

TWO ASPECTS OF MEMORY FORMATION IN HISPANIC AMERICAN LITERATURE

^aMONIKA BREZOVÁKOVÁ, ^bMAGDA KUČERKOVÁ,
^cNATÁLIA RUSNÁKOVÁ

Department of Romance Languages, Faculty of Arts,
 Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Hodžova 1, 949
 74 Nitra, Slovakia
 email: ^amonika.brezovakova@ukf.sk, ^bmkucerkova@ukf.sk,
^cnrusnakova@ukf.sk

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Abstract: This paper deals with the theme of collective memory and its formation in Hispanic American literature. After the introduction to the topic, it is presented by specific literary works of Hispanic American authors, mainly the Chilean writer Isabel Allende and Argentine novelist Elsa Osorio. Both of the authors deal with the theme of memory which we try to illustrate with concrete examples from their literary works.

Keywords: Memory, Hispanic-american literature, oral culture, testimonial narrative

1 Introduction

Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez (1927 - 2014) presented the first part of his memoirs called *Vivir para contarla* (2002; *Living to Tell the Tale*, 2003) with the following words: "Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it."¹ (2014, 7) Since he is one of the most famous Hispanic American authors, the epoch-making story of the Buendía family from the novel *Cien años de soledad* (1967; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1970) does not need to be presented. The autobiographical narrative constructs for the readers of his memoirs at the end of his life that clearly reveals the meaning and creative potential of memories: his native village of Aracataca, as we learn there, became the model of the famous Macondo, a literary micro-world that in the form of a synecdoche evokes the history of Colombia as well as the other Hispanic countries. In this forgotten Caribbean region originates the fruitful García-Márquez tension between the tragic and comic aspects of life or between real and miraculous elements, that is also the source of oral culture carried by distinctive female characters, symptomatically immersed in the author's work. These women are full of magical skills and a sense of rituals, with an extraordinary ability to communicate with invisible world, the women as storytellers and founders of oral tradition, as well as the women representing the indigenous world.

This brief outline of Gabriel García Márquez's poetics, realized at the edge of the author's biographical narrative and the fictional world of his prose, allows us to state that literature is an impressive, creative space for the renewal of memories and the memory constitution. The oral history of communities and nations clearly confirms that remembrance has always been something natural but also necessary for a human being. Therefore, it can be argued that "[memory] is [...] one of the basic characteristics of humanity and the basis of our existence continuity." (Maslowski - Šubrt, 2014, 7) That is also shown by various forms of thinking about this topic, recorded from Antiquity: Plato developed the concept of memory paradox and within it identified the ability to present things in the human soul; on the other hand, Aristotle thought about the differences between memory and imagination.

The theme of memory and imagination found its specific expression the Middle Ages, mainly in the Italian Medieval literature. The poets were inspired mostly by their physical separation from their beloved ones where the memory, and imagination helped them to make such an object present and real

(Pamulová Šavelová, 2019, 53n)². The Italian Renaissance tradition left a deep footprint in the development of literary tradition and evolution of literatures, written in Spanish language³. It has founded the concept of literature as an alternative or substitute reality respectively as a willingness intentionally aimed at memory creation. Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) in his poetics of remembrance (*poetica delle rimembranze*) followed the medieval line of thoughts and set the basis of interiorisation poetics, lived or thought reality in the poetry, where such reality was sensually lived or mentally and spiritually conceived. His experience of individual, subjective memory expressed in autobiographical notes has gradually become a collective one.⁴ The concept of writing as creation of an alternative reality was reinforced and perfected by the Classicist poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798 – 1837), where he did not bear in mind the reality sensually perceived by a person, but the reality to which is his intelligible and emotional willingness of a human wanted to be projected even in retrospective direction.⁵ Based on the mentioned concept, the literature has been for centuries perceived as a willingly conditioned creation of an alternative memory, an individual or a collective one. A very similar approach in the thoughts on memory was manifested by Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941) when he developed "*élan vital*", the concept of the life principle⁶, as a force, immanent to all living creatures, in organising the structure and evolution of all forms of natural life, the human life and existence included. Bergson explains this principle as inherent to consciousness of every man, thus to consciousness and awareness of the inner time passing, which he conceives as an interiorized life realization.⁷ In this way, Bergson deepens the Schopenhauer's postulate on independent existence of a will-to-live and transposes it to the philosophy of the life realising principle. The psychoanalytic approach, widely applied in late 19th century in philosophy and literature, has led in the French (or Parisian) ambience to the formulation of the so called selective-memory concept: active creation of own consciousness, using of will which from the memory selects the reality of its own interest. Such attitude of consciousness is naturally

²The analysis and interpretation of the imaginative processes in the work of Medieval Italian poets, Francesco Petrarca included, as explained in the work of ŠAVELOVÁ, M.: *Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca*. Nitra: UKF v Nitre, 2020. 124 p. ISBN 978-80-558-1598-5.

