LALR **Latin American Literary Review**
Volume 49 / Number 98 2022
Goldwin Smith Hall, Cornell University • Ithaca, NY 14853 • 607-255-4155
E-mail: latamlitrevpress@gmail.com • Website: www.lalrp.net

"Hasta tomar el cielo por asalto": Competing Historical Moods in Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*

Rebecca R. Garonzik
The College of Wooster

ABSTRACT: Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* is among the many twenty-first century Argentine novels that grapple with the historical events of the 1960s and 70s and their ongoing repercussions in the present. Based on the title of Pron's work, one might assume that the text would be focused on the spirit of possibility that characterized his parents' generation — the "spirit of hope for change" that John Beverley has identified as part of the cultural ethos of the armed struggle. However, Pron never provides a detailed account of his narrator's parents' activities as members of the Peronist organization Guardia de Hierro, nor does he offer a thorough depiction of the spirit of the era. This marked contradiction between what the title suggests the novel is about and what it actually addresses gestures to an alternate layer of meaning in the text, conveying the way in which the legacies of both the dictatorship and of neoliberal governance continue to overshadow memories and representations of the political movements that preceded the dictatorship and of the spirit of possibility that accompanied them. At the same time, the novel's title and the passage from which it emerges also indicate a coexisting desire in twenty-first century Argentine literature to regain access to the spirit of possibility of the political movements of the 1960s and early 70s so as to use it for the country's future.

KEYWORDS: Argentina, dictatorship, neoliberalism, memory, mood, *Stimmung*

> Me pregunté qué podía ofrecer mi generación que pudiera ponerse a la altura de la desesperación gozosa y del afán de justicia de la generación que la precedió, la de nuestros padres. ¿No era terrible el imperativo ético que esa generación puso sin quererlo sobre nosotros? (Patricio Pron, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*, 179).

Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* is among the many twenty-first century Argentine novels whose aim is to come to grips with the historical events of the 1960s and 70s and their repercussions in the present day. Described by critics as a work of autofiction, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* is also a self-begetting novel: a novel that explores the process via which the protagonist comes to write the novel we are reading.[1] One of the central characteristics of self-begetting novels is their self-reflexivity, as the narrator ponders the writing of the novel—how he will approach it and of what it will consist. The title of *El espíritu* emerges from one such self-reflexive instance in the fourth and final section of the text, in which the narrator declares his motivation for writing the novel and, presumably, what it will address:

> Mientras pensaba todo esto de pie junto a la mesa del teléfono vi que había comenzado a llover nuevamente y me dije que iba a escribir esa historia porque lo que mis padres y sus compañeros habían hecho no merecía ser olvidado y porque yo era el producto de lo que habían hecho, y porque lo que habían hecho era digno de ser contado porque su espíritu, no las decisiones acertadas y equivocadas que mis padres y sus compañeros habían tomado sino su espíritu mismo, iba a seguir subiendo en la lluvia hasta tomar el cielo por asalto. (186)

The spirit of his parents and their comrades that the narrator refers to here—this spirit of passion and determination that was going to "tomar el cielo por asalto"—is the spirit of affective engagement in politics that broadly characterized the revolutionary *Stimmung* of the sixties and early seventies in Latin America—what I will refer to as the *Stimmung* of possibility.[2] Based on this passage, and particularly given the fact that a phrase from this passage appears as the title of Pron's work, one might assume that a large portion of the novel would be about this spirit of possibility and "lo que [sus] padres y sus compañeros habían hecho" as members of the Peronist organization Guardia de Hierro prior to the rise of the Argentine dictatorship (186).[3] However, while the narrator briefly summarizes the organization's history in two of the many short segments that make up the text, he never provides a more detailed account of his parents' activities as members of the organization, nor does he of-

fer a thorough depiction of the spirit of the era. Instead, the bulk of the text is dominated by three overlapping themes: the protagonist's attempts to understand his father by following his father's pursuit of two missing persons, Alberto and Alicia Burdisso; the protagonist's repression and recovery of his own childhood memories of living under the dictatorship; and the protagonist's decision to write the novel itself. This marked disparity between what the narrator proclaims his text to be about and what it actually addresses gestures to an alternate layer of meaning in the text, conveying the way in which the legacies of both the dictatorship and of neoliberal governance continue to overshadow memories and representations of the political movements that preceded the dictatorship and of the *Stimmung* of possibility that accompanied them. At the same time, the novel's title and the narrator's resolute declaration about the aim of the text (cited above) also indicate a coexisting desire in twenty-first century Argentine literature to regain access to the spirit of possibility of the political movements of the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s in order to use it for the country's future.

