



Latin American Literary Review

VOLUME 51 / NUMBER 102 SPRING 2024

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The Mechanics of Uncertainty in Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre*

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ABSTRACT: Critical treatments of Argentinian author Rodolfo Walsh's watershed *Operación Masacre* (1957) often read the book as the explanatory force behind Walsh's later commitments to the militant leftist Peronist Montoneros. In this article, I attempt to complicate such interpretations somewhat: first, by analyzing the nonpartisan and deliberative qualities of the text which eschew political pigeonholing, and second, by remembering Walsh's shifting politics over the course of his life. Through close analysis of the text as well as later editions and paratexts, I show how Walsh's performance of uncertainty and verification on the page paradoxically strengthen his call for remedial action and lends moral urgency to the work.

RESUMEN: Los estudios críticos sobre *Operación Masacre* (1957), una obra fundamental del autor argentino Rodolfo Walsh, suelen encontrar en el libro la fuerza que explica los compromisos posteriores de Walsh con Montoneros, la militancia peronista de izquierda. En este artículo parto de esas interpretaciones e intento, en cierta medida, complejizarlas: en primer lugar, analizando las cualidades no partidistas y reflexivas del texto que eluden el encasillamiento político, y en segundo lugar, recordando los cambios políticos de Walsh a lo largo de su vida. A través de un análisis minucioso del texto, así como de ediciones posteriores y paratextos, muestro cómo la práctica que hace Walsh de la duda y la reflexión a través de la escritura fortalece, paradójicamente, el llamado a tomar medidas reparadoras y otorga urgencia moral a su obra.

KEYWORDS: Rodolfo Walsh, *Operación Masacre*, Argentina, nonpartisan, deliberation, uncertainty, politics, moral urgency, close reading

In December 1956, just before his thirtieth birthday, the Argentinian writer Rodolfo Walsh thought he had found the scoop of his life: six months earlier, on June 9, 1956, the police had taken a group of at least a dozen men to be executed in the middle of the night on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, and someone had lived to tell the story. Walsh discovers that the men were working-class civilians who had gathered that evening at a private home in the neighborhood of Florida, presumably to listen to the South American boxing championship on the radio. The police suspected the men of involvement in an uprising that same night to topple the new regime, which had replaced the ousted President Juan Perón. On a tip that the leader of the uprising was hiding in the house, they barged in with guns loaded. When they didn't find him, they rounded up whoever was there and had them interrogated at a nearby precinct. From the precinct, the men were loaded onto a truck and trailed by a police van. The caravan hit the highway and the men were ordered off on the side of the road, by a field littered with garbage. The police opened fire and killed as many as they could.

Walsh spends a year investigating and corroborating the story, writing about it in serialized articles which are published eventually as the book *Operación Masacre* in 1957. The experience marked a turning point for the writer, as he notes in his diary: "*Operación Masacre* cambió mi vida" (*Ese Hombre* 15). Critical accounts of Walsh's life and oeuvre tend to equate this moment with Walsh's politicization, the beginning of a story which would end with his assassination in 1977, a day after sending out his famously inflammatory "Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar." While such readings can be helpful for understanding Walsh's arc and the crucial role he played as a figure of the Argentinian left, they also have the potential to overlook what makes *Operación Masacre* itself so powerful. In what follows, I attempt to complicate such readings somewhat: first, by analyzing the nonpartisan and deliberative qualities of the text, and second, by remembering Walsh's shifting politics over the course of his life. Through close analysis of the book as well as later editions and paratexts, I show how Walsh's performance of uncertainty and verification on the page has the paradoxical effect of both strengthening his call for remedial action and lending the work its moral urgency.

Operación Masacre (1957): A Politics in Formation

Two days after hearing news of the survivor, Walsh acquired a copy of his statement accusing the police of murder and arranged for it to be published in a paper entitled *Propósitos*, which had a circulation of approximately 100,000 at the time (Ferro 145).¹ A day later, Walsh interviewed the survivor, Juan Carlos Livraga, for the first time. Then he kept digging. In January, February, and March of 1957, Walsh published five articles in the weekly oppositional newspaper *Revolución Nacional* stemming from his ongoing investigation.² Over the course of the following months, he collected interviews with more survivors, with relatives of the victims, and with authorities

involved in the execution. Walsh confirmed that, although an uprising was in fact staged on the night of June 9 in a number of towns and cities throughout Argentina, evidence of the men's participation was never presented and due process was completely ignored. The uprising, though suppressed almost immediately, prompted the de facto President Pedro Aramburu to declare martial law. But the announcement, Walsh discovers, was made at 12:32am on June 10, 1956, while the men had been arrested at 11:30pm on June 9, which meant that the execution was illegal (*Operación Masacre* 25).³ Five of the men apprehended at the house in Florida were killed in the botched execution: Nicolás Carranza, Vicente Rodríguez (35 years old), Carlos Lizaso (21 years old), Mario Brión (33 years old), and Francisco Garibotti (38 years old).⁴ The rest got away. Between May 27 and July 29, 1957, Walsh wrote nine articles for yet another oppositional periodical, *Mayoría*, laying out the results of his investigation.⁵ These pieces were eventually published together with a Prologue, Introduction, Obligatory Appendix, and Provisional Epilogue in November 1957 as the book *Operación Masacre* by the Buenos Aires-based Ediciones Sigla.

The July 1957 Prologue to *Operación Masacre* begins with a list of the periodicals where the articles were first published, followed by: "Estos nombres podrían indicar, en mí, una excluyente preferencia por la aguerrida prensa nacionalista. No hay tal cosa.... Investigué y relaté estos hechos tremendos para darlos a conocer en la forma más amplia, para que inspiren espanto, para que no pueda jamás volver a repetirse" (*OM* 185). Walsh defends against partisan interpretations of his work and is explicit in his wish for the 1957 edition of the book: he hopes that exposing these crimes in full detail will help prevent future ones like them. He continues:

Puedo si es necesario renunciar o postergar esquemas políticos cuya verdad es al fin conjetural. No puedo, ni quiero, ni debo renunciar a un sentimiento básico: la indignación ante el atropello, la cobardía y el asesinato.

También he aprendido que las distancias partidarias son quizá las más superficiales que separan a los hombres. (*OM* 186)

Walsh specifies the reason for writing as a fundamental indignation (or what he calls "insulto" in the book) in the face of abuse, cowardice, and murder. The 1957 Prologue privileges the visceral over the cerebral, unity over factions, depth over surface. In the next paragraph, he makes clear that the target of his writing is to confront not only the particular, unlawful execution of June 9th, 1956, but a more pervasive force he sees operating in the world:

El torturador que a la menor provocación se convierte en fusilador es un problema actual, un claro objetivo para ser aniquilado por la conciencia civil. Ignorábamos hasta ahora que tuviésemos esa fiera agazapada entre nosotros. Aun en la Alemania nazi fueron necesarios años

de miseria, miedo y bombardeos para sacarla a la luz. En la República Argentina bastaron seis horas de motín para que asomara su repugnante silueta. Aquí está, con su nombre circunstancial, para que todos la vean. Y obren en consecuencia. (OM 186)

Walsh makes a distinction between the grave injustice that hides in waiting over time, and the shape it takes in his contemporary moment. Understanding what kind of statement Walsh was making by resisting explicit political affiliation and generalizing injustice requires a sense of the historical context of his writing; I try to provide as much in the next two paragraphs.

Argentina's first military coup d'état took place in September 1930, when Walsh was three years old: President Hipólito Yrigoyen was nearly two years into his second term when General José Félix Uriburu took power.⁶ This coup launched what was later popularly referred to as *la década infame*, characterized largely by state corruption, as well as an acute increase in privatization and national debt.⁷ At the time, Juan Domingo Perón had just embarked on a promising military career but had refused to participate in Uriburu's coup. On account of his resistance, Perón remained in peripheral roles within the army for the next several years, serving as an attaché in Chile and being sent abroad to study the various social regimes of Europe—including Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany—before reengaging with national politics as the head of the Department of Labor under General Pedro Ramírez. Ramírez, whose 1943 coup had been successful and whose legacy included a declaration of war against the Axis Powers, was succeeded by General Edelmiro Julián Farrell, who served as de facto president from 1944 until 1946. It was Farrell who appointed Perón Vice President and Secretary of War.