³The influence of Italian literature on the American colonial culture is documented in the work of Bellini, G.: *Presencia de la literatura italiana en la América hispana de los siglos XVI y XVII*. Alicante : Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2008. Retrieved from: <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmnc01n1>

⁴In his poetics of interiorization he focused on the reality of love emotion, which was transposed by its spiritual form in verses, thus the literary reality had become the second face of the same love reality. Compared with the Medieval and Pre-Renaissance authors, Petrarca was able to identify the theme and its verbal expression into one unit, so the poetry itself was able to evoke the images of the beloved one, the memories or projections of future (Šavelová, 2020, 91-93). In *Canzoniere*, the collection of poetry, he was aiming to put such a memory into a perfect stylistic and composition form, making it objective by establishing the topicality and motives of his inner spiritualized emotion. His autobiographical notes were poetically transposed to love poetry with distinguished, extraordinary form that it later became a poetic style manner. The theme of the impossibility to handle or impossibility to conceive the present moment, always in fugue, possible to be expressed only through the memory, provoked the fight in poetry for a stable and fixed external form, as it was believed that only such a form is capable to preserve the memory and make it objective. Ref.: Petrarca, 2018 a Torre, A.: „Lege memoriter“. Petrarca e l'arte della memoria. Ref.: *Lettere italiane*, vol. 56, num. 1. Leo Olschki, 2004, pp. 12-49. ISBN 978882262790.

⁵Leopardi's concept of remembrance (*ricordanza / rimembranza*) was legated first of all to the poetry, but in the modern age it penetrated into some other disciplines, i.e. to psychology. Ref.: Polizzi, G.: *Leopardi e le «ragioni della verità»*. *Scienze e filosofia della natura in Giacomo Leopardi*. Roma: Carocci, 2003. pp. I-xix, 1-288. ISBN 88-430-2818-9. For Leopardi, in the time of writing *Canti*, the absence of real time, or the human incapability to live it contemporaneously with its passing, was the confirmation of human mind's incapability to conceive the infinity (*l'infinito*), which it can perceive only as an indefinity (*l'indefinito*). Infinity is for Leopardi an astral time analogy of terrestrial time passing and of the being of the single forms in it (Rusnáková, 2012).

⁶Ref. Bergson, 1908.

⁷Bergson's theory can be found also in the poetic work of Giuseppe Ungrethi, the Italian poet of the first half of the 20th century, who conceives and expresses time as an inner fact and element, perceivable only by intuition. There is no objective time, we can admit only the existence of consciousness of the individual living and being, an individual's inner, personal time. The feeling of the end of historical time and period stands in the centre of almost all modern avantgardes influenced by the phenomenological thought. The phenomenology, in an ontological way, identifies the concrete historical moment, with its perception within the human consciousness. Ref. Rusnáková, 2009.

¹ Unless it is not stated in the bibliography, texts published in the Slovak, Spanish and in the Czech language are translated into English by Monika Brezováková.

reflected in the literary narrative⁸, affected not only by selective recollection, but also by specific frames of reference (time, space, language) in which the individual moves, or how a person realizes himself. The aspect of the social conditionality of memory was pointed out by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877 - 1945), who was influenced by the theory of collective consciousness by Emil Durkheim (1858 - 1917): "Memory is constituted and functions and reproduces in certain social frameworks that are created by people, living in the society." (Lehmann - Maslowski - Šubrt, 2014, 17)

Both 20th and 21st centuries have brought several new and undoubtedly inspiring theoretical considerations seeking to conceptualize the memory phenomenon, and within their context the terms of cultural memory (J. Assmann, P. Nora), Cosmo lithic memory (D. Levy, N. Sznajder) or multidimensional memory (Michael Rothberg)⁹ are considered. We decided to grasp the interpretation of selected aspects depicting the topic of memory in Hispanic American literature on the background of literary and cultural-theoretical works illuminating the collective memory phenomenon going hand in hand with individual memory phenomenon. According to Halbwachs (2009, 50) he himself is the first witness to whom a person turns to during remembering, only then the process of remembering becomes a meeting of two people: one who perceives and testifies to what is seeing at a given moment, and the other who forms an opinion based on the statement.