At the level of plot, *El espíritu* is the story of a man's return to Argentina from Germany to be with his dying father. Upon returning to his childhood home, in his father's study he finds a folder full of documents detailing the search for Alberto Burdisso, a sixty-year-old man who had gone missing from the narrator's father's hometown of El Trébol. Upon further investigation, the protagonist learns that Alberto Burdisso is the brother of Alicia Burdisso, an intimate friend of his father whom his father had initiated into political activism and who was kidnapped and disappeared during the military dictatorship. The protagonist comes to the conclusion that, in following Alberto's disappearance, his father had somehow ultimately been seeking his lost friend Alicia, in the same way that the protagonist is seeking to better understand his father by following his father's search. Upon reaching this conclusion, the protagonist decides to allow himself to access his own memories of growing up as the child of activists during the dictatorship, memories that he had previously suppressed beneath high doses of psychiatric medication. The protagonist also determines that he will write the novel we see before us, in the self-begetting sense I have described above.

As Pron himself admits in the novel's epilogue, the text is autobiography mixed with "una gota de ficción" (198). Like the novel's protagonist, Pron was born in Rosario, Argentina the year prior to the military coup d'état. His parents were also both journalists and, like his protagonist, Pron lived in Germany for a number of years before returning to Argentina upon his father's hospitalization. As Pamela Tala asserts in "Migración, retorno y lenguaje en la narrativa latinoamericana de hoy: *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* de Patricio Pron," by incorporating this degree of autobiography into his narrative, Pron

> [está] desafiando los límites del género narrativo, escribiendo de una manera que la crítica argentina Josefina Ludmer ha llamado la 'ficción/no ficción' (Ludmer 2010), lo que complejiza la interpretación: ¿cómo tenemos, cómo tiene que leer la crítica literaria estas narraciones, tremendamente referenciales, que difuminan el límite de la ficción? (119)[4]

This element of autobiography, or "no ficción," adds another layer of complexity to our understanding of *El espíritu* as a self-begetting novel since, in one sense, it would be easy to reason that the novel is nothing more than an autobiographical description of Pron's coming upon his father's search for Alberto Burdisso and choosing to write an account of it. At the same time, within its many self-reflexive/metafictional passages—which themselves fall outside of the genre of autobiography—the novel moves away from this understanding of its content as somehow given, instead constantly questioning its ability to tell the story upon which it has embarked.

This questioning is clear from the novel's very first segment, in which the narrator addresses the child's desire to discover who their parents were by retracing their footsteps. The narrator begins this passage by describing his visits to a psychiatrist in Germany and the memory loss rendered by the drugs this psychiatrist has prescribed. As the narrator explains, this memory loss has meant that "el recuerdo de esos años —por lo menos el recuerdo de unos noventa y cinco meses de esos ocho años— es más bien impreciso y esquemático" (11). The narrator tells us that, at one point, he returned to the psychiatrist's office in an attempt to understand this period of his life, but then came up with a list of reasons why this attempt would be futile: "después consideré que tendría que haber pedido cita previa, que el psiquiatra no debía recordarme de todas maneras, y que además, yo no tengo curiosidad sobre mí mismo realmente" (12). Instead, the narrator reasons that, years later, one of his future children might make this visit in order to more fully comprehend who he was. The narrator then proclaims that all children are their parents' detectives:

> los hijos son los detectives de los padres, que los arrojan al mundo para que un día regresen a ellos para contarles su historia y, de esa manera, puedan comprenderla.... pueden intentar poner orden en su historia, restituir el sentido que los acontecimientos más o menos pueriles de la vida y su acumulación parecen haberle arrebatado, y luego proteger esa historia y perpetuarla en la memoria. (12)

This assertion, in the very first segment of the text, appears to prepare the reader for a process of discovery by which the meaning—"el sentido"—of the narrator's father's life will be revealed (12). However, immediately following this assertion, the narrator adds that "los hijos son los policías de sus padres, pero a mí no me gustan los policías. Nunca se han llevado bien con mi familia" (12). By proclaiming that "los hijos son los detectives de los padres," in one sense, the narrator is foreshadowing his own role within the novel

as his father's detective and chronicler, who will seek to elucidate the intricacies of his father's life and preserve his memory for posterity (12). At the same time, by asserting that he does not like the police because they have never gotten along well with his family, the narrator is also suggesting that he will not fully fulfill this investigative function—that it is in some way undesirable for him to do so. Thus from the novel's very opening we are primed for a story that will both shed light on the life of the narrator's father and, simultaneously, either refuse or fail to reveal everything, leaving some aspects of his father's story undisclosed. This theme of obscurity or opacity is one that reappears throughout the text, constantly underscoring the narrator's—and, by extension, our—inability to fully comprehend and appreciate his father's past.

