

UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE: NONA FERNÁNDEZ'S *LA DIMENSIÓN DESCONOCIDA*

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Abstract: This paper critically examines Nona Fernández's *La dimensión desconocida* (2016), within the broader context of Chilean literature and memory narratives, offering a unique exploration of silence, memory, and the interplay between reality and imagination. Fernández's narrative is deeply rooted in her engagement with *The Twilight Zone* television series, using it as a symbolic lens to navigate the liminal spaces between sound and silence, memory and forgetting. The sustained vacillation between the narrator and implied author's work as an investigative reporter and her childhood memories, firmly scaffolded to the dystopian imagination of parallel worlds presented through its interface with *The Twilight Zone* series, provides a compelling exposé of the present moment. The article analyzes the structural intricacies of the novel, divided into four sections corresponding to different 'zones', drawing parallels between the narrative structure and the episodes of the show. Through this, Fernández skillfully addresses the complexities of memory work, intertwining personal recollections with journalistic investigations into the crimes of the Pinochet era. The significance of Fernández's work lies not solely in its recording of a traumatic past but in its exploration of the temporal indeterminacy inherent in all exercises in memory that recall violent events. Through her intricate narrative and thematic choices, Fernández contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on memory narratives and the ethical responsibilities associated with remembering historical trauma.

Key Words: Memory narratives; Temporal distortions; reality and imagination; Liminal spaces; Nona Fernandez; Argentine literature

Mary McNeal, who set out on a voyage of discovery that brought her home again by a most curious route. Now, appointed guardian of doors best kept sealed, in the mirror, mirror world...of the Twilight Zone.
— “Memories,” *The Twilight Zone*

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Inspired by John Cage’s groundbreaking composition, *4’33”* (1952), which instructed performers to refrain from playing their instruments throughout the duration of the near five-minute piece, the composer and music theorist challenged his audience to contemplate the concepts of sound and silence. Cage’s deliberate absence of sound aimed not only to draw attention to the “unpredictable background noise in the performing space and to thereby suggest that these background noises are themselves music,” but also to challenge the conventional notion of silence as ‘the absence of sound’ (Cline 95). While Cage’s experiment unfolded in the postwar American music scene of the twentieth century, the way individuals and society grapple with and respond to silence remains a subject of artistic exploration. In contemporary Chilean literature, writers from the generation of “los hijos” take particular issue with the lingering silence first imposed in the 1970s by Pinochet’s military regime, and the whitewashing of the nation’s trauma facilitated by the neoliberal policies and the national reconciliation project initiated during the 1990s redemocratization process. Among these authors, Nona Fernández (born Patricia Paola Fernández Silanes in 1971) has risen as one of the generation’s most prolific and highly acclaimed voices, gaining increasing recognition from readers and critics since her debut novel *Mapocho* in 2002.¹ Her body of literary work can be seen as intricate memory narratives that resist generational amnesia and collective forgetfulness. In her latest novel, *La dimensión desconocida* (2016), Fernández provides a striking example of her approach by connecting personal memories with political issues and themes. Through compelling and sustained intertextuality with *The Twilight Zone* television series, the novel travels into the liminal space between silence and memory, the past and the present, delving into the realm between reality and imagination.

Fernández’s sixth novel, *La dimensión desconocida*, earned the prestigious Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize in 2017 and solidified her status, initially established with her critically acclaimed debut novel *Mapocho* (2002), as one of Latin America’s foremost authors.² Alongside Alejandra Costamagna, Rafael Gumucio, Andrea Jęftanovic, Andrea Maturana, Lina Meruane, and Alejandro Zambra, Fernández is routinely associated with the generation “los hijos de la dictadura”; a term coined to distinguish a group of writers whose members came of age during the dictatorship but made their authorial debut after the return to democracy.³ In stark defiance of the culture of silence imposed by the regime and tacitly accepted by the transitional governments,⁴ many Chilean artists –particularly among ‘los hijos’– turned their creative focus inwards, giving rise to a proliferation of memory narratives produced at the close of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. The increase in Chilean memory narratives coincided with pivotal historical events: Pinochet’s detention in London in 1998, the 30th anniversary of the military coup in 2003, and the dictator’s eventual demise in 2006. However, these narratives transcended mere individual reactions to traumatic events or commemorations of anniversaries and historical milestones. As articulated by Andrea Pagini in *Memoria, duelo y narración*, the ‘ola de recuerdo’ phenomenon evolved into a broader imperative associated with communal memory, effectively serving as pillars in the collective endeavor:

No se trata de ese recuerdo individual que cada uno lleva guardado, y hasta oculto en su corazón o en su cabeza; se trata de un imperativo más amplio, algo que tiene que ver con la memoria de una comunidad, con la memoria colectiva –es decir, algo que existe en la medida en que se lo comunica y comparte [...] La memoria colectiva se configura en el acto de

1. Ana Rodríguez Valentín observes that scholarly examinations of Fernández’s work can be classified into three primary domains: the construction of memory, the formation of history, and the exploration of space as a mediator bridging these two processes (239).

2. Fernández’s other novels include *Av. 10 de Julio Huamachuco* (2007), *Fuenzalida* (2012), *Space Invaders* (2013), and *Chilean Electric* (2015). In 2019, Fernández published the book-length autobiographical essay *Voyager*. She has also written numerous short stories, plays, television and film scripts, and acted in several theatrical works.

3. Alternate labels for this generation include: ‘generación X o la generación perdida de los 90’ (Blanco 162), ‘los niños de la represión’ (De Querol), and ‘generación del milenio’ (Simonetti).

4. ‘No estar ni ahí’ and the ‘compulsión al olvido’ endorsed by the nation’s political machinery and procured through the commodification and financialization of everything was, according to Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian, the price to pay to rebrand and “resituar a Chile, construírlo como país confiable y válido, el Modelo, la Transición Perfecta” (*Chile actual*, 33).

narrar, que es un modo de volver público el recuerdo individual y ponerlo a dialogar con otros recuerdos en una elaboración colectiva del duelo por una experiencia colectiva de pérdida. (9-10)

A decade into the new millennium, when the center-left coalition that had governed for two decades yielded power to the conservative Renovación Nacional's candidate, Sebastián Piñera, and an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and the ensuing tsunami struck the southern regions, claiming hundreds of lives and devastating towns and local economies, the role played by memory narratives in fostering (re)building efforts and a sense of community became even more crucial.

The impulse to transform individual memories into public narratives as a response to generational trauma extends beyond the borders of Chile and Fernández's contemporaries. In a broader context, the Western world witnessed a heightened emphasis on memory, notably coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Hitler's ascent to power, leading to the establishment of museums and monuments dedicated to the victims and survivors of World War II. In her influential work *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch argues that the proliferation of this memory culture can be seen as a manifestation of a deep-seated need for both individual and collective inclusion within a shared framework. This framework is shaped by a collective inheritance of multiple traumatic histories, prompting a sense of individual and social responsibility towards an enduring and traumatic past (33-34). Within the Chilean context, Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory,' examining how traumatic experiences are transmitted, and the 'generation after,' providing a framework for understanding how trauma and memory permeate successive generations, remain pertinent. Nevertheless, the significance of Fernández's work, particularly evident in her latest novel, extends beyond the mere documentation of a traumatic past and the ethical responsibilities linked to remembering and recounting historical trauma. Instead, the significance of Fernández work lies in the exploration of the inherent temporal indeterminacy present in all exercises in memory that recall violent events. As demonstrated by Cathay Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, the historical power of trauma lies not solely in its repetition after initial forgetting, but, crucially, in the fact that it is only through this inherent act of forgetting that it is experienced at all (8). In *La dimensión desconocida*, Fernández adeptly employs the sustained metaphor of "twilight," that fleeting moment in the day that anticipates nightfall, to explore the threshold between conscious awareness and the subconscious, examining the liminal spaces and intricate dynamics among different levels of memory associated with political violence.

La dimensión desconocida functions as a palimpsest of the first-person narrator's childhood memories from the Pinochet era. Within this narrative framework, recollections of Rod Serling's iconic sci-fi television series emerge as one of the novel's dominant reference codes, along with extratextual references to chronicles and testimonies on human rights abuses committed during the regime, adding depth to the narrator's present-day examination of these records in her role as a journalist. In concordance with the novel's paratextual alignment with *The Twilight Zone*, evident through its title, front cover and epigraph, the narrative unfolds in four sections, each named for the paranormal experiences that occur within their realms: "Zona de ingreso"; "Zona de contacto"; "Zona de fantasmas"; and "Zona de escape." Embracing the notion of parallel universes from Serling's series, and drawing specific references from episodes where characters navigate unfamiliar realities, the intermedial dialogue with the show becomes a narrative device, allowing exploration into philosophical, moral, and societal themes. By combining memory work with the supernatural and fantastical elements found in the speculative and allegorical storytelling