2 Memory in the context of oral culture

The collective unconsciousness of the Hispanic American community is directly linked to the autochthonous past and experience of the mestizos within the individual regions of the Central and South American continent. In particular, the national literatures represent one, internally differentiated local picture of what is universally valid for Latin America - an immediate, fruitful connection with the tradition of oral character where narration creates the core. The mentioned resource was not exhausted by the arrival of technological achievements of the (post)-digital age but it was still activated by writing, and the original existence in contemporary literary discourse is evidenced by the work of authors during 20th century. "Activating the coexistence of oral and written expresses not only literary language drawing on communicative liveliness, tonality of oral expression, its distinctive symbolism and metaphor, but also the overall composition of the work: living plotting, the presence of rituals, archetypal characters, poetics rich in sensory stimuli. The coexistence of oralism (as an old way of talking) and audio-visual media (as a new way of talking) has also resulted in the development of a specific genre in the Latin American environment - radio broadcasts and soap operas." (Kučerková, 2011, 87).

The depth of semantic constitution of memory in Hispanic America pars pro toto is illustrated by the Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos (1917 - 2005). In the essay *Oral Culture (Una cultura oral, 1988)* he shares the experience of writing fictional stories in which he develops an imaginary substance, but that is not possible without the contact with reality, "of all possible forms of reality, even that which has not been yet, or which has already ceased to be" (Roa Bastos; Housková, 2004,

273). Writing in the region where the culture was formed on the bedrock of the mestizos, more precisely the living presence of indigenous components necessarily presupposes their creative processing at various levels, but in the terms of memory, are especially related to meanings, carried within the individual life story but also in the national community context. "I have always been convinced that in order to be able to write stories in Paraguay, the first is necessary to read, or better said to listen to an unwritten text; thus before I start writing, I will be able to perceive and listen to the sounds of oral speech, unformulated but always present in the tones of memory. [...] These living sediments of mother tongue, inherited from ancestors, allow a new semantization and the appearance of new meanings when changing them into the scriptures, it is a text in which man does not think, but which "thinks" of man, as it is the case of language or history in general." (273-274)

Returning to the introductory words on the creative reach of remembering in the authorial style of Gabriel García Márquez, the oral culture proves to be essential in shaping the narratives of personal and collective identity in the Hispanic American cultural environment, with memory being an important constitutive element. Together with Aleida Assmann, who defines memory beyond the medium nature that preserves information, our study does not think of the memory in literature only as of the space in which the memories are organized into a special poetic and narrative form, but primarily understood as *vis*, as "an immanent force associated with imagination and reason" (30, 2018; Hromová Burcinová, 2019, 139). Thus, in the process of writing it can be interpreted as a life-giving energy, that by the words of the Argentine novelist Elsa Osorio (Goldkorn, 2014), it has "the power to bring life back to the lost [*desaparecidos*]", to overcome fear, find the truth or create the future.

However, at the level of personal and individual survival, such notions of creation can also represent a common effort to understand life or simply not to forget, or as the Chilean-American writer Isabel Allende claims, to nurture the roots "that are no longer set in any geographical location" (Correas Zapata, 1998, 16).

Allende's book of essays *My Invented Country (Mi país inventado, 2003)*, published a few years later than her interview with Celia Correas Zapata, confirms the rooted (conscious and unconscious) need to revive the faded, and transform it into something vital, give the sense to unrest, uncertainty, unclassification, abnormality, unhappiness, the circumstances of life, etc. It permeates the social, political, cultural-anthropological, sociological history of Chile, as well as own, intimate story of I. Allende. It is the vision of country, created by memories, but furthermore it can be understood as a metaphor for memory. As blurry as it may seem ("Things that happened in the past have fuzzy outlines, they're pale; it's as if my life has been nothing but a series of illusions, of fleeting images, of events I don't understand, or only half understand. I have absolutely no sense of certainty."); (Allende, 2020, 132) it is a fundamental pillar of the author's literary, reflexive, reportage, or other images about Chile.