Another aspect of the novel that can be seen to allude to the incompleteness of the narrator's coverage of his father's story is the epigraph from Jack Kerouac prior to the novel's first section, which reads, "*[…] the true story of what I saw and how I saw it […] which is after all the only thing I've got to offer*" (9). In one sense, by asserting that what follows is a "*true story*," this quotation points to the autobiographical nature of the text and its basis on actual events—the narrator's discovery of and investigation into his father's search for Alberto Burdisso (9). However, by admitting that "*what I saw and how I saw it … is after all the only thing I've got to offer*," the epigraph also suggests that the narrator's account of his father's political past may be incomplete or partial due to the fact that he was not there to witness it.

The narrator addresses this aspect of the text more directly in segment nineteen of section three, in which he begins to view the documents he has discovered in his father's office as material for a novel that his father wants him to write, reflecting that "yo tenía los materiales para escribir un libro y que esos materiales me habían sido dados por mi padre, que había creado para mí una narración de la que yo iba a tener que ser autor y lector, y descubrir a medida que la narrara" (144). However, in coming to the conclusion that he is to write the story his father has assembled, the narrator simultaneously questions his ability to do so effectively, asking himself, "qué hubiera pensando [mi padre] de que yo escribiera un relato que apenas conocía, que sabía cómo terminaba … *pero no sabía cómo comenzaba o qué sucedía en el medio*" (145; my emphasis). What the narrator really wants to learn from writing this novel is, as he expresses it, "¿Qué había sido [su] padre? ¿Qué había querido?" (145). Within the text, this desire is never fully realized. Instead, the narrator is left to pursue his father's story "en las historias de otros como si yo fuera el coyote y él el correcaminos y yo tuviera que resignarme a verle perderse en el horizonte dejando detrás de sí una nube de polvo y a mí con un palmo de narices" (145).

This description of the narrator's father as Road Runner and of himself as Wile E. Coyote hints at the text's overall structure as a *mise en abyme*.[5] In seeking to know "¿Qué había sido [su] padre? ¿Qué había querido?" the narrator has nowhere to turn except to his father's own search process, which was in fact a search for someone other than the person his father really wanted to find (145).[6] The narrator speaks to this aspect of the novel and to the misplaced nature of his father's search after he has—and we have—finished reading all of his father's documents dealing with Alberto Burdisso's case:

> Una vez más, me pregunté por qué mi padre había participado en la búsqueda de aquel hombre asesinado y por qué había querido documentar sus esfuerzos y los resultados que éstos no habían arrojado, … Tuve la impresión de que mi padre no había estado buscando realmente al asesinado, que éste le importaba poco o nada; que lo que había hecho era buscar a la hermana, restituir allí y entonces una búsqueda que ciertas circunstancias trágicas … le habían impedido llevar a cabo en el mes de junio de 1977. (129-30)

What the narrator's father had hoped to glean about Alicia Burdisso (the sister) or her disappearance by investigating her brother's death is something that the narrator never fully ascertains, and he addresses the inherent futility of said attempt as the passage continues:

> Cuando el hermano desapareció pensé, uno de los últimos vínculos que … unían [mi padre] a la mujer se había roto, y precisamente por ello carecía de sentido buscarlo, puesto que los muertos no hablan, no dicen nada desde las profundidades de los pozos en que son arrojados en la llanura argentina. (130)[7]

The narrator continues by comparing his father to "un insecto en el aire oscuro y caliente de una noche de verano" who is "dispuesto a arrojarse una y otra vez contra la luz que lo encandilaba hasta caer rendido" (130). In this sense, the narrator's father's search—and, as a result, that of the narrator—are both infinitely thwarted and infinitely deferred. Instead, what each of their searches ultimately leads back to is the devastation of the dictatorship and how its impact on Argentine society has obscured the history of the political movements that preceded it and precluded the memories of that era from being passed down.

As Geoffrey Maguire asserts in "Bringing Memory Home: Historical (Post)Memory and Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* (2011)," "the works of many of this generation," including *El espíritu*, "emphasize the breakdown of family narratives through the rupture of a generational heritage" (212). It is clear from *El espíritu* that part of what has been lost in this "rupture of a generational heritage" are the stories of the previous generation's political involvement and thus a fuller appreciation of their particular spirit, or *Stimmung*. The narrator, as author, does include one segment—number nineteen of section four—in which he refers to his parents' stories and those of his parents' friends about their

activities as members of Guardia de Hierro. However, in this passage, the narrator does not narrate these stories in detail but instead refers to them in passing; for example, he mentions

> el recuerdo, imaginario o real, de que [su] padre alguna vez [le] había contado que él había estado acreditado como periodista en el palco en el que supuestamente iba a hablar Perón a su llegada a Ezeiza, ésta es la parte real del recuerdo, y de cómo, al comenzar el cruce de disparos, se escondió tras el estuche de un contrabajo en el foso destinado a la orquesta, en la que quizá sea la parte imaginaria del recuerdo. (175)

