Illustrating Trauma: Repression and Expression in *Cruddy* and *Dear Patagonia*

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INTRODUCTION

The illustrated novel *Cruddy* (1999) by North American author Lynda Barry and the graphic novel *Dear Patagonia* (2011) by four different Argentine authors – Jorge González, Horacio Altuna, Hernán González, and Alejandro Aguado – converge and diverge in the way they explore verbal and visual text, narrative time, trauma and violence, and individual and collective memory. This thesis will explore the way these two texts use verbal and visual discourses to explore trauma, both personal and collective. The production of art as a result of trauma demonstrates the need to communicate the events according to the victim, a striving to tell the truth where truth has been denied. *Dear Patagonia* presents the possibility to heal from trauma while *Cruddy* does not present the process of trauma healing as a viable option.

In *Cruddy*, the main character, Roberta, asserts herself as the text’s fictional creator in the prologue and throughout in the use of the first person. Roberta’s perspective is also alive in the illustrations. Though there are four author/illustrators in *Dear Patagonia*, Alejandro Aguado is central in a discussion of trauma because he depicts himself as a character in the final chapter. In some ways, this final chapter unites this fragmented narrative together, with the help of the other protagonists of *Dear Patagonia*. Truth has been denied to the main characters by members of their family and the media at large. In Roberta’s case, the news stories about her disappearance and reuniting with her mother was not the whole truth. The truth of Aguado’s ancestry was unknown to him for most of his life, primarily because his grandmother did not discuss their indigenous ancestry. Through the gathering and presentation of his research, Aguado is able to claim his truth to the audience and to himself. Cuyul, another essential character in *Dear
Patagonia, experiences healing from his past when he moves from the city to rural Patagonia. Unfortunately for Roberta, all of the people that listened to her story die. Because of this isolation and her poisonous story, Roberta kills herself. Before beginning a further analysis of the texts, it is important to explore a brief history of texts that combine verbal text and images to depict traumatic events.

While these texts are similar in essential ways, their differences also make them more complicated to compare. Cruddy is an illustrated novel and Dear Patagonia is a graphic novel. Although they come from different practices, the combination of written text and image from a graphic novel and an illustrated novel broadens the scope of my argument as it applies to a wider range of formats that incorporate the visual. This broader range demonstrates the pervasiveness of representation of trauma through image. Cruddy is primarily an individual narrative while Dear Patagonia is a narrative that encompasses a group of people: Argentines. The title itself addresses the entire region of Patagonia like a letter in an effort to confront its past. However, there is still overlap in the depiction of individual and social trauma in both texts. Cruddy intersects with broader social traumas, including the government’s nuclear testing in the deserts of Nevada and mentions of the Mexican migrant and indigenous populations. Dear Patagonia becomes a collection of individual narratives as we follow several characters and their stories over the span of a lifetime. Individual trauma is also present in Dear Patagonia when we find out much of the story is related to Aguado’s life. These narratives demonstrate that trauma has the potential to be both individual and collective.

The two subjects, cartoons and trauma, may seem to be an unusual combination. Thomas Doherty describes this contradiction in an article about Spiegelman’s Maus, “associated with the madcap, the childish, the trivial. By its very nature comics seem ill equipped for the moral
seriousness and tonal restraint that have been demanded of Holocaust art” (71). Yet, over and over again comics and the graphic novel have been used to represent traumatic events and confront political systems, suggesting there is something appealing to this combination. Among some of the many hybrid forms that combine the verbal and visual, we can mention comic strips, political cartoons, illustrated novels and graphic novels. For example, some of the early comics that pushed the boundary between serious and trivial were *Pogo* (1948-1975) by Walt Kelly and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* by Walter McCay (1905-1926). *Pogo* was set in the South, specifically Georgia’s Okefenokee Swamp and became an outlet for Kelly to express his liberal views through discussions of race and the civil rights movement (Jarvis 85-86). *Little Nemo in Slumberland* was an earlier comic which depicted the violent dreams of the protagonist Little Nemo who, at the end of every strip, was shown waking up in bed (Inge 153). The comic seems to be connected to Sigmund Freud and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) (Inge 155). In fact, Freud includes a comic at the beginning of the book and Inge interprets this inclusion as “a tacit acknowledgement of mass culture’s ability to reflect upon inner psychology and the modern condition” (157). Inge argues for the intersection between image and psychology/trauma rather than their separation. Images of the trauma provide unique insight into the psychology of the individual characters and the collective memory of the groups of people in *Cruddy* and *Dear Patagonia*.

The comic form has been a prolific genre in Argentina, too. A prominent example, *Mafalda* (1964-1973) by Joaquin Salvador Lavado (pen name Quino) is an essential comic to past and present Argentine culture. *Mafalda* was produced during the Onganía and Lanusse regimes of 1966-1970 and 1971-1973 and, as a result, was censored as it attempted to critique the political leadership (L’Hoeste 82). *Dear Patagonia* is a different kind of art form, but finds
its place in a long standing tradition in Argentina to critique dirty politics and social systems through verbal text and image.

Though *Cruddy* and *Dear Patagonia* are not comics, there are certain points of contact with these earlier examples of verbal text and image. Like *Pogo*, *Dear Patagonia* generates a discussion of race through the exploration of indigeneity and European colonization. In *Cruddy*, the protagonist, introduces a place similar to Slumberland called Dreamland, which will be discussed later in more detail. Perhaps these later graphic and illustrated novels follow in the tradition of these previous comic strips by building on the idea of engaging trauma through image. The graphic novel as a genre should also be considered when investigating how representations of trauma through image became re-popularized.

Perhaps the most famous graphic novel is *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1980) by Art Spiegelman, where we find a more contemporary depiction of trauma and image. In the text, Spiegelman interviews his father, a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor who recounts his traumatic experiences. Alison Bechdel, creator of *Fun Home* (2006), another popular graphic novel, comments on *Maus*’s influence in an interview conducted by Emily Tess Katz,

> Comics were once sort of [for] superhero action stories. That was pretty much all they did, and [then] people started pushing the boundaries. Underground cartoonists in the ’70s started writing about more adult topics and themes. Spiegelman’s ‘Maus’ changed comics forever. Comics now can be about anything — any topic that’s as serious as you can come up with.

