup>39</sup>.

The translator must understand all these intricate subtexts that infiltrate the work, since these should ideally be present in the translation as well, so that its reader has the opportunity to detect the implicit references that might be evident to an Argentine reader in the original text. A problem arises, however, when the translation’s target reader does not have the contextual information necessary to understand the meaning of the text. The following chapter will examine these challenges, particularly those relating to the implicit socio-political aspects of *Últimos*, discussing possible translation solutions for them, and also exploring the parallel linguistic, cultural, and stylistic issues that arise during the translation process.

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<sup>38</sup> *Cine y dictadura* describes an interesting example of self-censorship relating to the movie version of *Últimos*. While preparing to show it to the government official, the director added extra scenes throughout the movie that made it extremely long. In the following quotation, Aristarain explains that the censor did not see the most erotic and violent scene of the movie: “lo que [el censor] autorizó era más largo que las escenas originales y cuando estaba por llegar al final dijo ‘bueno, ya está bien’ y no vio una escena de la que creíamos que no teníamos escapatoria” (qtd. in Gociol and Invernizzi 2006:53).

<sup>39</sup> For more on the differences between the novel and Aristarain’s movie, refer to Martin Rodriguez’s “El artista del crimen y la máquina de matar” in the proceedings of 1995’s *Primeras Jornadas Internacionales de Literatura Argentina/Comparatística*.

### **3. TRANSLATING *ÚLTIMOS DÍAS DE LA VÍCTIMA***

As Graham-Jones notes, during the military dictatorship in Argentina, “people had become good ‘interpreters’ or readers of signs” (2001:602). Critical readers were able to pick up on literary clues to a veiled social message left by the author within the text. The various strategies used to conceal this message of discontent with the current political situation of the country will be discussed further in this chapter. The main focus, however, will be the issues that arise when translating *Últimos días de la víctima*, and the possible answers to the many questions raised throughout its translation process. Beyond the stylistic, linguistic, and cultural problems inherent to any translation, what can a translator do to explain the often implicit socio-political clues without making them explicit? One of the tasks of the translator is to create a text which can elicit the same reader response as that of the original. How then does the translator compensate for the target reader’s potential lack of understanding of social tensions in Argentina during the military dictatorship, or even after it<sup>40</sup>? How can the translator suggest the internalized fear of the original reader? Is it even possible to re-create the original reader’s experience of *Últimos días de la víctima*?

#### **3.1. Why translate?**

Since the period between the World Wars, North America has shown a growing interest in Latin American literature. In the 1940s, academics began compiling lists of Latin American literature in English translation, including Remigio Pane, a professor at Rutgers University whose 1942 list comprised less than 50 novels. Most of the translations of Latin

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<sup>40</sup> Censorship and repression were not limited to the dictatorship years. Both continued in Argentina throughout the eighties and even into the nineties under the democratic leaderships of Raúl Alfonsín and Carlos Menem. This had an impact on both authors and readers. María Elena Walsh noted that “even though we may live in a democratic country, there is a censor in each one of us, a crouching dictator waiting to react” (qtd. in Graham-Jones 2001:604).

American literature in the English-speaking world have been published in the United States, due to the likes of publisher Alfred A. Knopf and philanthropist organisations like the Rockefeller Foundation<sup>41</sup>. Americans became even more curious about their southern neighbours in the sixties because of the political disruptions like the Cuban Revolution, which happened to coincide with the translation of Boom authors such as García Marquez, Cortázar, Borges, Carpentier, etc.

Most recently, “Inter-American” literature studies have been an area of increasing interest. In their work dedicated to this subject, Elizabeth Lowe and Earl E. Fitz explain that it “seeks to emphasize North-South literary relations and comparisons, and to promote the writers and literatures of the Americas” (2007:21). Of course, translation is the principal mechanism that allows this field to exist, just as it also encourages, among other things, communication and understanding. My translation of *Últimos días de la víctima* seeks to participate in this movement and develop relations between the source culture and the target culture, by establishing a connection between them: a common interest in the mystery novel.

While translation is important in the building of ties between North and South American countries, it plays an important role on the global scale as well. Literary translations can present a society or country to international readers, and relate important issues, both local and global. In the past decade, countless translations of novels have become best-sellers, dispersing their political messages around the world<sup>42</sup>. The world should have access to *Últimos* for this reason, and translation is the key. Translating this

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<sup>41</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the role of the Rockefeller Foundation in funding a translation program at the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York as well as a translation subsidy program and the political motivations behind it, see Deborah Cohn’s “A Tale of Two Translation Programs: Politics, the Market, and Rockefeller Funding for Latin American Literature in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s”.

<sup>42</sup> Examples are Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow* (translated into English by Maureen Freely in 2004) about the political and cultural conflict in modern Turkey, and Patricia Claxton’s 2003 English translation of Gil Courtemanche’s *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*, set during the Rwandan genocide.

work would introduce international readers not only to Argentine literature, but also to the conflict to which it alludes. *Últimos* has already been successful in three other languages. Since English is one of the most widely-spoken languages in the world, it is imperative that this important Argentine work be translated into English, as this would exponentially increase its readership. The mystery/thriller genre is already immensely popular in Canada, the US, and Great Britain. All of these countries have established associations for fans and writers of crime fiction, as well as prizes devoted to new works in the genre. In Canada, crime fiction writers can join the Crime Writers of Canada, as well as smaller associations in certain cities such as Ottawa (The Capital Crime Writers Association). The national association distributes the Arthur Ellis Awards annually, and in recent years has seen an increase in the number of nominations, which would imply an increase in the number of Canadian works published in the genre. The UK also boasts a Crime Writers Association which distributes a number of awards, including the Dagger Awards. In the United States, crime writers can become members of the American Crime Writers League, the North American branch of the International Association of Crime Writers, or the Mystery Writers of America. The latter grant the Edgar Award, a small bust of Edgar Allan Poe, to authors writing in the genre. Currently, the Mystery Writers of America have a database of over 600 crime authors, 1,000 novels, with 35 new novels to be released in the next few months, and averaging over 200 books released annually. The popularity of this type of literature in North America is perhaps due to the fact that the genre originated in English, and herein lies a particularly interesting point. The works which initiated the hard-boiled variety, such as Hammett's *Red Harvest* or Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, were translated into Spanish then distributed in various Hispanic countries, including Argentina<sup>43</sup>. There, they took on their

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<sup>43</sup> If a standard Spanish was used in the translation, it could be distributed as is among various Spanish-

own form and were appropriated, resulting in the critical hard-boiled-inspired texts of the seventies. Now, three decades later, translation is bringing the hard-boiled genre “home”, but it has evolved differently from its modern American counterpart. If published, my English translation of *Últimos* (and the translations of its contemporaries) would then represent a return to its point of departure both from a linguistic and a geographic perspective. The genre, however, has changed during its time in Argentina. According to Latin American literature scholar Santiago Colás, the novels written during the most recent dictatorship, including *Últimos*, “quietly stand as markers of the historical conditions that forced on them their present form” (1991:105). The “quiet” changes to the genre include the messages that had to be concealed due to censorship. Although *Últimos* could certainly be successfully marketed in the same way as other crime novels, some emphasis would have to be made on these latent critical elements. The question is how should the translation effectively do this without compromising or disrupting the subtleties of the original? This is a question I will attempt to answer in this chapter.

### **3.2. Translation questions**

#### **3.2.1. Audience**

When translating a work of literature, a translator will be faced with many challenges, each one presenting an equally large number of potential solutions. This is one of the reasons a translator must decide for whom the work is intended. Is the translator writing for an academic audience or the general public? Will the readers already have

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speaking countries. However, due to the differences between the different variants of Spanish, if the language of the translation was specific to a particular country, it would generally be re-translated in other Spanish-speaking countries.

knowledge of the time and place in which the original was produced? Will the readers even be aware that they are reading a translation? Should the translator proceed assuming readers have no prior knowledge of the novel's context? There is also the question of nationality: is the intended audience from a specific country, or should the translator use a more neutral language? Answering these questions and determining the target audience in advance is crucial to facilitating the translator's task, especially when it comes to solving translation issues which inevitably surface during the translation process, since the answer narrows down the number of solutions.

In determining the target audience for my translation of *Últimos*, the first factor to consider is whether the translation is intended for a general audience, or for a more specific, perhaps academic, audience. This would not necessarily affect the translation itself, but rather the paratext surrounding it. If an academic decided to read *Últimos*, he or she would presumably have an interest in either the detective genre or Latin American literature, and might already be familiar with Argentine history. However, the average reader who happens to read the translation might need extra background in order to understand the different levels of meaning in this novel. This information could be given in the form of a translator's preface, endnotes, footnotes, or explanation of foreign elements throughout the novel. The preface, endnotes, and footnotes are forms associated more with academic writing. Outside this field, many readers do not necessarily appreciate them. Both endnotes and footnotes interrupt the reading process, and translator's prefaces are often skipped because they were not part of the original text. Since I have no specific commercial audience at the present time, my translation of *Últimos* will have to find a balance, where different types of readers

can enjoy the reading experience they are looking for, whether it is reading a mystery, or critically reading to uncover implicit interpretations of the text.

Another factor to be determined is the geographical region in which the translation will be published and distributed. Translators do not necessarily know the answer to this question before they begin translating, and this is indeed the case in this translation of *Últimos*. Some countries offer more viable publishing options for this novel than others. There is a wide readership of crime fiction in Canada, as shown by the number of prizes awarded to authors of the genre, as well as by the number of associations for them. There are also a significant number of publishing houses in Canada which publish only works of this genre, for example Napoleon Publishing's *RendezVous Crime* series and the Dundurn Group's *Castle Street Mysteries*. Canada also boasts a large number of bookstores devoted to crime fiction, including *Whodunit* in Winnipeg, *The Sleuth of Baker Street* in Toronto, and *Prime Crime* in Ottawa. While Canada may have a large network of crime novelists, it lacks a publishing industry specializing in translations, unless the translations are of Canadian works into one of the country's official languages. It would most likely be a challenge to try and find a Canadian publishing house that would take on *Últimos* in English translation. The United States, given its long history of detective literature (the hard-boiled variety in particular) as well as its interest in Latin American fiction in English translation as discussed in the previous section, might provide a more fruitful search for a publisher. While the United States is often criticized for translating a surprisingly small number of foreign works into English<sup>44</sup>, there are quite a few smaller presses which publish translations, for example *Dalkey Archive Press*, *Seven Stories*, as well as a number of university presses.

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<sup>44</sup> A 2007 report shows that only 3% of books published in the United States are translations, as compared to 27% in Italy (Lowe and Fitz 2007:xiv).

When determining the audience, it is also important to consider that the hard-boiled novel originated in the United States, and so an important part of the genre is deeply engrained in its literary canon<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, the American language became an integral part of hard-boiled fiction. For this reason, even though the United Kingdom also has a large crime novel readership, and does publish Latin American works in translation (although on a much smaller scale than in the United States), the language<sup>46</sup> of my translation will be geared towards a North American audience in keeping with the hard-boiled tradition.

The translation strategies used by translators are just as varied as the different types of texts in which they are used. While translating *Últimos*, decisions had to be made between two strategies which have been the focus of translation debates for years. These are the dichotomous concepts of target-oriented and source-oriented translation. When making this distinction, translator and translation theorist Lawrence Venuti uses the terms domesticating and foreignizing strategies. He laments that domesticated (target-oriented) translations produce cultures “that are aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to foreign literatures, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with British and American values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other” (Venuti 2008:12). He emphasizes the importance of using “foreignizing” (source-oriented) strategies to resist cultural hegemony as well as to increase the translator’s visibility. Although neither of these two goals enters into my own translation, there were many instances that called for a decision between two strategies or for a compromise somewhere between them.

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<sup>45</sup> Both Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* and Hammett’s *Red Harvest* appear in Time Magazine’s “Top 100 Novels of All Time” list.

<sup>46</sup> “Language” in this sense refers to American spelling and expressions.

Before going into more detail about the translation issues encountered in *Últimos*, it is necessary to take a moment to briefly explain my personal translation strategy. In Translation Studies, many have debated over what is ethical in translation. In the publishing world, particularly in the English-speaking commercial presses, a translation must be geared towards the target culture in order for it to sell. However, if part of the original is lost through this process of modification, it would not be considered entirely ethical with respect to the author's original work. This is why academics like Venuti advocate the use of foreignizing techniques as they are more "faithful" to the original text, culture, and language. The problem with these techniques is that the resulting text is often much less accessible to the average reader, raising the question of whether accuracy or readability is more important in a translation. Of course, there are certain cases where it is possible to achieve both accuracy *and* readability, yet often the translator must choose between them. Again, knowing the future audience of the target text is crucial when making these decisions. Currently, the only known audience of this translation will be an academic one. Nonetheless, since markets already exist for this type of literature, there is certainly reason to believe that the translation might one day be published for a wider audience. Given these two factors, the strategies chosen in the framework of this translation will attempt to respond to the needs of these two types of readers. In this regard, literary translator Suzanne Jill Levine writes, "The good translator performs a balancing act...attempting to push language beyond its limits while at the same time maintaining a common ground of dialogue between writer and reader, speaker and listener" (1991:4). This balance is precisely the goal of my translation of *Últimos*.

### 3.2.2. Linguistic issues

This section will examine the linguistic issues that arise when translating the novel *Últimos días de la víctima* from Spanish into English. Obviously, when working between two languages, there are inherent differences which can be problematic in translation. For example, when translating from Spanish to English, it is often difficult to maintain the level of formality between “usted” and “tú”, both of which are linguistically equivalent to “you”<sup>47</sup>, whether a small child or a respected elder is being addressed<sup>48</sup>. In texts from Argentina, “vos” is used instead of “tú” to denote a familiarity with the person addressed, but is also translated by “you”. The question any translator faces is how to emphasize the difference between the two levels of formality when the linguistic equivalent is the same for both. One example in *Últimos* is the conversation between the protagonist, Mendizábal, and Sergio, the little boy he believes is Külpe’s son. Sergio’s kite gets caught in a tree, and Mendizábal, thinking this is the perfect opportunity to integrate himself into their lives, offers to help. Sergio responds by asking “¿Vos sabés algo de barriletes?” (Feinmann 2006:77) and the narrator notes that “A Mendizábal le sorprendió que lo tuteara. Pero (alcanzó a pensar) así debían ser las cosas ahora” (*ibid.*). This is a difficult passage to translate, first of all because the “vos” is a distinct regionalism, marking the language as specific to a particular part of the world. This geographical and linguistic marker is difficult to transfer into English. Yet it is important to do so, since the novel’s setting in Buenos Aires, and the language associated with this city, are integral parts of the novel, and introduce a new dimension to the detective genre. However, is it possible to transpose regionalisms into a different language? Or are they condemned to be lost in translation? On

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<sup>47</sup> The plural personal pronouns “vosotros” (Spain) and “ustedes” (Latin America) also translate to “you” in English.

<sup>48</sup> This is an issue that also arises when translating from French (“vous” and “tu”) or other Romance languages.

this topic, Rabassa believes that “[t]he transfer of local or regional idioms into another language... must be listed as another of the impossibilities of translation” (qtd. in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:509). *Últimos* is only problematic in this sense with its use of the personal pronoun “vos” as well as in certain expressions which are limited to use in Argentina and Uruguay<sup>49</sup>. Unfortunately, in this case, I must agree with Rabassa: in English, there is no way of emphasizing or even maintaining this regional difference, and these terms are usually adapted with an English equivalent.

In the sentence following Sergio’s question (“A Mendizábal le sorprendió que lo tuteara”), the translation is also problematic since the concept of “tutear” does not exist in English. The translator, therefore, must find other ways to maintain this unexpected sense of familiarity implied by the boy addressing the stranger as “vos”. This could be done by reducing the formality of the sentence. For example, Sergio’s previously-cited quotation could be translated as “D’ya know anything about kites?” with the “D’ya” serving as a very colloquial way of addressing someone. The sentence following the question could also emphasize this familiarity by pointing out that “Mendizábal was quite surprised at how informally he addressed him. But (he supposed) that was just the way things were now”<sup>50</sup>. This is obviously only one solution. One could remove the reference altogether and have Sergio ask “Do you know anything about kites?” with the narration omitting the following sentence about Mendizábal’s surprise and its cause. However, removing this sentence could be considered unethical since it would be tampering with the source text. In *most* cases, I try

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<sup>49</sup> Certain Argentine expressions, such as “Qué sé yo” or “Mirá vos” sound awkward or have different connotations when translated into English literally (for example, “What do I know” implies that the speaker has little confidence in the statement, whereas in Spanish this is not so). In these cases, equivalent idiomatic expressions were used (for example, “I don’t know”) in order to ease the target reader’s experience.

<sup>50</sup> All English translations of *Últimos días de la víctima* are my own. Certain sections of this translation can be found in Appendix 4 and are indicated with their corresponding page number where applicable. Within the translation, passages referred to in the thesis are set apart by using a different font.

to avoid this, if only because I believe that a translation should remain as close to the original as possible.

Another recurring translation problem was that of pronominal ambiguity. In Spanish, certain pronouns can denote any of the previous subjects mentioned. For example, in a paragraph referring to Külpe, the narrator says “apenas le restaban unos días de vida” (Feinmann 2006:24)( App. 4 pg.111). Although the last antecedent (two sentences before) was in fact Külpe, the “le” is ambiguous enough that it could be referring to Mendizábal as well. Since the narrator is omniscient, the text is written in a way that “le” could denote either man. This ambiguity is far from accidental, and generally occurs in scenes foreshadowing the death at the end of the novel. Throughout the novel, the reader is led to believe that Mendizábal will succeed in killing Külpe; however, there are textual clues that indicate that this may not be true. The translator must be aware of these clues, and in the case of the pronominal ambiguities, leave them as ambiguous as they are in the original so that the foreshadowing element is not lost.

