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Fiction and Testimony in *The House of Rabbits*, by Laura Alcoba

Fiction And Testimony In The Rabbit House, By Laura Alcoba

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Summary

This article analyzes the novel *The Rabbit House* (2022), by Laura Alcoba, investigating the relationships between fiction, memory, and testimony in the construction of a literary narrative about the political repression that preceded the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983). The work, of an autofictional nature, presents the childhood perspective of a narrator who experiences clandestinity alongside her militant Montoneros family, revealing experiences marked by fear, silence, and state violence.

The hypothesis is that the author transforms individual memory into collective testimony, converting fragmented childhood recollections into historical and political denunciation.

Methodologically, the research is based on a literature review, engaging with studies on memory, trauma, and testimonial literature, especially the contributions of Novaro and Palermo (2007), Copelato (2006), and Seligmann-Silva (2008). Given the above, the narrative not only documents a violent historical period but also promotes an ethical reflection on resistance, identity, and survival, demonstrating how writing can act as a form of subjective reconstruction and confrontation with forgetting.

Keywords: Fiction. Testimony. Memory; Argentine dictatorship. Latin American literature.

Abstract

This article analyzes the novel *The Rabbit House* (2022), by Laura Alcoba, investigating the relationships between fiction, memory, and testimony in the construction of a literary narrative about the political repression that preceded the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983). The work, of an autofictional nature, presents the childhood perspective of a narrator who experiences clandestinity alongside her militant Montoneros family, revealing experiences marked by fear, silence, and state violence. The hypothesis is that the author transforms individual memory into collective testimony, converting fragmented childhood memories into historical and political denunciation.

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the novel *The Rabbit House* (2022), by Laura Alcoba.

observing how the author intertwines memory and fiction to bear witness to the repression that precedes the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983). The autobiographical narrative reveals, through the childlike eyes of Laura, the scene of fear, violence, and resistance that marked her family in the 1970s. In 2022, the work was translated into Portuguese by Natalia Bravo, expanding its reach in countries such as... Brazil.

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collective, transforming the intimate experience of childhood into a literary denunciation of state violence.



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In this way, the work highlights the social role of literature as a space for preserving memory.

historical context and processing of trauma.

Methodologically, bibliographic research is carried out, based on authors such as Novaro.

and Palermo (2007), Seligmann-Silva (2008) and Copelato (2006). The work is divided into two sections:

The first contextualizes the Argentine military dictatorship; the second analyzes the literary narrative.

emphasizing the relationships between childhood, memory, and testimony.

1. ABOUT THE ARGENTINE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP (1976-1983)

To understand Laura Alcoba's novel *The Rabbit House* (2022), it is essential to situate it.

in the historical context of the dictatorship established in Argentina, a period marked by violence,

oppression and fear, in which many citizens were deprived of their rights under an authoritarian regime.

and militarized. It is worth noting that the aforementioned work portrays the author's memories that precede this period.

of the military regime, dated between 1976-1983.

According to Novaro and Palermo (2007), to understand the causes and impacts of the regime

In a military context on Argentinian soil, it is important to consider international factors and internal forces, such as...

The Cuban Revolution and the influence of the United States. It is also necessary to analyze the dynamics of...

class struggles and local political culture, as they contributed directly to shaping this

repressive scenario.

According to the History of the Argentine Civil-Military Dictatorship, published by the Ministry of Justice

According to the official Argentine government website, the dictatorship began with a coup d'état, as stated in the Human Rights Commission.

of March 24, 1976, which deposed then-President Isabel Perón. In this context, the practices

Repressive measures intensified, leading to a period of extreme violence.

It is estimated that more than 30,000 people have disappeared or been kidnapped, victims of

A systematic crackdown against political opponents. These actions became known as the practice

from "Los Desaparecidos," a term that refers to the enforced disappearances of individuals.

considered a threat to the regime, as data from the website indicates.

In this context, the military government justified such actions as part of a fight against the

Subversion and terrorism. However, these measures reflected serious human rights violations.

whose effects resonate to this day in Argentine society. Novaro and Palermo (2007) state that the

The situation preceding the coup was seen by the military and some civilian sectors as a

An opportunity to consolidate political power in military hands, under the justification of controlling the crisis.