*Maus* put graphic novels and trauma back on the map. At the end of *Maus*, an actual photograph of Spiegelman’s father is presented and yet, as – Doherty claims, “the snapshot on film seems pallid and duplicitous. The true picture of this survivor’s tale is in the cartoons” (82). The
cartoon constructs a more intimate, true relationship between reader and subject, a testament to the ability to connect to the drawn image. *Crucial* and *Dear Patagonia* also utilize image to construct a more accurate representation than a photograph could capture. Through an analysis of *Crucial* and *Dear Patagonia*, as with Spiegelman’s novel, visual art becomes a means for the fictional main characters in the texts to confront trauma. The creation of art is done through the fictional production of each text by the main character who, within the text, experiences trauma. *Crucial* takes place in the 1970s in Nevada and examines the life of Roberta Rohbeson, a sixteen year old girl, and the trip she took with her father, Ray. We enter Roberta’s story in the aftermath of a series of traumatic events. When the father leaves the family, the mother sends Roberta, then a young girl, with him. Roberta is forced to tag along with her father as he goes on a search for the money his father, a butcher who committed suicide, gave to other members of the family. Roberta witnesses multiple murders, is sexually assaulted, and has part of her finger removed after an infection from a knife cut. During this extremely violent journey through the Nevada desert, her father pretends she is a mentally handicapped boy named Clyde in order to gain sympathy from those they encounter on the road. At the final destination of their trip, an Air Force nuclear testing site called Dreamland, there are multiple murders, including Roberta murdering her own father by slashing his throat. Roberta and her dog Cookie are the only survivors. She is then adopted by a Christian family. Eventually, she is returned to her mother who is happy to be in the media spotlight of this news story. The trip with her father is communicated through flashbacks. In present day, Roberta skips school, does drugs, has crushes on boys, and fights with her mom and sister. After assembling a group of friends including Vicky, the Stick, the Turtle, and a boy called the Great Wesley, they take a car and drive back through the route Roberta took with her father. When they reach their destination, the Turtle and
the Great Wesley fall into a river and get swept away. The others return to town and, high and sick after doing drugs, end up in a hospital where Vicky’s brother dies after trying to kill himself. Roberta claims at the beginning and at the end of the text that, if the reader is holding the book in their hands, she has committed suicide. While her suicide is not explicitly included in the text, Julie, her sister, writes in the final page of the book “fuck you roberta!!! I hate you Roberta!!! Where are you??” suggesting Roberta has disappeared. It seems as if she followed through on her assertion to kill herself.

*Dear Patagonia* is organized into nine chapters that develop chronologically (with flashbacks) from 1888 to 2009. Some of the essential locations in the novel are Buenos Aires; the capital city, Facundo, a pueblo in the Chubut province of Patagonia; and Comodoro Rivadavia, a more urban city in the same province, all located in Argentina. These chapters are broken down into different parts. Jorge González illustrates Chapter One through part of Chapter Six. As the leader of the project and the author of most of the chapters, his name is featured on the front cover of the graphic novel but there are, in fact, three other author/illustrators: Horacio Altuna’s illustrations begin on page 127 of Chapter Six, Hernán Gonzalez illustrates Chapter Seven and Eight, and Alejandro Aguado illustrates the final chapter. The multiplicity of illustrators creates many characters and narratives in the text. All of these narratives are interconnected as they explore the historical and individual tensions between the indigenous Mapuche and European Argentines and, in the last section, the individual journey of Alejandro Aguado as he traces his ancestry. The Mapuche are a group of people who inhabited south-central Chile and south-western Argentina, parts of which are present day Patagonia. One of the central narratives begins with a married couple named Karl and Alicia, who are German immigrants and own a general store in Facundo. They have a son named Julián who, when he
becomes an adult, begins travelling back and forth to Buenos Aires to bring back goods for his parents’ store. On one of these trips to Buenos Aires, Julián meets a man named Roth after being intrigued by his German accent and invites him to Facundo. Roth accepts the offer and goes to Facundo to begin filming the indigenous population. Later in the text, Julián is depicted as an older man who owns a hotel in Buenos Aires. He discovers, with the help of a French guest in the hotel, that Roth was actually a Nazi hiding named Hermann Winsler. Another central character is Aguado, one of the creators of the book, who, in the last chapter, depicts himself and his story. His grandmother is the daughter of Isabel, a character who is represented briefly in Chapter 3 as a young girl and in Chapter 6 as an older woman interacting with Julián in Buenos Aires at his hotel. Another important character in the story is Cuyul, a boxer living in Buenos Aires with indigenous heritage who decides to move to Patagonia and live off the land after cutting off one of his arms in a fit of anger. While attempting to survive in nature, he is taken by Josef Mengele, a high-ranking German Nazi doctor who conducted thousands of experiments on prisoners and who hid in Patagonia. Mengele operates on Cuyul and gives him a new, bionic arm. Through the characters of Winsler and Mengele, larger traumatic narratives, such as the Holocaust, become connected to the text. In another example, a woman staying at Julián’s hotel discusses her experiences during Argentina’s Dirty War of the 1970s. The relationship between image and verbal text, cyclical and generational trauma, and the overlapping of individual and collective traumas are essential topics to explore in each text. There will be a separate discussion of each text addressing these topics. Then, in the conclusion, the findings of the two texts will be compared.

DEAR PATAGONIA

Image and Verbal Text
*Dear Patagonia* is primarily a visual experience, relying on its watercolor panels to tell the story. The images are presented in a cinematic style, zooming in and out, capturing panoramas of rural Patagonia and the capital city of Buenos Aires. The narrative moves chronologically, with interruptions and flashbacks. This revisiting of past images suggests a continuity in the events of the narrative. A variety of image sizes are used, from full-page images to smaller, framed images. Page-sized images are used as transitions between chapters, characters, and spaces. Verbal text is presented through dialogue bubbles, within the image itself, or as typed text at the beginning of chapters. The typed text directly states the place and/or time where the section takes place, usually at the beginning of a chapter. Image frames in *Dear Patagonia* carry different measures of time. Some, like the large images of landscapes, may not be representative of time at all, but merely strive to capture the existence of the space. In other frames, only one second may pass from one frame to the next. In others, the frames could skip to events further in the future or the past, making the reader responsible to fill in the gaps between the images. Deciphering the relationship between the frames on a page, is similar to the way it is difficult to decipher trauma in the text, an interrelated and confusing process.

Visual blending between verbal text and image occurs when words are drawn into the panels. This technique is demonstrated in the sequence of violence below which contains some frames without dialogue on the verso page (figure 1). Though some frames do not contain dialogue, they are not entirely silent, nor without verbal text. Sound is represented within the image with words such as “POUMM” and “PAAMMM” drawn into the frames to signify the sound of a firing gun. The words are barely distinguishable from the image as they are written in the same muted colors as the background of the image. The subtlety of verbal text in this case suggests a necessary active readership in order to notice the small details embedded in the
images. This near invisibility highlights the space where the sound occurs, claiming an inability to separate the environment from the sounds of the attack. The dialogue bubbles provide another type of text within the image. On the recto page, the dialogue bubbles are clearly separate from image as the white background and black, typed text stand out from the rest of the page (figure 1).

The dialogue bubbles complicate the framed organization of the narrative because, sometimes, the bubble does not remain in its own frame, but overlaps into other frames. This suggests the events in the frames are occurring rapidly enough that the sound of the dialogue bleeds into the two frames, the two actions, as in this case when the land-owner points the gun at the indigenous family and then a flame is thrown at him. In addition to being a marker of time and sound, the dialogue bubble without framed barriers causes the dialogue to be further separated from the construction of image because it operates under a different set of rules.