An equally important decision in this translation concerned the names of characters and places in the novel. The main question was whether to keep the names as they are in the original or adapt them to an English name that carries the same connotations as in Spanish. The names chosen by the author are significant, as they give insight into the characters’ personality and role in the novel. If the reader is unable to understand the implications of a character’s name, then an important source of the text’s meaning might be lost. Külpe’s name, with its German umlaut, has a visible and audible foreignness. The narrator draws the reader’s attention to this fact, saying “se llamaba Rodolfo Külpe. Un nombre extraño” (Feinmann 2006:15)(App. 4, pg. 108). As the name already seems foreign in the original, I

left it as such in the translation. This foreignness is important as it is a potential allusion to the subversive “other” targeted by the junta during the *Proceso*. Another reason to maintain Külpe’s foreign name was the nearly homonymic Latin word “culpa”, meaning guilt, with which English readers might be familiar due to the commonly used expression “*mea culpa*” (“my fault”). This connotation is important in order to maintain the myriad of possible interpretations concerning Külpe’s role in the story. For example, Külpe could represent Mendizábal’s guilt for all the murders he has carried out. His name could also hint at Külpe’s crime for which Mendizabal has been ordered to kill him. The connotations in Mendizábal’s name were also important to maintain. Etymologically, the name hints at the Latin word “mendax”, meaning lies, and in English this produced the word mendacious, describing someone who is prone to lying. Of course, mendacious is not a word used as commonly in English as “mendaz” is in Spanish. However, it is important to maintain the name for those English-speaking readers who are familiar with the word, so that they have the opportunity to recognize it in Mendizábal’s name, and perhaps tie it with the political reading of the novel. Külpe could represent the guilty conscience of the Argentine military junta based on lies (embodied by Mendizábal) that eventually lead to its downfall. Again, this could be the author’s way of countering (if only fictionally) the deplorable events unfolding at that time in Argentine history.

Finally, Peña could also have potentially been adapted to a more familiar name for English readers. It could have been translated as Stone in order to carry over the character’s malicious, cold, and stubborn qualities, and also to maintain the Spanish word’s definition of “crag” or “rock”. However, for the same reasons discussed above, the name Peña has been left in Spanish in the translation, especially since the word is phonetically homologous to the

English word “pain”, a term which aptly describes Mendizábal’s opinion of Peña, his nemesis.

Names were not the only connotative issues in translating *Últimos*. Over time, many Spanish words have acquired connotations which are lost when they are translated literally. One word in particular that kept resurfacing was “excitar”, which literally means to get excited or to work up. However, translating it by its closest lexical equivalent (“to excite”) would not necessarily capture its alternative acceptance, “to arouse”, the intended definition in most cases in this novel. For example, when Mendizábal thinks about Cecilia, the narrator observes that “lo excitó la posibilidad de observar nuevamente a esa mujer” (Feinmann 2006:48)(App. 4, pg. 124). Given the context, that is, the fact that the reader is already well aware of Mendizábal’s infatuation with Cecilia, the word “excite” in English does carry the same erotic weight as its equivalent in Spanish. This word also has an erotic element when used in Mendizábal’s thoughts regarding Külpe. In an article on *Últimos* and “Post-Boom detective fiction”, Latin American literature specialist Gail González remarks: “We also note in Mendizábal an intense desire for power over and domination of his victim, which frequently expresses itself in sexual terminology” (2006:43). For example, Mendizábal wants to “estar junto a Külpe, entregarse a esa fiesta excitante y secreta de conocer lo que él ignoraba, de observarlo, sentirlo vivir, y saberse a la vez dueño absoluto de su destino” (Feinmann 2006:19)(App. 4, pg. 110). In this sentence again, the verb “excitar” implies an almost erotic relation which Mendizábal (through the intermediary of the narrator) quite often expresses when he feels a sense of power over his victim.

### 3.2.3. Cultural references

Writing about the ‘cultural turn’<sup>51</sup> in Translation Studies, Susan Bassnett affirms that “the problems of decoding a text for a translator involve so much more than language despite the fact that the basis of any written text *is* its language” (1998:137). Therefore, the translator needs to look beyond the language and demonstrate sensitivity to any cultural differences, either major or minor, that may affect the target reader’s experience of the work. The translator must foresee potential cultural misunderstanding on behalf of the target reader and attempt to prevent it through explanation, adaptation, or in some cases, elimination. One very basic example in *Últimos* can be seen in the following sentence: “Cerró las persianas, y también la ventana.” (Feinmann 2006:206)(App. 4, pg. 133). At first glance, this phrase seems quite simple, even after translating it to “He closed the blinds and the window”. However, this trivial sentence can be quite problematic if the translator has never been to Argentina, where blinds are outside the windows as opposed to North American blinds which are inside windows. “Persianas” could be translated as “blinds” or “shutters”, and while both suggestions are perfect linguistic equivalents, neither effectively express the Argentine cultural reality represented by the word “persianas”<sup>52</sup>. The translator is then faced with a choice: should the reference be explained to clarify this difference, should it simply be replaced with a linguistic equivalent even if it denotes a different concept, or should it be removed altogether to avoid possible confusion? This seemingly straightforward sentence is a perfect example of how translation goes beyond linguistic matters. The translator, therefore, must be very familiar with the source culture, so that the target reader is not

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<sup>51</sup> The ‘cultural turn’ of the late eighties and early nineties in Translation Studies saw a shift from a mainly linguistic focus to an expanded focus on context, history, and cultural signs.

<sup>52</sup> “Blinds” are generally inside the windows in North America, and “shutters” conjure the image of a quaint house with painted shutters outside the windows to a North American reader.

puzzled by these simple sentences. This familiarity with the source culture is also important when it comes to identifying meaning within the text, as will be demonstrated further on.

The problem of translating concepts which do not necessarily exist in the target culture also arises when translating the names of existing geographical locations. For example, readers of *Últimos* who are not familiar with the city may lose some of the implicit information associated with the neighbourhoods mentioned. Belgrano, where Külpe lives, is known for being an upper-middle class *barrio*, with large single family homes, as well as many embassies. Saavedra, where Mendizábal lives before renting a room across the street from Külpe, is a quiet, provincial neighbourhood, with very low population density, and as a result, very large homes. Because of the associations with the neighbourhoods where they live, many of the original text's readers can assume that both men are quite well-off, whereas this socio-economic point would be lost both to readers of the original and of the translation who are unfamiliar with the city. This is a problematic issue for many geographical references, including street names, city landmarks (for example, Barrancas de Belgrano, the park where Külpe meets Amanda and Sergio), the names of real restaurants, bus lines, etc. Gregory Rabassa also struggled with this issue when translating a book by José Donoso set in Chile. He feared that translating Calle 18 by 18<sup>th</sup> Street "would immediately remove the thoroughfare from Santiago de Chile and place it in the Chelsea district of New York" (Rabassa 2005:149). In cases like this, the translator must make a decision, just as with the characters' names. She must decide whether to relocate the story to a more familiar setting for North American readers (e.g. in keeping with the hard-boiled tradition, perhaps New York, Los Angeles, or San Francisco), give an explanation of these foreign landmarks, or simply leave them with no explanation, accepting the potential

semantic loss. In order to remain consistent with my translation strategies and ethics, the first option is not viable. Furthermore, if the story were uprooted to a different city, then it would no longer be considered a translation (but rather an English-language *adaptation* of the original), and more importantly, it would no longer be a literary text alluding in many ways to the socio-political issues of Argentina in the late 1970s. It is also important to keep the action in real locations of Buenos Aires to maintain the realistic nature of the narrative, a trait typical of the hard-boiled genre. Decontextualizing the translation would skew the references to the Argentine socio-political situation and eliminate one of the qualities that place the novel within the hard-boiled genre. The second option (explanation) can occasionally be intrusive, adding information not present in the original. Whenever possible and semantically necessary, for example in the case of Barrancas de Belgrano, I added only a word or two to explain this foreign concept (“Barrancas de Belgrano, a large park in the middle of the neighbourhood”; App. 4, pg. 111). This avoided the semantic loss of the third option.

Another important question raised by this translation was how to translate something deeply rooted in the source culture, but which has no equivalent in the target culture. The tango, both a dance and a song style, holds a valued position in Argentine culture<sup>53</sup>. As a result, it is not at all uncommon for tango to make its way into Argentine literature, often in the form of references to popular songs or artists, or of tango lyrics incorporated into the text. Translating tango lyrics is a great challenge, and is an issue that has already been discussed by other translators of Argentine literary works. For example, Rabassa writes

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<sup>53</sup> The form evolved from a variety of different sources, including the gaucho culture, the Cuban habanera, the African drum-based candombe, and a fusion of European music. The tango has repeatedly risen and fallen in popularity ever since it appeared in the streets of Buenos Aires at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and has become an integral part of Argentine life, especially in the capital.

“Like any song, tangos are better left in the original or great and hilarious damage is done” (2005:54). In this sense, Rabassa prefers to maintain the foreignness of the original text by leaving the tango in Spanish. Suzanne Jill Levine, on the other hand, tends to choose a different tactic. Each chapter of Manuel Puig’s *Boquitas pintadas* begins with lyrics from a tango song as an epigraph, setting the mood of the chapter. These lyrics evoke certain feelings sparked by a musical memory in the source reader, particularly the Argentines, that Levine feared losing in translation. With the author’s help, she decided to “translate some tango lyrics that were essential to the plot...but to replace at least half of the epigraph quotations with either tag lines from Hollywood films or Argentine radio commercials, originally borrowed from Madison Avenue inventions” (Levine 1991:127). While Levine goes on to comment on the irony and subversion of using taglines from American cultural products in the translation of a novel which criticizes American cultural imperialism, she justifies her adaptative translation choices by pointing out how they maintain the theme or tone of the chapter. She also says that thematically equivalent lines from Hollywood movies would be more meaningful to non-Argentine readers. This problem was also faced in a section of *Últimos*, where Mendizábal goes to the strip club to spy on Cecilia. In the background, Lupe, one of the women who work there, is singing a tango, and the lyrics are incorporated into the narration:

Desde el pequeño escenario llegaba la voz de Lupe, sorprendentemente grave y triste: *Sé que mucho me has querido, tanto, tanto como yo...No sé por qué te perdí, tampoco sé cuándo fue. Ahora, junto a Külpe y Cecilia, pero a tu lado dejé quedaban dos taburetes vacíos toda mi vida. Mendizábal decidió no pensar es tan poco lo que falta lo que iba a hacer para irme con la muerte, sabía que si lo pensaba, ya mis ojos no han de verte no lograría atreverse nunca, nunca.* (Feinmann 2006:171)

This passage puts the translator in the same position as Rabassa and Levine. Should the song be literally translated or replaced with an equivalent song from the target culture? It would be simple to find a song with a similar theme. In the lyrics of this tango, “Toda mi vida”, the male singer laments the loss of his love, who took the singer’s whole life with her when she left. This song could be adapted to “All of Me”, a song performed by the likes of Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday:

All of me/Why not take all of me  
Can't you see/I'm no good without you  
Take my lips/I want to lose them  
Take my arms/I'll never use them  
Your goodbye left me with eyes that cry  
How can I go on dear, without you  
You took the part that once was my heart  
So why not take all of me.  
(Lyrics by Seymour Simon and Gerald Marks)

This well-known jazz classic evokes the same approximate time period of the tango song (the forties), as well as the same theme of lost love. However, it does lose a secondary theme that is present in the original tango: the reference to death. Here the translator must determine the function of the tango first within this passage, and secondly with regards to the overall intent of the text. In this passage, the reference to death in the tango, combined with the narration depicting a scene with Külpe, Cecilia, and Mendizábal, foreshadows the end of the novel, where Mendizábal loses Külpe (“No sé por qué te perdí”), who later returns only to kill him (“para irme con la muerte”). If the tango were to be replaced with a jazz song like “All of Me”, the translation would lose this foreshadowing element, which is the main purpose of this particular song’s appearance in this passage. For this reason, I translated the tango literally, adding a few musical characteristics for reasons of style (App. 4, pg. 129). Although it will not evoke the same audio memory in the minds of the target

readers, the theme is maintained, as is the foreboding message<sup>54</sup>. As for the function of the tango with regards to the overall text, the tango places *Últimos* concretely in Argentina, and consequently represents the country's firm appropriation of the hard-boiled genre. Replacing the tango with a jazz song would eliminate this important appropriative sign, as well as one of Argentina's cultural references, from the narrative, thus homogenizing the text for the target audience. Although translating the tango into English could be considered a homogenizing technique as well, it is crucial that the reader understand these lyrics because they relate important information for interpreting the text. It also contributes to the threatening mood of the novel, which will be discussed next.

#### 3.2.4. Style

One characteristic of *Últimos* that distinctly places it within the hard-boiled genre is the style in which it is written. The original hard-boiled authors had a distinctive style of writing which Feinmann, although he claims to have had no intention of writing a *policial*, perhaps inadvertently duplicated. The stylistic effects about to be discussed contribute to one of the most important aspects of the book, and that is the overall mood: the foreboding sense of fear that permeates the entire narration and which contributes to the implicit, yet important socio-political reading.

Creating tension is a major stylistic technique used to capture the reader's attention.

Feinmann wrote *Últimos* in such a way that the reader is constantly waiting for the inevitable final kill, reflecting perhaps his own fear of being "fichado" by the military

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<sup>54</sup> In the French translation by Françoise Campo-Timal, the translator leaves the tango in Spanish, providing the French translation in the form of a footnote. This is an interesting solution, since it maintains the Argentine flavour of the tango as well as the foreshadowing. However, with the mix of languages in the same passage as above, the reader loses the meaning of the song; or if following the footnotes simultaneously, the stylistic effect of the passage (narration and song intertwined) is broken by the reader having to glance down to the bottom of the page for the song's translation.

government. Referring to the atmosphere created in *Últimos*, González writes: “the menacing, yet at the same time indistinct nature of the threat recalls the tactics favored by the military and paramilitary groups during the *Proceso* in Argentina” (2006:45). This menacing mood is created in *Últimos* by building tension using a variety of strategies. One such strategy is the cliffhanger, where the chapter ends with a surprising or mysterious occurrence. Feinmann often uses this popular technique. For example, when Mendizábal breaks into Külpe’s apartment to look for clues of his victim’s guilt, the chapter ends abruptly with: “Fue entonces cuando oyó el ruido de la puerta. Como un cañonazo, así le sonó. Alguien-¿Kulpe?- acababa de entrar” (Feinmann 2006:50)(App. 4, pg. 125). This ending leads the reader to believe that Külpe has just entered the apartment and that there will be a confrontation and possibly a murder. Feinmann uses this same strategy at the end of the novel. Mendizábal has lost Külpe and consequently, his job. At the end of the chapter, he looks out towards Külpe’s apartment and sees that “[h]abía luz en el departamento de Külpe” (Feinmann 2006:255), which would suggest that Külpe has returned and that he still has an opportunity to kill him. In both these instances, suspense is created, contributing to the novel’s overall threatening atmosphere.

As previously mentioned, *Últimos* is written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who closely follows Mendizábal, noting his thoughts and exposing his actions to the smallest detail, just like Hammett’s narrator does in novels which feature Sam Spade, for example, *The Maltese Falcon*. This narration strategy is an integral element of the story because it gives the reader insight into the mind of the protagonist, where most of the plot development occurs. What is interesting is that the writing style corresponds exactly with

Mendizábal's mood, which is directly correlated to Mendizábal's sense of power, and ultimately strengthens the allusion to the Argentine socio-political context.

At first, the narrative is very cut and dry. Every little detail is depicted, as in a detective's report. Mendizábal's actions are traced step by step:

“Descansó durante dos horas. Eran las nueve de la noche cuando se acercó a la ventana y miró hacia afuera: unos nubarrones densos y oscuros cubrían el cielo. Observó las ventanas de Külpe y las vio sin luz: no había regresado todavía. Se ajustó la funda con la Luger, se puso el saco y extrajo de su valija un manojo de llaves” (Feinmann 2006:26)(App. 4, pg. 113).

This type of descriptive passage occurs at intervals throughout the novel, giving the time, the weather, and a breakdown of Mendizábal's thoughts or actions. The attention to very specific details is completely in line with the hard-boiled style. Hammett, the author who initiated the genre's popularity, wrote *Red Harvest* using a similar style:

“I caught the 5:25 train south. It put me in Poston, a dusty town twice Quesada's size, at 7:30; and a rattle-trap stage, in which I was the only passenger, got me to my destination half an hour later. Rain was beginning to fall as I was leaving the stage across the street from the hotel.” (1999:313).

Feinmann's truncated, very factual, almost cold style is reminiscent of the American hard-boiled novels, and even he admits that it is “muy de Hammett” (Feinmann 2009a). Within the narrative, however, this matter-of-fact style serves two purposes. The first is to give the reader a vivid image of the action. Feinmann is notorious for this attention to detail, which gives the narrative a particularly cinematographic quality. As has already been noted, Feinmann has very close ties with the film industry and has written many screenplays, including one for *Últimos*. Secondly, the ultra precise style serves as a literary device, reflecting Mendizábal's confidence in himself as well as the efficient and methodical ways of which he is so proud. For example, when Mendizábal enters Külpe's apartment, the

narration takes note of every little detail, including every piece of furniture or painting, every item of clothing in the closet, and anything out of place (Feinmann 2006:49).

As the events unfold, however, it becomes evident that Mendizábal's method is unravelling, and that he is perhaps losing his touch. Apart from obvious indications that he is not getting the job done (for example, the fact that he keeps delaying the killing), the narrative style also provides the reader with clues. There is a gradual yet deliberate change in the writing as the novel progresses. Words are added to phrases almost as an afterthought, sometimes haphazardly. The narrative flow becomes more broken and disjointed, while still maintaining the same basic structure. In the following passage, Mendizábal speculates on the relationship between Külpe and Amanda:

Sin embargo, atención. Había hechos que sería peligroso olvidar, y que, por sí solos, comenzaban a delinear una historia. Primero: él le pasaba dinero...El se hacía cargo - total o parcialmente, era imposible saberlo por el momento - de la situación económica de ella. Es decir, que si bien no era su esposo, al menos cumplía con una de las funciones - y no la menos esencial - que ese papel requiere. Segundo: su relación con Sergio estaba llena de calidez, de cariño. Es decir, que si bien no era su padre, se comportaba como si lo fuera. (Feinmann 2006:96-97)

Feinmann uses dashes and commas to separate phrases and syncopate the flow of the text. This gives the reader the feeling that they are following Mendizábal's stream of consciousness, interspersed with comments and after-thoughts. In translation, this is difficult to transfer, and if this sort of passage is translated too closely, the choppiness might seem awkward, even though in Spanish it reads perfectly well. This is a common trap: the translator must maintain the sense of urgency as Mendizábal attempts to piece together the mystery, without tidying up the text too much to make it clearer. In this particular passage, there is still order to Mendizábal's thoughts, as is seen in the way he lists the "clues". However, as the narrative progresses, these hectic passages occur more and more frequently

as the protagonist gets more and more involved in his targeted victim's life, getting carried away with his – often false – hypotheses regarding Külpe, and eventually losing the control he so desperately seeks to maintain over his victim. The previous chapter in this thesis established the parallel between Mendizábal and Külpe and the military junta and its victims; further parallels can be made using the passage above. Mendizábal invents false hypotheses regarding his victim's guilt to justify killing him. This is perhaps an analogy referring to the junta's victims who were often wrongly accused of subversion and killed. It is important for the translator to keep these possible analogies in mind while conserving the pace discussed above, remembering that there is a relation between the pace of the narration and the meaning of the text.