of the television series, frequently showing the darker aspects of human behavior and the potential consequences when taken to extremes, Fernández's novel presents a critical commentary that invites readers to contemplate the repercussions of individual actions and societal norms that took place under Pinochet and as part of the post dictatorial peacemaking project.⁵ The narrative begins in "Zona de ingreso," where the first-person narrator introduces the focalized subject, former Air Force intelligence officer Andrés Antonio Valenzuela, recounting his pivotal visit to the *Cauce* magazine office to confess to crimes of torture and disappearances.⁶ While examining the *Cauce* issue in her present-day role as a journalist, echoing the implied author's experiences, the narrator reflects on childhood memories of reading the issue and seeing Valenzuela's image published under the title "Yo torturé." Within this section, the narrator candidly acknowledges that her presentation of the historical facts surrounding Valenzuela's recorded confession to the *Cauce* journalist also involves elements of fabrication. Articulating her imaginative process, she envisions Valenzuela walking through the city center, creating a vivid mental image based on her readings:

Lo imagino caminando por una calle del centro. Un hombre alto, delgado, de pelo negro, con unos bigotes gruesos y oscuros [...] Lo imagino apurado, fumando un cigarrillo, mirando de un lado a otro . . . Lo imagino entrando a un edificio en la calle Huérfanos al llegar a Bandera. Se trata de las oficinas de redacción de la revista *Cauce*, pero eso no lo imagino, eso lo leí. (15)

The recurrent use of words like "imagino" and "no imagino," "supongo" and "o quizá" throughout the section underscores the narrator's awareness of the unreliable nature of her recollections from an event four decades ago. The tension between "imagino" and "eso lo leí" merges into a hybrid combination. As Luna Carrasquer observes, this tension between the referential and the fictional, and the ambiguity between them, are foundational characteristics of autobiographical fiction, often utilized by Fernández to create an effect of authenticity. "Así, la novela indaga, por un lado, en la memoria individual de la narradora y, por otro, en la memoria colectiva que ella explora para completar su propia memoria y para entender esta "dimensión desconocida" que es para ella la dictadura chilena" (24). By intertwining memories and archival work with imaginative elements, the narrator unleashes the latent potentialities concealed within the actual past –embracing both "the potentialities of the 'real' past and the 'unreal' possibilities of pure fiction" (Ricoeur 192).

The use of fictionalizing techniques in narrating the intertwined stories of the narrator and Valenzuela becomes more evident as the narrator emphasizes that her exposure to the perplexing words associated with Pinochet's rule took place during her formative and bewildering adolescence:

Era una revista *Cauce*, de esas que leía sin entender quiénes eran los protagonistas de todos esos titulares que informaban atentados, secuestros, operativos, crímenes, estafas, querellas, denuncias y otros escabrosos sucesos de la época [...] Mi lectura del mundo a los trece años era delineada por las páginas de esas revistas que no eran mías, que eran de todos, y que circulaban de mano en mano entre mis compañeros del liceo. Las imágenes que aparecían en cada ejemplar iban armando un panorama confuso donde nunca lograba hacerme el mapa de la totalidad, pero en el que cada detalle oscuro me quedaba rondando en algún sueño. (17)

While acknowledging that the unreliability in her recollections of the event is compounded by age, the ambiguity is also amplified by the violence and political uncertainties of the time. To this end, the narrator employs her memories and the documents she collects in her work to

5. Claudia Gatzemeier characterizes the agreements made in order to avoid violent confrontations in postdictatorship Chile in her article "Hacer memoria en el Chile actual." She states: "El afán de minimizar fricciones y polarizaciones se impuso ya en el proyecto político principal de la Transición chilena el trabajo de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación [...] Así Aylwin, por una parte, subrayó la continuidad entre el régimen anterior y el Estado de la Concertación y el carácter reformativo de la Transición y, por otra parte, le confirió la responsabilidad de los crímenes cometidos por el régimen militar al global de la sociedad. En fin, se trató de entablar una memoria consensual como pacificador social" (111).

6. *Cauce* was one of a few pro-democracy magazines authorized for limited circulation between 1983-1989. Issue number 32 from July 23rd -29th, 1985 features Andrés Antonio Valenzuela's image under the title "Yo torturé" and excerpts from his recorded testimony with journalist Mónica González ("Cauce" np).