Instead of lingering over these scant memories of his parents' stories of their political involvement, the narrator focuses on the incongruence between his parents' commitment to social justice—their spirit of possibility—and the spirit of the era in which the narrator was raised. Describing the aftermath of his parents' participation in Guardia de Hierro, the narrator writes,

> mis padres continuaron a su manera: mi padre siguió siendo periodista y mi madre también, y tuvieron hijos a los que les dieron un legado que es también un mandato, y ese legado y ese mandato, que son los de la transformación social y la voluntad, resultaron inapropiados en los tiempos en que nos tocó crecer, que fueron tiempos de soberbia y de frivolidad y de derrota. (168)

The dictatorship and the subsequent failed democracies have meant that the narrator and his parents have inhabited two very different *Stimmungs*, or historical moods, which has in turn impacted the way they view their country and the concept of political engagement.

In *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Jonathan Flatley provides a useful overview of Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung*, defining it as "a kind of affective atmosphere … in which intentions are formed, projects pursued, and particular affects can attach to particular objects" and which is "shaped by the concrete historical context in which we coexist" (19). Our *Stimmung*—or "the *Stimmung* we are in"—at any given point is a historical phenomenon which colors our individual perspectives and our collective sense of possibility (24). Here Flately explains,

> we might talk about the way an audience was attuned to a Detroit Tigers baseball game in 1967, the kinds of emotional energies that were collectively available because of the rebellion (or so-called riots) that had recently occurred in Detroit, or indeed of the *Stimmun*g that allowed for the rebellion to get going in the first place, … In each instance, certain objects in the world come into view in a particular way, certain persons (or social formations) appear as friends and others as enemies, and some kinds of actions present themselves that might otherwise not even come into view. But we may speak of and seek to analyze in each case the *Stimmung* that made some events possible and others not. Any kind of political project must have the 'making and using' of mood as part and parcel of the project; for, no matter how clever or correct the critique or achievable the project, collective action is impossible if people are not, so to speak, *in the mood*. (23)

The *Stimmung* of the narrator's parents' generation—that of the late fifties, sixties, and early seventies—was a mood of hope, excitement, and possibility that uniquely lent itself to the emergence of collective political action. In *Latinamericanism after 9/11*, John Beverley designates the mood of the "cultural superstructure" of that period—which is itself an aesthetic reflection of its *Stimmung*—as a "spirit of hope for change" and identifies it as one of the characteristics of the Latin American socialist movement that distinguished it from socialist movements in other parts of the world (105).[8] In her introduction to *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties*, Diana Sorensen describes the structure of feeling that characterized the era as one of "imminence" (2).[9] She writes that, in the 1960s,

> Imminence as possibility is entwined with the spirit of utopia, which is central to the cultural and political imagination of the sixties. In the vision of a possible world not yet realized but about to come lived the belief that the fulfillment of a future long awaited and postponed was on its way, almost there, making its signs visible, and hence ushering in a spirit of celebration. (2)

In a later passage she elaborates further, writing that the culture of the time "postulated other possible worlds about to rise from the ashes of the existing one—a world of liberated subjects who would suture politics and culture, sexuality and play, celebration and work, all as utopian avatars that shared a rejection of the established world in a new regime of sociability" (5). In this culture, "spontaneity and enthusiasm went hand in hand with the longing for transformation: in the condemnation of apathy and alienation, everything pointed to the energy of reinvention" (4). Pron's title, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*, and the passage from which it emerges, in which his parents' spirit and that of their comrades was going to "tomar el cielo por asalto," encapsulate this *Stimmung* and suggest that it will reappear at some point within the text—that this is what the narrator's detective search will ultimately lead the reader back to. However, in the end, such a conclusion is not possible, not only because the narrator's story revolves around the case his father was investigating, but also because the narrator inhabits a markedly different *Stimmung* from that of his parents' generation.

As a result, this spirit of possibility—this unflagging belief in the possibility of radical social change—is simply not what the narrator "[*has*] *to offer*" (9).

As the narrator of *El espíritu* asserts, the kinds of emotional energies available to his parents' generation were very different from those available to him and his contemporaries, who grew up amidst the terror and brutality of the dictatorship—"como si en el pasado [hubieran] vivido en un país con … una bandera que fuera un rostro descompuesto de espanto" (163). In a subsequent segment, the narrator elaborates on the nature of his generation's *Stimmung* and its implications for his orientation toward political engagement. The narrator starts by comparing the defeat of his parents' generation to the year-long march undertaken by an army of Greek soldiers who, having failed in their attempt to install Cyrus the Younger to the throne of Persia, were thus forced to traverse four thousand kilometers of enemy terrain before reaching friendly territory. According to the narrator, "para comprender las dimensiones reales de lo que nos sucedió a nosotros habría que imaginar que [la marcha de los griegos]"