In the final section of the novel entitled “Külpe”, the narrative becomes even more urgent as Mendizábal races to locate Külpe, who has disappeared. The sentences are quite short, producing an effect similar to that of a quickening beat in the background music of a movie, which is intended to increase the viewer's heart rate. In the following passage, Mendizábal has just seen a light come on at Külpe's supposedly abandoned apartment:

Sacó la Luger, descendió del andén y continuó su marcha.  
Caminaba con lentitud ahora. Sin pensar absolutamente en nada. Pero alerta.  
Comenzó a cruzar la calle. Miró otra vez la ventana del departamento.

*Entonces la luz se apagó.*

Se detuvo. Ya era imposible dudarlo: *alguien* estaba allí. Cruzó la calle y entró al edificio. Comenzó a subir la escalera. Un piso. Otro. Y el tercero. (Feinmann 2006:256)

These short sentences ensure that tension builds as the reader races to the climax of the novel to find out what will happen. Again, the translator must be attuned to this pace and ensure that it is maintained in the translation so that the intended effect is produced on the target reader.

Discussing the stylistic features of detective fiction, Todorov notes that “descriptions are made without rhetoric, coldly, even if dreadful things are being described; one might say ‘cynically’” (1977:50). Todorov is mostly referring to the American thriller and the French *Série noire*, and an example of such a description can be found in Hammett’s *Red Harvest*: “The pick’s six-inch needle sharp blade was buried in Dinah Brand’s left breast. She was lying on her back, dead. Her long muscular legs were stretched out toward the kitchen door. There was a run down the front of her right stocking.” (1999:143). Todorov’s statement also applies to *Últimos*. The descriptions at the beginning of the novel, before Mendizábal begins losing control, are all very precise, as discussed above. Similarly, at the end, when Mendizábal is desperate to find his victim, the violence committed by the protagonist is described in a detached, unemotional manner, despite the disordered thoughts running through the hit man’s mind. Describing the death of Külpe’s partner, Morales, Feinmann writes:

Mendizábal se arrojó al piso y desde allí disparó. Una mancha roja brotó en la frente de Morales, quien cayó sentado contra el piso y quedó así, sostenido por el escritorio, con los ojos muy abiertos y la sangre corriéndole desde la frente hasta los labios y el mentón.” (2006:244)(App. 4, pg. 144).

The precision of these descriptions of violence are clearly reminiscent of the American hard-boiled novels and show that Hammett and his contemporaries most certainly influenced this Argentine work. At the same time, these descriptions might also be intended to evoke the frequent reports of kidnapping and murders which became so common in Argentina during the seventies. As a female translator, it was especially difficult to translate scenes depicting excessive violence against women (also typical in the American hard-boiled models). At the end of the novel, Mendizábal tries to make Cecilia tell him where Külpe went (App. 4, pg. 138). In order to get this information, he throws her down the stairs,

punches her, and kicks her incessantly until she can no longer move. I did my best to remain emotionally detached from this very intense, albeit fictional, scene and translate it as I would any other passage, despite its highly graphic content. However difficult, it is important to convey this violence because first of all, it is an important characteristic of the hard-boiled genre, and secondly, because it is a recurrent mirror into the institutionalization of violence in Argentina during the military dictatorship. The challenge lies in making this connection as clear as possible to the reader, without explaining the reference. The following section will examine in greater detail the challenge of making the audience aware of implicit meaning of this kind within the text.

### **3.2.5. Interpretations**

It is evident that *Últimos* is a polysemic novel rich with possible interpretations and that its translator must be acutely aware of them to ensure they are preserved in the target text. In the most realistic interpretation of the novel, it is the jealous Peña who hires Külpe to kill Mendizábal after “el hombre importante” leaves for his vacation, i.e. after Peña usurps his position. In a more existential interpretation, the reader finishes the novel questioning whether Külpe really existed, or whether he was merely a reflection of Mendizábal’s guilty conscience (hence the name Külpe, so close to “culpa”). In the “fantastic” interpretation put forward by Maud Gaultier in an article on identity in Argentine *policiales* (2003:128), Mendizábal integrates himself in Külpe’s life to such an extent that they change places. In this sense, Külpe is Mendizábal’s *doppelgänger*, or double, which explains why Külpe kills him in exactly the same way that he had been planning to kill Külpe. The novel’s complex, yet ambiguous ending offers a sort of interpretive game which keeps the reader trying to solve this final mystery, even after the last page. The ending is left open to interpretation,

and different readers will interpret it as they see fit. This open ending is perhaps also what saved the novel from the government's blacklist. The most accusing interpretation, the socio-political one, was cleverly hidden in the form of a metaphor that only certain readers – those looking for it - would grasp. In his essay “Persecution and the Art of Writing”, Leo Strauss explored the esoteric texts of ancient philosophers, written in order to avoid persecution:

Persecution...gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only.” (qtd. in Balderston 1988:208)

Though the reference to the “trustworthy and intelligent” target reader could perhaps be construed as an elitist view, Strauss’ comment about this technique of writing is particularly relevant. If “all crucial things” are found between the lines, then these types of works invite a dialogue with the readers, prompting them to think for themselves. The ambiguous ending of *Últimos* also seeks this reaction. As discussed in chapter 2, Feinmann feared persecution from the military junta for the pro-Perón literature he had written years before. He therefore had to be careful not to provoke the junta by writing anti-dictatorship material in *Últimos*, although it was probably very present in his mind. For this reason, the socio-political commentary had to be somewhat allegorical. This is exactly one of the counter-censorial strategies mentioned by Graham-Jones, who maintains that Argentine authors used these strategies as a method of actively resisting censorship and sending the intended message to Strauss’ “trustworthy and intelligent” readers. This message is one of anger, “a literary response to the increasingly repressive and violent social climate of the period” (Simpson 1990:145). Just as the early American hard-boiled novelists implicitly

criticized the increasing violence and corruption of American society, Feinmann used this *policial* to denounce the institutionalization of violence in Argentina during the seventies. He left many clues to this effect for his readers in the form of metaphors, symbols or analogies, which can often be difficult to translate. For example, when Mendizábal first begins taking pictures of Külpe, the narrative describes this action as “Gatilló el disparador de la Pentax” (Feinmann 2006:22). In Spanish, this phrase automatically conjures the image of shooting a gun, foreshadowing the protagonist’s death. Although “disparador” can denote the shutter release on a camera, it also refers to the trigger of a gun. The verb “gatillar” exists only in Argentina, and means to cock a gun. To render this phrase into English, the translator must find a way to conjure both these lexical fields (photography and weaponry). The word “trigger” is problematic in English, because it most commonly denotes a part of a gun, but not a camera. For this reason it was necessary to go about it another way: “He aimed and took the shot” (App. 4, pg. 111). The Pentax is mentioned in the previous paragraph, so the reader knows that the shot is being taken with a camera, however, the words clearly take on a double meaning by using expressions most commonly associated with firing a gun.

Another hint of the latent message of the novel is the cigarette mark at the bottom of the curtain that Mendizábal leaves in Külpe’s apartment (and that Külpe likewise leaves in Mendizábal’s): “Fue hacia la ventana y se arrodilló junto a un extremo de la cortina, el izquierdo. Allí exactamente en el borde, practicó con la punta ardiente de su cigarrillo un milimétrico orificio” (Feinmann 2006:28-9)(App. 4, pg.114). This is a subtle reference to one of the junta’s preferred forms of violence, and the choice of the *left* side of the curtain is no coincidence. Argentines know that many prisoners who survived the junta’s

concentration camps reported having been tortured with burning cigarettes while they were held captive. This literary clue is difficult to subtly convey in translation. Of course, many Argentine readers will pick up on this reference, but it is unlikely that an English-speaking reader will automatically make the association.

Moreover, in the first chapter, Mendizábal is given a “ficha” with all the information on Külpe (App. 4, pg. 107). It has already been shown that “ficha” took on a new meaning in Argentina during the last military dictatorship, and as Feinmann himself notes, “[n]ingún argentino ignora el sentido terrorífico que tiene la palabra *fichero* en la Argentina cuando está ligado al Poder, cuando está en manos de *hombres importantes*” (1991:150). If the majority of Argentine readers understand the added connotation of this word, how is it possible to render the double meaning in English? There is no single word that carries these same meanings in English. Simply translating “ficha” with “file” loses the frightening association with the military government.

When Külpe goes missing, the reader is given another clue to identify meaning in the text. Mendizábal goes to see if Amanda can give him information on where Külpe might have gone. When she asks why he needs to know, he responds “Külpe desapareció y tengo que encontrarlo” (Feinmann 2006:232). The verb chosen is no accident and is an obvious reference to the *desaparecidos*, the lost victims of the military junta. Again, the majority of Argentines would most likely associate the word with the military dictatorship; readers of the translation who are unfamiliar with Argentine history might not.

These examples all refer to the often implicit socio-political reading of this novel. The gun, the cigarette, the file, and the disappearance are all references to the institutionalization of violence that took place during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. The

question is whether this interpretation is condemned to be lost in translation, or whether it is possible to convey this message in the target language. In some cases, for example the previously mentioned Pentax phrase, there are translation solutions that do not resort to explicitly explaining the double meaning. There are other cases, for example the fear-inspiring “ficha”, where this is not so simple. Even if it were possible to come up with doubly accurate translations for these problematic references, how can the target reader begin to experience the novel in the same way as the Argentine readers did in 1979, when it clearly paralleled the Argentine reality of the time? Furthermore, how would an Argentine reader interpret *Últimos* in 2009 as compared to the reader in 1979? Would today’s Argentine reader even detect the parallels between Feinmann’s novel and Argentine history, and the subtle political criticism? This, of course, would depend on the type of reader.

Argentine social communications professor Oscar Bosetti says in an article on *Últimos* and the Argentine *policia* that in Argentina, “las ‘nuevas’ historias escritas con posterioridad al setenta y seis aludirán *elípticamente* a una realidad de la que no se hable pero donde se transparentan - para quienes lo sepan o quieran ver o descubrir - los rastros de la violencia desenfrenada” (1982:31). Therefore, only those who lived through the dictatorship, or those who have that environment present in their minds when reading the novel, might seek out Feinmann’s message. Although the tragedies suffered throughout the military junta’s rule are deeply engrained in the Argentine collective memory, the underlying subtext is perhaps so “elliptical” that even the average contemporary Argentine reader may overlook it.

Regardless, the subtext is present in the original, whether the reader detects it or not. For this reason, it **must** be present in the translation. The option for that interpretation must exist, otherwise an important, almost testimonial part of the original text is lost.

How then is this done? In these challenging situations, some translators choose to include paratext such as detailed footnotes, endnotes, or a translator's preface. Although footnotes are much preferred to endnotes, where the reader must turn to the end of the book to find the information, footnotes are also disruptive, and therefore this strategy is not ideal. However, a translator's preface would be appropriate if the translation of *Últimos* were to be published. This explanatory introduction would provide the reader with the contextual information necessary to deduce the different levels of meaning, and also to understand the political climate in which the novel was written, briefly discussing the methods of torture used by the junta, and perhaps explaining that targeted citizens were often "fichados" and sometimes "desaparecidos". Thus when these references were mentioned in the novel, the reader would have some basic understanding of the context, thereby allowing the readers to arrive at their own conclusions regarding the book's message.

Discussing the task of the translator, Levine proposes that "[p]ersuasive translations uncover subtexts, or underlying meanings, for, after all is said and done, translation's first and final function is to relate meaning" (1991:7). While the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic difficulties represent quite a feat in translation, these subtexts and underlying meanings are even more challenging to convey to the target reader. However, I maintain that if *Last Days of the Victim* were published with a concise translator's preface and creative translation solutions throughout the text, the target reader would be given all the tools necessary to discover meaning in a text that cautiously refers to a foreign socio-political situation from three decades ago. As long as the clues are present in the translation, an important part of the translator's task will have been accomplished. The responsibility then falls to the reader.

## CONCLUSION

As outlined in the introduction, the objectives of this thesis were to explore the role of translation in the evolution of crime fiction in Argentina, to examine the effects of the socio-historical context on the novel, and to identify areas of difficulty in the novel's translation while giving possible solutions. The methodology of gathering important contextual information, specifically regarding the evolution of the crime fiction genre and the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, to create a framework of study allowed me to meet these objectives and better translate *Últimos días de la víctima*. First, I explored translation's important role in the evolution of the genre, from its British origins to the American hard-boiled novel, to its unique development and distinctive characteristics acquired over time in Argentina. This understanding of the genre was important as it allowed me to become familiar with the structure of works that inspired José Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima*. Secondly, I examined the socio-historical context of 1979 in order to familiarize myself with the situation in which the novel was created. This knowledge was imperative to the interpretive and translation processes, since an essential part of the novel's meaning derives from this context. The last chapter examined the translation process itself, pointing out problematic areas of the text, mainly of a linguistic, cultural, or stylistic nature, as they relate to socio-political issues. When *Últimos* was chosen for the case study, the first reading showed that there was much potential for implicit socio-political criticism. However, in the end, the material to analyze was limited due to the military government's censorship and the repressive regime instilled in Argentina. Given that violence and murder were fundamental aspects of the genre, the hard-boiled novel provided the perfect cover to comment on the

institutionalization of violence in Argentina, even under the watchful eye of the censorial military government. This thesis established that Argentine *policial* authors from the seventies and eighties therefore appropriated the American hard-boiled genre, using counter-censorial strategies to criticize their own violent and repressive socio-political environment. This particular point is one of the non-literary reasons to translate this type of literature. The translations would provide readers with an interesting way of learning about the troubled Argentine history of the second half of the twentieth century, making an important contribution to cultural understanding so crucial in today's globalized world. If published with a detailed translator's preface, the reader would be given all the pertinent socio-historical information necessary for deriving meaning from this type of work. This thesis provides more than enough material for this type of preface.

When the detective genre first reached Argentina, it was not only linguistically translated (i.e. from English to Spanish), but also structurally translated (by taking on a new form and implicitly commenting on the socio-political context). So what happens when these Argentine works are translated? While this thesis was limited to a case study, it nonetheless showed the types of challenges associated with the translation of *novelas negras* written during the 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship. In so doing, it has uncovered this relatively new Argentine hard-boiled genre, opening a new line of questioning from a Translation Studies perspective. For example, what types of counter-censorial strategies have been used in other Argentine *policiales*, and what translation strategies are used to render them into English? It would be interesting to look at the different English translations of the crime novels from this period in order to gain an overview of these strategies, as well as to examine the reader reception and sales figures of these translations.

A preliminary corpus of Argentine *novelas negras* and their translations has already been established (see Appendix 2), and, along with the methodology used in this thesis, could serve as a point of departure for this line of questioning. My methodology could also be applied to a study examining all Argentine fiction written during the military dictatorship to see what kinds of strategies, if any, were used in other genres outside the *policial*. It could also be used to examine literature from other countries and see how particular genres evolved as a result of the country's socio-political conditions. These thought-provoking applications are well beyond the scope of this particular case study, but would make interesting topics of research for the future.

When translating *Últimos*, or any other Argentine crime novel, the translations will ultimately be what Venuti considers “foreign texts that deviate from dominant literary canons in the receiving culture” (2008:152). The third and final chapter saw the translator seeking an ethical balance between the author's original text and the translation's target audience in many of the translation decisions. This applied to the form of the novel as well. Because the hard-boiled genre first appeared in the United States, where it has since been integrated into its literary canon, North Americans may have set expectations with regards to the rules of the genre. As a result, the translator may be tempted to modify the Argentine novels so that they do not “deviate” from the expected norms. Given my personal translation strategy, it is my opinion that the structure of the Argentine variant should not be dominated by the tendency to modify it in order to make the form more familiar for the target reader. In the translation of *Últimos*, it was crucial to maintain the socio-political reading of the novel, because this trait, along with the hit man protagonist and the surprise ending, makes it unique to the Argentine hard-boiled variety of the 1970s and 1980s. If this aspect of the

novel were eliminated, or mistranslated, the text would lose, in my opinion, one of its defining characteristics. By the same token, this implicit commentary inherent to the Argentine genre is precisely what makes for such a fascinating yet challenging literary translation experience, wherein the translator must find the perfect balance between explaining to the reader the novel's social commentary concealed by the author using counter-censorial strategies, while still maintaining the implicit nature of the socio-political criticism of the original text.

Upon completion, the translation of *Últimos días de la víctima* will be sent to Feinmann's literary agent, who will in turn send it to various English-language publishers in both North America and the U.K. It has been announced that Argentina will be the guest of honour at the 2010 Frankfurt Book Fair. As a result, the Argentine government has created a fund called the *Proyecto Sur* with the objective of promoting the translation and distribution of works by Argentine authors. Feinmann will be attending the Book Fair as a representative of Argentina, so there is a very good chance that publishers would receive this funding to publish *Last Days of the Victim* and fulfill Feinmann's wish to finally have one of his books translated into English. Beyond Borges and Cortázar, the world has yet to discover the large scope of literature Argentina has to offer. This spotlight at an exceptionally prestigious literary event, combined with new translations, will provide Argentina with the opportunity to share its unique literary talent with readers from around the world.

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## Appendix 1 - List of Argentine *policiales* from 1960-1985

### 2.4.2. Qué se publicó a partir de 1960

Citamos a continuación los títulos de los libros dedicados a este género, de acuerdo con el orden alfabético de los autores.

#### *Década del '60*

ANDERSON IMBERT, Enrique

"El Grimorio" (61).

"El gato de Cheshire" (65).

"La sandía, y otros cuentos" (69).