As a decorated, charismatic general with a background in labor relations, Perón was well positioned for his sweeping presidential victory in 1946. He remained in office for the full six-year term and was reelected in 1952. Perón was no friend of the dominant Catholic Church, which objected to his interference in the realm of charitable organizations—the Argentinian congress had authorized the distribution of copious funds to under-resourced neighborhoods through the Eva Perón Foundation, established by Perón's late wife (Romero 128). Perón, in turn, did not appreciate the Church's involvement in politics or trade unions and had banned religious processions and religious education in schools (Romero 128).⁸ The country grew more divided and, on September 16, 1955, a military revolt resulted in Perón's ouster.⁹ The new regime called itself the Liberating Revolution and was headed by de facto president General Pedro Aramburu and de facto vice president Isaac Rojas. Despite Perón's exile, his followers continued to organize and, on the night of June 9, 1956, staged an uprising.¹⁰ Aramburu gave orders to quash revolt wherever it sprang up and declared martial law. Over the next three days, a total of twenty-seven civilians and military personnel—including General Valle, the

leader of the uprising, and his second-in-command, General Raúl Tanco—were executed in retaliation.

To those familiar with the hardened figure of Walsh as a militant Peronist revolutionary, it may be surprising to learn that he was initially in favor of the Liberating Revolution that deposed Perón in September 1955. He disapproved strongly of Perón's tamping down of civil liberties, as well as his economic policies, which Walsh believed relied excessively on foreign capital. In fact, when the first attempted coup in June 1955 failed to remove Perón from power, Walsh wrote an elegiac piece for *Leoplán*, a monthly, politically unaffiliated cultural publication, about three naval pilots whose plane had plummeted to the ground after being hit with a missile launched by Peronist forces.¹¹ Walsh makes sure to note that the pilot in charge, Captain Eduardo Estivariz, was advised against taking a non-commissioned officer by the name of Juan Rodríguez on board on account of his alleged Peronist sympathies: "Se pensaba que el suboficial Rodríguez, hombre de tierra adentro, podía ser adicto al gobierno depuesto. Quizá lo fuera. No siempre un rótulo político basta para definir a un hombre, para abarcarlo en toda su profundidad" (*El violento oficio* 29). Walsh's rejection of political labels in his treatment of the young man's potentially conflicted or at least complex loyalties is a precursor to the self-portrait he gives two years later in *Operación Masacre*.

Walsh had grown up wanting to be a pilot himself, but it was his brother Carlos who ended up flying planes for the Argentinian Navy.¹² The grandson of Irish immigrants, Walsh was born in the Province of Río Negro in northern Patagonia and attended a Catholic boarding school with his brother where the priests and nuns treated them severely. As a teenager, Walsh joined an anti-Communist nationalist group and finished high school in Buenos Aires. He then moved on to study philosophy and literature at the University of La Plata, in the capital of the Province of Buenos Aires, where he met his future wife Elina Tejerina before dropping out. By December 1956, Walsh was living with Elina and their two young daughters, Maria Victoria (Vicky) and Patricia, in La Plata.¹³ He had gained some success as a writer whose first book of crime fiction stories, *Variaciones en rojo* (1953), received the Buenos Aires Municipal Literature Prize, selected by renowned writers Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Elina ran a school for blind students and was the primary breadwinner, while Walsh earned his living doing freelance Spanish-English translations and writing the occasional literary review or article.

When he decided to investigate the June 9, 1956, secret execution, Walsh was charting new territory. Writing about real people who had been killed under terrifying circumstances for political reasons put pressure on his own politics. On June 5, 1957, after the first article of the series on the execution had already been published, Walsh's private letters suggested ambivalence: "¿Cómo gobierna Perón? En algunos aspectos, admirablemente. En otros, como un increíble idiota" (*EH* 34). Walsh was responding to Donald Yates, then a doctoral student at the University of Michigan who was writ-

ing his dissertation on Argentinian detective fiction. Yates, who would continue corresponding and collaborating with Walsh over the next several years, was trying to draw a correlation between Perón's former government and the proliferation of detective fiction in Argentina.¹⁴ Walsh does credit Perón with industrializing Argentina and increasing domestic production but rebukes him for getting rich from business transactions. Under Perón, Walsh argues, justice was corrupted:

Perón oprime a los partidos opositores, los molesta, los persigue sin necesidad, ahoga progresivamente la libertad de prensa. Su policía no llega en general al asesinato, pero utiliza libremente las torturas y los encarcelamientos arbitrarios. Los dirigentes políticos peronistas son en general mediocres, ambiciosos y obsecuentes. La maquinaria de propaganda estatal se hace asfixiante e invade hasta las escuelas primarias. La justicia está corrompida. (EH 35)

Walsh's analysis is divided into categories, beginning with the assessment of Perón's politics above, and continuing in the next paragraph to discuss "el aspecto social": on the plus side, Walsh determines that unions grew stronger and, despite their tendency to then become entangled in politics and disband, there had been an increase in wages overall. "En el aspecto cultural, Perón revela una inagotable torpeza. Se gana la abierta hostilidad de los intelectuales, aún de los llamados 'escritores sociales' que lógicamente debían apoyar un programa obrero" (EH 35-6). As a writer and intellectual himself, Walsh considered Perón's inability to connect with the intellectual class especially frustrating.

But Walsh's critique of Perón was relative to his critique of Perón's successor (after General Eduardo Lonardi's 50-day stint), General Pedro Aramburu, who was at the helm during the failed June 9, 1956, Peronist uprising.¹⁵ According to Walsh in 1957, the workers' movement under Aramburu "[s]e está destruyendo meticulosamente" (EH 37), disgruntling the majority of the people, and freedom of the press was being granted only to journalists who were not Peronists. Walsh notes that it could be pure coincidence that the first two books of detective fiction stories published in Argentina came out the same year that Perón assumed power, reminding Yates that for the first two or three years under Perón, there was basic freedom of the press. "Después, en cambio, muchos escritores buscaron en la novela policial un derivativo, una evasión de la realidad. Como no podían hablar de temas políticos y sociales, se dedicaron a inventar ficciones policiales" (EH 38). Walsh ultimately attributes the increase in detective fiction to the repression of dissent under Perón, but also discerns a serious competitor in the journalism which appears after the fall of Perón in 1955:

El lector de novelas policiales encuentra un material mucho más apasionante, vivo y actual en las innumerables

revistas y periódicos que con lujo de detalles describen la corrupción, los negociados y las arbitrariedades del peronismo. Esto dura unos meses en cuyo transcurso el gobierno de la revolución, que en un principio contó con bastante apoyo popular, acumula desacierto tras desacierto. Entonces nace la prensa política opositora, que en escaso tiempo conquista una inmensa masa de lectores. (EH 39)

The newspapers were so filled with juicy material about corruption and scandal under Perón that detective novels paled in comparison. In the meantime, however, the Liberating Revolution was self-destructing and unintentionally mobilizing an army of oppositional readers. Walsh brings his letter to Yates to a close: "He completado prácticamente mi investigación del 'caso Livraga' y he escrito un libro sobre el tema. Ante la dificultad de encontrar editor, lo estoy publicando desde el 27 de mayo últ. en la revista *Mayoría*, en una serie que se prolongará según mis cálculos hasta mediados de Julio" (EH 40). Even in his personal correspondence, Walsh feels obliged to explain that he publishes his articles in the Peronism-sympathizing *Mayoría* newspaper rather than a more impartial publication because he has encountered such difficulty finding a publisher, and not because of his politics.¹⁶

In his letters to Yates, Walsh parses the relationship between Perón's and Aramburu's respective rules, on the one hand, and cultural expression in Argentina, on the other. Clearly, by 1957, Walsh was already forming strong political positions, but he does not endow the narrator of the first book edition of *Operación Masacre* with the same. In the 1957 Introduction, Walsh situates himself as an unassuming narrator who, potentially like the reader, starts out with a basic curiosity but no knowledge of the facts.