Figure 1.
This image sequence is full of details and actions, making it easy to miss potential key elements of the story. The distracting and competing images highlight the chaos and intensity of the attack. The chaos of the images can be partially attributed to the explicit depictions of violence. The violence is represented visually and explicitly by the presence of the bullet wounds and the squirting of dark blood on the recto page (figure 2). Other times, images on a page do not compete with one another or an image takes up the entire page, and the reader does not have to fight to understand the story. These moments of tension and complexity or blankness and simplicity communicate Patagonia’s contradictions. It is a vast, at times quiet land, but has also been a location for much violence and oppression. Image in the text highlights these contradictions.

Far more essential to this text than its written words is its visual component. The zoom-in, zoom-out tactic of this violent conflict captures the emotion of the indigenous as they fight for their lives. The zooming out depicts the general size of the attack and the characters’ movements, while the zooming in shows the details of the indigenous’ hands and face,
illustrating their reactions and body language (figure 2). The zooming in allows us to make out individuals. This provides a personal connection in the midst of the chaos of a large group, increasing the ability to empathize. The visual component has the ability to generate automatic empathy from an audience. William Ickes, a social psychologist, describes this phenomena as spontaneous communication:

The sender must display clearly the state in question and the receiver must attend to the display… Its elements are signs that are externally accessible to the referent… [This] is true of spontaneous facial expressions and gestures… Spontaneous communication is not intentional… The content of spontaneous communication is nonpropositional, because it cannot be false. (26-27)

*Dear Patagonia* makes use of spontaneous communication and, therefore, the images evoke a natural empathetic response, especially when individual faces are represented. This makes representing trauma through the visual an appealing option.

The above violent moment in the text represents an earlier time in history, making non-verbal communication depicted through images essential because of the language barrier between the Spanish speaking characters in the text and the indigenous, Mapuche speakers. The text could have represented moments of speech among the indigenous, but this erasure in the text underscores the silence and lack of communication available to the Mapuche. Verbal communication and written text becomes more essential as the text progresses and more assimilation of the Mapuche into Argentine society occurs. There is one instance of verbal communication among the Mapuche in the text. In the first chapter of the book, an indigenous mother sings to her baby, “Y johen win hosh hin kawy tamnia hues wai kan.” A translation of the Mapuche language into Spanish is cited at the bottom of the page, “Canción ona vete, anda,
vete...nieve, vuélveta a casa...localidad mítica en el cielo del norte...¿Por qué estás aquí? Nieve o lluvia” or “Song one go, come, go...snow, come back home...mythic place in the sky of the north...Why are you here? Snow or rain.” The inclusion of the translation of the song suggests the graphic text’s audience is one that speaks Spanish, not Mapuche, and reveals the desire for a sense of home and belonging. It seems as if the song is not fully translatable into Spanish, considering the first line, “Song one go, come, go” does not seem to make sense. This use of the Mapuche language is during a private, intimate moment between mother and child, demonstrating a minority language would be used in private spaces. The last chapter departs from the previous chapter in its execution of image and verbal text style. Paradoxically, the final chapter also connects all of these seemingly discombobulated narratives together.

The different style of verbal text and image is evident in the last chapter because there are less image frames, the dialogue contains a more free-form structure, and the style and use of color has morphed. In part, this is due to the changing illustrator, now Aguado. But, there is also symbolic significance: the active, self-aware processing of Alejandro Aguado’s family history in the final chapter inspires the range of colors and abstract art. These tools may be connected because working through trauma can be a confusing, fragmented process, perhaps leading to the production of art that lends itself to interpretation. Abstract or blurred images are prevalent and, coupled with the traumatic subject matter, suggest a difficulty in processing visual memory of traumatic events. One of these unique illustrations is the final image of Dear Patagonia, a painting, portions of which appear to be finger painted, a reference to indigenous art (figure 3). Aguado discusses indigenous cave art in the final chapter when he describes a visit to the caves and says, “Lástima que ya no sepá que significan,” “It’s a shame that now we don’t know what they mean.” The inability to understand these cave images manifests itself in the abstract style of
some of the art work in this last chapter. This image appears to represent an indigenous person’s face crying with tears dripping down the right cheek, ending the text by communicating the profound pain and sadness experienced by the indigenous community as a result of colonization and abuses of power. The blurriness and abstract style of the image is related to repression and the inability to identify the origin of a traumatic event.

The use of color and media becomes more diverse in the final chapter because memory is more vivid with recent events. When we arrive at the year 2009, multiple artistic tools are used. This image, for example, uses pen, a tool not used in any other chapter and the subjects of the images overlap (figure 4). The overlapping of the images is symbolic of Aguado’s mixed racial ancestry. The images represent an indigenous woman, a white man, and an Argentine gaucho.
This suggests many Argentines share this mixed racial history though their indigenous counterparts tend to be ignored, as in Aguado’s case.

Figure 4.

The final chapter appears to be a work in progress, as if we are peering into Aguado’s sketchbook. This sketchbook feeling is further demonstrated by the preliminary pencil sketches Aguado includes (figure 5). Directly above the old man pointing is a replica of this same image, but it is drawn in light pencil; a practice version. This drafting throughout the chapter demonstrates Aguado’s process in understanding his past is not over and requires multiple iterations, like the abstract style of some of the other images in the chapter. Lack of color and definition in the pre-formed sketches makes the preceding chapters seem even more important because their fictional representation is able to fill in the blanks of Aguado’s memory, biased trauma process, and inaccessibility to images of the past.
The narrative fills in the gaps of knowledge in Aguado’s story. This includes creating visual representations of the town, the relatives, and the dialogue Aguado would not otherwise have access to. The town of Facundo is one of the main locations of the text and is an actual Argentine town that is essential to Aguado’s personal history. His great-grandmother, Isabel, was born there. The name Facundo evokes the famous Argentine novel *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) written by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Sarmiento’s book is about modernization, the transition from a rural life, like life in Patagonia, to an urban one. The reference highlights the tension between the rural and the urban and its connectedness to indigeneity and white Europeanism in Argentina. In addition to representing his quest for knowledge about his ancestry, Aguado depicts a meeting he had with Jorge González, the lead author, in which they discuss the creation of *Dear Patagonia*. Through this scene, the reader is given insight into the timeline of the real production of the text, using meta-fiction to assert the
presence of the text. The narrative structure of not revealing Aguado until the end of the novel is successful because the unveiling of Aguado’s central role in the final chapter forces the reader not to focus on one character or narrative, but to contemplate the wide-ranging effects of colonization. Then, the reader can come to understand the non-fictional effect these issues have had on a singular person and their family in the final chapter.

**Cyclical and Generational Trauma**

Cyclical and generational trauma are demonstrated through the narrative of Alejandro Aguado in the final chapter. Although Aguado does not experience direct violence, his trauma is a result of his grandmother’s reluctance to speak about her indigenous heritage. He inherits this generational trauma in the form of ignorance: he does not know the truth about his ancestry. The reasoning behind Aguado’s grandmother’s unwillingness to speak is clear. In one scene, Isabel, his great-grandmother, is yelled at and scared away by white Argentines, “¡Fuera de aca!! Jaja…que cara de susto de la indiecita,” “Out of here! Haha…what a frightened face from the little Indian girl.” This rejection of indigeneity was passed down generationally leading to Aguado’s grandmother’s aversion to discussing the matter. The lack of communication causes Aguado to search, produce, and display his truth to an audience in order to reclaim his identity.