"La locura juega al ajedrez" (71).

BAJARLÍA, Juan-Jacobo

"Cuentos de crimen y misterio" (64) (antología).

"Cuentos con espías" (68) (antología).

BOSCO, María Angélica

"La trampa" (60).

"¿Dónde está el cordero?" (65).

"La negra Vélez y su ángel" (69).

GOLIGORSKY, Eduardo (todos publicados bajo seudónimo)

"La morgue está de fiesta".

"Tarde o temprano la muerte".

"Te vengaré, mi amor".

"Lloro a mis muertos".

(Se han citado estos títulos al azar, entre su muy copiosa producción.)

PÉREZ ZELASCHI, Adolfo

"El caso de la muerte que telefona" (66).

"Con arcos y ballestas" (67).

"Presidente en la mira" (69).

PEYROU, Manuel

"Marea de fervor" (67).

POLETTI, Syria

"Historias en rojo" (69).

#### *Década del '70*

BOSCO, María Angélica

"Historia privada" (72).

"Carta de mujeres" (75).

"La ilusión" (76).

"En la estela de un secuestro" (77).

"Muerte en la costa del río" (79).

DÍAZ, Geno

"Los desangelados" (77).

GALTERO, Julio César

"El jefe de seguridad" (73).

LAISECA, Alberto

"Su turno para morir" (73).

LEONARDO, Pablo (seudónimo de Pablo Leonardo Molledo)

"La mala guita" (?).

MARTELLI, Juan Carlos

"Los tigres de la memoria" (73).

MARTINI, Juan Carlos

- "El agua en los pulmones" (73).
- "Los asesinos las prefieren rubias" (74).
- "El cerco" (77).

PIGLIA, Ricardo

Citamos aquí su producción porque, si bien no es netamente policial (salvo en el caso concreto de algunos cuentos), suele privilegiar uno de los mecanismos típicos del género: la investigación.

- "Nombre falso" (75).
- "Agua florida", cuento publicado por la revista *Crisis*, No. 10.
- "La loca y el relato del crimen" (75), cuento con el que obtuvo uno de los cinco premios del Concurso Siete Días de 1975.
- "Respiración artificial" (80).

PUIG, Manuel

- "The Buenos Aires Affair" (73).

SINAY, Sergio

- "Ni un dólar partido por la mitad" (75).

SORIANO, Osvaldo

- "Triste, solitario y final" (73).

TIZZIANI, Rubén

- "Noches sin lunas ni soles" (75).

TRILLO, Carlos; SACCOMANO, Guillermo, y MARCUCI, Carlos

Escriben en forma individual o colectiva cinco novelas, entre 1973 y 1974, publicadas con seudónimos:

- "Crimen en Dinamarca", de Knut Welhaven.
- "Círculo mortal", de Lester Millard.
- "Déjame morir en paz", de François Lombardi.
- "Trampa para ratones", de David Grenell.
- "Como un perro rabioso", de Chester Powell.

URBANYI, Pablo

- "Un revólver para Mack" (74).

URRICELOQUI, Evaristo M.

- "Sangre bajo la lupa" (72).

Participa, junto con Eugenio Juan Zappietro y otros narradores (que comparten su carácter de ex policías), de dos antologías que edita Plus Ultra en 1976: "Veinte cuentos policiales argentinos" y "Veinticuatro cuentos policiales argentinos".

#### Década del '80

CÁCERES, Germán

- "Los silencios prohibidos" (82).

FEINMANN, José Pablo

- "Los últimos días de la víctima" (primera edición del '79 y reeditado en el '84).
- "Ni el tiro del final" (primera edición del '81 y reeditado en el '84).

MARTINI, Juan Carlos

- "La vida entera" (81).

PÉREZ ZELASCHI, Adolfo

- "Divertimento para revólver y piano" (81).

SACCOMANO, Guillermo

- "Prohibido escupir sangre" (84).

SINAY, Sergio

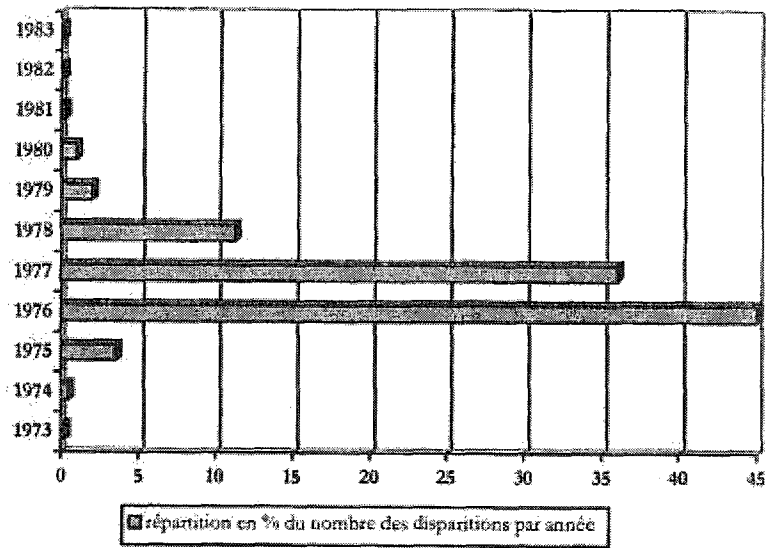
- "Sombras de Broadway" (83).

## Appendix 2 – Selection of Argentine *novelas negras* (1976-1983) and their Translations

- Feinmann, José Pablo. *Últimos días de la víctima*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1979.
- . *Les derniers jours de la victime: roman*. Trans. Françoise Campo-Timal. Paris: Albin Michel, 1991.
- . *Gli ultimi giorni della vittima*. Trans. Olivo Bin. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993.
- . *Kurbanin son günleri*. Trans. Hüseyin Boysan. Istanbul: Ayrinti, 1996.
- . *Ni el tiro del final*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Pomaire, 1981.
- . *Amaro, non troppo*. Trans. Gina Maneri. Firenze: Giunti, 1999.
- . *La ballade d'Ismael Navarro : un roman*. Trans. Isabelle Gugnion. Paris: Albin Michel, 1996.
- Piglia, Ricardo. *Respiración artificial*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Pomaire, 1980.
- . *Artificial Respiration*. Trans. Daniel Balderston. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.
- . *Künstliche Atmung*. Trans. Sabine Giersberg. Berlin: Wagenbach, 2002.
- . *Respiration artificielle*. Trans. Isabelle Garma-Berman; Antoine Berman. Marseille: A. Dimanche, 2000.
- . *Techniti anapnoi : Mythistorima*. Trans. Efi Giannopoulou. Athens: Kastaniōtīs, 2004.
- Soriano, Osvaldo. *Cuarteles de invierno*. Barcelona: Bruguera, 1982.
- . *Das Autogramm*. Trans. Volker Klotsch. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.
- . *De laatste roes : roman*. Trans. Ana Maria Carvalho. Haarlem [Netherlands]: In de Knipscheer, etc., 1987.
- . *Quartéis de Inverno*. Trans. António José Massano. Porto: ASA, 1994.
- . *Quartieri d'inverno*. Trans. Angelo Marino. Torino: Einaudi, 1981.
- . *Quartiers d'hiver*. Trans. Marie-France de Palomera. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1982.
- . *Tangomatchen*. Trans. Jens Nordenhök. Stockholm: Alba, 1986.
- . *Winter Quarters: a novel of Argentina*. Trans. Nick Caistor. London: Readers International, 1989.
- . *Winterquartière*. Trans. Andreas Klotsch. Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1984.
- . *No habrá más penas ni olvido*. Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980.
- . *En beskidt lille krig* [Danish]. Trans. Jan Gustafsson. Kbh: Tiden, 1990.
- . *A Funny Dirty Little War*. Trans. Nick Caistor. London: Readers International, 1986.
- . *Geen tranen, geen vergeten: roman*. Trans. Raoul De Smet. Haarlem [Netherlands]: In de Knipscheer, 1984.
- . *Jamais plus de peine ni d'oubli*. Trans. Marie-France de Paloméra. Paris: Fayard, 1980.
- . *Mai più pene né oblio*. Trans. Angelo Morino. Torino: Einaudi, 1979.
- . *Nem lesz többé gyötrelém, sem feledé*. Trans. Nándor Huszágh. Budapest: Magvető, 1983.
- . *Nie będzie więcej męki, nie będzie zapomnienia*. Trans. Zofia Chądzyńska. Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1980.
- . *Yek jedāl-e kūchak-e kasif-e maskhareh* [Farsi, Western; Persian]. Trans. Jamshid Navā'i. Tehrān: Sohrevardi, 1987.

Source: Index Translationum, UNESCO (<http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/xtra-form.shtml>)

### Appendix 3 – Number of “Disappeared” in Argentina by Year



Source: García-Romeu, José. *Dictature et littérature en Argentine – 1976-1983*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005. Page 54.

#### Appendix 4 – Translation of Passages from *Últimos días de la víctima*

*He stood in the doorway of the living room, a revolver in his hand.*

HAMMETT

*Then, very carefully, he fired.*

BORGES

#### **Part One:**

#### **FOLLOWING KÜLPE**

He was an important, arrogant man, with shady dealings and more than a few enemies. Mendizábal, however, did not need his authorization to sit down in the velvet chair facing the desk. He was important too – he told himself – and no one could dispute that, not even the important man. And so he sat down, going so far as to cross his legs.

One thing was clear: he, Mendizábal, was not like the others. Meaning: not like the others who came to this same desk and stood there, tense and scared, respectful to the point of humiliation, anxiously awaiting an order like someone requesting permission to breathe. No: Mendizábal spoke to him as an equal. He did not receive orders; he did business. For this reason – and this reason precisely – the important man said:

“There’s a job for you, Mendizábal,” interlocking his fingers under his chin while he said it. Slowly. Choosing his words.

Mendizábal did not answer right away, took his time. He liked the sound of what he had just heard so much, that he could not help but secretly admire the man across the table who had just finished saying it, looking expectant yet serene.

*There’s a job for you*, he had said, instead of *I’ve got a job for you*. The difference was significant. Nobody gave Mendizábal a job: life had a way of secretly and patiently concocting jobs just for him.

“Alright,” he answered. “I seem to have plenty of time these days.”

The important man smiled. Mendizábal’s answer had most likely sounded pedantic to him. But it did not seem to affect him.

He took a long, thin cigar from a carved wooden box. He was not alone. (He was never alone, really. Probably because of the shady dealings and the enemies, yes, that was probably why.) Standing behind his chair, gaze fixed on an undetermined spot in the room, was a tall, sturdy man. He wore a red tie with a very yellow shirt. Also – it was impossible not to notice – the shape of a threatening object bulged underneath his coat.

There was a quiet moment. The important man lit his cigar and said:

“Look, Mendizábal, I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad thing that you have all this time. Not at all. Things have a way of working out nicely for you and me. Because time is exactly what this job needs. That’s why it’s yours, Mendizábal. Let’s say that it’s a matter of prevention for us. We don’t know if the danger is imminent, but we know it’s there.”

Mendizábal nodded. It was quite nice to hear the important man speaking in the first person plural, knowing that he was just one more element in an impenetrable network of powers and subpowers, perhaps enjoying the vertigo more than the sense of collectivity.

“I’ll take all the time it needs,” he answered.

“That’s fine,” said the other. “But let’s make one thing clear: *not any longer than is necessary.*”

“Not any longer than is necessary,” Mendizábal repeated, and smiled.

The important man handed him an envelope.

“For your expenses,” he said. “And for your leisure. It’s the amount we gave you for the last job, but tripled. I think we can agree that it’s acceptable.”

“Alright,” said Mendizábal. “Just one thing: when I finish the job, I want another envelope like this one, with the same amount.”

The important man put out his cigar. He hesitated before answering.

“That’s fine. We like the way you work, Mendizábal, and I see you know it. We like your...meticulousness, shall we say. And we don’t mind paying you for it.”

Pointing to the man in the incredibly yellow shirt, he added:

“Peña here will be your contact. You can trust him. That is all, Mendizábal. Good luck.”

They shook hands. Then, the man named Peña gestured to follow him. Mendizábal followed him down a long hallway and into a badly-lit narrow room stacked with metal filing cabinets. The man named Peña took out a small file filled with type-written notes.

“This is your guy. Kill him, that’s all.” he said.

Mendizábal was rather surprised at the contemptuous tone of the remark. He did not expect it from someone capable of wearing a shirt like that. Still somewhat confused, he stuffed the file he had just been given into his pocket and went out into the street.

Outside, the birds sat in the trees, the sun shone relentlessly. It was summer. Mendizábal suddenly remembered it was almost his fiftieth birthday.

He lived in the neighborhood of Saavedra, alone, in a tiny yet immaculate apartment on Lugones Street. He was a predictable man, who lived his life in an orderly fashion, and loved music, photography and watching television. Saturday afternoons were the only times that he lost himself in the violent artifice of firearms. Only then.

He went up to the small loft where he had set up his photo lab. He placed the file given to him by the man named Peña on a well-lit table, and began to read.

His man - that is, the one he had to kill - was named Rodolfo Külpe. Strange name. He was Argentine, as were his parents and even his grandparents. He was between thirty and thirty-five years old. Blond. And tall: five foot eleven. He lived alone, in an apartment on Zapiola, between Echeverría and Sucre, on the third floor, facing the street. He knew things, he might be dangerous, and he had to be killed. That was all. All that mattered to Mendizábal, at least.

Taped on the back of the file was a small envelope containing a photo. Mendizábal observed it closely, captivated. This Rodolfo Külpe had an interesting face. That hair (Mendizábal was surprised to catch himself thinking about it) must have shone intensely in the afternoon sun. The eyes made him feel nauseous, or dizzy. The mouth, with thin but sensual lips, arched in a way that gave the slightest impression of arrogance.

Mendizábal tore the photo into five pieces, piled them into the sink, and lit them with a match that he held in his hand until it burned his fingers. He remained absorbed in the vision of the flames, as if performing a dooming, secret rite.

“No,” he said out loud. “No.”

He took a long nap, riddled with perhaps foreboding dreams forgotten by the first coffee he consumed to wake himself up. It was getting dark when he returned to the attic. He opened the window wide and, with careful fervor, looked up at all the fleeting glow of the dusk. Afterwards, satiated, calm, he went out to find Külpe.

He was very familiar with the streets of his victim's final (he knew it) abode. Coincidentally, or not, he had lived there for a few years as a child. Now, shaken by memories, he crossed them one by one: Washington, Martínez, Melián, Superi, Freire, and finally, Zapiola. He stopped the car – a Renault 12 – and got out.

Those familiar with this part of the Belgrano neighborhood know that when Zapiola crosses Pampa Street, it forks, with one side continuing on the west side of the train tracks, and the other on the east side. They also know that this intersection boasts an old boarding house, a store called *Europa*, and a jungle of intensely leafy trees. However, they are most likely familiar with the sudden loneliness that invades these streets at night, the silence broken only by the chirping crickets, and the ghostly shadows of the tall trees.

This, then, was where Külpe lived.

No lights shone through the windows of the third floor balcony. Mendizábal lit a cigarette, his eyes fixed on the building, then went to sit on a bench in Belgrano R train station. From there he had a view of the entire block. He decided he did not mind waiting and accepted the risk of being seen. He also decided (but could not explain why) that this time, more than ever, he would leave no distance between himself and his victim. He would kill Külpe up close, looking him in the eye.

Almost an hour went by – or maybe much more – and no one passed. The night was completely dark, suffocating. He smoked cigarette after cigarette. Then, a bald and thin old man walked his dog down the block. It was almost midnight. What did Külpe do? He had not asked, nor had they told him. Also, why did it matter? He only needed to know what

hours he kept. What time he left the house, what time he ate lunch, what time he came home. That was all he needed to decide when to kill him.

He put out his cigarette. *Here he was.* A blond man, tall and thin, had just appeared on the corner. It was Külpe. He was walking slowly, with a slight pendular motion, his long thin arms against his body. Mendizábal felt an intense and strange excitement. He shuffled over to the darkest part of the bench and watched from there, hiding. Külpe flicked his cigarette and pulled a keychain from his coat pocket. He did not look behind him, or even to the side, at all. He seemed very sure of himself, and did not appear to suspect any possible danger. Mendizábal, almost amused, smiled silently. How little people know of their own fate. In this serene moment of this serene night, while he opened the door to his house, already enjoying the encroaching sleep, how was he to know that he had just crossed paths with death? Mendizábal was shaken by a disturbing thought: was he himself just as unaware of his own fate?

The third floor windows lit up shortly thereafter. Külpe's shadow, slim and ghostly, cut across them. Mendizábal lit another cigarette and stayed there until the lights went out. It was almost two in the morning. Still shaken but exhausted, he returned home. All he could think about was sleep.

The next morning, he went straight to work.

The first thing to do was solve the distance problem. He wanted to be close to Külpe, submit to the exciting and secret escapade of knowing what he did not know, of watching him, of feeling him live, and of knowing that ultimately, he was master of his fate.

He had a feeling that the back rooms in the boarding house on Zapiola might offer a good view of Külpe's windows, since he did not remember seeing any trees or anything else that would obscure the view between the two buildings.

And so that is where he went.

The owner of the boarding house, a rake-like British woman named Garland, did not ask him for too many details. Nor was he planning on giving them to her. He merely told her that he wanted to rent one of the rooms at the back for no longer than a month. Mrs. Garland said that would be fine, adding that not too many people were around at that time of year (it was February), as it was always too hot and every one was away on vacation. Mendizábal commented that, despite the heat, February was an excellent time to be in Buenos Aires: the city was solitary and, consequently, calm. That was all.

They climbed a solid set of stairs to the room on the second floor, where Mendizábal put the suitcase he had brought on the bed, and Mrs. Garland excused herself with the faint insinuation of a smile. Once the door closed, Mendizábal hurried to open the windows up wide. There, a mere fifty meters away, was Külpe's apartment. The view was perfect.

He then closed the shutters and the windows, and then drew the curtains. This cut off most of the light in the room, except for the dim light emanating from a lamp. Mendizábal liked this. He had always hated that irritating, unrelenting shine that people called "natural light". He opened the suitcase and took out a gun which he laid, very carefully, on the bed. It was a Luger. Mendizábal, a seasoned weapons expert, always pictured it in the hands of some young merciless Prussian official. How many lives had it taken? How much futile crying, pleading, or begging had it heard? How many men, lonely, defeated, in dark, narrow rooms (maybe even the same Prussian official once the war was over), had seen the end of their days feeling its faithless cold against their temples?