La primera noticia sobre la masacre de José León Suárez llegó a mis oídos en la forma más casual, el 18 de diciembre de 1956. Era una versión imprecisa, propia del lugar—un café—en que la oí formulada. De ella se desprendía que un presunto fusilado durante el motín peronista del 9 y 10 de junio de ese año sobrevivía y no estaba en la cárcel.

La historia me pareció cinematográfica, apta para todos los ejercicios de la incredulidad. . . .

Pedí más datos. (OM 187)

With "La primera noticia" as the subject of the first sentence, it is the news that comes to Walsh, not Walsh who comes to the news, and it arrives by chance. Already in the second paragraph, Walsh likens the story to a movie, to fiction, something not to be believed. This is the first intimation Walsh gives of a deliberative process that vacillates between belief and incredulity, a process of doubt and verification that reinforces the notion of an undecided subjectivity which Walsh puts forward in the Prologue. He presents himself as

being drawn in by the facts regardless of the politics. Walsh's acknowledgment of how unbelievable the story seems both anticipates the reader's possible hesitation to believe him, and also lends his voice an appealing familiarity, vulnerability, and authenticity. He begins the penultimate section of the 1957 Introduction as follows:

Suspicias que preveo me obligan a declarar que no soy peronista, no lo he sido ni tengo intención de serlo. Si lo fuese, lo diría. No creo que ello comprometiese más mi comodidad o mi tranquilidad personal que esta publicación.

Tampoco soy ya un partidario de la revolución que —como tantos— creí libertadora.

Sé perfectamente, sin embargo, que bajo el peronismo no habría podido publicar un libro como éste, ni los artículos periodísticos que lo precedieron, ni siquiera intentar la investigación de crímenes policiales que también existieron entonces. Eso hemos salido ganando.

La mayoría de los periodistas y escritores llegamos, en la última década, a considerar al peronismo como un enemigo personal. Y con sobrada razón. Pero algo tendríamos que haber advertido: no se puede vencer a un enemigo sin antes comprenderlo. (OM 192-3)

Walsh declares that he is not a Peronist, nor a supporter of the so-called Liberating Revolution. He carves out a subjectivity that is defined not by partisanship, but by a desire and a need to understand. His deliberation is gripping precisely because he is politically ambivalent. Though he concedes that it would have been impossible to publish *Operación Masacre* under Perón, Walsh warns against the blanket disavowal of Peronist positions:

En los últimos meses he debido ponerme por primera vez en contacto con esos temibles seres —los peronistas— que inquietan los titulares de los diarios. Y he llegado a la conclusión... de que, por muy equivocados que estén, son seres humanos y debe tratárselos como tales. Sobre todo no debe dárseles motivos para que persistan en el error. Los fusilamientos, las torturas y las persecuciones son motivos tan fuertes que en determinado momento pueden convertir el error en verdad.

Más que nada temo el momento en que humillados y ofendidos empiecen a tener razón. Razón doctrinaria, amén de la razón sentimental o humana que ya les asiste, y que en último término es la base de aquélla. Y ese momento está próximo y llegará fatalmente, si se insiste en la desatinada política de revancha que se ha dirigido sobre todo contra los sectores obreros. La represión del peronismo, tal como ha sido encarada, no hace más que justificarlo a posteriori. Y esto no sólo es lamentable: es idiota. (OM 193)

Walsh leads the reader through his thinking, a path which requires an allowance for subtlety, contradiction, and doubt. He urges readers not to lend the doctrinaire Peronists reasons to be right and notes quickly that they are already right in a sentimental and humane way, so as not to dwell too long on the emotional part of his own otherwise logical and purportedly unbiased argument. He concludes with the rationalist's condemnation of idiocy. Finally, Walsh writes:

Reitero que esta obra no persigue un objetivo político ni mucho menos pretende avivar odios completamente estériles. Persigue —una entre muchas— un objetivo social: el aniquilamiento a corto o largo plazo de los asesinos impunes, de los torturadores, de los "técnicos" de la picana que permanecen a pesar de los cambios de gobierno, del hampa armada y uniformada. (OM 193)

Resolute in his conviction that his book lacks a political agenda, Walsh encourages his readers to take their moral cue from the gravity of the suffering to which he has borne witness, directly or indirectly, and rendered in writing. He asks that they ignore the changing regimes and put aside their own political allegiances; surely, he wagers, everyone can agree that those responsible for the death of these civilians should be held accountable. The remainder of the Introduction gives a broad account of Walsh's investigation into the June 9, 1956, execution. He ends with a statement of belief: "[S]ucede que creo, con toda ingenuidad y firmeza, en el derecho de cualquier ciudadano a divulgar la verdad que conoce, por peligrosa que sea. Y creo en este libro, en sus efectos" (OM 195). Already in 1957, Walsh both acknowledges the risks that can come with telling the story he is committed to telling, and also asserts belief in the possibility that his work might have an impact.

Confessions of a Nonbeliever

The fundamental attributes of the Prologue and Introduction of the 1957 original book publication of *Operación Masacre*—the impetus for writing as indignation, the explicitly nonpartisan desire for the book to act, a subjectivity that is grappling with and working through the facts of the crime—are even more prominent in the Prologue to the 1969 edition of *Operación Masacre*. This is the version of the Prologue that would be reprinted in 1972 and in every subsequent printing of the book. Walsh revises the opening:

La primera noticia sobre los fusilamientos clandestinos de junio de 1956 me llegó en forma casual, a fines de ese año, en un café de La Plata donde se jugaba al ajedrez, se hablaba más de Keres o Nimzowitch que de Aramburu y Rojas, y la única maniobra militar que gozaba de algún renombre era el ataque a la bayoneta de Schlechter en la apertura siciliana.

En ese mismo lugar, seis meses antes, nos había sorprendido una medianoche el cercano tiroteo con que empezó el asalto al comando de la segunda división y al departamento de policía, en la fracasada revolución de Valle. (OM 17)

The accidental nature of the news reaching Walsh remains, only now the news itself is buried in a long list of specific historical and regional references. Taken together with the disorienting temporal shifts between the night of the execution in June and the night the following December when Walsh finds out about it, the reader gets a sense of who he is writing to: Argentinian citizens of the time who know, for example, that "Valle" refers to General Juan José Valle. Walsh is appealing to the "conciencia civil," which he references in the original 1957 Prologue.

For readers beyond Walsh's contemporary Argentinian audience, it might help to know that Paul Keres, Aron Nimzowitsch, and Carl Schlechter were world-renowned chessmasters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the third sentence of the Prologue, Walsh has plunged into his memory of that eventful night, when he was sitting in La Plata: "Recuerdo cómo salimos en tropel, los jugadores de ajedrez, los jugadores de codillo y los parroquianos ocasionales, para ver qué festejo era ése, y cómo a medida que nos acercábamos a la plaza San Martín nos íbamos poniendo más serios y éramos cada vez menos..." (OM 17). With the first-person plural, he places himself among the regulars—"salimos... , nos acercábamos..., nos íbamos"—outside of the action and within the ambient disinterest of the café.¹⁷ "Para ver qué festejo era ése" introduces Walsh's characteristic irony and also positions him again as one of a mass of bystanders who now begin to peel off, "éramos cada vez menos," leaving Walsh alone:

Recuerdo la incoercible autonomía de mis piernas, la preferencia que, en cada bocacalle, demostraban por la estación de omnibus, a la que volvieron por su cuenta dos o tres veces, pero cada vez de más lejos, hasta que la última no tuvieron necesidad de volver porque habíamos cruzado la línea de fuego y estábamos en mi casa. (OM 18)

Something changes as Walsh's legs take on a life and a will of their own. A force beyond his control strips him of agency and determines his fate. When he reaches his home, he is struck by the sound of a soldier dying in the street: "Tampoco olvido que, pegado a la persiana, oí morir a un conscripto en la calle y ese hombre no dijo: 'Viva la patria' sino que dijo: 'No me dejen solo, hijos de puta'" (OM 18). Walsh brings the reader into his process of discovery by implying his own surprise at what he has heard.