The circumstances in which the coup took place proved extremely favorable for strengthening the conviction, shared by the overwhelming majority of the military, as well as by certain civilian groups, that the gravity of the situation demanded definitive responses applied by an iron fist that concentrated the sum of political power (Novaro and Palermo, 2007, p.45).

Therefore, this perspective became consolidated among the military, who understood Peronism as a



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A movement to transform the relationship between the popular classes and the State, encouraging them to demand rights through trade union organizations. Thus, "[...] the bases on which she had built herself up, and which had allowed her to overcome the more or less comprehensive, but always frustrated, attempts to discipline it (Novaro and Palermo, 2007, p. 48), in order to contain the who believed it to be a "populist Argentina".

In this sense, the military justifications for the repression were based on a worldview who considered it urgent to redefine the foundations of Argentine society. In general, this involved the Elimination of two targets: an "undisciplined" working class and a so-called industrial business class. "Inefficient." Accordingly, the union between the military and free-trade conservatives reflected a historic rupture:

[...] the foundations of disorder had to be destroyed, the 'cursed Argentina' had to be liquidated, putting an end forever to the insolence of the political and social identities of the popular sectors, their unions, their social services, and even a good part of the factories in which this 'plague' had its fundamental point of support (Novaro and Palermo, 2007, p.49).

Furthermore, the military also manipulated historical memory to legitimize its actions. authoritarian figures, appropriating past events to present themselves as defenders of the nation. According to Copelato (2006), an example of this was the celebration of the centenary of the "Campaign of "Desert" in 1979, in which the regime compared the elimination of indigenous people by General's troops. Roca joins the fight against contemporary subversives.

The political use that the military made of the past implies the valorization of a certain era and certain figures. In 1979, the commemoration of the centenary of the 'Desert Campaign' offered the dictatorship the opportunity to showcase promises of a new beginning based on the fight against an 'irrecoverable enemy', the subversives (Copelato, 2006, p. 68).

It is noticeable that this historical manipulation aimed to construct a national identity marked by an imagery of war and defense against an internal threat. According to the author, furthermore, The Montonero militants also looked to the past for inspiration, evoking the The nationalism of Juan Manuel de Rosas' campaigns and the figure of Eva Perón as an icon of revolution.

In short, the dictatorship in Argentina lasted about seven years, ending on December 10th. 1983, with the direct transfer of power to a constitutional and democratic government. With the end During the dictatorship, militants like the Montoneros, who were cruelly persecuted, confronted the The challenge of reintegrating into a society in democratic transition, carrying the traumas and the memories of resistance, as Novaro and Palermo (2007) point out.

In the following section, it will be shown how Laura Alcoba (2022) intertwines her memories. personal connections to the country's political history, through the autofictional narrative *The House of Rabbits*, revealing the depth of the scars left by that dark period.

**2 THE RABBIT HOUSE: FICTION AND TESTIMONY**

The *Rabbit House* is the first autofictional work in the trilogy by writer Laura Alcoba, published in 2006 under the original title *Manèges: petite histoire argentine*. Curiously, the term The French word "Manèges" means "carousel," referencing both the child's playful perspective and the... Strategies used by Montonero militants to circumvent censorship and military oppression. Here, we will analyze... Some excerpts from the version translated into Portuguese by Natalia Bravo, published in 2022.

In this novel, Laura revisits memories of her childhood marked by military oppression in Argentina. Daughter of left-wing Montonero militants, the girl of only seven years old begins to live clandestinely with her mother in Buenos Aires during the persecution that preceded the "Trial of National Reorganization" in 1970.

Alcoba's narrative approaches the field of testimonial literature, a genre in which memory... Individual experience and historical experience intertwine. Since personal narrative functions as... A record and symbol of social traumas. Thus, the narrator's childlike character recalls events, as well as critically reconstructing the past, transforming memories into historical elaboration.

According to Copelato (2006), in the 1970s, Argentina went through a period marked due to intense violence and political radicalization. Repressive methods, such as kidnapping and torture, They became commonplace, serving as an experiment that would be widely applied after the coup. 1976. In *The Rabbit House*, Laura and her mother represent the resistance of various families who They witnessed the horrors of that phase, as well as the militants' struggle for survival and dignity. amidst oppression.

The narrative is divided into eighteen chapters, in which Laura progressively reveals the Reasons why he needs to live in hiding. The story takes place in a house located in La Plata, where the girl is taking refuge with her parents. The residents of this house were working as a front. Raising rabbits, inspiration for the novel's title.