Slowly, he shined and cleaned the gun before returning it to its holster. He would kill Külpe with it. There were other ways, of course. Even other guns, more modern and precise. He knew that. His house on Lugones held a plethora of powerful rifles with completely accurate riflescopes. Nonetheless, he still preferred his old Luger. Not because he did not know the advantages of the other weapons (that sterile distance between him and the target, that sensation of infallibility), but rather because he did, and detested them wholeheartedly. He did not want weapons that killed alone. He refused to let anything or anyone snatch that magnificent sensation of being the agent of the deaths he caused. Yes, he was ready to admit that he had nothing to do with the innumerable details that had sentenced these people he was told to kill. But at the end, he was always there.

It was eleven in the morning. Mendizábal clipped the zoom lens onto his Pentax (a weapon almost as indispensable to his work as the Luger) and took a myriad of photos of Külpe's apartment. The shutters were half closed. Did his victim always wake up so late in the day?

He waited patiently. At 11:40 the shutters went up and Külpe appeared on the small patio. He still looked half asleep. He tossed a cigarette into the street and studied the trees and the sky. Mendizábal zoomed in with the Pentax. There he was, he finally had him. The grey eyes, the thin lips slightly parted, the blond hair. He was sure that if he reached out his hand he could touch him. **He aimed and took the shot.** Now he was his.

He hurried from the room, got in his car, and parked half a block from Külpe's. There he waited. In his coat pocket, he carried an incredibly small photographic device that was no less ruthless than his Pentax.

Külpe came out soon afterwards. He walked to the corner of Pampa and Zapiola and took the number 113 bus. Mendizábal followed. It was a humid day, very hot, even more so than the day before. It would soon rain.

Külpe got off the bus at Barrancas de Belgrano, a large park in the middle of the neighborhood. Mendizábal parked and got out of the car. From there, he took another picture of him going up the steps towards the gazebo. Külpe met a woman then, and gave her a kiss – almost imperceptible – on the cheek and sat down next to her on a spacious wooden bench. Mendizábal bought a newspaper and devoted himself to watching them. Then a boy appeared: blonde, thin, between five and six years old, riding a tricycle, cheerful. Külpe opened his arms and swung the boy around. Mendizábal had no doubts whatsoever: it was his son. Was this woman the mother? And if so, why did they not live together?

The boy went back to his tricycle and Külpe began to talk to the woman. She was young, with long dark hair, and a somewhat solid figure. She talked with her hands, nervously, as if this conversation was going to have an enormous impact on her fate. Every now and then, she would swipe at her uncooperative hair, which kept falling onto her face. Külpe listened to her in silence. What did he feel for this woman? Hate, disgust, contempt? Something – decided Mendizábal – but not love. Even though he had never participated in this type of experience, he was generally able to guess if two people loved each other or not. Külpe had barely kissed her, and now, instead of trying to take her hand or get close to her, he kept his distance, as if the mere possibility of physical contact with her appalled him. Why? How had so deep a rift formed between these two people?

Mendizábal snapped a great many photos of the pair. And of the boy. Finally, Külpe got up clumsily and made as if to leave. Mendizábal thought he could see tears on the woman's face. She tried to take his hand, but stopped herself when she noticed the boy nearby. It was a pitiful gesture. Külpe kissed the boy tenderly, picked him up again in a hug, and said goodbye. Angry now, the woman swept the hair from her face once more and dried her tears. It had been an unpleasant scene, almost violent.

He saw him get on a bus heading towards downtown. He then decided to stop shadowing him for the day: the scene by the gazebo had been quite enough. Külpe had a son whom he loved and a wife he abhorred. He thought it absolutely absurd and pathetic to see him submit to those emotions so wholly when he had such little time left to live.

Mendizábal returned to his car and drove towards his house on Lugones. It was the beginning of an already suffocating afternoon. He went up to his lab in the attic, filled up the

car with everything he could possibly need to develop and enlarge the photos he had taken, and then drove back to the boarding house. Mrs. Garland, after offering him a tea which he refused, asked him why he needed all those things. Mendizábal explained his love of photography to her, and asked if it was alright to set up a small lab in the bathroom. Mrs. Garland, after a long deliberation, agreed.

It was four in the afternoon when it began to rain. Mendizábal had already developed and enlarged many of the photos: Külpe tossing a cigarette from his apartment window; Külpe taking the bus; Külpe going up the steps in Barrancas de Belgrano; Külpe picking up the boy on the tricycle; Külpe in heated conversation with the woman with the stubborn hair; Külpe getting back on the bus.

It stormed the entire afternoon, with lightening and deafening thunder. As the hours passed, Mendizábal's work became more and more meticulous, almost obsessive. He ignored any picture that was not of Külpe's face. He no longer cared about the boy, about the defeated woman, about the steps or the gazebo in Barrancas. Only Külpe. His face, at first, then each of its parts, individually: the lips, the forehead, the nose, the eyes. Especially the eyes. He worked to the point of exhaustion, producing enlargement after enlargement, becoming filled with a deep sense of power and triumph. That face belonged to him.

He finished when the first shadows of the night appeared. It had stopped raining and a fresh breeze blew in through the spaces between the shutters. Mendizábal was putting the enlarged pictures up with tacks, practically covering the entire wall. Only Külpe surrounded him now. His eyes – he had enlarged nine pictures of them – stared at him from every possible angle. Slowly, though unable to understand why, he realized that he was losing the original sensation of power he had felt. Now, instead of giving him a feeling of possession, Külpe's eyes filled him yet again with that dizzying nausea that he had felt in the attic on Lugones when he had looked at them for the first time.

He pulled the pictures down one by one, and buried them underneath the bed.

He rested for two hours. It was nine at night when he approached the window and looked outside: dense, dark, threatening clouds covered the sky. It was hot out again, and still raining. He looked across to Külpe's windows, but the lights were not on: he was still not home. He put on his holster with the Luger, then his jacket, and took a set of keys from his suitcase.

He had decided to go visit Külpe's apartment.

He needed nothing more than a pen to open the door at the building's front entrance. He climbed the stairs to the third floor. Nobody saw him. He reached Külpe's apartment and looked closely at the lock. It was, luckily, a fairly common one, although it probably would not have taken him very long to open any other kind. He tried three or four keys and the door ceded immediately. He went in and turned on the light.

He knew he was taking a significant risk. But that was how he wanted to handle this job. Perhaps the important man (and no doubt his lackey, the man named Peña, as well) would disapprove of such methods. But in the end, only his opinion counted. Plus, what could possibly go wrong, save being surprised by Külpe and having to kill him right then and there?

The apartment had two sparsely furnished but large rooms. Mendizábal did not leave a single object uninspected: the living room, the bathroom, the bedroom, the nightstands, the closets. He did not find any guns, did not find any drugs, did not find incriminating documents of any kind. Nothing. The only thing that caught his attention was a photo on one of the nightstands.

It showed a young woman (20 years old, perhaps), almost beautiful, smiling, with short, platinum blond hair. She was very distinctive, thought Mendizábal. He guessed that she was a model or an actress. What other kind of woman would dye her hair that colour? But beyond that, who was she? What role did she play in Külpe's life? A bit young to be the mother of the boy on the tricycle, she could only be an unimportant mistress. But would a man keep a photo of a woman of no importance on his bedside table?

Mendizábal picked up the portrait and looked at it more closely. It had a small, handwritten inscription on it, almost unintelligible at first sight: *To Rodolfo, With love, Cecilia*. So that was her name: *Cecilia*. He searched a number of drawers for a photo of the woman from the park, but he did not find a single one. Nor one of the boy on the tricycle.

Then, an idea hit him with a jolt: why not leave a trace of his visit? A mark on the wall, an object moved elsewhere, or a shirt button magically placed in the bathroom beside the tube of toothpaste. *He thought to himself, reasoning excitedly, that any sign left to alert Külpe would give his work more merit.* He looked at his watch: did he have time? In any case, there was no other option: the idea had completely overpowered him and his whole body tingled with excitement.

He looked over the entire apartment once more. Selecting the appropriate sign was not an easy task. Rearranging the photos on the bedroom wall? Too obvious. Leaving a piece of clothing from the closet on the bed? Same. Closing a door that he had found open? Not obvious enough: Külpe could attribute that to a mere breeze. No. This required something more discreet, but something that would betray the alarming intrusion of a *person* in this empty dwelling.

He stood in the living room. Drawing a small picture on one of the chairs or on a table top? Something like that – he said to himself – but even less noticeable.

It was then that his eyes stopped on the curtain covering the main window, the one that Külpe's shadow cut across that first night he had watched him from the bench in the train station; the very same one Külpe had opened that morning before going out onto the small balcony and unknowingly submitting to the covetous Pentax.

Yes, he was sure now: the curtain, that was it.

He lit a cigarette and took three deep drags. He did not mind the idea of ashing on the spotless surface of the table, but he decided against that as well. He went towards the window and kneeled beside the bottom of the extreme left side of the curtain. There, right down at the bottom, he burned a very precise hole through the curtain with the burning tip of his cigarette. That was all. Would Külpe see it? And if he did, would he dismiss it as insignificant (neglect on his part, or another of the fleeting cleaning lady's clumsy gaffes)? Or would he see in it, as Mendizábal hoped, the terrible warning of the danger that awaited him?

He left the apartment and went back to his post on the bench in the station. It was still not raining, and that afternoon's earlier storm, as is usually the case in February, had only made the heat even more suffocating. Mendizábal loosened his collar and wiped his face with a handkerchief: it was bathed in sweat. He then realized, as he drowned in his own sweat, enveloped in the shadows of that solitary bench, just how much the visit to Külpe's apartment had excited him. He must have a fever, he told himself, completely unfazed.

He spent the next two hours sitting on that bench. He had decided to wait for Külpe to come home. In the meantime, he could not help but think of new methods to get closer to his victim and control him. Among others: bugging the apartment with microphones. The idea fascinated him not only for the possibility of hearing the most unperceivable noises emitted by Külpe, or even his secret monologues (who has not talked out loud to himself?), but also because he was sure that Külpe's associates or friends would eventually visit the apartment. In that critical moment, he would no longer need to imagine – for example – the conversations between Külpe and the woman at the Barrancas: he would merely need to listen to them.

He also knew that the young blond woman from the photo in the bedroom would soon make her appearance. How would Cecilia's voice sound? Even though, he realized, it was not her voice that most sparked his curiosity, and he could not stop thinking about her making love to Külpe. Why else would such a beautiful woman go to a man's apartment? He would then be able to hear her panting, her provocative laughter, her stifled cries of pleasure or pain.

Not bad – he decided – the microphone idea.

But there were risks involved. More than a few. Beyond the possibility of Külpe discovering the microphones (something that could happen quite accidentally), a third party would undoubtedly be necessary to install them, since Mendizábal admittedly knew very little on the subject. The only possibility then, was resorting to an efficient and discreet acquaintance to do the job. Mendizábal did not have any that met these criteria. Furthermore, he confessed, the whole story of microphones and the magnificent power of electronics was becoming all too complicated, just like the rifle scopes, drugs, computers, and all that other rubbish now being used to kill people. Feeling the warmth of the Luger against his left side, he decided that none of that tempted him.

Around midnight, once again, it started to rain. Mendizábal felt a damp chill penetrate his clothes. Why was Külpe so late? He smiled at the naivety of his question. How did he know he was late? Perhaps what for him constituted tardiness was nothing other than the strict routine of his victim. He had barely started to get to know Külpe's schedule. He still had not checked – for example – what he did in life, information that (he now remembered) had seemed completely superfluous the night before, and that now needed his curiosity with surprising intensity. Nor had he checked why they wanted him dead. Although *that* did not actually matter much to him.

Finally he showed up. Mendizábal looked at his watch: one in the morning. Despite the rain, Külpe walked slowly. He carried an umbrella, and was not alone. Mendizábal did not need to see the platinum hair to guess that he was with Cecilia. Even without the obscuring shadows, he could see her face fairly well. She was not as young as she had looked in the photo in the bedroom: either the photo had been taken long ago (which he should have noticed) or he had been entirely mistaken. He could see her well now: she was

no more than thirty years old, but not much less. She was tall (she reached Külpe's chin), and her body and face were positively arousing.

Mendizábal felt satisfied: it had not taken long for Cecilia to make her appearance, and it had not been necessary to go looking for her or for information about her. Now she was right there, and she could not escape what would soon happen.

He saw her press herself against Külpe and kiss his lips. He felt intensely uneasy. Why had she done that? As dark as the street was, did she have to do it there? Paralyzed and dazed, he saw her run her hand through his hair and down his front, until it rested between his legs. Then he heard her laugh.

Was this really happening? What kind of woman was Cecilia? And what kind of man was Külpe, if he let himself be used, humiliated, aggressed that way? He saw them enter the building: passionate, insulting.

It was not long before the lights on the third floor lit up. Now, surely, Külpe would close the door behind her, and she would look at him thirstily. Maybe he would offer her a drink, but she would refuse with a joking and almost offensive gesture. It would not be long before she would remove her blouse, revealing her naked breasts which Külpe would caress for a while, then, giving in, bend down and kiss them. What do you do with a woman like her, how do you satisfy her, how do you keep her?

The door opened and Cecilia appeared on the balcony. She let the rain fall on her face. Surprised, Mendizábal saw that she had not taken off her clothes. Then Külpe appeared and handed her a drink which she accepted and drank in silence. They stood there, under the faint drizzle, until they reached for each other and began kissing again. Then they went in, closed the door, and lowered the shutters.

Now the light came on in the bedroom. The curtains were closed and he could barely make out the fleeting shadows of the couple. But, there, yes, now Mendizábal was sure: not only her, but also Külpe, both, were naked. And when he saw the light go out he knew that they were entwined, ravenous, on the bed.

He walked back to the boarding house. He went up to his room and took off his wet clothes. He turned out the light. Frozen and humiliated, he lay down naked in his bed. He then imaged Cecilia on top of Külpe, now exhausted and empty, kissing him, biting him, caressing him, demanding that he penetrate her again.

"Whore," he heard himself say in the darkness of the room. "Whore."

He had to masturbate to get to sleep.

It was eleven in the morning when he woke up. He lit a cigarette and tried to put his thoughts in order. He had now spent two days (it had been a Monday, in the morning) since his meeting with the important man. Today, then, was Wednesday. He was living in a boarding house run by a certain Mrs. Garland and he had to kill a man by the name of Külpe. That was all. And there was also the woman from the Barrancas and the boy on the tricycle. And Cecilia, there was also Cecilia.

He got out of bed and was startled by the sight of his naked body in the mirror. What did he have in common with the reflected image? He looked at his arms, his stomach, the legs. So that was how he had slept, completely naked. He thought of Cecilia again. Was she still with Külpe or had she already left? He decided he did not care.

He put his face right up to the mirror and examined his eyes. This was him. He then examined his hair (falling out and fading), his nose, the wrinkles around his mouth. And then again his body, his stomach, the white hairs which had started to sprout on his chest, his sleeping sex and his short legs. *This* was him. He felt softer, weaker than before. He remembered again that he was about to turn fifty. And it seemed ancient.

He dressed quickly and went down to the ground floor. He asked Mrs. Garland if he could use the phone. He had just remembered that (since it was in fact Wednesday) it was now his third day on the job and he had still not contacted the man named Peña. Mrs. Garland passed him the phone and left him alone at the reception desk. He dialed the same number he had already been given in previous jobs and waited a very long time. A voice asked him who he would like to speak with and he answered with Peña.

“Peña here,” said the voice.

“It’s Mendizábal,” he answered.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” said Peña. “You were supposed to call yesterday.”

“I couldn’t,” answered Mendizábal. “Now don’t complain just for the hell of it, I’m not that late. Now I need to see you.”

“Fine,” said Peña. “Just say where.”

“Near you,” said Mendizábal. “At the corner of Lacroze and Cabildo. There’s a grill there called *Albor*.”

“Fine,” said Peña. “I know it. I’ll be there in an hour.”

He hung up.

One hour. Mendizábal stood there in silence still holding the receiver. One hour. Then he hung up. He knew this meeting would have to happen sooner or later, but not now, so soon. He returned to his room. One hour. What to do until then?

He looked towards Külpe’s shutters and found them half open. He had surely already gone out. He left his room and went to get his car.

It was noon. He remembered that the day before, Külpe and the woman with the boy on the tricycle had met at Barrancas Park in the blazing heat of the noon hour sun. Would they meet again today? Checking would be the best way to kill the hour before his appointment with Peña.

He arrived shortly thereafter. He parked the Renault in front of the square with General Belgrano’s bust and began to walk slowly towards the gazebo. Why was he so sure he would find them there? He did not know. But he suspected that Külpe and the woman with the treacherous hair had plenty of unfinished business to settle, countless hurtful acts committed throughout the years. Of which the boy on the tricycle was only one.

There they were: on the same large wooden bench. She had tied her hair back a bit better, and let her hands sit on her skirt, seeming much more decided and serene than the day before. Mendizábal had to confess that he liked it. He no longer saw her as submissive and needy, for example. She now seemed to have decided that she would defend what was rightly hers, selling the rest of her honour only for the highest price.

He took many photos of them. They were so absorbed in their conversation that there was not even a remote possibility that they would see him. The boy, who had tied a red balloon to the handlebars of his tricycle, went up to Külpe and pointed to the ice cream truck. Külpe nodded yes and bought ice cream for the three of them.

There were many birds and the sky was clear. It was still hot. Külpe took one of the woman's hands and held it in his. Mendizábal saw them look at each other for a long time. There was still something between them.

Did this woman know about Cecilia? Maybe they were talking about her at that very moment, because Mendizábal saw them drop hands and face each other again, tense. He deduced that Külpe was confessing his passion for Cecilia to her. He also deduced that the woman would not accept this turn of events, that her broken pride would completely triumph over her love for this man.

And so it did. When he reached for her hand again, she drew back as if she feared contamination. She was hurt, but strong. Külpe repeated the gesture and she again rejected him. It was clear that she knew she was the most important woman in his life, and that she was in no mood to hear him beg.