Después no quiero recordar más, ni la voz del locutor en la madrugada anunciando que dieciocho civiles han sido ejecutados en Lanús, ni la ola de sangre que anega al país

hasta la muerte de Valle. Tengo demasiado para una sola noche. Valle no me interesa. Perón no me interesa, la revolución no me interesa. ¿Puedo volver al ajedrez?

Puedo. Al ajedrez y a la literatura fantástica que leo, a los cuentos policiales que escribo, a la novela "seria" que planeo para dentro de algunos años, y a otras cosas que hago para ganarme la vida y que llamo periodismo, aunque no es periodismo. La violencia me ha salpicado las paredes, en las ventanas hay agujeros de balas, he visto un coche agujereado y adentro un hombre con los sesos al aire, pero es solamente el azar lo que me ha puesto eso ante los ojos. Pudo ocurrir a cien kilómetros, pudo ocurrir cuando yo no estaba. (OM 18)

What Walsh outlines in these opening paragraphs is the scene of his own conversion, one riddled with doubt. He is overwhelmed by the violence of the night of the uprising, he wants out, he claims disinterest in politics and revolution, he resists, he wants to go back to chess, to games instead of reality. But just as his incoercible legs move him towards the gunshots, the story lures him in, the reality of it magnetic. Can he go back to his old life? This awakening must be reversible. He could go back to making up stories and the occasional article, though he notes that what he has written until this point is not journalism. True journalism, Walsh suggests, is a story that confronts injustice, has high stakes for real people, and needs to get out into the world—not like a fictional novel, whose potential to be "serious" he dismisses. Walsh ends the paragraph with a counterfactual like the one he began with—he could have never witnessed the violence of the uprising, it could've happened when he wasn't there, just as he could have never learned of the execution. Revisiting the counterfactual works to emphasize both the claim for authenticity that Walsh is making—that *this really happened* and *it happened in this way*—as well as the warning that *it could easily happen to you or someone you love*.

Walsh was compelled beyond his own resistance and uncertainty to respond as he did, just as a reader might be compelled to respond under similar circumstances.¹⁸ He describes his experience as a moment when he is fundamentally changed as a person and he is urging readers—through an appeal to something beyond their political inclinations—to join him in this transformation that is difficult but ultimately rewarding.¹⁹ The call to belief and to action is subtle and softened by reflection and deliberation. Walsh's performance of a reluctance to get drawn into the story together with an inability to turn away, gives readers the impression that it was difficult if unavoidable, even for him, to recognize the truth.

Once he has flashed back to the night of the June uprising and his conflicted desire to resume his old life, Walsh returns to the present of the first line of the Prologue:

Seis meses más tarde, una noche asfixiante de verano, frente a un vaso de cerveza, un hombre me dice:

—Hay un fusilado que vive.

No sé qué es lo que consigue atraerme en esa historia difusa, lejana, erizada de improbabilidades. No sé por qué pido hablar con ese hombre, por qué estoy hablando con Juan Carlos Livraga.

Pero después sé. Miro esa cara, el agujero en la mejilla, el agujero más grande en la garganta, la boca quebrada y los ojos opacos donde se ha quedado flotando una sombra de muerte. Me siento insultado, como me sentí sin saberlo cuando oí aquel grito desgarrador detrás de la persiana.

Livraga me cuenta su historia increíble; la creo en el acto.

Así nace aquella investigación, este libro. (OM 19)

"Hay un fusilado que vive" becomes emblematic of the story, the turn of phrase itself a contradiction: "un fusilado" denotes one who has been executed by firing squad, but in this case, the executed man was alive. Everything about the story as Walsh tells it borders on the contradictory, the improbable, and the inexplicable. In his repetition of "No sé," he locates the explanation for his attractions, desires, and actions elsewhere, once more displacing his own agency. Something unidentifiable that he can't quite grasp is pulling him in. In retrospect, though, he can identify it: "Pero después sé." As soon as he is faced with the horror of what remains of Livraga's face, Walsh feels insulted as he now realizes he felt when he heard the conscript dying in the street during the uprising. The narration turns around Walsh's gradual arrival at knowledge and comprehension, and the reader's engagement depends on Walsh's ability to make the story of that arrival captivating. Certainty on the heels of uncertainty, a vacillation that keeps the reader's attention: "No sé.... No sé.... Pero después sé," followed by "su historia increíble; la creo en el acto." Ultimately, he describes himself taking a leap of faith with the survivor's testimony: he believes the unbelievable, and he is converted.

Even though this Prologue as we know it only appeared for the first time in 1969, when Walsh was already involved in Peronist workers' movements, he withholds political posturing. Professing his Peronist sympathies would have been not only ineffective as a means of engaging an ordinary reader—hearing a platform they've heard so many times couldn't possibly move them unless they already shared his positions—but anachronistic with respect to Walsh's own perspectives when the book was first published in 1957. As Michael Wood astutely notes, Walsh's

initial indifference to Argentinian politics underwrites a stylistic virtue. He retains... a sort of shock at behaviour it has become easy to take for granted, to be horrified by only as a sort of moral display put on for ourselves. Of course dictators don't respect the rule of law; neither do democracies when it doesn't suit them. Of course there

is torture everywhere. We can hang on to our opposition to these practices but hardly to our old surprise. This is what Walsh manages to do, in the midst of his dawning despair... (Wood XI)

Walsh attempts to renew the reader's surprise at injustice by modeling it himself in his narration. The explicit demand for action and statement of belief in the impact that the book can have in the 1957 Prologue and Introduction are replaced by a moving narrative of personal conversion in the 1969 Prologue. Though Walsh's own politics may have veered towards support for Peronist and working-class causes, he acknowledges through his editorial decisions that the force of a narrative of doubt and revelation, uncertainty and faith, is far more persuasive than that of a political screed.

The Politics of Technique

The evolution of Walsh's literary practice can be set within the greater context of the documentary impulse of the time, emerging in forms such as the crónica, testimonio, and New Journalism in the Americas. In *Latin American Adventures in Literary Journalism* (2019), Pablo Calvi argues that the reportage and literary journalism of Walsh, Gabriel García Márquez, and their contemporary Juan Carlos Onetti, an Uruguayan writer who wrote both fiction and journalism, largely shaped the genre of testimonio—testimonial literature—and eventually the fiction of Latin America in the 1960s.²⁰ Scholar and writer Daniel Link names *Operación Masacre* as a non-fiction novel which predates Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) by nine years, but also notes that in 1955 the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* had published twenty daily exposés of government corruption by García Márquez which were released in 1970 as a book—arguably a nonfiction novel—*Relato de un naufragio*.²¹ Nonetheless, Link sees Walsh as a critical figure for the nonfiction genres proliferating in the Americas at the time, and considers the September 1955 coup of the Liberating Revolution to be a pivotal moment, as Walsh moved away from fiction towards journalism.²²

There have been many attempts to categorize the genre of *Operación Masacre*. Angélica Franken identifies a meeting of testimonial writing and melodrama—"el relato esencialmente periodístico y testimonial es penetrado por lo emotivo" (81)—whereas Diego Alonso sees less of a penetration by the emotional, and more of a synergistic relationship between the narrative, emotional, even melodramatic aspects of Walsh's testimonial writing, on the one hand, and the more journalistic and legalistic, on the other: "la tensión más productiva de la obra de Walsh [es] una tensión que su escritura testimonial asume dialécticamente, verificando a través de pruebas materiales las hipótesis formuladas en la narración" (105). The question of genre is also taken up by Ana María Amar Sánchez, who characterizes *Operación Masacre* as a non-fiction departure from the traditional crónica: "[L]a no-ficción *narrativiza* (o 'ficcionaliza') a los protagonistas de los hechos. Es decir, construye una nar-

ración y lleva a primer plano, los 'enfoca de cerca' e individualiza, a aquellos *sujetos* que en un informe periodístico quedarían en el anonimato" (48). Amar Sánchez claims that the subject in nonfiction literature blurs the boundary between the narrator—whom she equates with the writer—and the real person about whom they are writing.