“conformar una especie de panorama de la represión” (22). As noted by Cecilia Olivares Koyck, in *Mapocho* and *La dimensión desconocida*, the act of constructing a panorama depicting the repression during Pinochet’s regime—despite the unfinished, unreliable, and perpetually open nature of the work—reflects the urgency felt by Fernández and her generation to narrate the untold spaces of the social imaginary, particularly those related to political violence. Olivares emphasizes the writer’s endeavor:

La tarea a la cual se enfrenta la develación de hechos de violencia sería entonces, el ofrecer un espacio narrativo a sabiendas que toda restitución de los hechos es imposible, pero que la construcción como signo de la vivencia en su posibilidad en tanto que, amplía su espectro mediando vivencia, recuerdo y a su vez traduce lo que permanece oculto. (24)

At this juncture, the novel establishes its structural framework for expressing, naming, and observing forgotten or silenced discourses. Navigating through distinct temporal planes and narrative levels, it seamlessly alternates between episodic and semantic memories recounted in the past tense, and the present-day narrator’s interior monologue, presented as a compilation of incomplete thoughts and ideas.⁷ As the narrator’s interior monologue continues to oscillate between processing and preserving information gathered in her role as a journalist and transforming the same facts triggered by her fragmentary remembrances and feelings of uncertainty towards any claim of truth, echoes of incidents and silenced discourses originating from the traumatic events rise to the surface during her visit to the Museo de la Memoria. These echoes are portrayed as involuntary memory traces—traumatic memories and histories that exist in a state neither fully illuminated nor entirely shrouded in darkness.⁸ The narrator reflects on this internal struggle, stating:

¿De quiénes son las imágenes que rondan mi cabeza? ¿De quién son esos gritos? ¿Los leí en el testimonio que usted entregó a la periodista o los escuché yo misma alguna vez? ¿Son parte de una escena suya o de una escena mía? ¿Hay algún delgado límite que separe los sueños colectivos? (26-7)

This oscillation underscores the unfinished and unreliable nature of memory work, perpetually open to reconfiguration, as the narrator grapples with the haunting uncertainties surrounding the origin and ownership of the vivid images and cries that permeate her consciousness.

The exploration of memory traces in *La dimensión desconocida* resonates with a broader discourse on echoes or residue evident in Fernández’s body of work. As articulated by Luis Valenzuela Prado, the concept of remnants or residue serves not only as a material critique but also functions as a political instrument, echoing Nelly Richard’s examination of post-dictatorship Chilean tensions. Valenzuela Prado highlights how Fernández’s challenges established discursive hierarchies through lateral positions and hybrid decenterings, effectively questioning entrenched social and cultural hierarchies (184). By harnessing echoes and residue, the novel transcends its role as a mere literary exploration of memory, transforming into a potent instrument for addressing and redressing the historical injustices of the dictatorship. The intertwining of personal narratives with broader socio-political critique vividly illustrates the intricate relationship between memory, literature, and the ongoing process of reckoning with the traumatic past. This dynamic interplay reveals Fernández’s intention in shaping a collective understanding and confronting the complexities of historical memory.

For the remainder of the section, Fernández explores the dichotomy

7. While modern cognitive architecture allows for different types of memory, autobiographical memory is determined by two main parts: episodic and semantic. Claudia Hammond explains that episodic memory “consists of specific personal experiences, for example arriving on your first day at a new school; and semantic memory, which consists of the knowledge we have about our lives and the world, and would include the facts about the school you went to—the town it was in and how many pupils attended” (151).

8. Walter Benjamin revisits Freud’s theory on memory traces in *Illuminations*, stating that involuntary remembrances that never fully entered consciousness are often the most powerful and enduring (160).

between actual historical events and invented counterfactual scenarios introduced by the narrator's visit to the Museo de la Memoria, a theme recognized by Catherine Gallagher in all narratives involving any historical speculation. For Gallagher, the exploration between fact and fiction enhances the significance of specific facts, which hold importance due to the possibility that they might have been different, and broadens the scope of the generalizations that fiction can convey (1131). The imperfections and incompleteness inherent in both "the real" and "the potentialities of the real," along with the splitting and doubling of the autobiographical "yo" in both the narrator's recollections and in Valenzuela's testimony, accentuates the unreliability of the narrators of the novel. It is important to note that, unlike Walter Booth's characterization of an unreliable narrator, defined as one expressing values and perceptions differing from the implied author, aiming to avoid issues related to biographical interpretations or functioning as irony, as outlined in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), the unreliability depicted in *La dimensión desconocida* emphasizes the temporal indeterminacy and inherent incompleteness in all exercises in memory, particularly those recalling violent events.

