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**Discovering Knowledge through Historiographic Metafiction: *La novela de Perón* and
Santa Evita by Tomás Eloy Martínez**

A Thesis Presented

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Abstract of the Thesis

Discovering Knowledge through Historiographic Metafiction: *La novela de Perón* and

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The intent of this thesis is to illustrate the unique abilities of the historical novels *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* written by Tomás Eloy Martínez, in drawing significant conclusions about the personas, personalities and lives of Argentina's most controversial leaders of the 20th century, Juan Domingo Perón and Eva Duarte Perón, as well as conclusions on the events, circumstances and peoples incorporating and surrounding their governance of Argentina. It is the assertion of this thesis that historical fiction or what contemporary critics call historiographic metafiction has the ability to investigate the underlying realities of past events and people by using a combination of documented history and educated inference to delve into pockets of history that have been untouched by historians and/or non-fiction works. I will be using both *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* in combination with non-fiction books and articles on both Juan and Eva as well as the genre of historical fiction as the basis for my study on whether or not a historical novel can render and comment upon historical knowledge more effectively than a non-fiction work studying the same subject.

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**Discovering Knowledge through Historiographic Metafiction:
La novela de Perón and *Santa Evita* by Tomás Eloy Martínez**

Introduction

The intent of this thesis is to illustrate how two historical novels by Tomás Eloy Martínez, *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* shed light upon the personas, personalities and lives of Argentina's most controversial leaders of the 20th century, Juan Domingo Perón and Eva Duarte Perón, as well as conclusions on the events, circumstances and peoples incorporating and surrounding their governance of Argentina. It is the assertion of this thesis that historical fiction/historiographic metafiction has the ability to investigate significant underlying realities of past events and people by using a combination of documented history and educated inference to delve into pockets of history that remain inaccessible to traditional historians. I will be using both *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* in combination with non-fiction books and articles on both Juan and Eva as well as the genre of historical fiction as the basis for my study on whether or not a historical novel can render and comment upon as much historical truth as a non-fiction work studying the same subject.

Both *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* approach details and events surrounding the lives of the Peróns that factual evidence alone cannot fully access. Concrete facts concerning the Peróns' method of governing and existing are accompanied by holes or lack of mention in history. In relation to Juan Perón himself there is a lack of verifiable information surrounding his central relationships with his wives and/or key people/staff throughout his life. Such

ambiguity surrounding such controversial and historic political figures leaves ample room for inquiring minds to seek answers on the subject; to attempt to string together facts and wait while conclusions begin to bloom from within them. This thesis analyzes the historical documentation provided to us by history as well as the research-based inferences drawn by Tomás Eloy Martínez in his novels written about Juan and Eva Perón. Through researching the documented fact as well as interpreting the novels alongside that fact this thesis asserts that historical fiction can be used to determine untold truths. There are many aspects of the childhood, maturation stage and core modes of operating that lay a foundation for drawing inevitable conclusions about Juan and Eva's personalities, personas and lives. Juan and Eva both spent their lives creating and re-creating their personal history and legacy. The fictionalization of their lives began within themselves, long before Martínez endeavored to speculate on broadening the public knowledge base on the Perón couple via his own fictional accounts. Martínez's novels intend to gain an outsider's perspective of who the Perón's were beneath the self-creation. The novels focus on obtaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of the couple; hoping that knowing more about their personalities and early lives may contribute to understanding the manner in which they conducted themselves and by which they came to govern Argentina.

Tomás Eloy Martínez
The Man behind the Novels

“Fiction reveals truth that reality obscures.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Tomás Eloy Martínez is an Argentine journalist and novelist who wrote both *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*, two works of post-modern historical fiction. These books aim at presenting possible unknown realities regarding the personas and existences of General Juan

Domingo Perón and Eva Duarte Perón in the context of the mythic status both eventually came to assume in Argentina. The couple, who mystified so many people during their administration, left many questions to be answered about themselves. The biographies and historical documents surrounding the Peróns provide information (some biographies such as *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Peron* by Nicholas Fraser and Marysa Navarro, do a good job at conveying the multiple dimensions of Evita) but many do not offer an in-depth study of the couples' behaviors, perceptions and emotions. Martínez's interest in the Peróns began early: "In the late 1960s, Mr. Martínez interviewed the exiled Perón in Madrid. They recorded hours of conversation, which became the basis for "The Perón Novel"" (Brown 2). Caleb Bach also attests to this interview that Martínez held with Perón in his article, *Tomás Eloy Martínez: Imagining the Truth*: "In the company of poet Cesar Fernandez Moreno, who served the role of witness, Eloy spent long days recording Perón's memoirs, which the general had dictated earlier to his secretary and mayordomo, José López-Rega, who was often called "the sorcerer," because he was steeped in the occult....The sessions with Perón, eventually published as *Las memorias del general [Memories of the General]*, also served as the basis for *La novela Perón* and led to the writing of *Santa Evita*" (Bach 4). Although writing a historical 'fiction' novel, Martínez uses first-hand accounts from Perón himself to aid in the construction of the novel. What Martínez aims to do via these novels is bring about a peek into the inner truths of Perón and Evita by relying partially on fact and partially on what we can refer to as creative license/fabulation. Davies comments the following regarding the historians imagination and its use to reconstruct a past for subjects whose primary sources are lacking. "Today the historian's imagination is increasingly used to reconstruct the past, almost to reinvent it, as New Historical discourse gravitates towards literary creativity. In the case of Eva Perón, such an approach is almost *de rigueur*, since primary