Part of the challenge of generically classifying *Operación Masacre* lies in the structure of the book itself. The definitive, posthumous 1984 edition of *Operación Masacre* is composed of four sections: "PRÓLOGO" (8 pages); "PRIMERA PARTE: LAS PERSONAS" (28 pages portraying the victims of the execution); "SEGUNDA PARTE: LOS HECHOS" (66 pages relating the events of the night in question); "TERCERA PARTE: LA EVIDENCIA" (47 pages of testimonies by state officials and others, character portraits, and the presentation of incriminatory evidence); and "APÉNDICES" (55 pages of paratexts, including Walsh's 1977 "Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar").²³ Walsh certainly uses affective and graphic language to enhance the vividness, theatricality, and suspense of the narrative, sometimes to the point of melodrama, in the Prologue, Part I, and Part II. Yet he builds his case against the de facto State using hyper-rational and legal terms both in Part III and the Appendices. The subjects in the Prologue of *Operación Masacre* are not as comingled as Amar Sánchez suggests, but the fluid alternation between subjectivities is a defining feature of Walsh's writing in Parts I and II.

Rather than trying to pin down the genre of *Operación Masacre*, my intention in the current analysis is to highlight the stylistic means Walsh uses to enhance the sense of political complexity within the narrative. To that end, I turn now to a close reading of the first portrait Walsh presents in "LAS PERSONAS":

1. CARRANZA

Nicolás Carranza no era un hombre feliz, esa noche del 9 de junio de 1956. Al amparo de las sombras acababa de entrar en su casa, y es posible que algo lo mordiera por dentro. Nunca lo sabremos del todo. Muchos pensamientos duros el hombre se lleva a la tumba, y en la tumba de Nicolás Carranza ya está reseca la tierra. (OM 29)

Walsh tells us definitively that Carranza was not happy that night, but then states that we can't know for sure or completely whether something was gnawing at him inside—"nunca lo sabremos del todo." Just as in the Prologue, Walsh embraces rather than eschews what can't be known, using it to create intrigue and also give shape to what *can* be known.²⁴ Most striking in the case of Carranza is Walsh's ability to bring the reader closer to the truth of Carranza's thoughts precisely by gesturing at what can't be known about them. In the continuation of his depiction, Walsh moves to purely imagining the experience of life on a typical winter night from Carranza's perspective:

Por un momento, sin embargo, pudo olvidar sus preocupaciones. Tras el azorado silencio inicial, un coro de voces chillonas se alzó para recibirlo. Seis hijos tenía Nicolás Carranza. Los más pequeños se habrán prendido a sus rodillas. La mayor, Elena, habrá puesto la cabeza al alcance de la mano del padre. La ínfima Julia Renée —cuarenta días apenas— dormitaba en su cuna.

Su compañera, Berta Figueroa, alzó los ojos de la máquina de coser. Le sonrió con mezcla de pena y alegría. Siempre era igual. Siempre llegaba así su hombre: huido, nocturno, fugaz. (OM 29)

Walsh passes briefly into Carranza's mind—"pudo olvidar sus preocupaciones"—and into that of his wife—"Siempre era igual"—to create uncertain, undecidable subjectivities that are substantiated just enough to give the reader an idea of what is lost when they are harmed or, in this case, killed. After three introductory paragraphs about Carranza's family, Walsh reveals Carranza's political allegiance:

Era peronista Nicolás Carranza. Y estaba prófugo.

Por eso, cuando en furtivos regresos como éste algún chico del barrio le gritaba al encontrarlo: "¡Adiós, don Carranza!", él... apresuraba el paso y no contestaba.

—¡Eh, don Carranza! —lo seguía la curiosidad.

Pero don Carranza —silueta baja y maciza en la noche— se alejaba rápidamente por la calle de tierra, levantado hasta los ojos las solapas del sobretodo.

Y ahora estaba sentado en el sillón del comedor, hamacando en las rodillas a Berta Josefa, de dos años, y a Carlos Alberto, de tres, y acaso a Juan Nicolás, de cuatro —toda una escalera de pibes tenía, don Carranza—, hamacándolos e imitando el fragor y el silbato de los trenes que manejaban hombres como él, gente de esa barriada ferroviaria. (OM 30)

Unlike the majority of the men who were rounded up that night, Carranza was a known Peronist and a fugitive from the law, which had the potential to make him a less sympathetic victim to those readers who considered themselves allied with the reigning military junta. Although Walsh begins with Carranza, he waits three paragraphs to introduce these facts about his politics, which gives the impression that the information is essential not for political reasons, but rather for any attempt at an accurate character description. Walsh and the reader need to know that Carranza is an avowed Peronist to be able to enter his interiority and have a visceral comprehension of the experience of walking through one's own neighborhood with lapels turned up for fear of being recognized. After a flight into Carranza's mind, Walsh switches back to the scene he had begun to depict: Carranza with his children piled upon him, rocking them back and forth as though he were a train they'd just boarded.

We already knew that Carranza had six kids, but now we have a renewed appreciation of the staircase full of children: here is who will be left behind, here is what is at stake in the loss of this person's life. Walsh describes the relationship between Carranza and his eleven-year-old daughter Elena, "la preferida," with the tenderness of a father of two young girls—his own daughters were only several years younger than her when Walsh was first writing the articles that would become *Operación Masacre*. Given that Walsh was not nearly as politically committed as he would later become, the passages channel an eerie premonition: his older daughter, Vicki, would later join a militant Peronist group and die by suicide to avoid capture.

In Part II, "LOS HECHOS," Walsh steps back into his role as knowing narrator of the events that would unfold the same night and in the following days, keeping in motion the parallel stories of the uprising as seen from the subjective perspectives of both the military authorities and the men being rounded up. After hours spent under interrogation, the group is loaded up again and taken to the field in José León Suárez. The Buenos Aires Province Police Department Chief Inspector Rodolfo Rodríguez Moreno shouts: "¡De frente y codo con codo!":

Carranza se da vuelta, con el rostro desencajado. Se pone de rodillas frente al pelotón.

—Por mis hijos... —solloza—. Por mis hi . . .

Un vómito violento le corta la súplica. (OM 92)

No detail is spared. The alliteration of violent vomiting maintains the relentless velocity of a chaotic bloodbath, Carranza's plea swallowed by his own retching. Walsh adds more descriptions of the scene—screaming and crying, orders to shoot, men begging for mercy, attempts to run or play dead on the ground while gunshot wounds bleed out—before returning to Carranza at the bottom of the next page in two short sentences that make up their own paragraph: "A Carranza, que sigue de rodillas, le apoyan el fusil en la nuca y disparan. Más tarde le acribillan todo el cuerpo" (OM 93). The succinctness of Walsh's prose is excruciating: a reminder of Carranza's life—Peronist or not—cut horrifyingly, stupidly short.

Closing Arguments

The deliberative, grappling, nonpartisan voice and powerful modes of depicting grave injustice form the backbone of Walsh's demand for action, which originates in the July 1957 Prologue to the first edition: "Escribí este libro para que fuese publicado, para que *actuar*, no para que se incorporase al vasto número de las ensoñaciones de ideólogos" (OM 185). Walsh wanted the story of *Operación Masacre* to do more than bear witness and offer empathy to those left behind: the book itself was meant to seek justice for the victims and their families. From Walsh's perspective, he hadn't succeeded as long as the Chief of Police Desiderio A. Fernández Suárez was still in office and as long as the families of the victims had not been duly

compensated. As the years went on and justice was not served, Walsh's demand for action necessarily evolved. He knew that, realistically, the time for immediate action to compensate the victims of the 1956 execution had passed. In the Epilogue to the 1964 edition, he lists his meager but ultimately dashed hopes for the original publication:

Pretendía que el gobierno... por boca del más distraído, del más inocente de sus funcionarios reconociera que esa noche del 10 de junio de 1956, en nombre de la República Argentina, se cometió una atrocidad.