They sat there in silence. Things had been different between them today, however. Maybe they would end up separating forever, but everything was now happening as if they had learned to face each other as two people, neither of whom was ready to give up their dignity in front of the other.

Külpe had just taken out his wallet and was handing her money. She accepted it without fuss. He kissed her on the cheek (close to her mouth, or so it seemed to Mendizábal), he stood up, and called the boy.

"Sergio!" Külpe's voice rang out.

Mendizábal started. *So that was the sound of his victim's voice*: not very powerful, but clear and penetrating. And that was the boy's name: *Sergio*. Then, Külpe said goodbye with a wave of his hand, and Mendizábal saw him get on the same bus as the day before.

The woman was alone. Mendizábal watched her very carefully, devoting every detail to memory. She wore little makeup and dressed simply. She was not beautiful, but in no way unattractive. He wondered how she was in bed and imagined her sensual, and shrill.

Why not go up to her?

The idea seemed sensible enough. And the circumstances were perfect: she was alone, her pride hurt, living as a mother, not a woman. What could be better for her than meeting someone who was ready to put an end to her loneliness?

At the same time, there was no risk involved. It was highly improbable that she would tell Külpe about a relationship with another man. To upset him, maybe, to make him jealous or to restore her pride. But no. Mendizábal surmised that she was more the type to torture him with the hurt mother-of-his-child, abandoned-but-proud woman routine.

He looked at his watch. Only fifteen minutes until his meeting with *Peña*. Not today then, but the decision was already made: he would befriend this woman, become her gentle confidante, and, of course, her lover.

It would just be another way of getting K lpe.

Peña was waiting for him on the corner in front of *Albor*. He was not wearing the yellow shirt this time, and was, generally speaking, more carefully dressed.

“Come on,” he said after shaking Mendizábal’s hand, “let’s get a bite to eat.” He stopped and asked: “Want to get a pizza or something else?”

Mendizábal answered that a pizza was fine. They went in. Peña chose a table in the middle, far from the windows.

“You know why,” Peña said, like someone who has no need to explain anything.

“Fine,” he replied.

They called over the waiter. They ordered a large pizza with ham and red pepper, and the house wine. “A carafe of red” was how Peña asked for it. Mendizábal would have preferred something else, but he did not object.

He was on edge. He could not stop wondering why Peña had invited him to eat. It had been Mendizábal who had suggested they meet, but only to give him the address and telephone number of the boarding house where he was living. Such a simple exchange could have occurred on the corner of the street, in less than a minute, hidden in the anonymity of rushed and oblivious people around them. But no. Peña preferred a lunch, along with the risk of showing their faces there – near the windows or not, it did not really matter – together, for what would take at least an hour.

Mendizábal could not stop wondering what this man wanted, what – apparently uncontrollable – need had brought him to act this way.

The waiter brought the carafe of house wine. “The pizza’s in the oven,” he said, then left. Peña poured two generous glasses of wine and lifted his.

“To your health, Mendizábal,” he said, adding: “To the success of your job.”

He said it somewhat ironically.

Mendizábal barely drank. He did not like drinking before eating. He lit a cigarette and said:

“Look Peña, I like getting straight to the point. What I have to say might make you lose your appetite, or might make the peppers rot, or might make this shit wine fester your liver. But the first part is for sure.”

“Alright,” Peña jumped in quickly. “The first part is for sure. That’s why I invited you here. Because I also like to get straight to the point, Mendizábal. There are things inside me that if I don’t get out and say them, then yes, as you said, my liver does rot.”

He was quick, Mendizábal thought, surprised. He was, in that sense, much more than he had expected him to be. This man kept surprising him. He would have to stay on his toes with this one, and not make the mistake of misjudging him again. And above all: not cede any ground. He said:

“I’m not too concerned about your liver, or whatever it is you have to tell me. Hang on, I’m doing the talking now. There’s a job to be done, and you know it. And I’m the one who is going to get it done. That is why we are sitting here like two bored idiots. The only thing you need to know today is the address and phone number of the place where I’m staying. That’s the only reason I called you.”

Peña did not answer. He served himself some more wine and looked over Mendizábal’s shoulder, as if checking to see if that waiter was bringing his pizza already. Mendizábal kept on talking, but as he went on, he angrily realized that it was Peña and the tension his silence created that was pushing him to do so. He heard himself say:

“I know that you, and other guys like you, don’t like the way I do things. I know that you go around saying that I complicate things, that I’m a bit strange, or even dangerous. But you should know this: I don’t give a shit what you and guys like you say. Got it?”

Peña remained calm, expressionless.

“So you moved,” he confirmed. “These things you do, Mendizábal,” he said, moving his head from side to side, resigned. “Do you really need to move across town to knock a guy off?”

Mendizábal took a paper napkin and wrote down the address and phone number at Mrs. Garland’s boarding house. He passed it to Peña.

“Here,” he said. “When you need to get a hold of me, for something important,” he stressed this last part, “call me here. You can ask for me by name. I didn’t give them a fake one.”

“Alright,” said Peña. And reading the address on the serviette: “Zapiola, nice street. And the exact same one the guy you’re supposed to kill lives on. What a coincidence.”

Mendizábal felt a strong urge to punch his face in.

“Don’t be a wise guy, Peña,” he warned, aggressively. “It’s no coincidence. You know very well that I have my own way of doing things. And it’s because I do things my way that I’m the one who got the job, and not you. I’m the one who makes the cash. I’m the one everyone calls when they need something, something good, not some cheap butchering that guys like you love to do.” And saying more firmly now, pointing at Peña: “And even though it burns you to admit it, I am the best.” And he insisted: “The best of all.”

Peña said nothing. He just watched him in silence, a cigarette between his lips, and an undulating line of smoke dividing his face. A vague sense of powerlessness invaded Mendizábal, he felt the urge to keep talking, but he understood that not even a thousand words would convince this man.

Also, and this was what really infuriated him, why was Peña’s opinion so important to him?

The waiter showed up with the pizza, already sliced. Mendizábal served himself, putting a slice on a plate. Peña used a paper napkin to grab his. Smiling, he said:

“I hope it doesn’t bother you, but I like eating pizza this way. It’s a habit I picked up when I worked at the meat-processing plant. That was years ago, but these are things you don’t forget. Every day at lunch, after the first shift, me and the guys would go to this place nearby and we’d eat pizza like this, with our hands, but standing at the counter. Then we’d drink a muscat and go back to work until nighttime. It was a shitty time. But that’s where I picked up this habit, pizza just doesn’t taste right unless I eat it with my hands.

Mendizábal did not answer. He did not care about Peña’s story. He heard him keep going:

“Later, I changed jobs, but didn’t have much luck. Until the boss called me.”

“What boss?” asked Mendizábal.

“The boss,” replied Peña simply.

Mendizábal nodded; that was what Peña called the important man. It could not be any other way.

“Of course,” Peña carried on, “that’s how I started, at the bottom. I don’t know how things went for you, but you must have had better luck than me.”

Mendizábal, visibly annoyed, dropped his cutlery.

“Listen,” he said, “don’t tell me your sad stories. And don’t tell me the story of your life because I don’t care. If you want to tell me something, tell me the truth: that you can’t stand me, that it riles you up that your boss calls me and no one else, including you, and that you’d like to see me out of the game. Come on, out with it, tell me everything, not this garbage about the old days in the meat-packing business.”

Peña did not lose his cool. Once again, he moved his head from side to side, resigned.

“You’re exaggerating, Mendizábal,” he said. “You’re making a mountain out of a molehill. I don’t have it in for you, and I don’t want things to turn sour for you. At the end of the day, you and me work for the same boss.”

“He’s not my boss,” corrected Mendizábal.

“Okay, whatever you like. But if you want me to be honest, I have to tell you that you’re just getting by on luck.” He hesitated for a moment, and then said: “Of course, you must have some talent, you must have done something right, because it’s true that lots of people ask for you and give you work. And I guess there must be a reason for that.” He poured himself another glass of wine, and went on. “Look, I even asked the boss one time. Why do people always call this Mendizábal, I asked. You know what he said? That he called you because you are an anonymous weapon. That’s what he said, anonymous. I remember the word because, even though I knew what it meant more or less, I still looked it up in the dictionary. Anonymous. What do you think? ‘On the other hand,’ he said, ‘if you off a guy, everyone knows I sent you.’ Alright, I get that.”

Mendizábal smiled, satisfied.

“That’s how it is,” he said. “I have a prestigious reputation, it’s true, and that’s why I get calls from different places. But don’t complain, Peña. At the very least, you have a secure job, and that’s never a bad thing. I, on the other hand, rely on demand.”

Peña’s gaze hardened. He had stopped eating and was tense.

“There’s always demand for you,” he said. “But now, like it or not, I’m going to give you some advice: *watch out*. You’re arrogant and you enjoy your reputation. That’s fine, that’s your business. But in our line of work, it’s best not to have a reputation. You should know that.”

Mendizábal finished his glass of wine. He said:

“Keep your advice. The only people who know me are the people who need to know me, that’s what I call my reputation. And maybe I am arrogant, I don’t deny it, but I have plenty of reasons for it.”

He got up to leave, but Peña stopped him.

“Wait,” he said. “Not so fast. You wanted me to tell you the truth. Well, here it is: it’s true that I can’t stand it, it’s true that the way you work pisses me off, all that bullshit and the comings and goings just to off a guy.” He smiled contemptuously, though clearly upset. “*Your meticulousness*, as the boss always says. And what pisses me off the most is that they prefer you, and give you the best jobs, the most expensive ones.”

Mendizábal stood up, Peña did as well. They looked at each other in silence, face to face.

“So now you know,” said Peña finally. “I am your enemy. I resent you so much I could kill you. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Mendizábal could not speak. He left the grill and walked for a few blocks, his mind blank. A painful anxiety gripped his chest. For the first time in years, he felt like he was in danger.

He returned to the boarding house. Stretching himself out on the bed, he stared hard at the ceiling, confused. *So that's how it's going to be.* But was Peña really as he seemed? The conversation had taken so many different turns.

He jogged his memory. He'd only be able to relax if he made sense of all this. Yes, he had been the first one to go on the offensive. And the surprising part was that Peña, with unexpected skill, had avoided the attack, using silence and irony as his weapons. And then the story about the meat-processing plant, the pizza and the muscat wine at the end of the first shift of the day. What had possessed him to share all that?

But no, it wasn't that either. None of that was really what worried him. It was something else. It was the hatred, the fierce hatred that had appeared out of nowhere, just seconds before the final threat. Did people really have it in for him, resent him, feel he was different to that extent? *Don't say I didn't warn you.* Fine, he'd been warned.

He got up, lit a cigarette and went to the window. He looked outside: it was three in the afternoon and the heat was suffocating yet again. Not far from the tracks, in a small plot with yellow flowers and butterflies, two small children were kicking a ball around. He loosened his tie: it was stifling in there. It was definitely going to rain again.

Was he going about this the right way? The question surprised him: never had he asked himself that question before. Then again, no one had ever said anything like what Peña said to him today. Everything about the running around and bullshit just to off a guy. This wasn't something he could just shrug off, god damn it.

He took one last drag of his cigarette and tossed it away. No, he told himself, it wasn't worth worrying about. This Peña character was just resentful, envious, and full of shit. Some nobody with no talent, and, as hard as he tried, no rank. He, on the other hand, had a style, which was the reason for who and where he was.

Külpe's shutters were still half open, just as they had been at noon: he still wasn't back. Would he come home alone or with Cecilia? It was impossible to know, or even to guess. Nonetheless, the possibility of watching her again excited him.

*But she had been there.* There was no need, then, to wait until that night to sense the warmth he felt when she was close by. There would no doubt be remnants of her presence in the apartment, little hints, her scent on a pillow, a belonging carelessly left behind, or something even less tangible but no less significant.

He decided to visit Külpe's apartment again.

He got to the train station and took the stairs down to the underground passage connecting the two platforms. He hadn't been down there in years. He looked at the white tiles, now old and mostly broken, reading the mundane, obscene, or political scrawl covering the walls. A dirty dog lay in the corner sleeping, or dying.

He climbed the three flights of stairs, used the same key from the first visit, and entered the apartment. He felt an urgent tickle in his palms. *He was in enemy territory.* If he got caught, he couldn't come up with any reason that would justify why he was there. And, he realized, he liked that.

It was less tidy than the day before: a few fallen pillows, a couple of half-filled glasses on the buffet, a bottle of whisky, another of gin, and an overflowing ashtray on the table.

One of the glasses was stained with lipstick. Not only that, the very air he breathed confirmed that a woman had been there. Mendizábal took the glass and gently stroked the edge. He held it like that in his hands for a while. Then, kneeling down, he placed his lips

over the lipstick stain, and slowly passed his tongue over it, his eyes closed. He was sweating.

He focused, and let the sensations run through him: the particular sweet taste, the light and creamy consistency of the lipstick, the heat of his hand against the glass, the lightheadedness, his knees firmly planted on the floor, supporting him, the warmth between his legs. It all confirmed that his body was there. He could have stayed that way for a long time.

Startled, and almost ashamed, he discovered his erection.

He dropped the glass as if it were possessed. He watched it tumble violently onto the carpet. In an attempt to distract himself with something else, he stood up, went to the table and examined the ashtray: it was stuffed to the brim with cigarette butts, and many of them bore the same lipstick stains. He took no less than three and put them in his pocket. He then went to the curtain: the miniscule burn mark he had created the night before was still there. *Had Külpe noticed it?*

He went towards the bedroom. He stopped before crossing the threshold, almost as if he were afraid of something. He started to feel that tickle in his hands again, and the burning palpitations in his temples. His mouth was dry. He went in.

The bed was unmade, the pillows and the comforter had fallen to the floor beside it. There were also two glasses with alcohol left in the bottom, another bottle of whisky, and yet another ashtray overflowing with cigarettes smoked practically to the filter.

*This was the place - they had been there.*

Two yellowish stains were clearly visible on one of the sheets - one larger one, and another smaller one. Mendizábal, fascinated, examined them for a long time. Then, sitting on the bed, he slowly stretched his arm out and placed his right hand on them. He stayed like that, holding his breath, until, suddenly enraged, he grabbed the sheet so violently that his knuckles turned white.

It was then that he heard the door. It echoed in his ears like a cannon. Someone -Külpe? - had just come in.

He took out his Luger, pressed himself up against the bedroom wall, and tried to look into the living room. The first thing he saw was a bucket with a rag draped over the side, and a broom leaning against the table. He started to calm down: he doubted Külpe lugged all that around with him. It was obviously some cleaning service.

The footsteps sounded sturdy, uninhibited: the person who had entered walked around like they knew the apartment was empty. If it was not Külpe, it was clearly someone who knew his schedule. Tense, readying himself to react, Mendizábal peered again toward the living room.

The woman had a large frame, wore curlers and an apron. Probably the doorman's wife, or some cleaning lady from the neighborhood. What mattered was that she was there now. Mendizábal swore under his breath. He should have guessed. Külpe always stayed in his apartment until noon and then returned at night. When else would they come to clean? It made sense now why the apartment had been so pristine when he had come the day before: the woman had already come to clean.

He watched her pick up the glasses, the ashtrays, put the whisky and the gin bottles in the buffet, then disappear towards the kitchen. This was his chance. What if she saw him? He couldn't even fathom an answer, a simple action plan. *His one objective was not to be seen.* Any other result (he was certain) would guarantee his failure.

Holding his breath, he left the bedroom. The woman had turned a tap on, and was now, in all likelihood, washing the glasses and the ashtrays. Mendizábal heard her singing the old pasodoble "El beso de la española". Great, the more noise, the better.

He reached the door, opening and closing it with the utmost care. It was over now - he'd been lucky. He kept the Luger ready as he started down the stairs. He could still hear the woman singing: *When she kisses, the Spaniard's kiss is true...*

He took the tunnel again to cross underneath the station. He arrived back at the boarding house agitated, his heart pounding in his chest. He was confused. Even worse: he could not identify any of the sensations running through him. He went up to his room and violently closed the door, as if protecting himself.

With disgust or with pleasure, he couldn't tell which, he tasted his saliva, thick and too sweet: it was Cecilia, or what little of her he had managed to get. He went to the bathroom and angrily brushed his teeth. He gargled forcefully, spitting violently against the sink, until he began to feel better, more serene, almost purified.

It was true: he had been lucky. As he calmed down, however, he told himself that the cleaning lady having the keys to Külpe's apartment and going in like that, whenever she pleased, at any given time, wasn't *that* foreseeable. Did Külpe really feel that safe? Did he have so little to hide? He surely knew that everyone leaves something behind, even when taking steps to avoid it.

And yet, with Külpe, it was different. He had not put an extra lock on the door, he had given an extra key to that disruptive cleaning lady, and he left his house empty all day long. Either his secrets were hidden somewhere else, or he didn't have any.

And then there was Cecilia. He didn't even try to hide his relationship with her. The glasses, the cigarettes, the stains on the sheet, everything that pointed to her presence in the apartment, all left out in the open. Did he not care that the cleaning lady, with the penchant for gossip so inherent to her profession, might disclose all this to someone?

He had trouble understanding it. Who, then, was this Külpe? If his life was so transparent, if he really had so little to hide, why had he been dispatched to kill him? He

thought briefly that there might be some mistake, or some injustice. But he stopped - he wasn't the one who decided these things. And, Külpe had obviously done *something*, he told himself, something secret, but something real and concrete.

His experiences on the job had taught him that his targets were never innocent. And not necessarily because they had done something bad, because good and bad never really had anything to do with it, but simply because they'd done something. *It was simple*: every man acted against another; every man, then, became a target in the other's eyes, just like Külpe was for him. The only way to escape this game was by becoming the lethal instrument *at the end* of the line of actions carried out by others. But for this to work, he could not act, could not interfere. If he didn't do anything to cross anyone, then he couldn't possibly become a target.

The key was to show up at just the right moment, when the game was up, and the loser identified. And then it was the loser's time to die, not the winner's.

*An instrument.* Mendizábal liked using the word to define his role. It made him feel pure, uncontaminated, separate from those ruled by passion. And efficient. If justice entered into his way of thinking, it was dictated by his pride: whoever called him deserved to win, because they'd chosen the best.