At the end of the section, the narrator once again finds herself gazing into Valenzuela's eyes while conducting research for a television docuseries in 2009 on the Vicaría de la Solidaridad's role in recording human rights violations. This encounter repeats in 2015 when she works on a documentary on the same topic.⁹ No longer confined to a static image under the title "Yo torture" from *Cauce* magazine's cover, she becomes entranced by his movements during a television interview given upon his return from exile to testify in court. A bond forged by trauma connects them—the direct experiences of an intelligence officer who betrayed his orders and publicly revealed state crimes, and hers as a witness, both as a teenager who was too young to fully grasp the regime's horrors and as a middle-aged journalist who recalls those experiences. She describes: "Mi rostro se refleja en la pantalla del televisor y mi cara se funde con la suya. Me veo detrás de él, o delante de él, no lo sé. Parezco un fantasma en la imagen, una sombra rondándolo, como un espía que lo vigila sin que se dé cuenta" (24-5). As she becomes mesmerized by their superimposed images on the video screen in front of her, the narrator begins to believe that the forces responsible for Valenzuela's repeated appearance in her life through her ongoing work to uncover the country's dark past and subconscious memories are transmission sent from a parallel university—from a dimension that has not succumbed to silence and oblivion. She questions: "¿Aló? ¿Control en Tierra? ¿Hay alguien ahí? ¿Alguien me escucha?" (52).

The entangled structural pattern established in the first section, which unveils the entwined life stories of the narrator and "el hombre que torturaba," reveals a paranormal connection that blurs the boundaries between the past and present, reality and imagination. This thematic complexity gains further depth in the second section aptly labeled "Zona de contacto." During the screening for the documentary on the Vicaría, which the narrator attends with her mother, time seems to pause within the confines of the empty cinema, creating a temporal and spatial capsule: "El tiempo hace un paréntesis en esta sala de cine vacío, que es no es más que una cápsula espaciotemporal, una nave en la que mi madre y yo viajamos pauteadas por un reloj a destiempo" (74). While the documentary aims to lend significance to the names displayed at the Museo de la Memoria and in Valenzuela's testimony, "para que nada salga disparado al espacio y se pierda" (74), the narrator comes to a profound realization. She acknowledges that her unintentional adherence to an exclusionary framework, characterized by the repetition of curated lists and aged images, prompts her to question the genuine impact of her efforts. Reflecting the dystopian aspects of Chilean's reality, the narrator recalls *The Twilight Zone* episode featuring Barbara Jean Trenton, where everything circulated as usual but with an

9. Nona Fernández worked on both Josefina Fernández's docuseries, *Los archivos del Cardenal* (Televisión Nacional de Chile, 2011-2014), and on the film *Habeas Corpus: La contrainteligencia de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (directed by Claudia Barril and Sebastián Moreno, COFRO, 2015.)

unsettling modification.¹⁰ Similar to Barbara, an aging former movie star immersed in celluloid memories, the narrator realizes she has crossed a threshold into a disorientating dimension at the midpoint between light and shadow. The narrator becomes aware that the archives and testimonies she has grown familiar with are stagnant and unreliable. Instead, the dark theater becomes a portal that opens up a realm of dreams and ideas reminiscent of those depicted in *The Twilight Zone* –a universe that pushes the boundaries of what one is accustomed to seeing. Within this portal, subjective and fragmentary counternarratives from other dimensions emerge, resembling postcards sent “desde otro tiempo [...] una señal de auxilio que pide a gritos ser reconocida” (79). In the closing moments of the second section, the narrator receives a signal that transmits a consideration of Valenzuela as one of the regime’s victims:

Sin pensarlo, el hombre que torturaba se lanza al mar, se sumerge por fin en las aguas de ese planeta perdido del que sólo quedan las huellas que figuran desordenadas sobre la mesa del salón parroquial. Desde ahí escucho que me grita. Recuerda quién soy, dice. Recuerda dónde estuve, recuerda lo que me hicieron. (118-9)

In line with Fernández’s creative interest to reveal the limitations of official discourse and memory processes by blending-in different narrative modalities, a technique used to confront silence as well as critique modern society’s complicity in perpetuating silence from an ethically reflective stance, Fernández employs the metaphor of twilight and parallel dimensions to explore alternate routes towards accessing and interpreting reverberations from the past.