Pretendía que, a esos hombres que murieron, cualquier gobierno de este país les reconociera que la justicia de este país los mató por error, por estupidez, por ceguera, por lo que sea. Yo sé que a ellos no les importa, a los muertos. Pero había una cuestión de decencia, no sé cómo decirlo. . . .

En 1957 dije con grandilocuencia: "Este caso está en pie, y seguirá en pie todo el tiempo que sea necesario, meses o años". De esa frase culpable pido retractarme. Este caso ya no está en pie, es apenas un fragmento de historia, este caso está muerto. . . .

Se comprenderá, de todas maneras, que haya perdido algunas ilusiones, la ilusión en la justicia, en la reparación, en la democracia, en todas esas palabras, y finalmente en lo que una vez fue mi oficio, y ya no lo es.

Releo la historia que ustedes han leído. Hay frases enteras que me molestan, pienso con fastidio que ahora la escribiría mejor.

¿La escribiría? (OM 221-2)

One could understand, Walsh writes, how he might have lost faith in justice, reparations, and democracy, given the lack of action taken in the past seven years since he first brought these facts to light. Instead of conceding complete failure, however, Walsh ends on a hypothetical: if given the chance to do it again, knowing that it wouldn't make any substantive difference for the lives of the victims and their families or the state of the country, *would he write it?* Echoing the counterfactual formulations of the Prologue, Walsh provokes the reader with an unanswerable, performative question. Asking this question—whether of himself or his readers—underscores both Walsh's feelings of dejection about the book's lack of impact and the fact that, whatever his misgivings, he has continued to authorize publication. While he does not hold out hope for that remedial action, he betrays a different object of hope in his insistence, through every new edition of *Operación Masacre*, that the story needs to be told.

In the fifteen years that passed between the first edition of the book in 1957 and the final one during his lifetime, in 1972, Walsh wrote for Prensa Latina, founded in 1959 in Cuba as part of Che Guevara's socialist vision for Latin America and beyond. Che's fellow Ar-

gentinian-born Jorge Masetti directed the agency, recruiting writers like Walsh and García Márquez. It was while working for Prensa Latina in Cuba that Walsh deciphered CIA telex codes which helped Fidel Castro prepare for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Separated from his wife Elina, Walsh became increasingly involved in working-class revolutionary movements for justice in Latin America, traveling beyond Cuba to Bolivia and Guatemala and more to report on actions there. In 1969, he published another book of investigative journalism, *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*, about the murder of a union leader in Buenos Aires whose perpetrators had gone unpunished.²⁵ And in 1970, he began working with the Peronist Armed Forces and eventually the leftist Peronist Montoneros group.²⁶ In the introduction to the 2008 revised edition of Walsh's *El violento oficio de escribir*, Daniel Link writes: "*Dicen que participó en prácticamente todas las acciones militares de Montoneros, pero lo cierto es que sólo colaboró (y siempre en su área específica, Inteligencia) en algunas pocas*" (383). Nonetheless, Walsh was partly responsible for Montonero actions, including bombings that resulted in casualties, and was firmly on the militant left towards the end of his life as he watched friends and colleagues vanish.

Walsh's growing militancy is reflected in some of the changes to the 1972 edition of *Operación Masacre*. Chapter 37—"Aramburu y el juicio histórico," entirely new to the book—begins with a description of the execution of Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, de facto president of Argentina from 1955 to 1958, by a group of Montoneros: "El 29 de mayo de 1970 un comando montonero secuestró en su domicilio al teniente general Aramburu. Dos días después esa organización lo condenaba a muerte y enumeraba los cargos que el pueblo peronista alzaba contra él" (*OM* 175). Among the first two reasons for his execution, Walsh notes, were the unlawful killings of the night of June 9, 1956, which took place under Aramburu's presidency. He neither justifies nor condemns the execution of the former president but, after a comprehensive account of not only the political but economic damages Aramburu's reign inflicted upon the Argentinian people, makes his position clear:

Quince años después será posible hacer el balance de esa política: un país dependiente y estancado, una clase obrera sumergida, una rebeldía que estalla por todas partes. Esa rebeldía alcanza finalmente a Aramburu, lo enfrenta con sus actos, paraliza la mano que firmaba empréstitos, proscripciones y fusilamientos. (*OM* 178)

Perhaps ironically, the emergence of a more explicit political allegiance to a working-class Peronist movement in his final years has the adverse effect of rhetorically diluting his demand for change. The deliberative movement of the Prologue, which signaled a subjectivity coming to terms with and actively thinking through a problem or question on the page, is gone, and instead the reader is presented with a *fait accompli*, a suggestion that some kind of restitutive balance has been reached. Where the judicial system

failed, History intervened.²⁷ But Walsh does not alter the majority of the book—it is only in this final chapter and latter paratexts that a more strident political agenda comes into view. Once the writer has hooked the reader with the thrilling personal struggle of the Prologue, the evocative descriptions of the victims in Part I, and the dramatic events of the night of the execution in Part II, he has sufficiently captured her attention and earned her trust to deliver the more analytical and incriminatory Part III, which concludes with Chapter 37. The 1972 edition of *Operación Masacre* is the work of a writer and rhetorician who recognized both the power of a narrative of transformation, as well as the need for abundant evidence if one is ever to persuade a jury of readers.

Six months after his daughter Vicki's death, having absconded to the nearby city of Tigre on the Paraná Delta with his romantic partner Lilia Ferreyra, Walsh ventured into Buenos Aires incognito to meet a fellow Montonero. The contact had disclosed the location of their meeting under torture and Walsh was gunned down on the street by agents of the reigning junta, his body disappeared. As of this writing, it has not been recovered. On March 24, 1977—the day before his death—Walsh sent his now famous "Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar" to local and foreign press outlets. The letter begins:

1. La censura de prensa, la persecución a intelectuales, el allanamiento de mi casa en el Tigre, el asesinato de amigos queridos y la pérdida de una hija que murió combatiéndolos, son algunos de los hechos que me obligan a esta forma de expresión clandestina después de haber opinado libremente como escritor y periodista durante casi treinta años.

El primer aniversario de esta Junta Militar ha motivado un balance de la acción de gobierno en documentos y discursos oficiales, donde lo que ustedes llaman aciertos son errores, los que reconocen como errores son crímenes y lo que omiten son calamidades. (*OM* 225)

The events and facts that are obliging him to write take the subject position, just as the news of the secret execution does in the Prologue. But now the tone is direct and accusatory. Walsh sets out to convey the gravity of injustice by listing the Junta's various failings in numbers, each item on the balance sheet followed by paragraphs of explication. He begins by addressing the Junta's abuse of language to cover up their crimes and goes on in items 2, 3, and 4 to refer to the mass executions of civilians that have gone largely unseen and unreported. The paragraphs of explication are punctuated by heavily researched statistics as well as more philosophical interventions. In his use of "ustedes" and its related verb and pronoun forms, Walsh addresses the Junta directly, appealing to their status as humans with agency and therefore choice. Walsh's stubborn faith in humanity peeks through in his intimation of the pos-

sibility that one could act otherwise. The remaining paragraphs of the letter relate to the economic violence—a 722-percent increase in the price of animal products, for example—perpetrated by the Junta upon Argentinians, which Walsh considers on a par with if not worse than the physical violence he has already described in detail. He ends by claiming that the revelation of the truths being currently hidden from the public will only embolden the resistance. The final paragraph states:

Éstas son las reflexiones que en el primer aniversario de su infausto gobierno he querido hacer llegar a los miembros de esa Junta, sin esperanza de ser escuchado, con la certeza de ser perseguido, pero fiel al compromiso que asumí hace mucho tiempo de dar testimonio en momento difíciles.