A sudden clap of thunder shook him from his thoughts. It was raining - again. He closed the shutters and turned on the lights. He took off his jacket, his tie, and hung the Luger, still in its holster, on a chair. He then remembered the photos that he'd taken at the park that morning. He locked himself in the bathroom, developed and enlarged them. Afterwards, he went back into the room, retrieved the other photos and put them back up on the wall until it was completely covered.

He took a long look at them again: Külpe running for the bus; Külpe on his balcony; Külpe at Barrancas Park in Belgrano, beside the gazebo, talking to the mother of his child, or picking up his son, or spinning him around.

Külpe. He still didn't know very much about him. For example, what did he do after he left the woman and his son in the park? Twice now, he had seen him take a bus heading downtown. Fine, but what was he doing there? He'd have to follow him, find out. After, he was determined, he would take care of the woman.

He undressed, turned out the light, and went to bed. He felt his body ease into a state of relaxation. He thought to himself: a ship in the calm after the storm, and fell asleep.

He woke up at nightfall. He turned on the light, went to the bathroom, and washed his face. He thought that maybe, in the end, some good had come of the cleaning lady's disruption: if she hadn't washed those glasses, what (or who) would Külpe think had removed the lipstick stains? Because *that* had certainly been imprudent. Or it would have left a not entirely obvious, but at least unnecessary trace of a stranger in the apartment. And that, coupled with the insignificant burn hole in the curtain, maybe even went beyond the requirements for completing this mission. He promised to control himself better, to be more careful.

He came out of the bathroom, took the photos down from the wall and locked them in the suitcase. He had to fold some of them, but he didn't care. They were his biggest secret and he wanted them safely hidden.

He ate dinner at Munich, a restaurant a few blocks from the boarding house. It had stopped raining, and it was cool out. He thought about going to a movie, but he was still

tired, and just wanted to go back to sleep. He lit a cigarette and went back to the boarding house.

Sitting in one of the armchairs in the reception area, her tiny glasses perched on the end of her nose, Mrs. Garland was reading the Buenos Aires Herald. She wished Mendizábal a good night after handing him, obligingly, his key. Mendizábal nodded good night and headed for his room.

“Would you like me to wake you up tomorrow morning?” he heard her ask.

He stopped and looked down at her. She was at the bottom of the stairs; she had taken off her glasses and was smiling.

“No,” answered Mendizábal, “that won’t be necessary,” adding “Thank you.”

He entered his room. Leaving the lights off, he opened the shutters and looked outside. There was a light on at Külpe’s. His hours weren’t consistent, then: he’d come home earlier tonight. He looked at his watch: ten thirty. And what’s more, he was alone. No shadow but his appeared against the curtains, and only briefly, intermittently. Mendizábal deduced that he was in the kitchen – having dinner or a coffee and reading the newspaper - far from the window in the living room.

But one thing was sure: he was alone. Meaning without Cecilia.

He lowered the shutters and undressed. That was enough for today. There had been a few setbacks, but he couldn’t say that things were going badly. *Everything was under control*. Tomorrow, he decided, he would follow Külpe downtown, see what his business was there. And then there was the woman in Barrancas Park. But that could wait.

He turned on the lamp. He took Cecilia’s cigarette butts from his coat pocket and put them on the night stand: there were four, smoked practically to the bottom. Practically though, not completely. The same excitement ran through him as when he had taken them that afternoon.

He turned out the light. Lying naked in his bed, he lit them one by one, lost in thought, smoking them until they burned his fingers.

Then he fell asleep.

Mendizábal felt a sudden urge to escape. He managed to control it. For now (he told himself) he must remember one thing: the man who had just entered did not know him. And, even if he did know him, it was highly unlikely that he would see him there, hidden in the corner of the club, alone amongst the shadows.

He immediately realized how absurd it was even to consider this last point. The one true and definitive fact was that Külpe did not know him, and no one can spot a person they do not know. He calmed down.

Külpe had not come alone. Morales was with him, although this time without the black glasses hiding his round, slightly protruding eyes, underlined by thick, violet bags.

Cecilia left her barstool, wound her arms around Külpe's neck and kissed him on the lips. She then went towards Morales and accepted a kiss on the cheek. Morales said a few words and left them with a few, quick steps, disappearing behind a little door to one side of the stage, most likely the club's office. Külpe and Cecilia stayed at the bar, talking, looking into each other's eyes, sometimes holding hands, always very close, very much together.

From the small stage, Lupe's voice sang a tango, surprisingly low and sad: *I know that once you loved me, loved me as I loved you.* At that moment, Mendizábal saw the large, vulgar woman who when he arrived had been with Lupe and Cecilia at the bar, abandon her barstool. She went to escort a scrawny customer who had just come in looking like a chicken ready for the final blow. *I don't know why I lost you, nor do I know when. Two barstools were free, but there at your side right next to Külpe and Cecilia I left my whole life behind.* Mendizábal decided not to think *so little time remains* about what he was about to do *before death comes for me*, he knew that if he thought about it, *my eyes will see you no more*, he would not dare *never, never*.

He lit a cigarette and stood up. *And if by chance one day I made you shed a tear.* With a determined step, he crossed the club, *because you loved me dear* and went to sit on the second barstool *I know you will forgive me* that had been left empty beside Külpe and Cecilia.

One barstool between them: that was all that remained of his caution.

A few people clapped. Lupe had finished her first tango. She had said (Mendizábal recalled) that she would sing three. There were two to go before she returned to the table, looking for him. He had to hurry.

The bartender leaned towards him from the other side of the bar and asked him what he wanted to drink. Mendizábal ordered a whisky. *Your shadows torture my sleepless nights*, Lupe went on. Over the noise of the club (the hushed but persistent conversations of the couples at the tables, the clinking of ice cubes being dropped into his glass of whisky by the barman, the music, Lupe's low voice, and even the sound of cars honking in the street), Mendizábal tried to listen to the conversation between Külpe and Cecilia.

He realized, however, that his hands were trembling, and that an intense and unfamiliar excitement was running through his body. At that moment, he was only an arm's length from Külpe: they had never been so close. He vaguely recalled that only days before, he had thought it unwise to follow Külpe on the same bus. Now, he was right next to him, even if it was amidst the shadows and din of a night club, but nonetheless there they were, leaning against the same bar with nothing between them but one insignificant barstool.

He told himself that if he managed to reach the glass of whisky, bring it to his lips and take a good swig, his hands would stop shaking, and he would be able to calm down. At least enough to hear a bit of Külpe and Cecilia's conversation.

He managed it. Then, from far away, a barely audible phrase reached his ear. It was Cecilia: "finish it soon because just now". That was all. He took another swig. *Glued to your streets, as if to a cross*, sang Lupe's voice. Now his ears were ringing and his head was pounding. Son of a bitch, he snarled to himself. Why was everything going wrong when up until now everything had gone so well? Suddenly, closer this time, Cecilia's voice reached his ear: "I can wait but sometimes". Things were improving, though not much *my dreams drift away, drift away, never to return*. Even though he was missing most of it, the words were coming more clearly. Finally, he heard Külpe's voice: "I'm serious, don't pressure me, I don't want anyone to". He took another swig. His hands had stopped trembling altogether, but now he was sweating. His shirt clung to his back, and small but burning drops of sweat ran down his forehead and onto his face. He put his glass down on the bar, *and just like new* he gently pushed it towards the bartender and ordered another whisky *dressed for a party, my ol' arrabal*<sup>55</sup>. More applause. Lupe's voice, thanking the audience: "you're too kind, thank you". She had finished her second tango. Christ, would it be over so soon? Cecilia now: "you're getting too involved in this and wasting time". The bartender served him a second whisky. *If only I could slowly open my veins and spill my blood at your feet*, Lupe started again. Külpe now: "it's one thing to say it, saying it is easy, any". There was no doubt about it: they were arguing about Amanda, and the complicated story she had roped Külpe into. *I could have been happy, and now I'm dying in life*. Cecilia: "sometimes I'm sick of". Külpe: "let me handle it my way, don't". And again, the trembling hands. Why, goddamn it, why? *Shadows and nothing more*. He managed to lift *between your life* the glass of whisky, *and my life* and bury the burning liquid *shadows and nothing more* down his *between your love throat and my love*. He emptied it in one shot. Now, his sweat turned to ice. Külpe: "I know that no one can, no one can, no one can". He shook his head wildly and tried to breathe deeply. He left his glass on the bar. Alright, that was enough. In any case, he was in no condition to listen to much more. The applause broke out again. Lupe had finished. Fine, just fine. It was better this way. He paid the bartender for his drinks and returned to the table.

It was not long before Lupe returned.

"Give me a cigarette," she said, sitting down like someone who is about to fall apart. "God, all this is killing me. But I guess there isn't much else."

Mendizábal lit her cigarette.

"You sing well though," he said. "Like you love it."

"Baby, nothing is done well here. And no one loves what they do. But no matter." And smiling, she said deliberately: "I saw you at the bar. It seems you couldn't resist."

"Resist what?"

"Getting close to her. Don't act like you don't know. Her. Cecilia."

"Is that her name?"

"That's her name."

Mendizábal signaled to the waiter and ordered two more whiskies. Then he said:

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<sup>55</sup> *Arrabal* is an Argentine word for a suburb of low-income housing. In tango lyrics, the *arrabal*, which is generally considered the home of the tango, is often personified as a woman, and the singer its scorned lover.

“Look, I don’t even know why I went to the bar. But I guess I thought I might hear you better from there, or that I’d feel less alone. I don’t know, something like that.”

Lupe blew out smoke, as if sighing.

“She’s with someone now,” she said. “Did you see?”

“Yeah, I saw,” confirmed Mendizábal, and his voice quivered. Lupe looked at him closely.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Why?”

“You’re sweating. Your forehead is soaking.”

“It must be the heat,” Mendizábal responded. And then: “Tell me: who’s she with?”

“Him? Don’t know, he hasn’t been around for long. But he must be a great customer, because she latches on to him like a leech. Look at her now.”

It was true: Cecilia had just wrapped her arms around Külpe’s neck and had locked him in a kiss.

“They can’t keep their hands off each other,” said Lupe. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she added: “Oh well, we’ll see how long it lasts.”

The waiter brought the two whiskies.

“It’s not surprising that they’re hot for each other,” added Mendizábal. “Especially if, as you said yourself, he hasn’t been around for long.”

Lupe took the bait:

“It’s true. He only showed up about a month or two ago,” though she added right away: “But hey, enough about that. At first you had me waste my breath on that one, and now on the macho who’s with her. Baby, if you don’t knock it off I’m going to get seriously angry.”

“Well,” smiled Mendizábal, evasive, “we have to talk about something, don’t we?”

“Let’s talk about you then. That would be better. Wait though, don’t miss this.

Teresita’s doing the Fred Astaire bit.”

The lights went down on the small stage and Teresita appeared wearing a tux with a top hat and a cane. She began to slink around the stage with smooth, insinuating movements.

“She does it well, that vixen,” smiled Lupe affectionately. “Honestly, she does it better than most.”

Teresita started removing her clothes. Lupe watched her, ecstatic, her eyes shining. Mendizábal quickly took a large gulp of his whisky.

“Are you singing again after?” he asked.

“Shit. Yeah, unfortunately. But that’s the last one. Then I’m out of here. Give me a cigarette, baby.”

Mendizábal passed her one and gave her a light. Külpe and Cecilia left their barstools and started walking towards the back of the room. Lupe forcefully blew the first mouthful upwards. Külpe and Cecilia disappeared behind the door beside the stage; the same one Morales had used. Lupe smiled and said:

“They’ve left you, baby. All the important stuff in this dive is cooked up behind those doors. So they’ll probably be in there a while. You’ll have to make do with me.”

“God you really are a pain,” said Mendizábal. “I told you from the beginning that you’re good for me. I don’t need anything more.”

She got closer and kissed him on the lips. Mendizábal kissed her back forcefully.

“Mmmm...,” purred Lupe. “That was good. I need to ask you something.”

“What?”

“Wait for me. I want us to leave together.”

Mendizábal hesitated.

“You don’t want to?” she asked.

This time he kissed her.

“Alright,” he said. “I’ll wait for you and we’ll leave together.”

“Will you tell me about yourself?”

Mendizábal smiled.

“Do you really want me to?”

“Yes” she replied. And then: “I don’t know. You seem like a mysterious guy.”

“You’ll be disappointed.”

She looked back at the stage. Teresita, with studied indifference, was sliding her bra over a chair.

“Look at her,” sighed Lupe. “Doesn’t she have sensational tits?”

Mendizábal agreed. Teresita finished up her number. More applause. Lupe downed what was left of her whisky. She looked at Mendizábal, saying:

“Listen, and listen good. I want you to wait for me. And I want us to spend the night together. There’s a hotel near here, on Agüero. Or we can go somewhere else, wherever you want, it doesn’t matter. But baby don’t let me down, because I don’t want to be alone tonight. And because I want to be with you. Got it?”

Mendizábal listened to her and did not answer. She kissed him hard, then walked to the stage. Mendizábal felt a deep, almost painful sadness.

He called the waiter over and settled the bill. Then he got up and left the club. He could still hear: *you were an illusion made of glass that broke when I left, but never...*

The voice was Lupe’s.

He closed the door to his room, walked to the window and looked outside: Külpe's shutters were still completely closed. He looked at the time: one in the afternoon. Was he still with Amanda at the park? That was most likely. Or maybe not. Maybe he'd already left to meet Morales at the Lottery Bureau. Or not. Maybe he was with someone else, somewhere else entirely. In any case, it didn't matter. Because Külpe had a rendezvous tonight, and it would be his last.

He closed the shutters, and the window. The room was completely dark. He turned on the lamp and took out a pen and a few sheets of blank paper from the drawer in the nightstand. On one of the sheets he wrote:

*I've got nothing against you, Külpe.*

It was exactly the thing he wanted to say right before killing him. That he had *nothing* against him. That he wasn't killing him for anything personal. That it wasn't because he hated him, or that he wanted to punish him, or anything else like that. Then why?

He brought his suitcase up onto the bed and took out the photos he had taken of Külpe. Once again, he pinned them up on the wall until it was completely covered. He worked carefully and quickly, almost feverishly. Finally, they were all up: Külpe tossing a cigarette out the window of his apartment; Külpe taking the bus; Külpe going up the steps in the Barrancas in Belgrano; Külpe picking up Sergio, or spinning him around; Külpe talking to Amanda; Külpe getting back on a bus; and finally: Külpe's face, and his eyes, pictures upon pictures of his eyes.

He lit a cigarette, put his Luger on the night stand and started wandering around the room. He needed another sentence. Brief, precise, not revealing anything more or less than the reason for killing him.

A clap of thunder roared outside. Mendizábal opened the window and the shutters. Outside, it was completely dark and raining hard. Zigzags of deformed lightning streaked the sky. Within seconds Mendizábal's face was completely drenched. A fierce wind pushed the water into the room. He struggled to close the shutters and then managed to shut the window.

He continued his task. One more sentence, so that Külpe would *understand* before dying. He took the sheet of paper and wrote:

*They're paying me to do this.*

He didn't like it. He crossed it out quickly, almost violently.

He continued to walk around the apartment, smoking, looking at the photos on the wall. He needed something different. Something that didn't mention money, which was important in his line of work though by no means essential, but rather the job itself.

He stopped: that was the point of the matter. Külpe had to understand that he was killing him because he was doing his job. Simple.

He wrote:

*But I've got a job to do.*

Then, satisfied, he grabbed the Luger, stood in the middle of the room, looked at the photographs of Külpe up on the wall one at a time, and said aloud, firmly:

"I've got nothing against you, Külpe. But I've got a job to do."

There was one thing he was sure of: Külpe would come home alone tonight. First of all, because Cecilia had just been with him the night before. And also because it was Monday, and if Külpe's actions followed any sort of order (which was the case), he would come home alone that night, just as he had the previous Monday, that first night he had waited for him on the bench in the train station.

He put the photos back in the suitcase, took off his clothes, and lay down. He was exhausted, since he had barely managed to sleep a couple of hours on that tiny couch in the house in Florencio Varela. But he could not fall asleep right away. Insidious and stubborn, the image of Funes' coffin being lowered into the ground kept entering his mind. Finally, he fell asleep. Outside, the din of the storm started to quiet down.

He woke up as night was falling. Only the slightest bit of light filtered through the shutters. He went to the bathroom, had a shower, and shaved carefully. His face was smooth now, relaxed. He looked much better, practically rejuvenated. It was almost over, and soon another story would begin. He went back into the room and started to get dressed. When he finished, he checked the clip on the Luger and put on the holster.

He opened the window and the shutters. It was still raining, but not as intensely as before. Every now and then, however, a quick but powerful streak of lightening would threaten that it could start all over again in an instant. Külpe's shutters were still fully closed.

*Fully closed.*

He put on a trench coat and went down to the street.

*Fully closed.*

How had he not realized it before? Külpe had always left the shutters half open, never closed all the way. Was it because of the storm? Possible. But no, the storm had started afterwards, after Külpe had already left and probably gone to see Amanda in Barrancas, or Morales, or wherever else.

Of course, the day had shown signs of a storm from the beginning. Maybe Külpe had closed the shutters as a simple precaution. But probably not: because many days that week, in fact most of them, had started out the same way, and Külpe always kept the shutters half open when he left, maybe to air out the apartment, or for some other reason, or merely out of habit or carelessness. It did not matter why. The fact was that that was how it had been.

He crossed the underground passage.

He also could not blame the cleaning lady, because he had seen that the shutters were closed when he returned to the boarding house and looked across to his victim's apartment earlier that day. And that had been around one in the afternoon; before, much before the time when the cleaning lady generally started her duties.

It was almost dark now. He looked at his watch: it was 7:45 p.m. He entered the building and went up the three flights of stairs.

He opened the door to the apartment. He turned on the light.

The first thing he saw was the telephone, which was no longer behind the cabinet, hidden from view, on a chair, but rather on the floor, and entirely visible. The first thing he *did not see* were the three little paintings of maritime scenes. They were not there. He immediately became aware, with astonishment bordering on rage and fright, that there were many things – actually, almost all of them – that were not there. The ashtrays, the whisky or gin bottles, even a couple of chairs.

He went to the bedroom. The bedside lamps, the sheets, the comforter on the bed: all gone. He opened the closet: not one item of clothing, not even a single tie. He went to the kitchen: no plates, no glasses, no pots, nothing.

He returned to the living room. He looked around him and came to his senses: he was in a deserted apartment. Külpe's deserted apartment.