In fact, the house was a "shelter" or "cell," that is, a hideout for the militants. Montoneros, who improvised a clandestine printing press in the warehouse in response to the censorship imposed by military regime. Thus, they could produce and print the articles for the opposition newspaper *Evita Montonera* without being discovered by the military.

In the plot, Alcoba (2022) describes some details that mark clandestine life, such as the use of false documents, association with militants, strategies used by the Montoneros to to escape the political reprimand of the Argentine military and, above all, the absence of comfort. maternal and a decent and peaceful home. For example, when she says:

I've often daydreamed about the house I'd love to live in, a house with a red roof, a garden, a swing, and a dog. Like the houses in children's books.



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[...] When I spoke of a house, it was merely a figure of speech. [...] What I desired was the life that comes from within (Alcoba, 2022, p. 2).

Thus, Laura's desire to have a "normal" life, free from fear and anxiety, becomes apparent. Her dream of a normal life is crushed by the oppression by the military authorities. However, the girl's dream is interrupted when her mother reveals, given the circumstances, the oppressive reality of activism and the violence against them. Montoneros.

If we left our apartment, it's because the Montoneros now need to hide. It's necessary because some people have become very dangerous: they are members of the AAA commandos, the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, who kidnap militants, like my parents, and murder them, or make them disappear. Therefore, we need to protect ourselves, hide, and also be able to react [...] (Alcoba, 2022, p. 4).

Faced with her mother's words, Laura falls silent and assumes the role of guardian of the secrets of her family. Despite her young age, she understands the cruel reality in which she is immersed. This early exposure to political violence permeates the author's childhood, leaving deep marks: the constant fear of death and torture, in addition to the weight of silence regarding their own identity.

I promise not to say anything about the hiding place in the roof. Not to the men who might come and ask me questions, not even to Grandpa and Grandma. Mom and Dad hide weapons and newspapers in there, but I can't tell anyone. The others don't know that we were forced to go to war. They wouldn't understand. At least, not yet (Alcoba, 2022, pp. 7-8).

In the passage above, one can perceive the emotional burden the child felt during a childhood that she should be carefree. The author revisits her memories, intertwining them with the child's point of view with the adult's reflections. Simultaneously, she presents fragmented information about the traumas and challenges of political resistance in Argentina, through her testimonial writing.

According to Seligmann-Silva (2008), testimony is an essential activity, since "[...] it depends on the survival of someone returning from a *Lager* (concentration camp) or another extreme situation of "Violence that implies this need, that is, that triggers this absolute lack of narration" (Seligmann-Silva, 2008, p.66). Therefore, *The Rabbit House* exemplifies this function of testimony well. In literature, it narrates the painful memories of a woman whose childhood was stolen.

In this regard, Gomes and Ribeiro (2022, p. 379) observe that the aforementioned novel "[...] realizes a movement of presentification, where the adult narrator's interpretation transforms the memories. "Children's reflections become more complex reflections on the past." Thus, it not only reflects a testimony, but also a look at Argentina in the 1970s, marked by the brutal repression of the regime and by AAA, an organization that sought to eliminate leftist groups.

However, it should be noted that the historical context of the military regime in the country is introduced as a backdrop to the narrative, without delving into historical details. In telling his story, Laura Alcoba (2022) invites the reader to reflect on the traumatic consequences triggered by authoritarian regimes and the resilience of those who, like her, survived to share their life stories.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In *The Rabbit House* (2022), Laura Alcoba uses literature as a tool for denunciation, and a space bearing witness to the political repression that preceded the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983). Interweaving memory and fiction, she gives voice to personal and collective experiences that were, for a long time... time, silenced. In this way, the metaphor of silence reflects the clandestine life experienced by Montonero militants and their families.

It should also be noted that after her father's arrest, Laura is taken to France with her mother, but it carries the trauma of irreparable losses, such as the brutal execution of Diana, a pregnant Montonera, and her husband. Furthermore, experiences with forged documents and fragmented identities leave... deep scars that hinder their writing process. Trauma, according to Seligman-Silva (2008, p. 66), expresses "the desire to be reborn" – and, for Laura Alcoba (2022), this translates into the rescue of a crucial collective memory, so that stories of resistance and pain are not forgotten or simply erased by time.

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