In an article on trauma and performance, Diana Taylor defines trauma as, “Not all blows or wounds create trauma- just those that produce the characteristic aftershock…Thus trauma is known only by the nature of its repeats…Past blows haunt our present and shake our individual or social body” (1675). Taylor defines trauma not as the moment of impact, but as its future implications and the way trauma has the ability to repeat itself. This is true in the case of Alejandro Aguado whose trauma is more underlying than overt, a social trauma that has affected him personally.
There are other instances of generational trauma, too. Cuyul, a man with indigenous ancestry, inflicts and receives violence through his profession as a boxer in Buenos Aires. Not only does he inflict violence on his boxing opponents, he also cuts off his own arm to make weight in a competition. The violent removal of his arm is linked to an experience in Cuyul’s childhood that also displays self-mutilation as self-punishment. When his coach tells him, “¡¡Tenés que bajar todas las mollejas que te morfaste!!” “You have to get rid of all the gizzards you ate,” he ridicules him for being too heavy to participate in the boxing match. On the following page, a black, white, and gray flashback sequence from Cuyul’s childhood is shown. The scene depicts Cuyul and his father cooking and eating mollejas or gizzards, a typical dish in an Argentine barbeque. Young Cuyul asks his father, “¿Papa le puedo dar una molleja a Sifón?” “Dad, could I give a gizzard to Sifón?” The father harshly rejects Cuyul’s desire to feed the dog, but, when the father leaves the room, Cuyul feeds the dog anyway. The father comes back and hits Cuyul hard across the face and says, “¿No ves que los perros salchicha no pueden comer salchichas? Es canibalismo pelotudo,” “You don’t understand that wiener dogs can’t eat hot dogs? It’s cannibalism stupid.” Young Cuyul is distraught by his father’s words and puts his hand down the dog’s throat to force him to vomit. The dog bites off part of Cuyul’s finger in response. The flashback returns to Cuyul’s present day narrative in the boxing gym where he then decides to cut off his arm, thereby associating self-hatred and shame with the removal of limbs. Both his father and his boxing coach shame him for food related issues. As a result of this shame, Cuyul experiences (when the dog bites off his finger) or inflicts (when he cuts off his arm) violence on his own body. Alice Miller, a childhood trauma psychologist, explains the effects of child abuse which can be connected to Cuyul’s narrative:
The knowledge that you were beaten and that this, as your parents tell you, was for your own good may well be retained (although not always), but the suffering caused by the way you were mistreated will remain unconscious and will later prevent you from empathizing. (115)

The removal of his arm is connected to the lack of self-empathy produced by the abuse from his father. This is not to say that Cuyul is unable to empathize with others, but he is unable, and trying to recover from, the inability to empathize with himself which causes him to self-harm. His ability to box and be physically violent with others is also a signifier of the ability to distance empathy and a repetition of the violence his father inflicted during his childhood.

Individual and Collective Trauma

The multiplicity of traumas in the text along with the many characters and story lines contributes to the idea that large scale traumas are similar and connected, such as the Holocaust and Argentina’s Dirty War, during the dictatorship in the 70s. The Dirty War is brought into the text by a woman staying at Julián’s hotel in Buenos Aires who describes to Julián how her friend was taken and tortured by the military junta. She comes from Trelew, a Patagonian city, to Buenos Aires as a form of escaping the violence of the guerrillas. Both Julián and this woman have fled Patagonia and come to the city, demonstrating the capital to be a more desired space than isolated Patagonia for white European Argentines. However, Patagonia is attractive for others, such as the ex-Nazis in the text, Josef Mengele and Hermann Winsler who value the land for its isolation and indigenous population. The interactions between colonization, the Holocaust, and the Dirty War claim that these traumas are linked by the concepts of otherness, extermination, and eugenics:
For many of Argentina’s Jews, especially those who were directly affected by the state terror associated with the military junta of 1976–83, or who look back on that era now in the light of subsequent revelations, the Nazi Holocaust resonates deeply with their own nation’s Dirty War. (Kaminsky 104)

The connection between these two violent moments in history transcends geography to show that with certain political agendas (i.e. the elimination of the other), similar traumas will be created, leading to the extinction of empathy through state terror.

While Julían and the woman staying in his hotel left Patagonia for the city, Patagonia becomes a space for Cuyul to escape the difficulties of Buenos Aires. This portrays Buenos Aires as a kind of haven for white Argentines from Patagonia and Patagonia as a more desirable location for someone with indigenous ancestry. Cuyul stands out in Buenos Aires because he is not white. The distinction between white (the norm) and indigenous (other) is evident earlier in the text when an indigenous woman is dressed in contemporary clothes in Buenos Aires and young Julián says, “¿Qué hace un indio vestido de señora?” or “What is an Indian doing dressed like a woman?” This scenario can be linked to Cuyul’s decision to leave Buenos Aires as he may have experienced similar aggressions.

While attempting to live in the Patagonian wilderness, Cuyul is captured by Josef Mengele, an ex-Nazi who conducted experiments on children and was obsessed with creating the perfect human form. Mengele notices his missing arm and gives him a new, metallic one. This, in a way, repairs the physical damage done to Cuyul and connects Argentina’s colonization trauma to the Holocaust because the surgery is done by a German Nazi doctor. Unlike the white Argentines, Cuyul rejects the urban for the rural. Cuyul’s desire to leave Buenos Aires is evident in the last images we see of Cuyul. In these last images, following his escape from Mengele,
Cuyul is seen with bandages covering his face and arm, walking into an area with a sign that says “Territorio Mapuche Recuperado” or “Recuperated Mapuche Territory.” His defeated appearance shows that, even in isolated Patagonia, Cuyul cannot escape his otherness, racism, and eugenics. In a final attempt to find a home, he participates in a larger healing of the indigenous inhabitants from the loss of their land and overall oppression by entering this reserved space. The shift in indigenous rights activism is represented here as, in the beginning of the text, we see the European landowners unapologetically and aggressively occupying the Mapuche’s space, but now there has been movement to reclaim the land. Many of the white Argentines have moved to the city and Cuyul seems to be alone in his return. With this isolated return, a sense of loss and an ability to return to and correct the past is highlighted. To further complicate this sadness, the text also claims that, though the Patagonian land was important to white Argentines in the past, they no longer care about it, though they created so much damage to the Mapuche. Cuyul’s section, connects to past groups of the Mapuche who lived on this land and the fetishization and exploitation of the indigenous body by white Europeans.