The narrative art of García Márquez, in which the daily events intersect with elements drawn from a distinctive Caribbean mentality and imagination, in a specific way "pays off an imaginary debt to all those who have shown him that storytelling presupposes continuity." (Kučerková, 2011, 51) This specific dimension of author's writing co-creates the essence of magical realism poetics, also influenced the work of Isabel Allende, and what literary critics often mentioned connected with her novel debut *La casa de los espíritus* (1982; *The House of the Spirits, 1985*). Although this poetics is not the subject of our thinking, it should be emphasized that some of its specific features can significantly help to reveal the concept of memory in verbal art. For example, "[d]isruption of the chronology of narration (retrospective) in an original way helps [...] to reconstruct both the collective memory and the individual memory. The immersion into human memories through the return to a new

⁸ Almost parallel to the literary avantgardes was the thinking of Benedetto Croce (1866 - 1952), who conceived the theory of relation between the human's inner life made of material in memory, and its literary representation. The Italian philosopher has distinguished two types of knowledge, in simple words: the knowledge in images and a knowledge in terms. Only the image is pertinent to the immediate inner life, therefore to the artistic expression, without any need of other integration or explanation discourse. Ref. Croce, B.: *Poesia e non poesia*. Bari: Laterza, 1923. The sense of literature is, according to Croce, the realisation of images, where time interferes into their interpretation by the change of the receiving and perceiving optic. Such a thought is in accordance with in that period already widely established Freud's thought, which compares the surmounting of the space between the original image and its interpretation to the suppression of the „cultural“ non-consciousness, by formatting the time-optic. Ref. Bhabha, H. K.: *Disem/Nácia: čas, rozprávania a hranice moderného národa*. In: *Medziliterárny proces VII*. Nitra: FF UKF, pp. 348-376, 2010. ISBN 978-80-8094-753-8.

⁹ Ref. Lehmann, Maslowski, Šubrt, 2014, 15.

story, which presupposes the continuity of life, is realized through the cyclicity of narration or various crossings in time schedules. The world of the living beings, under changes, is thus immediately confronted with a mythical eternity." (64-65)

Allende's poetics is characterized by a creative approach to different layers of reality, where the memory is a common thematic denominator of almost all works. The author applies the material of dreams and memories; the implementation of the indigenous element allows her to create the atmosphere of magic, miracle, mystery, but also astonishment or tension. Similarly, to the works by García Márquez, the fictional world emanates from oral culture, more precisely from folk folklore, but also from a thorough and curious observation of the surrounding world. Narration in her artistic interpretation signifies the continuity of life and the life itself: through it "shapes reality, creates and transforms the world" (Correas Zapata, 1998, 17). As she claims, the coding of a story into writing is "an organic need, like a dream or motherhood. Talk and talk ... is the only thing I want to do". In this way, she simultaneously fulfils the words of H  l  ne Cixous from the manifesto *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975): "A woman must be written down: she must write about women and she must lead women to write[...]. A woman must incorporate herself into the text - just as she must incorporate herself - on her own initiative - into the world, into history" (1995, 12; Cvikov  , 2014, 123).

Writing about women, in Allende's works about the beings from different worlds, is an artistic reconstruction of the collective memory co-created together. The author sought for inspiration and impulses for the magical side of her story from the narrative of oral culture: her grandmother taught her to interpret dreams, her mother taught her to look at events from behind and look at people from inside, the maids in her grandfather's house initiated her into the world of myths and folk legends and they also taught her to listen to radio series (cf. Correas Zapata, 1998: 16). This memory, which extends to the collective unconscious, is realized in the novel by the character of nurse Nana, who deals with the family problems in a way that is superstitious in her mind, but also in the unusual beauty of Rosa and her almost destructive effect on men, in the extraordinary large tablecloth with motifs of unseen mythological animals, which Rosa embroiders, but also in Clara's ability to predict the future, communicate with the next world or even live after death. Clara and Rosa from *The House of the Spirits* move very naturally between materialized reality and the misty, vague world of some supernatural nature. The "miraculous" memory and smell, discovered by Eliza Sommers in the novel *Daughter of Fortune*, thanks to the indigenous cook Mom Fresia and her impulse, are a subtle part of the whole story on the search for freedom. Although at first glance Aurora del Valle, the main character of *Portrait in Sepia*, is a more real character, the ability to capture things that pass through the camera lens also transports her to another reality layer, the layer of senses, sensations, memory that reveals the most hidden desires of a human soul. The presence of oral culture in literature is also useful regarding the concept of folk memory (*memoria popular*), which reflects the encounter of the archaic with the new, the traditional with the modern. Gabriel Cocimano (2006, 24) brings closer the context of Latin American oral tradition: this ancient memory coexists with new narratives, while oral codes bring to life, reconstruct a strong sense of community (among heterogeneous folk sectors). From that point of view, orality can be therefore understood as an important part of the collective memory and as the 'primary cultural experience of majority' (24) but also as a constant phenomenon with a strong identity, which was confirmed in her relation to scripting culture and in response to the challenges of modern digitization.¹⁰