> hubiese durado varias decenas de [años], y pensar en los hijos de aquellos soldados, criados en la impedimenta de un ejército derrotado que atraviesa desiertos y picos nevados de un territorio hostil, con el peso inevitable de la derrota y ni tan siquiera la compensación del recuerdo de un período en el que la derrota no era inminente y todo estaba por ser hecho. (179)

For the narrator, he and the other men and women raised under the scourge of the dictatorship are like these children of the defeated Greek soldiers in that, unlike their parents, they never had the chance to experience "un período en el que … todo estaba por ser hecho"—what one might identify as the spirit/*Stimmung* of possibility of their parents' era. They have no recourse to the memory of this *Stimmung* to sustain them or to fuel their political involvement now that the dictatorship has passed. Along these same lines, the narrator asks himself:

> ¿Qué podía yo hacer con ese mandato [de la transformación social]? ¿Qué iban a poder hacer con él mis hermanos y todos aquellos que yo iba a conocer después, los hijos de los militantes de la organización de mis padres pero también los de los miembros de las otras organizaciones, todos perdidos en un mundo de desposesión y de frivolidad, todos miembros de un ejército derrotado hace tiempo cuyas batallas ni siquiera podemos recordar … ? (178)

When the narrator describes his world as one of "frivolidad," he also alludes to the political and economic systems that were put into place following the dictatorship, which built upon the neoliberal policies developed during the dictatorship itself (178). Pron speaks to this in an interview with Silvina Friera:

> La generación de nuestros padres participó de un esfuerzo colectivo valioso que resultó incomprensible para los que vinimos después, que fuimos criados en la década de los '90, que fue una continuidad del proyecto político y económico de la dictadura; una década de frivolidad y de estupidez muy dolorosa para quienes considerábamos como finalidad de la sociedad otras cosas distintas que el éxito individual y económico. ("Este libro no se propone ofrecer respuestas")

Thus it is not only the dictatorship that has stymied the narrator's relationship to political engagement, it is the dictatorship's ongoing economic and political legacy in the form of neoliberalism.[10]

The narrator's sense of inherited defeat also colors his view of his country, resulting in a sense of detachment and disassociation. In an early segment of the novel, as the narrator is flying home to Argentina and reflecting on his limited memories of his father, he remembers his father driving the family to different Argentine provinces "en procura de que encontráramos en ellas una belleza que a mí me resultaba intangible, siempre procurando darle un contenido a aquellos símbolos que habíamos aprendido en una escuela que no se había desprendido aún de una dictadura cuyos valores no terminaba de dejar de perpetuar" (18-9). Just as the beauty of the Argentine countryside eludes him, the narrator is unable to feel any sense of attachment to his country's flag. In describing his childhood perception of the flag, he elaborates on this feeling of estrangement and its roots in his country's recent history:

> podía dibujar … una bandera que era celeste y blanca y que nosotros conocíamos bien porque supuestamente era nuestra bandera, aunque nosotros la hubiéramos visto ya tantas veces antes en circunstancias que no eran realmente nuestras y escapaban por completo a nuestro control …: una dictadura, un Mundial de fútbol, una guerra, un puñado de gobiernos democráticos fracasados que solo habían servido para distribuir la injusticia en nombre de todos nosotros y del de un país que a mi padre y a otros se les había ocurrido que era, que tenía que ser, el mío y el de mis hermanos. (19)

As Norma Kaminsky argues in "Trauma nacional, amnesia personal en *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*, de Patricio Pron," one could interpret the narrator's choice, while in Germany, not to have his own apartment and to sleep on the sofas of friends and acquaintances as a reflection of this same "ausencia de patria" which characterizes the *Stimmung* of his generation (9). Over the course of the novel, the narrator realizes that it is also his generation's *Stimmung* that propelled him to leave Argentina for Germany

and to over-medicate himself in an attempt to forget his past: "Entendí también que no había sido la intoxicación producida por las pastillas la que había ocasionado la incapacidad para recordar los eventos de mi infancia, sino que habían sido esos mismos hechos los que habían provocado mi deseo de intoxicarme y de olvidarlo todo" (165). Some of the details of his childhood that the narrator recovers after going off his medication include not being allowed to invite friends to his house, being forbidden to repeat any of the things he heard at home, and being told to always walk against the direction of traffic and, if ever kidnapped, to drop the nametag with his name and telephone number that he wore around his neck to the ground and to scream his own name as loudly as he could. Within the novel, the psychological force and gravity of this narrative—that of the impact of the dictatorship on both the narrator and his parents—has the effect of overshadowing the narrator's limited attempts to portray the *Stimmung* of possibility of his parents' generation, leaving the reader with a novel that is, in effect, "más triste que el día del padre en un orfanato" (136).[11]