Roth’s ethnographic film during Cuyul’s transition to life in Patagonia demonstrates this fetishization. In the beginning of the text in 1929, Roth and Julián meet in Buenos Aires and Julián invites him to Facundo, his hometown. Upon arrival, Roth becomes interested in the indigenous inhabitants. Roth is introduced to the Mapuche and begins filming them. The film seems to be an ethnography of the group’s behavior and customs, capturing the Mapuche as they dance, have sex, and eat (figure 6). Although Roth films the Mapuche in 1929, the film is not shown in the text until the French researcher and Julián watch the film in 2002. The French researcher informs Julián that Roth’s real name was Hermann Winsler and that he was the favorite director of Goebbels, Hitler’s minister of propaganda.
Goebbels was partial to Winsler’s directorial work for a reason, which we can see through the film strips, Winsler’s attitude towards Facundo, and through the visual treatment of Patagonia. A certain image of Patagonia is explored in the text through Roth/Hermann Winsler’s idealization of Facundo. The illustrations of the tranquil scenery and Roth’s film contribute to a propagandizing of Patagonia as a peaceful, quaint land. This idealization of Patagonia is called into question through the violent conflicts between the Mapuche and the Europeans and in Cuyul’s struggle to survive alone in Patagonia. The color of Roth’s film, black, white, and shades of grey is reflective of the cinematic tools available in 1929 and provides a separation from Cuyul’s narrative in color to the Mapuche who survived in Patagonia in the previous century. The connection between other Mapuche and Cuyul demonstrates they faced similar, but different struggles as they tried to fit into a white Argentina and survive in Patagonia.

The fetishization of the indigenous body that appears in Roth’s film also appears in Cuyul’s personal life, demonstrating that white Europeans desire indigeneity and otherness in
certain, exploitative contexts, but were violent and merciless in others. While Cuyul has sex with the French researcher who comes to investigate Roth’s film (they are both staying in Julían’s hotel), she says “¡Meteme el muñon!!” or “Put the stump in me!” referring to his cut off arm. Though he does what she asks, he then walks away from the bed and says “No soy un muñon,” “I am not a stump.” Cuyul is able to speak out against the French (another white, European) woman’s fetishization and gain back some power, unlike the earliest represented indigenous people in the text who were not able to communicate with their European counterparts in Spanish and under threat of constant violence and harassment.

Narrative time contributes to the understanding of individual and collective traumas in the text. In one sense, narrative time is simple and linear. Typed text in the beginning of each chapter reveals the place and time in which the action occurs. As stated earlier, the story begins in 1888 in Tierra del Fuego and ends in 2009 in Buenos Aires. This time frame coincides with Alejandro Aguado’s personal history and investigation of his family’s past. The complexity of narrative time develops because of its fragmentation and disorientation through the intermingling of narratives. The intermingling of narratives is done by maintaining the same characters while introducing new ones and connecting them, such as the ethnographic film in Cuyul’s section, the Holocaust, and the military dictatorship. The nature of narrative time presents trauma as an interconnected experience, showing there is a relationship between traumas that transcends time and geography.

CRUDDY

Image and Verbal Text

The subject matter and Roberta’s narrative voice seems to situate the text in the genre of young adult fiction or a dark fairy tale as she uses language like “Dreamland” and names her
characters as tropes, such as “the Father” instead of “my Father.” This distinction in the naming of her father distances Roberta from her filial connection to him as a way of coping with the trauma he has inflicted. Because of her dark life, chiefly caused by her parents, Roberta recognizes a wish for a happy ending, “Only in a fairy tale could he ever get home again. In fairy tales it happened all the time. It was possible. I was thinking it was really very possible” (58). However, Barry’s text is a grittier, more violent representation of young adulthood than the typical young adult text. The text incorporates the horror and mystery genres through its intertextual references to movies such as Them! (1954) and the disturbing illustrations, complicating the typical princess fairy tale of young girls.

Part of this unusual narrative is the choice to employ the visual and the use of a diary format for Roberta’s voice. Alisia Chase, a scholar of visual culture, discusses this phenomenon:

Black and white “diaries,” as well as individual comics, stand as an “alternative” vision of growing up female, one far more telling than the glittering pink and sparkling purple, highly sanitized fantasy proffered by most mainstream media. By laboring to make visible that which is normally obscured, to give voice to that which society would prefer remain unspoken about growing up as a girl in late twentieth-century. (211)

The text, then, is a more accurate representation of a young girl’s story because it does not shelter the audience nor the characters from examining a dark, abused character. Turtle, a secondary character who has a crush on Roberta, says, using one of Roberta’s many nicknames, “I should like to hear the conclusion of the tale of the Hillbilly Woman, which I assume is a very happy one” (292). The conclusion to Roberta’s story is not happy, contrary to expectation. The accuracy of the dark narrative is connected to Roberta’s desire to tell her own truth through image and verbal text.
The images are visual representations of the world as Roberta sees it. We see the characters as she sees them: grotesque, murky, and distant. Sometimes these images take up the entire page at the beginning or end of a chapter. Sometimes smaller images are located within the body of the verbal text. The verbal text in *Cruddy* almost always explains the image because the visual medium does not provide enough information for the reader to understand the story. However, different effects are had when the explanatory verbal text precedes an image as opposed to when the verbal text follows the image. For example, if the reader sees the image before reading the verbal text, the reader begins to compare the relationship between image and written text. The images in *Cruddy* do not reveal plot development, though. The reader would need to read the written text to understand the story. Reading the verbal text first and then seeing the image is a more comfortable experience for the reader because the text relies on verbal text rather than image to inform the reader of the story. The reader is able to first understand the context and then a visual element, the illustration, provides another dimension.

The style of the images in *Cruddy* is described by Kirtley as “loose, smudged…a considerable departure from the clear lines and jubilant, frenetic energy of much of Barry’s comic art [suggesting] a dark, muddled fear, the result of a warping and disfiguring of the image” (85) (figure 7).
The cover of a previous text by Barry *The Good Times Are Killing Me* appears to feature a young girl who looks similar to Roberta, if this was a happier story (figure 8). The images in *Crddy*, then, are not simply a reflection of Barry’s style. This further highlights that *Crddy*’s illustrations are representative of Roberta’s inner feelings about the dangerous situations she has been in, feelings of fear and disgust.
Though there is plenty of violence in *Cruddy*, it is not shown through image. Rather, violence is described in the verbal text. The aftermath of a violent scene is presented at the beginning of Chapter 3. Roberta, the protagonist, describes a murder she witnessed when she was younger. The bloody aftermath is described in gruesome detail highlighting the blood covering Roberta’s body, “the authorities found a child calmly walking in the boiling desert, covered in blood…she could not give the authorities any information about why she was the only survivor and everyone else was laying around in hacked-up pieces” (Barry 13). Though the description is vividly violent, the image does not display this blood or the hacked-up pieces. On the page preceding the verbal text of the chapter, there is a portrait of Roberta with her head shaved, holding her dog, Cookie (figure 9).