¹⁰ However, the radio novels also accompany the characters in the novel *De amor y de sombra* (1984). Rosa, a cook and babysitter with indigenous roots, through them learns how difficult and painful is the path to happiness (cf. Allende, 1992, 19); for Digna Ranquileo, from night to night they become an imaginary journey into a distant and unknown world that this rural woman understood only a little (22).

3 Memory and Testimonial Narrative

Aleida Assmann reflects on literature in the background of social and historical scope, especially pointing out the ability of literature to thematize what has been forgotten and what has not been deliberately taken into account, what attributes her the ability to seek and create new narrative processes and, through them, to reflect the traumatic experiences of the past. Italo Svevo (1861 - 1928), the Italian novelist quoted by this German theorist, associated the past with a surprising attribute. According to him, the past is always new: "as life progresses, the past changes because those parts of it that once seemed lost in oblivion come to the surface, and others disappear [because they are no longer important]" (Assmann, 20, 2018). Svevo's words confirm the one's memory being an important and current key for looking at memory.

In the history of several Hispanic American countries, and smaller communities within them, such as families and then their individual members, the experience of dictatorship resonates through this prism. Literary texts are a medium that allows the event of a dictatorship to be reflected, to make people aware of forgotten stories, to preserve the memory of those who have been relentlessly lost, to appeal to future generations so that the tragedy of the past would not be repeated. However, as Tzvetan Todorov claims, "the past as such will not teach us a lesson. [...] The act itself is not an impulse to learn any lessons. We are those who give sense to the events, when we incorporate them in a broader context, when we ask questions, when we give some value to them ... This is how we can express an opinion." (Mattis, Todorov, 2007). A person, a group of people and a nation can change the angle of view on a memory, namely based on will, need or reason, they may want to remember it as part of their history, more precisely life story, or even displace it. At that time, according to Aleida Assmann, memory affects their individual or collective identity (cf. Hromov   Burcinov  , 2019, 139).

The testimonial narrative, which was developed in Hispanic American literature in the mid-1960s of the 20th century, and which has a relatively hybrid character in terms of genre, is basically viewed by one unequivocal opinion, which as it comes from its attribute is connected to the narrative, and moreover it contains the confidence in the power of literature. According to Argentine prose writer Elsa Osorio (1952), "literature [...] can touch the truth more deeply than direct testimony." (Goldkorn, 2014). Language further "helps us to formulate concepts, imaginations about absent things, about the past and the future" and literature, for which it is a creative tool, can and should be the space for social dialogue, a signal of truth, "a means of justification and criticism, beliefs and attitudes" (Maturkani  , 2018, 77).

The testimonial narrative strengthens the memory of the community. According to Halbwachs, confidence in the accuracy of memories is bigger if except for our own memories, we can rely on the memories of other people: "As if the process of remembering is reinforced by the fact that the same experience is again experienced not by the same person, but by more people at the same time." (2009, 50- 51) Although people may experience and remember different situations in relation to the same event, the act of 'collective thinking and remembering' (51) is proved to be important.

Astrid Erll summarizes several functions of literary texts when researching the relationship between collective memory and literature: "They fulfil a multitude of mnemonic functions, such as the imaginative creation of past life-worlds, the transmission of images of history, the negotiation of competing memories, and the reflection about processes and problems of cultural memory." (2011, 144) Similarly, Brigit Neumann argues that memory and remembrance processes have always been an important, if not dominant, topic in literary work: "Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities on the basis of the recollected memories." (Erll, N  nning, 2008, 333)

José Miguel Oviedo in *The History of Hispanic American Literature. From Borges to the present*, gave a suggestive title to one subchapter *Disappearances and the Dead: A Tragic List* mapping the literary events of the last four decades of the 20th century. At the very beginning, he mentions that politics in the Hispanic American environment has always tended to intertwine with intellectual life and for many, also important authors (eg García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Fuentes) it did not remain only on the level of difficult matters, but touched them personally, as well as touched national communities in the form of exile, imprisonment, torture and death. Naturally it influenced the creative process, as these were obvious forms of silencing (2005, 434).