Despite the psychological roadblocks generated by his generation's *Stimmung* of estrangement and unprecipitated defeat—which, as we have seen, have severely impacted his personal character formation—in the end, the narrator determines to write his father's story, viewing it as "una tarea política, una de las pocas que podía tener relevancia para mi propia generación" (184). It is from this determination that the novel takes its title, as we saw in the passage I cited in my introduction (provided here again in abridged form):

> me dije que iba a escribir esa historia porque lo que mis padres y sus compañeros habían hecho no merecía ser olvidado y … porque lo que habían hecho era digno de ser contado porque su espíritu, no las decisiones acertadas y equivocadas que mis padres y sus compañeros habían tomado sino su espíritu mismo, iba a seguir subiendo en la lluvia hasta tomar el cielo por asalto. (186)[12]

This mission, to tell what his parents and their contemporaries did as members of Guardia de Hierro and, in so doing, to perpetuate the legacy of their *Stimmung* of possibility, is one that the narrator shares with Pron himself. In "Este libro no se propone ofrecer respuestas," the above-referenced interview with Silvina Friera regarding the novel, Pron asserts that

> Los supuestos derrotados de la historia, la generación de mis padres, introdujeron cambios sociológicos y políticos sin los cuales la sociedad argentina sería inconcebible. Creo que era el momento de pensar si algo del espíritu del proyecto político de mis padres era pertinente y merecía ser rescatado. ("Este libro no se propone ofrecer respuestas")[13]

However, before delving into the story of his parents' political engagement, it seems that the narrator (and perhaps Pron himself) must first come to terms with their own generation's *Stimmung* and the way in which this *Stimmung* has prevented them from fully reclaiming their parents' political legacy. It is this story—not so much the story of his parents' spirit of possibility, but the story of the narrator's struggle against his own *Stimmung*—that we read in the pages of *El espíritu*.[14] The narrator himself intuits something of this discrepancy between the story he set out to write and the story he has actually written, reflecting:

> A veces pienso también que quizá yo no pueda nunca contar su historia, … si esto es verdad, si no sé contar su historia, debo hacerlo de todos modos para que [mis padres y sus compañeros] se vean compelidos a corregirme y hacerlo con sus propias palabras, para que ellos digan las palabras que sus hijos nunca hemos escuchado pero que necesitamos desentrañar para que su legado no resulte incompleto. (190-1)

Similarly, in the same interview with Friera, Pron asserts that *El espíritu* "no se propone ofrecer respuestas sino interrogantes" ("Este libro no se propone ofrecer respuestas"). In this sense, what the novel expresses is the narrator's/Pron's desire to encourage his parents to tell their story by sharing his own and, in so doing, to learn "cuánto de todo aquello"—how much of his parents' political experience—"es pertinente aquí y ahora" (Pron, "Este libro no se propone ofrecer respuestas").[15] In the meantime, the text paints a compelling portrait of Pron's generation's *Stimmung*—the spirit of fear and political estrangement that those raised during the era of the dictatorship are haunted by and from which they have yet to fully emerge. In this vein, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* concludes with the following passage:

> A veces también pienso en mi padre junto al pozo donde fue encontrado Alberto José Burdisso y me imagino estando a su lado… los dos contemplando la boca negra del pozo en el que yacen todos los muertos de la Historia argentina, todos los desamparados y los desfavorecidos y los muertos porque intentaron oponer una violencia tal vez justa a una violencia profundamente injusta … A veces nos recuerdo a mi padre y a mí deambulando por un bosque de árboles bajos y pienso que ese bosque es el del miedo y que él y yo seguimos allí y él sigue guiándome, y que quizá salgamos de ese bosque algún día. (192)

NOTES

[1] Some of the critics who have addressed *El espíritu*'s status as a work of autofiction include Ilse Logie, Angélica Tornero Salinas, and Ana Casas. In *The Self-Begetting Novel*, Steven Kellman writes that "like an infinite recession of Chinese boxes, the self-begetting novel begins again where it ends. Once we have concluded the central protagonist's story of his own sentimental education, we must return to page one to commence in a novel way the product of that process—the mature artist's novel, which itself depicts the making of a novel.... The final line, as in *Finnegans Wake*, returns to the beginning" (3).

[2] Jonathan Flatley offers a concise definition of Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung* in *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, explaining it as "a certain mode of attunement" or collective historical mood that facilitates our affective attachments, making it possible for affect to function in particular ways at a particular historical moment (21). Heidegger's *Stimmung* is a useful framework for conceptualizing the degree to which our shifting thoughts and feelings in relation to politics and political movements are historically situated and guided by affect as well as by reason. One could argue that, in Argentina, this *Stimmung* began in the 1950s and that, in Central America, it lasted into the 1980s.

[3] As Norma Kaminsky indicates in "Trauma nacional, amnesia personal en *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* de Patricio Pron," both the novel's title and the above passage are metafictional references to the poem "I Fellowed Sleep" by Dylan Thomas, which, as Kaminsky explains, "trata de un viaje onírico a los antepasados muertos" (13).