Rodolfo Walsh. –C.I. 2845022
Buenos Aires, 24 de marzo de 1977. (*OM* 236)

Walsh describes the words that have preceded this final paragraph as reflections, not denouncements or accusations, even though that is what they are. He makes a familiar if crucial distinction in his final sentence, one that juxtaposes hope that his words will be read or heard, with faithfulness or loyalty to his commitment to bear witness. This commitment is not dependent on the knowledge or even the belief that doing so will bring about improved conditions. Positioning himself from the start not as an activist or even specifically a journalist, he claims his identity as a writer representing no political party but himself alone as he signs off with his own unique ID number.

The addition of Walsh's open letter to every posthumous edition of *Operación Masacre* serves to draw a direct line between the person who wrote the articles that would become the book in 1957, and the person who wrote the open letter twenty years later. While the far more explicitly political 1977 text is certainly an accurate reflection of Walsh's thinking before he was killed, it tends to overshadow the searching nature of the 1957 edition, which is integral to the original text's potency. On the other hand, the addition of the letter highlights the prophetic quality of Walsh's 1957 text, its futurity instantiated by the fascist and cruel policies of Argentina's military junta starting in 1976. A reader in 2024 knows that Walsh was killed the day after posting the letter by the very forces of domination that he spent much of his life fighting, and that another six years of vicious—and secret—bloodshed would follow before the return of democracy in 1983. A 2024 reader might know, as well, that Ediciones de la Flor only began publishing *Operación Masacre* with the open letter included in 1984, once the junta had dissolved.

Although the argument put forth in these pages could be interpreted as an effort to contradict readings of Walsh as an exemplar of the Argentinian and greater Latin American left of the mid-20th Century, my aim is not to defang Walsh as a political figure, but rather to show through evidence of his own ambivalence, vacillation, and

transformation, how hard-earned his politics were. When *Operación Masacre* is considered in its historical context, Walsh emerges as a maker who looked to words and eventually action as a way into and out of the horrific injustice of his time. The fortune of a relatively comfortable childhood and a warm welcome into the bourgeois literary world had kept Walsh at some distance from such violence and from corrupt state authorities.²⁸ *Operación Masacre* brought the horror in close, converted Walsh the writer and the person and set him in a new direction: he now felt called to reveal the truth about abuses of power. The risks Walsh took and the fate he ultimately met are all too relevant today, as journalists continue to be murdered with impunity for reporting on state-sanctioned atrocities.²⁹

In a late diary entry, Walsh writes that what he needs most to continue with his work is ample time:

Soy lento, he tardado quince años en pasar del mero nacionalismo a la izquierda; lustros en aprender a armar un cuento, a sentir la respiración de un texto; sé que me falta mucho para poder decir instantáneamente lo que quiero, en su forma óptima; pienso que la literatura es, entre otras cosas, un avance laborioso a través de la propia estupidez. (*EH* 15)

Once more, Walsh names stupidity as his nemesis. While he may have yearned for the ability to say instantly and directly what he wanted, in its best form, it is Walsh's indirect, deliberative process in *Operación Masacre* that makes his writing breathe and captivate a reader. The book would be far less compelling if it didn't dually serve as an index of Walsh's gradual reckoning with a series of military regimes that were ruining his beloved country. As he trudges through the mud, Walsh relies on his commitment to bearing witness despite the odds of justice being served. Recall the 1964 epilogue: "Pretendía que, a esos hombres que murieron, cualquier gobierno de este país les reconociera que la justicia de este país los mató por error, por estupidez, por ceguera, por lo que sea. Yo sé que a ellos no les importa, a los muertos. Pero había una cuestión de decencia, no sé cómo decirlo" (*OM* 221). "Por lo que sea"—for whatever reason—reminds the reader of one of the more difficult mysteries Walsh tried to solve over the course of his life. At bottom, it was still hard for him to understand how it is that people can be so indecent.

NOTES

¹ Roberto Ferro writes that *Propósitos*, founded by journalist and intellectual Leónidas Barletta, “se distribuía en los kioscos” (145) and possessed an “indudable filiación izquierdista” (146): “Desde sus páginas se opuso a los golpes militares, criticó a Juan Perón y valoró a Evita, denunció las maniobras para privatizar la producción y explotación del petróleo...” (145-6).

² *Revolución Nacional* was run by Dr. Cerruti Costa, a known Peronist sympathizer, and had a circulation of not more than 3,000 copies. For the third article—“La verdad sobre los fusilados” (February 19, 1957)—of this series, however, the newspaper printed 1,000 posters and 20,000 pamphlets with the hopes of doubling their normal circulation (Ferro 154). In his introduction to the 1957 edition to the book, Walsh makes a point of noting that he published with *Revolución Nacional* because Cerruti Costa was the only one with the courage to print him at the time: “Espero que el doctor Cerruti no me culpe de ingratitud si digo que el hecho de que le llevara ese material no implica una preferencia o una simpatía por la línea política en que él está colocado. Como periodista, no me interesa demasiado la política” (OM 192).

³ Walsh's source was Eduardo Suárez, who worked at the State Radio and was subsequently fired for helping with the investigation.

⁴ Walsh never notes Nicolás Carranza's age at the time of his death.

⁵ Ferro writes: “A fines de abril [1957], Tulio y Bruno Jacovella, los editores de la revista *Mayoría*, deciden publicar *Operación Masacre* en entregas semanales.... En esos años, *Mayoría* era un semanario ilustrado de gran circulación, portavoz de los sectores nacionalistas más cercanos al peronismo” (157).

⁶ Yrigoyen's first elected term had run from 1916-1922, after which Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear held office for the designated six-year term, until 1928. Yrigoyen was reelected in 1928 but then fell ill and was replaced for a day by his Vice President Enrique Martínez, before ultimately being ousted by the coup.

⁷ The term was coined by Argentinian historian José Luis Torres with his 1945 book of the same title.

⁸ Romero elaborates on this period: “The Peronization of public administration and education advanced with the demands for affiliation to the party, wearing of the Peronist ‘badge,’ obligatory mourning for Eva Perón, pressures to make contributions to the latter's foundation, and demonstrations in support of Perón and his wife, whose names emblazoned railroad stations, hospitals, streets, plazas, cities, and entire provinces. The Peronization even affected the armed forces.... The space for political opposition was reduced to a minimum, both in the press and in congress...” (125).

⁹ Priests were arrested and an Argentinian flag burned at a public celebration of Corpus Christi on June 8, 1955. The government blamed the procession marchers for the burning of the flag, but it was later revealed that members of the Buenos Aires police were in fact responsible (Romero 128-9). On June 16, 1955, Perón's opponents within the military and the government saw an opportunity to attack: Argentinian Navy jets flew over the Plaza de Mayo Square in central Buenos Aires with the intention of bombarding the Casa Rosada, the Presidential Palace just outside the Square, and assassinating Perón (Romero 129). As Peronist forces held them back, the jets dropped over a hundred bombs—between nine and fourteen tons of explosives—on thousands of civilians who had gathered in support of Perón, killing between three and four hundred people. (See *Bombardeo del 16 de junio de 1955: edición revisada*.)

¹⁰ Perón traveled to Paraguay, Panamá, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic before settling in Franco's Spain in 1960.

¹¹ The article was entitled “2-0-12 no vuelve” in reference to the ID number of one of the pilots, Captain Eduardo Estivariz. Scholar Claudia Fino reads Walsh's tone as conveying not anti-Peronism but rather sympathy for the cause of the hero writ large, whether they be loyal to the state or the rebels. For Fino's perspective, see Anguita and Cecchini, “Los textos donde Rodolfo Walsh elogiaba a la aviación naval que se levantó contra Perón.”

¹² Walsh's sister, Patricia, became a nun.