Isabel Allende and Elsa Osorio, in their literary works from exile, dealt with the topic of dictatorship in their countries of origin. Neither of them did not come from the lived experience, although both were inspired by real events in Chile and Argentina. Their narratives take the form of fiction in which the authors become the voice of the silenced and the “memory of the forgotten” (Oviedo, 2005, 373), or, as Allende claims, the voice “which speaks for those who in our earth suffer and are silent” (1985: 451). In that the prose writer Allende also sees the sense of literature (Correas Zapata, 1999, 17) and in her work she tries to fill it by thematising the issues of gender and other marginalization.

Allende's novel *The House of the Spirits* describes the circumstances of the fall of Salvador Allende's government, the novel *Of Love and Shadows (De amor y de sombra, 1984)* is the memory of so called “*desaparecidos*” (lost victims of the regime) during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Based on the facts and in the background of the love story of two young people, the writer describes the atrocities of the Chilean dictatorship - fear for the missing people, torture, revelation of illegal cemeteries, confirming the cruelty of the military government. The novel *The House of the Spirits* made her to join the most important Chilean “resistance” novels (González-Ortega, 1999, 204), inspired by the military dictatorship: *Diary of a Chilean concentration camp (Tejas verdes, 1974)* by Hernán Valdés, *A House in the Country (Casa de Campo, 1978)* written by José Donoso and the novel *For the Fatherland (Por la patria, 1986)* by Diamela Eltit. Osorio's novel *My name is Light (A veinte años Luz, 1998)* brings the reader closer to the events of the last Argentine dictatorship, which began in 1976, when was the political power in the country taken over by the army and the country began the so-called the process of national reorganization (Proceso de Reorganización Nacional) led by General Jorge Rafael Videla.¹¹ Osorio, dealing with the theme of dictatorship, also integrated the group of the Argentine authors who developed the theme of dictatorship before her (authors as Ricardo Piglia, Juan José Saer, Angélica Gorodischer, Griselda Gambaro) and almost simultaneously with her, i. e. in the eighties and nineties of the 20th century (e.g. Alicia Kozmeh in the novel *Steps Under Water - Pasos bajo el agua, 1984*).

In the context of genre typology, as it was developed by Nelson González-Ortega (1999, 204), and based on certain specific features that emerge from the novels *The House of the Spirits* and *My name is Light*, it is more appropriate to define them as symbolic prose with elements of testimony. These are, in essence, fictional works in which the reliability of the narrator is difficult to examine, in contrast to the autobiographical narrative, where an act of legitimacy applies “to confirm whether textual references correspond to the facts” and subsequently, “in case of agreement, the truth of the story, sincerity of narration and at the same time the reliability of the narrator is recognized” (Görözdi,

2013, 31). Nevertheless, the personal commitment of the authors, their personal attachment to the topic, its internalization, and thus the place of their own story in it, leak from these works. The way in which the subject of memory is creatively grasped is undoubtedly determined by the chosen perspective of narration about what was, “at least the perspective of the present tense, [because] the narrative about the past contributes to shaping the future” and shaping personal identity” (Görözdi, 2013, 32). These narratives can be understood as a part of a larger historical narrative, composed of the testimonies of others, and represent “one form of oral history and humanitarian journalism” (Oviedo, 2005, 373).