![Figure 9.](image)

The image is surrounded by a frame connoting the presence of a portrait. However, this is a non-traditional portrait as the subjects have just been through a traumatic event. Typically, a
portrait would represent its subjects in a flattering light and to frame it would signify that the image is being displayed publicly and proudly. The context of the image is described in great detail in the verbal text on the following pages:

Our picture was in the next morning’s Las Vegas newspaper. Me and Cookie’s picture was. We looked bad and crusty. The caption called me the Mystery Child and the story underneath told of my shocking condition and amnesia and asked did anyone recognize me, anyone in this world? The picture was of the very olden me, my hair very very short, shaved like a boy’s and my arms and legs so skinny and my expression very paralyzed, me holding Cookie in my breadstick arms. And even though most of the blood was washed off of us we were still very convincing because the newspaper photographer told the Christian Homes lady to please leave some of the blood. (14)

With just the image, the audience would not be able to understand the context. The verbal text identifies the origin of the image; it was taken after a traumatic event and the photo was used in a newspaper containing a caption with Roberta’s story. Because the image does not contain color – none of the images in Cruddy do – it is not clear that there is blood in the image.

Trauma and memory are depicted in Cruddy through black, white, and gray images that capture the horrifying nature of Roberta’s lived experience. Roberta’s mental images are characterized by the murky, distant style and a typical color scheme for representing the past. The use of color in Cruddy’s images would have been overwhelmingly grotesque as the figures themselves are already terrific. The verbal text provides details that force the reader to reexamine the image for traces of trauma. The newspaper photographer’s request to allow Roberta and her dog to remain covered in a certain amount of blood suggests a voyeuristic/sensationalist aspect of representing traumatic events visually.
The written text closely responds to the images by capturing the visual dimension of Roberta’s point of view. In their discussion of illustrated books, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott describe the relationship between the visual and the written texts, “If we consider what images and words each do best, it is clear that physical description belongs in the realm of the illustrator who can, in an instant, communicate information about appearance that would take many words and much reading time” (83). *Cruddy* employs both written text and image to provide the reader with an optimum understanding of Roberta’s world. Because the illustrations so closely match Roberta’s description, they highlight the subjectivity of visual representation in the text. What Roberta says in the text is reflected in the drawing. For example, Roberta’s written description of the woman from the Washeteria, the laundromat, directly corresponds to the image (figure 10):

Through the window the lady watched us. And she was everything Vicky said, the million warts and the saggy boobs. The shadow of the window-painted word WASHETERIA was falling on her face, the “W” was…It was moles. Beige moles, a million of them growing one upon the other. (62)
The image mirrors this verbal description. This example also provides another dimension of understanding the multiple genres *Cruddy* invokes. The woman’s witch-like appearance suggests the text is like a dark fairy tale. The large W the woman is surrounded by and her plethora of warts certainly hint at the image of a witch. She is also unkind to the three teenagers when they enter her laundromat, as if they entered a witch’s home and disturbed her.

Roberta addresses the fairy tale genre by asserting her own death as a “happily ever after” in the prologue when she claims that, if the reader is holding this book, she is already dead.

Susan E. Kirtley refers to Roberta’s dedication and assertion of suicide in this passage:

On the left side of the book is an imprint of a left hand with part of the index finger missing. This, apparently is Roberta Rohbeson’s mark—an impression of her identity and a symbol that this document is one of her possessions…The signature and years are written in scrawled, childlike cursive. This self-referential note and stamp lead readers to believe that they have happened upon the not-so-secret diary of a young girl who has committed suicide and that her death indicates the happy conclusion of her fairy tale. (83-84)

Figure 11.
Kirtley recognizes how Barry positions Roberta to break the fourth wall and leads the audience to question whether or not they are holding a real artifact that a young girl wrote and left behind (84-85). The description of the conclusion, Roberta’s death, is evident in the prologue as well as the handwriting on the final page of the text, with the words written by Julie, Roberta’s sister, “fuck you roberta!!! I hate you Roberta!!! Where are you??” This angry sentence complicates the multi-layered narrative time frame by indicating a moment following production of the text. Julie becomes a reader and a contributor to the text. Though her suicide is not depicted in the narrative, these clues claim Roberta followed through with her plan.

The narrative begins with a map that is presented before the prologue. The maps at the beginning and end of the narrative provide evidence for Roberta’s story. Because her parents have not allowed her to speak freely about the events in her life, she puts forth this map as evidence as a way to concretize her experience, especially because there are no other living witnesses to her story. The maps also link Roberta’s story to the genre of adventure/treasure hunting. However, the Xs on Roberta’s maps are not treasure, they are dead people (figure 12). She could have drawn the X on the location of the suitcases filled with money, but her decision to focus on the dead shows that witnessing murders was more impressionable to her. This demonstrates that Roberta is a less materialistic and shallow person than Vicky and the father who are only interested in the suitcases of money at these locations. The X also represents a cross on a grave as Roberta experiences a necessity to provide a proper burial for those who died anonymously and were easily disappeared and forgotten, except by Roberta.
The maps blend verbal text and image in the illustrated novel because the images contain the verbal voice of the protagonist. Already, we are introduced to Roberta’s voice in the key of the map through descriptions of strange events including “All the places where we got high” and “Dead people we left behind” (figure 12). The events that are written in the map have already happened as they are written in past tense. This causes the reader to attempt to construct the narrative, creating an active readership. The first map foreshadows the actions in the plot and creates a visual reference for the space Roberta traverses. In the case of the first map, these events will occur in the future of the text and be further explained. The phrase “That way to Dreamland” on both pages of the first map invoke the reader’s physical space, suggesting the turn of the page will transport the reader to Roberta’s world, claiming the story is not a fiction, but a tangible space. Describing a place such as Dreamland suggests that the area is a desired destination, somewhere the protagonist will try to go and we, as readers, will be witnesses to that journey. Upon coming to the end of the novel, it is evident that Dreamland is an Air Force nuclear testing site, not a desirable place to be. Because Dreamland does not fit on the map but is merely referred to by suggestive arrows and verbal text, the reader is further curious to learn more about the story because they lack visual answers. This conflicts with the need to document Roberta’s journey.

The map at the end of the text presents events the reader has already learned about, the reverse experience of the maps at the beginning of the text. The key departure of these final maps is the verbal text, “This is dreamland. It is all over. Every direction. Above and below and always moving.” The text attempts to answer what Dreamland is/where Dreamland is, a question posited in the beginning maps. The maps at the beginning and end are in conversation with each other because they fill in each other’s narrative gaps. The first map shows what happened when
Roberta is in her hometown, while the last map shows the events that take place in the desert on both journeys with her father and then with her friends. The map does not separate these events chronologically, but separates them spatially. This separation makes clear the final murders are, in Roberta’s mind, inextricably linked to the desert, to Dreamland.

Cyclical and Generational Trauma

Much of the cyclical trauma in *Cruddy* revolves around Roberta’s family. Roberta’s father is a pathological liar who is even dishonest to strangers about Roberta’s name and gender. Her mother lied to news stations about how Roberta was taken away from home (her mother forcibly sent her away). Miller discusses the effects suppressing the truth could have on a child: “An upbringing that succeeds in sparing the parents at the expense of the child's vitality sometimes leads to suicide or extreme drug addiction, which is a form of suicide” (106).