In the third section, titled “Zona de fantasmas,” the narrator further develops the lasting impact of the dictatorship within a broader social and ethical context, presenting a sustained counter-narrative that challenges established notions of recording and erasure. Specifically, the narrator delves into exploring the imagined possibilities of Valenzuela’s experience during his flight into exile after providing his testimony to *Cauce* and the *Vicaría* –depicting him not solely as a repentant torturer but as a complex individual. Similar to the previous two sections, where the narrator reengaged her childhood memories with present information and used her imagination to fill in the voids, she shifts the focalized object to view it from another angle. This isn’t an attempt to arrive at a definitive conclusion of the facts but rather a reconsideration of his circumstances in a different light –an additional dimension missing from this physical and temporal plane. Fabián Leal and Carolina Navarrete’s argument about Fernández’s ethical political stance, aiming to bring discourses lacking proper closure or consideration into the public view as alternate versions of official history, becomes more pronounced. According to Leal and Navarrete:

Así, la labor del escritor sería dar cuenta de todas aquellas historias que han sido silenciadas principalmente desde la memoria oficial, reconstruyendo mediante diversas estrategias la memoria acallada y realizando un “trabajo de memoria” sobre ellas. (73)

The third section of the novel shifts focus to highlight the narrator’s cosmic, if not somewhat ghostly connection with Valenzuela, portraying their bond as equally creative, intellectual, as it is moral. Leal and Navarrete’s argument aligns here with Mary Lusky Friedman’s observation regarding Fernández’s work, as well as that of her contemporaries. They strive to contextualize memories of the dictatorship’s legacy within a broader social and ethical framework, underscoring the idea that acknowledging “past political wrongs form a necessary undergirding for intimate life in current Chilean society” (614). Despite their inherent fragility, imagination and memories serve

10. “The Sixteen-Millimeter Shrine.” *The Twilight Zone*, season 1, episode 4, CBS Television Network, 1959.

as the basis for ethical constructs. The third section of the novel moves from a focused interplay between the narrator's childhood memories, chronicles, and testimonies to include a counter-narrative that posits Valenzuela as an additional victim of the terrors of the regime. As the narrator traces and imagines Valenzuela's possible final actions that drove him to report the crimes to *Cauce*, she recognizes that these were "cosas que no se podrían contar, que formaban parte de una realidad secreta e inconfesable, una dimensión oculta en la que sólo ellos y nadie más que ellos podrían habitar" (147).

Drawing on a childhood fascination with ghost stories featuring characters like Dicken's Ebenezer Scrooge, Irving's Ichabod Crane, Brontë's Catherine, Bombal's Ana María, the narrator envisions Valenzuela as a haunted spirit caught in limbo, torn between his guilt as a horrific employee and a repentant military officer himself victimized by the dictatorship. "Imagino al hombre que torturaba así, como uno de los personajes de aquellos libros que leí de niña. Un hombre acosado por fantasmas, por el olor a muerto. Huyendo del jinete que quiere descabezalo o del cuervo que lleva instalado en el hombro" (162). As the narrative progresses in this section, the liminality of the space-time portal created in the theater becomes an opportunity to engage with the voices and stories hidden beneath the acts of reconciliation and forgetting. Imagining the situations and feelings Valenzuela may have experienced as a man fleeing into exile, the narrator places emphasis on the opportunity that memory work provides: exploring flawed memories and histories contaminated with incomplete information and partial truths.