¹³ In the Introduction to Enriqueta Muñiz's *Historia de una investigación: Operación Masacre de Rodolfo Walsh: una revolución de periodismo (y amor)*, the journalist Diego Igal suggests that Walsh and his wife Elina Tejerina were separated at the time of the investigation that led to *Operación Masacre* (see page 51), and that Walsh developed a romantic relationship with Enriqueta Muñiz, a young journalist who collaborated with him on the investigation, and to whom every edition of *Operación Masacre* is dedicated. *Historia de una investigación* is a compilation of Muñiz's diary of the investigation as well as several personal letters from Walsh to her, preceded by a prologue from Daniel Link which focuses largely on Walsh and his relationship to literature and action, and Igal's Introduction, which focuses primarily on Muñiz's life and her changing relationship to Walsh over the years. Igal cites Walsh's daughter Patricia who says, “Claro que para entonces mi padre ya estaba casado con mi madre, tenían dos hijas, mi hermana Vicky y yo y vivíamos en La Plata. Creo que Enriqueta nunca quiso aclarar nada sobre esa posible relación. Las personas que conocí que la entrevistaron me transmitieron siempre lo mismo. No quería hablar. Supongo también que no compartió las decisiones políticas que luego mi padre fue tomando a lo largo del resto de su vida” (64). Despite years of reluctance to comment in depth on her relationship with Walsh, Muñiz left careful instructions for her heirs about what to publish of her diary; she passed away in 2013 at the age of seventy-nine and *Historia de una investigación* was published by Planeta in 2019.

Walsh's relationships to women are explored at length in *Historia de una investigación* as well as in Maria Moreno's *Oración*. There is a wider literature as well about the sexism rampant in leftist guerrilla movements that contradicts any purported commitment to equality, which I will not address in this article, both for reasons of space and also because, from what I have read about and by Walsh to date, I do not consider this literature essential to every analysis of his work.

¹⁴ A compilation of the correspondence between Yates and Walsh, *Rodolfo Walsh: Cartas a Donald Yates*, was published in 2021. See Aguirre, “Cartas de Walsh antes de Walsh.”

¹⁵ Walsh begins his analysis: “Veamos ahora lo que hace el gobierno de Aramburu,” and goes on to cite Aramburu's executive decree in 1956, which “pena con cárcel a todo el que públicamente elogie al peronismo” (EH 36).

¹⁶The series of articles itself is published with the heading: "Un libro que no encuentra editor."

¹⁷Walsh's depiction of himself as a chess-playing writer is more than just an allusion to one of his favorite hobbies. In his 1957 letter to Yates, Walsh writes: "El peronismo... no reprimió la literatura policial, inofensiva para él. Hasta es posible que la haya estimulado, como en la Rusia comunista se estimula hasta la hipertrofia la práctica del ajedrez, que colectivamente es un opio para la inteligencia de las multitudes (y conste que personalmente me apasiona el ajedrez)" (EH 38-9). The claim that the patrons at a café in La Plata know more about chess than about politics can be read as an implication of the State in the ignorance of its citizens. Walsh positions himself vis-à-vis the "multitudes" with a certain irony: he sets himself apart through parentheses while also commiserating with them through his love of chess and detective fiction.

¹⁸As conversion narratives go, the thought that others should respond as he does remains more of an implicit suggestion than an outright command. While I don't delve into a study of conversion narratives here, I have in mind Saint Augustine's *Confessions* as a classic example of an account of one's experience of coming to faith that is told with a more explicit recommendation that others do as the author does if they do not want to live in sin. Like Walsh, however, the force that compels Augustine to change his life comes from outside himself: it is an imperative voice which calls him—*tolle lege* ("take up and read"), in reference to Paul's letter to the Romans—and motivates his conversion to Christianity. Thank you to Zakir Paul for raising that quotation with me in conversation.

¹⁹See also William James' lecture on conversion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902):

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about. (270)

²⁰Calvi dedicates an entire chapter of his book to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo o Civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* (1845) as a foundational, genre-nonconforming text of Latin American literature. Like *Operación Masacre*, *Facundo* began as a series of articles published in contemporary newspapers and criticized the reigning Argentinian regime.

²¹García Márquez narrates the story from the perspective of a survivor who accuses the state of covering up the true reason for a naval carrier's shipwreck: it wasn't a storm, but the excessive weight of contraband goods that caused the disaster. Eventually, *El Espectador* sent him abroad for his safety to report from Europe.

²²Link writes: "Walsh había abandonado el terreno específicamente literario para incursionar en lo que hoy se llamaría 'información general'.... Interesado por los personajes excepcionales, Walsh escribía sobre el mundo de la política con notas que exaltan el heroísmo, como la que dedicó a los pilotos que bombardearon Plaza de Mayo ese mismo año. Comienza, al mismo tiempo, a escribir notas en serie, un sello característico del 'nuevo periodismo' del cual Walsh será, al mismo tiempo, su profeta y su Cristo" (Muñiz 15).

²³Note that Walsh does not write "PERSONAJES"—namely, the characters or the players of a drama—but "LAS PERSONAS," the historical individuals whose lives he is writing about and transforming into a narrative. Daniel Link also makes this observation in his Prologue to Enriqueta Muñiz's *Historia de una investigación* (13). Still, there is plenty of dramatic flair to both the composition and style of the book, not least the theatrical presentation of testimonies and judges' questioning and opinions in the "EVIDENCIA" section.

²⁴Ricardo Piglia argues that absence is key to a mechanics of displacement in Walsh's writing. Piglia sees this absence exemplified in the soldier who doesn't want to die alone in the street: "Walsh had a natural ability to depict a scene using what is heard and to condense pure experience. It is a movement that occurs within the story, an ellipsis that displaces truth-telling onto the Other" (OME 226). Calling this movement a mechanics of displacement may be misleading as it can imply distancing the reader from the source of the truth.

In "Mimesis by Other Means: The Aesthetics of Disappearance in Rodolfo Walsh's 'Variaciones en rojo,'" Karen Bishop connects the role of absence, disappearance, and dissimulation in Walsh's early crime fiction to his treatment of the same in later documentary work. Through a close analysis of Walsh's "Variaciones en rojo," Bishop makes an argument for the revelatory power of art when confronting a crime whose solution seems remote, obscured, or disappeared. "In Walsh's work," she writes,

closely reading the conception and composition of visual art, space, and received logic negates the hypervisibility of dissimulation that attempts to cover up for disappearance. Walsh trains his reader in oblique reading practices that reject art's mimetic aspirations for its indexical capacity; instead of copying a lived world, art points us back to it, if newly configured or reframed. (69)

This hermeneutic practice, Bishop contends, shows "how dissimulation and disappearance work in concert as symptoms of violence and as catalysts for the production of new logic-based knowledge. These possibilities... confirm that disappearance can be dismantled by logic and the careful parsing of spatial composition, and the violence at its core revealed" (69). Bishop's multifaceted argument provides yet another helpful resource for interpreting the trope of absence and its relationship to what can and cannot be known in Walsh's work.

²⁵Walsh's final book-length nonfiction work of investigative journalism, *El caso Satanowsky*, published in 1973, incriminated Argentinian government intelligence for the murder of a lawyer who had ties with a Peronist-sympathizing newspaper.

²⁶Although he had his disagreements with the Montoneros, Walsh did not disassociate himself before his death in 1977.

²⁷In the epilogue to the 1969 edition of *Operación Masacre*, Walsh writes: "Era inútil en 1957 pedir justicia para las víctimas de la 'Operación Masacre', como resultó inútil en 1958 pedir que se castigara al general Cuarenta por el asesinato de Satanowsky, como es inútil en 1968 reclamar que se sancione a

los asesinos de Blajaquis y Zalazar, amparados por el gobierno. Dentro del sistema, no hay justicia" (*OM* 224). Union workers Domingo Blajaquis and Juan Zalazar were sitting at the table with Rosendo García (of *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*) when they were all shot.

²⁸ Walsh did suffer as a result of his father's gambling habit, which led to the loss of Walsh's childhood home and to his mother's decision to send him and his brother to a strict Catholic school. I am not suggesting that Walsh had a charmed life, simply that murder by execution, deeply rooted state corruption, and excruciating injustice were not salient parts of it before *Operación Masacre*.

²⁹ See Nicholas Casey's "Who Hired the Hitmen to Silence Zitácuaro?" While Walsh's militancy differentiates him from most other journalists and he was arguably murdered not only on account of his writing but his militancy, there was no justification for his assassination.

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received Oct 15 2023

reviewed Nov 21 2023

approved Jan 22 2024