Roberta’s parents are selfish and use lies for their own benefit. This causes Roberta to be unable to express herself and, therefore, she turns to drugs and later suicide. Miller highlights the particular importance of adolescence, Roberta’s age, in self-expression,

At puberty, adolescents are often taken totally by surprise by the intensity of their true feelings, after having succeeded in keeping them at a distance during the latency period.

With the spurt of biological growth, these feelings (rage, anger, rebelliousness, falling in love, sexual desire, enthusiasm, joy, enchantment, sadness) seek full, expression. (107)

Roberta has been able to suppress the trauma of the journey with her father because it happened when she was younger, but now, as a teenager, the suppression takes a toll on her psychologically. Roberta is no longer able to suppress her trauma and it manifests itself through the telling of the story, the use of drugs, and her supposed suicide.
This narrative is Roberta’s voice, Roberta’s opportunity to tell the real story. Edward Brunner, a scholar of the graphic novel and trauma, defines trauma as a hidden phenomenon, “never patent but must be deduced,” the combination of the visual and verbal create an ideal format for representing trauma (186). Brunner further claims, “the visual/verbal arrangement…contributes enhanced understandings to a project that is intent on examining what goes hidden and unsaid in daily life” (196). Much of Roberta’s story is hidden by her parents’ lies until she is able to write down her experience and tell it to her friends. Therefore, the text revisits and reexamines the previously hidden instance of Roberta’s violent trip with her father.

The violent trip invokes a repetitious trauma because, after Roberta tells her friends the story, she takes them back to the desert to relive the experience. Her friends, the Turtle and the Great Wesley, both perish in the irrigation canal next to the train tracks. Their death is a direct result of their interest in Roberta’s story as they badger her to continue, “The Great Wesley again. ‘Please Hillbilly Woman. Continue’” and agree to drive to the scene of the crime (283). Vicky does not get sucked into the story like the others, “Are you lying? Because if you are lying I am going to get very violent. I get extremely violent when people lie to me. Is it money?” (52). Her distrust allows Vicky to survive while all the others perish. She remains distanced from Roberta’s narrative and is only willing to go on the road trip because of the promise of money. Like Roberta’s father, Vicky navigates the world by valuing material objects, not by connecting and empathizing with others. This proves to be successful in Vicky’s survival. However, Roberta’s father dies in the end, showing the limits to this tactic.

The violence inflicted by the parents reappears in the physical fighting between Roberta and her sister, Roberta’s biting of men throughout the story, and the murder of her father. There is a learned tendency towards violence in the family which, according to Miller, is common for
those who have been abused, “They beat, mistreat, and torture out of an inner compulsion to repeat their own history and they are able to do this without the slightest feeling of sympathy for their victims because they have identified totally with the aggressive side- of their psyche” (115-116). This lack of empathy applies more to Roberta’s father than Roberta, as she is a character capable of sympathy. However, her ability to sympathize is overridden by her need to survive when she is put in dangerous circumstances. The father’s violence, lies, and lack of empathy demonstrates the generational trauma does not originate with the father.

Roberta’s grandfather owned a butcher shop and was surrounded by animal flesh and knives. The grandfather committed suicide by hanging himself in the butcher shop, connecting to Roberta’s own suicide and demonstrating a tendency towards self-inflicted violence. The butcher shop and generational violence demonstrates a lack of separation between the private and public spheres. The men did not distinguish between the knife violence of animal butchering and the ability to murder people with a knife. This processing clearly lacks empathy, and these ideals are partially passed on to Roberta as she is capable of inflicting violence and deifies knives.

Roberta retelling of the violent journey is itself a repetition of trauma. Most of the chapters are organized by going back and forth between the past and the present. One chapter will be about Roberta’s drug use and relationships with her new friends as a teenager, and the next chapter will be a flashback to the journey with her father, sandwiched by another chapter about the present. This back and forth demonstrates Roberta’s psychological link between the events of the past and her behavior in the present.

By writing the events down and providing them to the reader, the events become reimagined, distorted, and relived. Roberta expresses her need to tell her story to her friends, “This story was tumbling out of my mouth as we walked to the Washeteria. It tumbled out in
chunks and pieces. Turtle was listening’ (60). “Chunks and pieces” is similar vocabulary for a
description of vomit, suggesting Roberta has been made ill by her trauma and is now expelling
something vile. Once Roberta finds someone to tell her story to, she cannot stop and continues
her retelling until the end of the text until they physically revisit the space where the final
murders occurred.

Individual and Collective Trauma

Though *Cruddy* is primarily an individual narrative, Roberta’s story becomes attached to
collective experience through the maps, Mexican migrant workers, a brief mention of North
American indigeneity, and Dreamland. An attempt to position her narrative into the society she is
a part of occurs through the inclusion of landmarks and neighborhoods in the maps at the
beginning and end of the narrative. The map contains a scale, “1 inch = 1 mile,” an attempt to
make it relatable for a reader, to accurately capture, in the first map, the town she is a part of.
The precision with which the maps are drawn juxtaposes the amount of information on the maps
that is abbreviated and unknown, like the real names of the neighborhoods. For example, in the
first map, arrows and verbal text such as “Rich people” and “Poor people” indicate different
parts of town. This colloquial use of language is how people, particularly an adolescent, might
define the space around them, highlighting Roberta’s voice and asserting that she is the one who
made the maps. These references to other neighborhoods demonstrate that Roberta is defined in
relation to and part of a collective.

The presence of indigeneity that Roberta encounters in the Nevada desert draws in a
broader, social trauma to the narrative. On the door of the Poky Dot Lounge, a bar Roberta and
her father enter, it says “NO INDIAN. Someone had added an “A” to the end of INDIAN and
then wrote ‘Fuck ALL people of INDIANA. INDIANA peoples sucks SHIT!!!’” (72-73).
Because the owner of the bar/the person who wrote this sign did not use proper grammar, “No Indian,” someone was able to make an edition to the sign and denounce people from Indiana. Their ignorance is highlighted here. The addition to the sign begs the question: Why does this person hate the people of Indiana when this bar is in Nevada? It seems random. The randomness of Indiana questions the original aggression towards Native Americans in Nevada. Though Native Americans are not physically present in the text, they are briefly alluded to only racially and through aggression, connecting the text to the broader trauma narrative of Native Americans in the U.S.