The story of the family of Truebas from Allende's *The House of the Spirits* is an allusion to the dictatorial regime in an unnamed Hispanic country that can be easily identified through a description of political and social history (so-called haciendas controlled by the powerful hand of the oligarchy, the first agricultural reforms, the victory of Salvador Allende, a military coup supported by the opposition and foreign countries, but also thanks to references to the “poet” (Pablo Neruda) or the “president” (Salvador Allende). However, the reader perceives the story primarily as an impressive narration about the family of the landowner Esteban Trueba, into which - especially in connection with female characters - magic, symbols, and also that supernaturally and that irrationally enter in symbiosis with everyday reality. As it is typical for Allende, the female characters represent a hidden, unbridled force capable of changing history. In *The House of the Spirits*, the belief in a better future is also evoked by the semantic motivation of the choice of female names - Nivea, Clara, Blanca, Alba. They come from one synonymous series: whitishly pure, clear as the dawn of a new day that gives hope to the individual and society. The opening sentence of the novel *The House of the Spirits* is emblematic, written by Clara as a child into her notebook, a character with the ability to anticipate the future: “Barrabas [an animal of mythological proportions] came to us by sea...” (Allende, 1986, 11) This sentence is the point at which the narrative begins and to which returns by Clara's granddaughter Alba. Narrative as the flow of life thus closes cyclically.

In the novel *My name is Light*, Elsa Osorio artistically contemplates the tragic chapter of Argentine history, focusing not only on the history of the nation, but also on the personal, more precisely, individual history. The central theme of the novel against the background of socio-political events in Argentina is the trajectory of recognizing one's own identity, which the main character Luz lost as a result of the cruel practices of the dictatorship - shortly after her birth she was kidnapped and placed in a regime supporter family.

During drafting the story, the author relied on real events: the regime's violence had no regard for pregnant women and children.¹² In the story about young woman Luz, who searches for her biological mother, Osorio discusses - on a universal level - the pain-broken but at the same time powerful voice of relatives demanding information about lost family members, as well as the role of human rights organizations that helped them. Her novel includes *The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Madres de la Plaza de Mayo) as a collective protagonist, who began to gather in protest every Thursday in front of the government building, from which *The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo) emerged - one of them separated from the women in the square and asked who would be looking for her grandson. Then twelve women joined her. Osorio emphasizes the importance of the organization's work in reconstructing the memory of individuals and re-establishing their personal identity, as its aim was to return kidnapped children to their original families. After the birth of her son, Luz

¹¹ The political violence of the 1970s reached such proportions in Argentina that it could not be compared to any other period of Argentine history. According to Daniel Nemrava, it was one of the most violent regimes in the country's history, resulting in more than 30 million lost people, so called *desaparecidos*, the forced exile of a large number of Argentine intellectuals and an economy on the verge of bankruptcy. (2013, 34)

¹² The abductions of new-borns were closely linked to another phenomenon of dictatorship - the disappearance of people. It was “a widespread phenomenon that is perhaps the only one to stand out from the dictatorships of the European style: the Argentine so called junta let uncomfortable people literally disappear (*desaparecer*).” (Charvátová - Mizau - Pokorný - Kazmar, 2017, 80) In this connection, Rey Tristán formulates the statement that the dictatorship in Argentina was characterized by the so-called triad by kidnapping - torture - disappearance (*secuestro - tortura - desaparición*). (Rey Tristán, 2007, 39)

is unable to get rid of the idea that her family has concealed her true origins and therefore she is driven by a desire to reveal them. In this process of searching Luz is receiving help by activist Delia, the real founder of *The Grandmother of the Plaza de Mayo*. With this, and the atmosphere that accompanies the search, the author enriches the narrative with a documentary element. In this sense, the dialogues between Luz and Delia have a strong expressive value, but the motif of friendship and co-ownership, which reflects the relationship between the two women, also has an equally important place in Osorio's literary composition:

"We became very good friends around then. I was a little ashamed the first time I went back to the Abuelas' office after the blood test, because they couldn't find a match in the database. But after Delia told me that they knew who my grandfather was, I felt much more comfortable. I didn't have to be afraid of being found or treated as if I were crazy." (2004, 330)

Elsa Osorio plastically captures the long, essential need-guided path of healing the scars caused by the cruel methods of dictatorship. It is difficult to predict the end of this journey, it has its specific folds, composed of moments of hope, but also of disappointment and feelings of helplessness.

"Ramiro told me that when he was fifteen, Marta took him to see an exhibition on children who were disappeared or born in captivity. There were photos of the missing parents and children, and birth certificates and letters, souvenirs of those mutilated lives. The thing that made the biggest impression on him, which he could still remember quite clearly, were the unisex child-size silhouettes in black cardboard with a question mark next to them, which stood for the babies born in captivity. I asked the Abuelas if they still had the photos from that exhibition and I spent hours looking for family resemblances to me. They were incredibly patient. I would point out a girl and they would say, "No, it can't be her, she disappeared in 78," or, "We know she had a boy." (2004, 342)

This narrative is set in the documentary framework by passages inspired by information about secret detention centres (so called *centros clandestinos de detención*) and concentration camps (*campos de concentración*), which Argentine society found out with the pass of time.¹³ The author reconstructs by the testimony of Liliana, the biological mother of Luz, the experience of repeated humiliation, for example the humiliation of human dignity, ruthless and calculating torture, but mainly the insecurity of survival in the detention centre, which was doubled in the case of mothers.