[4] As though directly responding to Tala's inquiry, in their respective articles, Ilse Logie, Angélica Tornero Salinas, and Ana Casas identify and analyze Pron's novel as a work of autofiction, which Casas defines as "[un] tipo de enunciación híbrida —mitad referencial y mitad ficcional—, en la que no es posible discernir lo fabulado de lo realmente acontecido, generando, así, una narración de tipo paradójico (que no es ni autobiografía ni novela, o, si se quiere y como se ha repetido tantas veces, que es ambas cosas a la vez)" (98). Logie references Philippe Gasparini in explaining that "el término 'autoficción' designa en la actualidad ese lugar de incertidumbre estética, que es también un espacio de reflexión acerca de la relación entre ficción y realidad (2008: 7)" (Logie 61).

[5] Tala also refers to the quality of *mise en abyme* in Pron's work but does so in reference to its language rather than its plot (132). Other critics have commented on this same aspect of the novel, calling it a game of mirrors.

[6] By including, verbatim, many of the documents that he finds in his father's file on Burdisso, the narrator asks the reader to carry out this search with him.

[7] This same sense of futility and infinite recession comes across in the narrator's description of a photo of Alicia Burdisso that he has found among his father's files: "Si se posee una copia digital de la fotografía, como es el caso, y ésta es ampliada una y otra vez, como lo ha hecho mi padre, el rostro de la mujer se descompone en una multitud de pequeños cuadrados grises hasta que la mujer, literalmente, y detrás de esos puntos, desparece" (140).

[8] In this same passage, Beverley describes the extent to which the concerns of the movement permeated literary and cultural production, including the Brazilian *cinema novo*, the Colombian *teatro de creación colectiva*, the Cuban *nueva trova*, and the *poesía militante* from many different regions of Latin America (105).

[9] With regard to Raymond Williams's term "structure of feeling," Flatley writes that "although Williams and Heidegger are coming from different theoretical traditions, I do not think that *Stimmung* and structure of feeling are incompatible concepts; their points of emphasis are just different. Where *Stimmung* as a concept focuses attention on what kinds of affects and actions are possible within an overall environment, structures of feeling are more discrete, less total, and they orient toward a specific social class or context" (27).

[10] Idelber Avelar addresses the formative relationship between the dictatorship and the neoliberal economic and political model in Argentina in *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), writing that "The end of dictatorships [in the Southern Cone] cannot, from the perspective I advance here, be characterized as a transitional process. As was implicit in my critique, *the real transitions are the dictatorships themselves*. According to Willy Thayer, ... 'It was the dictatorship that made the transit from State to Market, a transit euphemistically designated as 'modernization." ... 'Transition to democracy' meant nothing but the juridical-electoral legitimation of the successful transition carried out under the military" (58-9).

[11] One of the few moments in the text in which the narrator's parents' *Stimmung* of possibility shines through is the following poignant description of the reunions among his parents' comrades: "mis padres volvían a encontrarse con sus compañeros y los recuerdos dolorosos y los alegres que se superponían en sus voces y se confundían y se fundían en algo que era tan difícil de explicar para mí y que tal vez sería inconcebible para sus hijos y que era un afecto y una solidaridad y una lealtad entre ellos que estaba más allá de las diferencias que pudieran tener en el presente y que yo atribuía a un sentimiento que yo también podría haber tenido hacia otras personas en el caso de que hubiéramos compartido algo fundamental y único, en el caso de que ... yo hubiera estado dispuesto a dar la vida por unas personas y esas personas hubieran estado dispuestas a darla por mí" (177).

[12] Beverley's pronouncements about the Latin American armed struggle in "Rethinking the Armed Struggle in Latin America" could just as easily have been made about the narrator's parents' *Stimmung* and the political activism in which they took part: "A more comprehensive rethinking of the armed struggle would have to involve a critique of the misconceptions, arrogance, and just plain foolishness often involved in both its theory and practice. Even so, with all its flaws and sometimes lethal illusions, the armed struggle revealed Latin America in its most generous, creative, courageous, and diverse aspects. Like the sixties in the United States, with which it was closely bound up, the promise of the armed struggle pointed to the possibility of a more egalitarian and joyful future" (58).

[13] Pron's desire to recover his parents' story and *Stimmung* is also evident from his translation of the final line of Dylan Thomas's poem "I Fellowed Sleep" from which the title is taken as "*El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*." In the English original the line is "My fathers' ghost is climbing in the rain," and a straightforward, literal translation would be 'El fantasma de mis padres está subiendo en la lluvia' (Thomas 32). However, Pron's translation: "*El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*," has a much more positive, hopeful valence – evoking an image of something that is ever-present and may take on new life as opposed to something that is permanently dead.