Scaffolded to the framework of parallel worlds and dystopian imaginings presented through the novel's medial interface with a television show that uses strangeness as a defamiliarizing device to provide insights into social concerns, Fernández's narrator assumes at the end of the third section the role of Mary McNeal from *The Twilight Zone* episode "Memories."¹¹ A dealer of dreams and memories, Mary McNeal embodies the idea that the discovery of former past lives and viewpoints "is the greatest good she can render to a forgetful humanity (3:58-4:07)."¹²

In the fourth section titled 'Zona de escape,' the narrator's exploration of memory extends beyond the personal to the societal, as she confronts the challenges of constructing a collective memory in the face of political upheaval and social precarity. Here, the narrator turns to childhood photographs and reminisces about her classmate Estrella González, the daughter of a regime participant involved in the gruesome acts of cutting throats and disposing of the bodies on the road to the Pudahuel airport. With Estrella's introduction here, the narrator broadens her exploration of the unwritten and unofficial names of the regime's victims by including González alongside Valenzuela's, stating:

Aquí debiera hacer un nexo con el hombre que torturaba. Seguir la regla que yo misma he establecido y develar el extraño y torcido vínculo que existe entre él y González, eslabones lejanos o cercanos de una larga y pesada cadena, como esa que arrastran las ánimas de Dickens o los prisioneros de una cárcel clandestine. (182-3)

Engaging with memories that resist generational amnesia and challenge the whitewashing of national trauma, reconsidering who gets remembered and written into history, the narrator proposes a broader discourse on the ethical responsibility of remembering.

In the novel's concluding pages, the narrator makes explicit references to her generation's inheritance, drawing inspiration from Billy Joel's song "We Didn't Start the Fire," a rapid enumeration of historical events and figures spanning 1949 to 1989. This additional intertextuality with a

11. In *Strange TV*, M. Keith Brooker claims that Serling's television series was an effective interrogation of the line between normality and abnormality, and that, although formulaic in its structure, the unusual and far-fetched scenarios "always retained a clear sense of relevance to contemporary reality, their strangeness merely serving as a defamiliarizing device that helped to provide insights into and perspectives on a number of concerns of the late 1950s and early 1960s" (53).

12. "Memories." *The Twilight Zone*, season 3, episode 6, CBS Television Network, 1985.

culturally recognized icon from the era serves to underscore that the events of the 70s and 80s were not choices made by those who were children during that tumultuous period. The narrator articulates this sentiment with Joel's translated lyrics: "Nosotros no empezamos el fuego. No lo encendimos, pero intentamos apagarlo" (198). Positioned as inheritors of this historical narrative, the narrator conveys the frustration and disillusionment echoed in Joel's song, framing his lyrics within a Chilean contest. Commencing in 1973, she recites the events initiated with the *coup d'état*, concluding her rendition of the song with Pinochet's death in 2006. While the song emphasizes the enduring impact of the past on her and her nation's present, the broader imperative inherited by her generation –to reconstruct a communal memory for the benefit of future generations– becomes apparent on the final page: "Soplamos e intentamos apagar, de una vez y para siempre, con la fuerza de quien escupe un ataúd, el fuego de todas las velas de esta torta de mierda" (227). In this process, the narrator recognizes that her efforts to confront her memories and comprehend her cosmic connection to Valenzuela have been guided by transmissions from a parallel plane, also intended for her child.

Through intricate intertextuality with *The Twilight Zone*, Fernández crafts a narrative that moves beyond the conventional boundaries of time and space, delving into the liminal realm between shadow and substance. By employing the metaphor 'twilight' as a symbol for the ambivalent dynamics between memory and forgetfulness, the narrator presents life not as an unadulterated reflection of reality but as a disorientating and anachronistic rendition of life "tal como ha sido olvidada," as Idelber Avelar aptly puts it (26). The sustained vacillation between the narrator and implied author's work as an investigative reporter and her childhood memories, firmly scaffolded to the dystopian imagination of parallel worlds presented through its interface with *The Twilight Zone* series, provides a compelling exposé of the present moment in a country void of a coherent socio-political dimension.

The thematic complexity of the novel heightened through its narrative structure mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and its temporal effects, where "[t]odo es como ayer o anteayer o mañana" (Fernández 29). As stated by Andreas Huyssen in *Twilight Memories*, the textual representations of memories always reveal the elastic properties of time: "[A]ny act of memory is always the present and not, as some naive epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience" (3). In this way, Fernández's novel *La dimensión desconocida* stands as a powerful and complex exploration of memory, silence, and the interplay between reality and imagination in the context of post-dictatorship Chile. Through the doubling and splitting of universes, much like the doubling of the autobiographical 'yo' established at the beginning, the narrator ends by emphasizing a call for the reestablishment of a collective memory that acknowledges what is revealed in history and what silence hides. In this exploration, Fernández guides her readers on a journey into a dimension of both shadow and substance, highlighting her belief that the past is not a fixed entity, but rather an unsettling dimension of the present.

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