"because in the centre they kill you little by little, they degrade you, they wear you down, they make you feel dirty. They kill you over and over again. And if you're pregnant, well, if I hadn't been, I would be dead by now. Now I know why they only used the prod on my legs – they were trying to make sure the pregnancy went OK because they wanted my child to be healthy to give to Dufau's daughter. He chose me, the dirty bastard, the murderer. [...] I've gone through some horrific things and I've met a lot of Pilóns along the way. Like the one who shoved us to the ground and kicked us. "Not this one," he said to the other bloke, and picked me up, but they left Sofi black and blue and covered in burns from the electric prod. Or the other Pilón, the one who brought us some cider and then while we were drinking it knocked the glasses out of our hands and starting screaming at us and beating us. They're sadists and monsters. Miriam, you can't stoop that low." (2004, 80 – 82)

¹³ In the Argentine detention centres, kidnapped people were held in the dark, they were handcuffed, naked, with a hood on their heads and during an interrogation, in which torturers tried to obtain information about other suspects, they practised various types of violence, such as: "Suffocation, beatings, sexual violence (both men and women were allegedly raped, according to Pilar Calveiro they were raped up to twenty times in a row) and electroshocks (mainly to the genitals) were practiced." (Charvátová - Mizzau - Pokorný - Kazmar, 2017, 80)

Among the narrative mechanisms that the novel *My name is Light* and literary works about dictatorships often use in general, in addition to allusions to the repressive regime, it is necessary to mention the retrospective on the time-space axis, the interruption of the story and the change of the space in which it takes place (in the case of Osorio's novel *Madrid - Buenos Aires*). The novel consists of three parts, which reflect three important moments, more precisely stages in Luz's life: her birth (corresponds to the year of the beginning of the dictatorship) and the last days of Liliana's life; her life with her family (year 1983), family which adopted her and which in some way represents Argentine society in the micro-space of the narrative;¹⁴ the period from 1995 to 1998, when the adult Luz identified in herself the need to know her own roots. The conclusion of the novel, which the reader follows in the epilogue from 1998, is remarkable in terms of composition. The novel ends the way it begins (the initial and final situation is the same, or at least analogous; see Všeticka, 1986, 55), and thus represents a closed, unbroken circle of events, more precisely circular type of framing, which is very similar to that used by Allende in the novel *The House of the Spirits*. The story begins with the arrival of Luz, her husband Ramiro and their son Juan at Barajas Airport: they arrived in Madrid in order to find Carlos, Luz's probable biological father. The conclusion brings Luz at the same age as at the beginning of the novel, but her search is already illuminated by new findings. At the same time, it is possible to talk about the temporal framing of the story, as the events at the beginning and end of the novel take place at relatively the same time, in 1998. Those mentioned compositional frameworks in a way reflect the process of reviving memory against the background of historical, political and social contexts of the time: "forgetting is followed by awareness, awakening, remembrance and return" (Assmann, 2018, 57).

4 Conclusion

In the literary constitution of cultural memory, which undoubtedly includes the depiction of the dictatorship theme in all its breadth and depth, the connection between personal and collective memories is confirmed. The hope is hidden in the name of Luz (Light) but also in other female names marked by the dictatorship. Further it captures a desire to find oneself, the truth about own origin and stolen identity. The meaning can be also interpreted as the light of painful knowledge that guides the character on the path and despite everything it liberates her. It is a symbolic path of rebirth, during which the told stories of thousands of people meet and pass through, to whom the dictatorship came into their life and the literature gave them the voice and restored their memory.

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¹⁴ In this context, María Eugenia Osorio Soto assigns the stepfather of Luz Eduardo to a crowd of naive and simple citizens, the so-called unprepared citizens (from Spanish ciudadano desprevenido) who could be easily manipulated by the dictatorship. She also characterizes stepmother Mariana, a representative of the upper social class, as restrained, representing conservative values and supporting the regime (2011, 164).

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