[14] Other critics have taken note of the extent to which the focus of the "literatura de los hijos" is on the writers' own identity formation. For example, in "Reconstrucciones de la identidad en *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*," Angélica Tornero Salinas writes that "los hijos … reconstruyen las historias familiares y personales con el fin de comprender más de sí mismos y sus circunstancias en el presente" (67). Another aspect of Pron's narrator's inability to tell the story of his parents' generation's *Stimmung* may be his conflicted view of their efforts. In one sense, the narrator feels dismayed that his own generation will never be able to achieve the same level of commitment and self-sacrifice as his parents' generation (as I have shown above). At the same time, he is also profoundly critical of what he sees as the short-sightedness of his parents' endeavors, writing, "¿De qué otra manera estar a su altura que no sea haciendo como ellos, peleando una guerra insensata y perdida de antemano y marchando al sacrificio con el canto sacrificial de la juventud desesperada, altiva e impotente y estúpida, marchando al precipicio de la guerra civil contra las fuerzas del aparato represivo de un país que, en sustancia, siempre ha sido y es profundamente conservador?" (180). The line: "todos miembros de un ejército derrotado hace tiempo cuyas batallas … nuestros padres ni siquiera se atreven a mirar de frente todavía" from an earlier passage also seems to imply that, according to the narrator, his parents' generation has not yet critically engaged with their own history of political activism and militancy (178).

[15] Pron's father did, in fact, respond to *El espíritu* with his own reflections and insights, which Pron subsequently published on his blog as "The Straight Record: La versión de mi padre." In an interview with Carina González, "La identidad de los hijos: Memoria y reconstrucción de la dictadura militar. Entrevista a Patricio Pron," Pron expressed what his father's response to *El espíritu* has meant for him personally, stating that "el hecho de que [la novela] haya servido para que mi padre me contase su versión de los hechos ya supone un triunfo para mí como escritor" (394).

WORKS CITED

Avelar, Idelber. *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*. Duke UP, 1999. DOI: 10.1215/9780822398776.

Beverley, John. *Latinamericanism after 9/11*. Duke UP, 2011. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv11318h8.

Beverley, John. "Rethinking the Armed Struggle in Latin America." *boundary 2*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2009, pp. 47-59. DOI: 10.1215/01903659-2008-023.

Casas, Ana. "Memorias del desastre: la autoficción en la literatura de los hijos (y los nietos)." *La impronta autoficcional: (Re)fracciones del yo en la narrativa argentina contemporánea*, edited by José Manuel González Álvarez, Iberoamericana, 2018, pp. 97-115. DOI: 10.31819/9783954877522.

Flatley, Jonathan. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Harvard UP, 2008.

Kaminsky, Norma. "Trauma nacional, amnesia personal en *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*, de Patricio Pron." *Revista Estudios*, vol. 31, 2015, pp. 1-14. DOI: 10.15517/RE.Vol31.22656.

Kellman, Steven. *The Self-Begetting Novel*. Columbia UP, 1980.

Logie, Ilse. "Relatos autoficcionales de filiación que operan un descentramiento lingüístico: *Lenta biografía* de Sergio Chejfec, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* de Patricio Pron y *Más al sur* de Paloma Vidal." *La impronta autoficcional: (Re)fracciones del yo en la narrativa argentina contemporánea*, edited by José Manuel González Álvarez, Iberoamericana, 2018, pp. 59-74. DOI: 10.31819/9783954877522.

Maguire, Geoffrey. "Bringing Memory Home: Historical (Post)Memory and Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* (2011)." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2014, pp. 211-28.

Pron, Patricio. *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*. Mondadori, 2011.

Pron, Patricio. "Este libro no se propone ofrecer respuestas sino interrogantes." Interviewed by Silvina Friera. *Página 12*, 16 Apr. 2012.

Pron, Patricio. "La identidad de los hijos: Memoria y reconstrucción de la dictadura militar. Entrevista a Patricio Pron." Interviewed by Carina González. *A Contracorriente*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2012, pp. 391-96.

Sorensen, Diana. *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties*. Stanford UP, 2007.

Tala, Pamela. "Migración, retorno y lenguaje en la narrativa latinoamericana de hoy: *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* de Patricio Pron." *Literatura y Lingüística*, vol. 26, 2012, pp. 115-33. DOI: 10.29344/0717621X.26.40.

Thayer, Willy. "Crisis categorial de la universidad." *Revista Iberoamericana*, vol. 69, no. 202, 2003, pp. 95-102. DOI: 10.5195/reviberoamer.2003.5687.

Thomas, Dylan. *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas*. New Directions, 1953.

Tornero Salinas, Angélica. "Reconstrucciones de la identidad en *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*." *Anuario de Letras Modernas*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2020, pp. 65-83. DOI: 10.22201/ffyl.01860526p.2020.23.2.1139.