He had lost him.

He walked to a chair, sat down, put his elbows on the table and buried his head in his hands.

Then the phone rang.

**Part Two:**  
**FINDING KÜLPE**

Mendizábal jerked his head up instinctively. For a few moments, he looked at the phone, astonished. Yes: it was ringing. *Someone was calling Külpe.*

He stood up, walked slowly towards the telephone and picked up the receiver, keeping silent, and still.

“Hello,” a woman’s voice said from the other end. “Hello.” And then: “Rodolfo? Is that you, Rodolfo?”

It was Cecilia. Mendizábal hung up. He went to the chair, sat down, and lit a cigarette. Meanwhile, the phone started to ring again. Mendizábal counted ten rings before picking up the receiver. Again, he did not say a word.

“Hello? Rodolfo?” insisted Cecilia.

Silence. Mendizábal could hear the woman’s agitated breath on the other end. He hung up again. There wouldn’t be any more calls. Now (he guessed) she would show up at the apartment.

But he wasn’t sure. She might do something else.

He went to the bedroom, and threw himself onto the bed, face up, and stared at the ceiling. Angry, distressed, and even scared, he told himself that maybe all was lost. That Peña had been right, that he should have killed Külpe the night before, when he’d seen him come home, like all those other nights, distracted, easy. There: that had been the right time. Or any other time, really. Even the first night. One shot, done, onto the next thing. Anything but this, this anxious waiting, with everything – unexpectedly – depending on whether Cecilia came over to the lonely, abandoned apartment or not.

An unfamiliar anxiety was slowly taking over. He got up suddenly, returned to the living room and started walking around, counting each step. Something, in his head, kept saying: *Külpe’s gone, Külpe’s gone.* He stopped. He sat down on a chair at the table. How much longer would she be? But that wasn’t the most distressing part; it was all the rest: that all his work, the entire flawless investigation he had put together that week, could come undone so easily. Sitting there, just waiting, unable to do anything, completely dependent on the actions of a third party: that was the absolutely intolerable part. He stood up and started wandering around the room again.

He turned off the light, went to the window and looked outside. Nothing. Just a train whirring through the station. He turned the light back on. Then the buzzer rang.

He hesitated. Had he actually heard it? He was upset, so maybe his senses were playing tricks on him. But no. The buzzer rang again, more intense this time. He thought: she’s here, and she’s on edge too, that’s why she rang the buzzer again so quickly, unable to stand this waiting.

He relaxed. Everything was coming together again. Cecilia was there, and she would lead him to Külpe.

He picked up the receiver for the buzzer, but did not say a word. He just pressed the button which opened the front door of the building. Through the receiver, he could hear some quick, hurried steps.

He grabbed the Luger and went towards the living room door. He waited. He heard the elevator come to a stop. He felt serene, completely in control, given his expertise in these situations. The elevator doors opened and closed. Then he heard a few steps from the

hallway, slower, cautious, approaching the door. When they stopped at the door, Mendizábal opened it violently.

There, in front of him, staring at him with shock and fear, was Cecilia.

“Say one word and you’re dead,” said Mendizábal, adding, “Get in here.”

Cecilia remained frozen in the doorway. She looked into Mendizábal’s eyes, as if she thought she might find answers in them: whether this was serious or some bad joke. She just stood there, frozen. Mendizábal motioned with the gun for her to come in while he moved away slightly from the door, giving the woman more space to enter.

“I said get in here,” he said, this time with more severity in his voice.

But Cecilia still did not move, simply staring at him. Finally she asked:

“Who are you? Why are you here?”

She said it quietly, almost whispering. But she said it. Mendizábal was starting to lose his patience.

“I warned you not to speak. Get in here now or this won’t be pretty.”

Then – slowly, without breaking eye contact – she started to back away towards the stairs. Her face no longer showed fear or surprise, just a stubborn will resembling courage.

Mendizábal realized that it was no use trying to do this nicely. He launched himself at her, trying to grab her by the wrist. Cecilia, however, managed to dodge him. They stood motionless again, uneasy, staring each other down, ready to react. Mendizábal, for a brief moment, thought she might scream or cry for help. But she did not. He saw her feeling for the stairs, her eyes, stubborn, difficult, still glued to his. He thought about putting a bullet in her. The hand, or the arm, something like that, nothing serious, something that would keep her still, that’s all.

Suddenly, she screamed:

“Don’t shoot, you bastard!”

The scream paralyzed him. It echoed off the walls and reverberated violently throughout the stairwell.

Also, how the hell had she guessed that he was going to shoot her?

Then Cecilia turned towards the stairs and hurried down them. The sound of her high heels rang out like the peals of a submachine gun.

Mendizábal reacted instantly and raced after her. Was this a joke or was this girl seriously going to get away from him? But no; he had practically caught up to her by the time they reached the ground floor. Cecilia, however, made it to the door, opened it violently and ran out into the street. It was raining hard. Mendizábal saw her run across the street towards the station. A train had just come to a halt. Or even worse: it was about to leave. If she managed to catch it (Mendizábal thought to himself while he frantically ran across the street), he would lose her forever. The train started to move. The station was deserted. Mendizábal reached Cecilia before she even made it to the platform. She screamed with all her might, but the train was even louder. Mendizábal spun her around and dug the barrel of the Luger up underneath her ribs. The woman hunched over like a ragdoll. Mendizábal let her drop to the floor. Then he grabbed her by the arm and dragged her to the underground passage.

“Now I’ll show you, you fucking whore,” he said in a gruff voice, furious and out of breath.

At the top of the stairs, he let her go. The woman’s body rolled violently down the stairs until it reached the bottom. There, in an almost grotesque, broken position, Cecilia lay still.

Mendizábal came down the stairs nonchalantly, giving the woman a minute to recuperate. And she did, because she started moving when he reached her side.

“Get up,” he told her.

She looked up at him. Her mouth was bloody. Shaken, she attempted to stand up, and fell back onto the floor against the wall. She gave him the same look as before, stubborn, determined.

“You’re a bastard,” she said. “Coward.”

Mendizábal wanted to hit her again. But he restrained himself. He pressed the barrel of the Luger into her neck.

“No one will even notice if I finish you off here,” he said. “So you might as well tell me what I want to know.”

She didn’t say anything.

“Where is Külpe?”

Her breathing grew heavier, saying:

“I don’t know.”

Mendizábal pushed the barrel of the Luger even harder against her.

“I’m not going to ask again. Where is Külpe?”

“How the fuck should I know?” she said. “Would I have come looking for him at the apartment if I knew?”

“That has nothing to do with it,” said Mendizábal. “You know where he’s gone.”

She shook her head forcefully, trying to lessen the pressure of the gun.

“I don’t know anything, you son of a bitch,” she screamed angrily.

Then Mendizábal punched her in the stomach. It was a rough, cruel blow.

“Where is Külpe?” he repeated.

She didn’t answer. She wrapped her arms around her stomach while blood streamed out her mouth. Mendizábal realized it was no use, that he wouldn’t get a word out of her. He hit her again, this time not asking any questions, without even knowing why.

“Whore,” he said, his voice dry and full of hate. “Whore.”

He started pummeling her with the butt of his gun, compulsive, unable to stop. The woman could barely let out a moan every other strike, and no longer shielded herself from the blows. She finally fell to Mendizábal’s feet, who, exhausted, backed away until he was leaning against the wall.

A few minutes passed. A train rumbled through the station. The lights in the tunnel went out and came back on. Mendizábal holstered the Luger. Cecilia started to move slowly. She stretched out an arm and managed to grab onto the handrail. But it was useless. She fell back heavily onto the floor and stayed there, still.

Mendizábal climbed the stairs and left the tunnel.

He got to the Lottery Office around 9. He parked and got out of the car. It was still raining. He went into the store.

"We're closing," said the young man who had served him the last time.

"I'll be quick," said Mendizábal.

The store was empty.

"Alright then," said the young man. "You just made it. You're lucky. I'm alone and was just about to leave."

"Right," said Mendizábal. "Then close."

The young man looked at him blankly, not understanding.

"Yes, of course," he said. "But I'll serve you first. What would you like?"

Mendizábal opened his jacket and showed him the Luger in its holster.

"I would like you to close the store. Get it? That's what I would like."

All the colour instantly left the young man's face. Not saying a word, he went to the door and lowered the metallic paneling.

"Lock it, too," Mendizábal said.

The young man looked at him. He was very scared.

"Please sir, that's not necessary," he pleaded. "No one's going to come in if the shutters are closed."

"Do what I tell you."

The young man obeyed. He then looked at Mendizábal again.

"If you want money," he said, "it's in the cash register. But there isn't much."

Mendizábal smiled.

"I don't want the money," he said. "Come here."

The young man went towards him. Mendizábal drew the Luger and pushed it against the man's stomach.

"Please, sir..." he said.

"Don't talk until I tell you to," said Mendizábal. "Stay calm. I could easily shoot you dead, but you might be able to save yourself. It all depends on you."

They both remained silent. The boy's eyes were filled with terror. Mendizábal said:

"Your boss. Morales, right?"

"Yes," the boy replied.

"Guy with a mustache," Mendizábal went on, "with black glasses and kind of fat. That's Morales, right?"

"Yes," confirmed the boy, "he owns the office. But he's not here."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure, sir. I'm not lying."

Mendizábal pointed at the door in the back.

"What's in there?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir. Papers, files. Nothing."

"Come on. Let's go."

They went to the door. Mendizábal threw it open, turned on the light, and went in ready for anything. But it was true: only papers, files, nothing. He turned back to the boy, saying:

"Get in here and close the door."

The boy obeyed. Mendizábal smacked the boy hard in the face with the Luger.

"Alright," he said. "Get up. It's not that bad."

The boy got up. His nose was bloody. Mendizábal said:  
“As you can see, I could really hurt you if I wanted. So you’d be better off telling me everything you know.”  
The boy wiped away the blood with his sleeve. He was shaking.  
“What time did Morales leave here today?” Mendizábal asked.  
The boy hesitated. Then he said:  
“Around 8.”  
Mendizábal put the gun away.  
“Alone?” he asked.  
“Yes, sir,” the boy replied. “Alone.”  
“Good,” said Mendizábal. “Now listen. Your boss sometimes meets a friend here. A blond guy. Tall. Do you know him?”  
“Yes, he comes here sometimes. But not a lot, only now and then.”  
“Did he come today?”  
“No.”  
Mendizábal punched him hard in the stomach, holding him up so he couldn’t fall.  
“Did he come today?” he repeated.  
The boy didn’t answer right away. He was trying to breathe normally again. He said:  
“I’m telling you the truth. I swear he didn’t come.”  
Mendizábal let him go. The boy had to hang on to a cupboard so as not to fall.  
“Do you know where your boss went?” asked Mendizábal.  
“I think so,” answered the boy. “He owns a club near the Botanical Gardens. He always goes there once he closes the store.”  
“Why didn’t he close today?” asked Mendizábal. “Or does he always leave you alone before closing time?”  
“No, he almost always closes the store himself. I don’t know what happened today, but he left early and asked me to close.”  
Mendizábal smiled.  
“You were unlucky today, kid. Okay, open the door.”  
The boy obeyed. They crossed the store. Mendizábal said:  
“I hope you weren’t lying to me. Otherwise I’ll be back tomorrow.”  
“I’m telling you the truth, sir. I swear.”  
“Unlock it.”  
The boy obeyed once more. Mendizábal went out into the street. The rain fell on his face.

*You're crazy.* He was driving along Cabildo, towards Las Heras. The rain was coming down hard against the windshield. In any case, he thought, one thing was certain: he'd been crazy to confess to Amanda that he was looking for Külpe to kill him. It was useless to try to go back and see her now. He'd lost her forever.

What had possessed him to do that?

It was 11 p.m. when he reached the *Annie Malone*. He parked across from it, ran across the street, and went in. It didn't surprise him too much to find his hands were trembling. He went up to the bar and ordered a whisky.

There were quite a few people in the club, especially considering it was a Monday. At one of the tables, Lupe laid out all her wisdom before a rotund – and certainly loaded – man. The corpulent man was rubbing her leg and smiling like an imbecile. Lupe let him, although she sometimes stopped his hand: not so fast, baby.

The bartender served his whisky. Standing next to the cash register was Morales. He wasn't wearing the black glasses this time either. A rock song filled the bar. Mendizábal took his whisky. Then, he got off the stool, went to the corner of the bar and around to the other side, stationing himself beside Morales.

Morales looked at him. Mendizábal shoved the Luger in his stomach. Morales opened his mouth as if about to yell but he stopped himself.

"Say one word and I'll shoot you dead where you stand," said Mendizábal.

Morales looked at him, his eyes pleading.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Let's go to the back room."

Morales hesitated. Mendizábal pushed the Luger harder.

"Let's go," he repeated.

Morales put out the cigarette he was smoking and started walking slowly towards the door next to the stage. Mendizábal followed him. They went in. Morales turned the light on. Mendizábal closed the door.

They looked at each other in silence.

"I'm looking for Külpe," Mendizábal said finally.

Morales took a seat on a desk. He seemed somewhat calmer. He asked:

"Can I smoke?"

Mendizábal nodded his head yes. Morales lit a cigarette.

"Külpe didn't come by here today," he said. "And if he hasn't come by now, he probably won't show. Why are you looking for him?"

"I'll ask the questions," said Mendizábal.

"Whatever you like."

"What's your business with Külpe?"

Morales shrugged his shoulders.

"Only this one. We own this club. We're partners."

Mendizábal walked around the room. Morales kept smoking. Then, suddenly, Mendizábal grabbed him by the lapel and smashed the Luger into his face. Morales fell to the floor. Mendizábal kicked him in the ribs.

"Get up," he said.

Morales pulled himself up with difficulty, using the desk as support. His nose was bleeding.

"Please," he said, "don't hit me. Tell me what you want from me, anything, but don't hit me."

Mendizábal looked at him with contempt. He said:

"Külpe split from the apartment he was living in today. I need to find him. That's all."

"So what do you want from me?"

"Don't act like such a wiseguy. You must know where he is. When a guy splits, he's gotta go somewhere, right? So, where'd he go?"

Far away but persistent, he could hear the music from the bar. Morales was pale and blotting his bloody nose with a handkerchief.

Mendizábal said:

"Listen, I don't want to shoot you. That's not why I came here. But if I have to, I will."

Morales shook his head, looking defeated.

"I can't tell you what I don't know. And I swear I don't know where Külpe is."

Mendizábal smiled.

"You're a lying bastard," he said. "But not to worry, I'll make you talk."

"Please, don't hit me again," Morales pleaded. "I have heart problems."

Mendizábal let out a loud, fierce laugh.

"You're funny," he said. "I tell you I'm going to shoot you and you tell me you have heart problems? What do you think this is? You don't believe I'd shoot you? Or are you more afraid of my fist than my gun?"

Morales looked at him with terror in his eyes.

"Fine then," said Mendizábal, "I'm going to beat the shit out of you, just like I beat the shit out of Cecilia."

"Cecilia?" stammered Morales. "What have you done to Cecilia?"

"I just told you. She had a date with this, see?" And he showed him the butt of the Luger. "You should have seen that slut. Beaten to a pulp. When they find her, she'll be stuck in the hospital for at least a month. If you'd like, I can see to it that you join her there."

Morales' face was bathed in sweat.

"Please, I'm telling you, honestly. I don't know anything. I don't know where Külpe is."

Mendizábal punched him in the stomach. Morales hunched inwards, letting out a cry of pain.

"Come on," insisted Mendizábal, "out with it. Where is Külpe?"

Morales hung on to the desk so as not to fall.

"I don't know," he repeated, barely audible. "How many times do I have to tell you? I don't know."

Mendizábal put the barrel of the Luger up to Morales' head.

"Don't play me," he said. "Only an idiot would let himself get shot over something so insignificant."

Morales didn't answer. Mendizábal lowered the Luger.

"No, I'd better not," he said. "Breaking your face with my gun would be much better. Don't you think?"

"Please, stop," begged Morales, exhausted.

Mendizábal went on:

“Listen, I’m going to tell you something. Lately, instead of killing people with a well-aimed bullet, I’ve taken to absolutely tearing them apart. Into pieces, you understand? Like Cecilia. Would you like me to tell you what shape you’ll be in once I’m done with you?”

“Listen,” pleaded Morales, “there’s money in the safe. Quite a bit. I also have property.”

Mendizábal punched him in the gut again. Morales fell to the floor.

“Shut up, you son of a bitch,” Mendizábal muttered. “I don’t give a damn about all that.”

Then the door opened.

Mendizábal, caught off guard, quickly spun on his heels, turning his back on Morales and pointing the Luger at the person who had just come in.

There stood Lupe and another woman.

“Hey, Morales,” Lupe was saying as she opened the door, “someone’s asking for you at...”

She stopped when she saw Mendizábal. She was paralyzed, first with shock, then with fear.

“Up against the wall,” Mendizábal ordered. “Both of you, let’s go. No talking.”

The two women obeyed. Mendizábal heard something behind him. He turned around. Morales had opened one of the desk drawers and now held a gun. Mendizábal dropped to the floor and fired. A red hole appeared in Morales’ forehead as he slid to the floor, sitting up against the desk motionless, eyes wide open, and blood running down his forehead onto his lips and chin.

Of the two women, Lupe was the first to scream. Then the other one started. Mendizábal, like a flash, was out the door, running across the bar. There were more people in there now. They were dancing. The music was still booming, that’s why no one had heard the shots. Mendizábal elbowed his way through the crowd. Then, behind him, he heard Lupe and the other one shouting:

“Get him! He killed Morales! Get him!”

Again and again: *get him*.

Some people stopped dancing, others didn’t hear, or pretended not to hear. Mendizábal pushed his way to the door. He was almost there when the bartender jumped slickly onto the bar and threw himself down on him.

“Don’t let him go!” Lupe shouted while pushing through the crowd. “He killed Morales! Get him!”

Mendizábal shook him off violently and the bartender fell to the floor. Mendizábal tried to reach the door. But the bartender, a young and agile guy, managed to grab him by the foot. Mendizábal stopped, turned, and shot two bullets into his head.

Lupe started screaming again. The other women around her did too. No one was dancing anymore. Some tried to protect themselves by hiding behind tables, chairs, or the bar.

Mendizábal opened the door and went out into the street.