The Mexican migrant workers in Nevada are integrated into the story through the essential role of the grandma who saves Roberta’s life. Roberta and her father do not stay long in many of the towns they drive through. However, they are stopped by a sheriff and he takes them back to the town he is from. The father, the sheriff, and the father’s new girlfriend, Pammy, spend much of their time at the local bar, the Knocking Hammer. One day at the Knocking Hammer the father asks, “‘Why do you keep that meat saw room locked?’ Pammy and the sheriff hesitated. Pammy said, ‘Mexicans,’ and the sheriff said, ‘We’ve had trouble’” (205). Like the sign warning against the Indians, the white American bar owners have conflicts with other racial groups. The grandma is a part of the Mexican migrant population in the town and Roberta befriends her when the grandmother nurses her back to health from blood poisoning after a knife cut, “What saved me was a midnight tap on the trailer door and the grandma-ma’s voice” (198). Because the grandma is an outsider, she is one of the only people in the text who is able to understand the truth of Roberta’s story. Part of this truth is discovered when the grandma cleans the father’s trailer which contains the remains of a dead man, “Before she left she pointed toward the Knocking Hammer with Bared teeth and said, ‘No good’…A man lost his life in that trailer
of yours. I know it for a fact” (200). The grandmother takes pity on Roberta and sees through
the father’s lies. Because of their connection, when Roberta returns to the desert with friends
years later she stops the car and asks a couple of migrant women about the grandma’s
The witch…Yes. Yes. She’s dead” (290). The use of Spanish indicates the diversity within
Nevada and, as Roberta is unable to understand them, is representative of racial and cultural
division. The Mexican grandmother again demonstrates that anyone who connects with Roberta
and her story dies. She is not able to return to the desert and find solace in the grandmother,
leaving Roberta feeling further isolated and her truth further limited. These collective narratives
of Mexican migrants and Native Americans in Nevada demonstrate that violence and corruption
is not limited to the individual narrative of Roberta, but is also occurring in the larger society she
is a part of.

Dreamland is another concept Roberta encounters in the desert. The term is used by the
Air Force to describe the nuclear testing site. Auntie Doris, who Roberta and her father visit in
an attempt to collect a suitcase of money, is paid by the government to live on Dreamland. As a
result, her son, Gy-Rah is affected by the radiation, “My dark itching protean/results in
terpsicorean” (276). Auntie Doris describes her arrangement with the government, “the
government has been very good to us. They pay me to stay…Were useful to them” (277). She
claims this usefulness is “classified” (278). Auntie Doris originally moved to the desert with her
lover, Carl, AKA the Powder Monkey, who was given this nickname because he was a tight rope
walker in the circus. He started a hotel business in the desert, but “then Dreamland came along.
The first horrible blasts sent bad smells rolling out of the cave. No tourist would put up with that.
The Powder Monkey fell despondent and lost his will to live” (277). The Powder Monkey’s story
shows Dreamland’s potential: it could have been a source of hope and prosperity as an isolated place in the desert, but the government made it deadly. Therefore, Dreamland is representative of a corrupt government and how it affects individuals (i.e. The Powder Monkey’s suicide). Roberta claims this corruption permeates:

Dreamland is Air Force. Top Secret. Located somewhere on the base that stretches on and on for miles...There are many people who know about Dreamland but there are not many people who know this: Dreamland is never in the same place twice. Dreamland roves about beneath the landscape. Sometimes it’s under a dry lake bed, sometimes it is in the mountains, sometimes it roves off the base completely through a system of chutes and tunnels and natural underground passages. Dreamland is nowhere and everywhere at once. (268)

This passage illustrates Roberta’s notion that there is corruption everywhere. This corruption is inescapable, leading her to commit suicide.

The father is compared to the radiation of Dreamland: every person he comes in contact with dies. Roberta’s cousin, Gy-Rah, points out this connection as he felt, “so polluted by the father’s visit” that he refused to leave his cave or give up the suitcase of money (277). He even calls the father a “pollutant” (278). His perception of the father as a pollutant is made more credible as he lives on a nuclear testing site. Roberta, too, takes on this toxic quality as she carries with her the traumatic narrative and this results in the death of her friends.

CONCLUSION

Image and word in both texts create an active readership. In Dear Patagonia this is done through the chaotic placement of images on a page and the multiplicity of characters and stories. The reveal of Alejandro Aguado’s role as an essential character in the text is not evident until the
final chapter of *Dear Patagonia*. This necessitates an active readership in creating a cohesive narrative and connecting the rest of the text to Aguado’s story. In *Cruddy*, the reader must piece together the story as Roberta’s perspective changes from chapter to chapter between the retelling of the violent journey with her father and her present. The maps at the beginning and end of *Cruddy* also create an active readership because the maps present events to the reader before they happen, causing the reader to seek them out in the narrative for an explanation. Active readership works in these trauma narratives to connect the past and the present to trauma processing. The origin of a traumatic event is not separate from the effects in the present.

The character of Roberta in *Cruddy* can be compared to both Cuyul and Alejandro Aguado in *Dear Patagonia* as individual, main characters who experience cyclical and generational trauma. Roberta and Cuyul are both physically and verbally abused by their fathers during their childhoods and this causes them to act out as adults. Interestingly, both Cuyul and Roberta have missing fingers. Cuyul’s finger was bitten off by his dog and Roberta’s father cut off her finger to prevent blood poisoning from spreading through her body. These missing appendages signify a loss of innocence during their childhood. This loss manifests in later years. Cuyul acts out when he has a mental breakdown and cuts off his own arm before a boxing match and eventually moves to Patagonia. Roberta copes with her traumatic past through drug use and her desire to commit suicide, which she associates as a product of Dreamland. Both characters have a desire to be somewhere other than where they are. For Cuyul, this is a search for homeland, Patagonia, a place his ancestors used to inhabit. For Roberta, the only solution would be to commit suicide. Roberta and Alejandro Aguado share similarities in that they are an anchor for the text. In *Cruddy*, Roberta’s central role is clear. In *Dear Patagonia*, Aguado’s anchoring role is less evident and not presented to the reader until the final chapter. Though *Dear
*Patagonia* is presented as a collective story, the individual trauma is evident in the character of Aguado, as in Roberta. In addition, Roberta experiences these traumas first hand while Aguado bears witness through his own research to trauma. The effects of generational trauma are marginal in comparison to the first hand, violent traumas of his ancestors. Isolation and proximity to trauma causes Aguado to live and Roberta to die.

Through an analysis of the texts’ links to collective trauma, it becomes palpable that there is a systemic perpetuation of trauma and a lack of empathy from the government/society. In *Dear Patagonia* this is evident by the collective indigenous population and their interactions with white Europeans/descendants of Europeans. Aguado makes evident that these tensions exist in non-fictional, present day Argentina. Simultaneously, references to the Holocaust and Argentine dictatorship also refers to a government system devoid of empathy. In *Cruddy*, the trauma of collective narratives is included through the white Americans’ treatment of Mexican migrants and Native Americans and the radioactive desert of Dreamland that exposes a corrupt government as they pay off citizens to live on the land though it is unsafe.

Both texts end with the creation of the text itself, making the production of art a response to trauma. An audience is crucial to this retelling because the purpose of truth-telling is to be heard. In *Cruddy*, Roberta seems to be made worse by the production of the text because the end of the text is inextricably linked to her suicide. Roberta’s act of writing *Cruddy* and retelling her story to her friends acts as a necessary expression of her inner turmoil, it is a way of bearing witness, but also acts as a poison as she realizes there is no way to fully heal from her past. All of her sympathetic friends have died. *Dear Patagonia* is presented as a healing process because, through the production of art, Alejandro Aguado revisits the national (and global) trauma of colonization by lending his voice to indigenous rights work and drawing connections to present
day. Cuyul also attempts to heal when he returns to Patagonia. *Dear Patagonia*, then, presents healing from trauma as a possibility while *Cruddy* does not have such a positive outlook.
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