sources are scarce and the nature of the subject resists coherent analysis” (Lloyd Hughes Davies 415). The question to be answered is: can fiction reveal possible truths that history alone has been unable to document? Martínez defends his use of the historical fiction genre as an appropriate and necessary means to exploring areas of the past that were unavailable to the genre of history. “Si la historia es como parece otro de los géneros literarios, por qué privarla de la imaginación, el desatino, la indelicadeza, la exageración y la derrota que son la materia prima sin la cual no se concibe la literatura.” (Martínez cited in Davies 417) Fernando González, in his article *Juan Perón: Man and Myth*, says, “Martínez creates a fascinating illusion. His fantasy sounds like journalism. His reporting takes on a hallucinatory quality.” In his article *Portraits of a Lady: Postmodern Readings of Tomás Eloy Martínez’s “Santa Evita”*, Lloyd Hughes Davies quotes Borges (a writer to whom Martínez makes reference in Martínez’s own novels as well as his own commentary on using historical fiction to draw conclusions about Juan and Eva Perón) as saying this about history: “no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió” (Davies 415). The previous quote, which is an indirect quote of Freud’s, refers to the fact that one can never really know exactly what the past consisted of nor what the people who lived within that time experienced and/or thought at the time. The authors of the biographies, books, journal articles, and novels on Juan and Eva are all judging, based on their own research, who Juan and Eva were and why. The fact is that all works written about the past are judgments of what happened, as all history is, not direct indicators of what 100% actually occurred. Borges’ interpretation of history as well as Martínez’s own views on history as a literary genre surmise that not only can historical fiction aid in interpreting actual historical events and figures, but that history in and of itself is a subjective analysis of what we have the capacity of perceiving post-occurrence and post-existence of all events and people.

In order to properly defend my thesis statement that historical fiction/historiographic metafiction do have the ability to provide a deeper knowledge of past events and people it is important to establish the credentials and motives that Tomás Eloy Martínez had in writing *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*. Martínez has written several novels, including *La pasión según Trelew* (1974), *La mano del amo* (1991), *Las memorias del general* (1996), *El vuelo de la reina* (2002) and *El cantor de Tangos* (2004). The most popular of all his novels are *La novela de Perón* (1985) and *Santa Evita* (1995), the latter became the most translated Argentine novel ever. Martínez worked as a columnist for the: *The New York Times*, the Spanish newspaper *El País* and the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*. *The Latin American Herald Tribune* reports that “He [Martínez] is considered one of the best Argentine journalists of the 1960s and the first years of the 1970s...” (Latin American Herald Tribune). The *Tribune* continues by writing that the military regime of Isabel Perón forced Martínez into exile after his reporting on the atrocities committed by her military dictatorship during the years of 1976-1983. One of his [Martínez’s] obituaries recounts the dramatic circumstances of his exile: “In 1975, while eating lunch in a Buenos Aires restaurant, Mr. Martínez received word that when he stepped outside, he would be assassinated. There was no back exit. Reasoning that the least he could do was document his own murder; he phoned his newspaper and requested a photographer” (Fox 3). Martínez’s secretary sent all the photographers available, and it was the mass of them outside the building that scared off the assassins so Martínez could escape to Venezuela. Martínez’s unfailing dedication to accuracy in reporting, it seems, was not even compromised by his almost imminent assassination. It is this dedication that lends itself positively in exhibiting Martínez’s qualifications to author a work of historical fiction which was passionate in its compilation but written in a non-judgmental manner. He wrote about Perón from the point of view of someone

who simply wanted to understand the inner-workings and thoughts of the man, in spite of the fact that he was almost killed by a government-run violent hit squad backed by Isabel Perón.

Martínez did not write from a vengeful position born from a place of pain or resentment. He wrote from a place of inquiry, yearning to understand the most revered leader Argentina has ever known. Martínez also “earned a Bachelor’s degree in Spanish and Latin American Literature from the University of Tucumán, followed by a Master’s Degree from the University of Paris” (Fox 3). Given the extensive interviews with Perón and the education in journalistic writing that Martínez obtained over the years it is fair to state that Martínez was well informed on Perón as a person and a leader. Although being well-learned on a subject does not guarantee trustworthiness as a novelist, it does serve as an important benchmark for determining the level of qualification one has in writing on a subject. For these reasons alone his abilities to draw feasible and realistic inferences as to the nature of the man behind the public image are heightened above that of another writer of the historical fiction genre. Martínez’s in-depth study of Evita through the novel *Santa Evita*, was such that the biographer Alicia Dujovne Ortiz referenced Martínez’ words on various occasions in her own book when the section called for other opinion. The fact that Ortiz, having written a very popular biography on Eva, made the decision to reference Martínez, who wrote the most popular work of historical fiction on the woman, leaves one to wonder where the lines of fact and fiction begin to blur.

In summary, in the words of Martínez, to explain the motivation behind writing both *La novela de Perón* as well as *Santa Evita*: “Nothing is true; at the same time everything is true” (Fox 3). Martínez is saying that when we look upon the past we have two options. The first is to take what we are presented by historical accounts and accept it as reality. The second is to question whether perhaps those records have not provided us with the entire story; perhaps there

is more to be told. If we are to look upon history as merely a story of compounding versions of reality then in essence nothing is true. If we are to look upon the past, while pondering countless possibilities of what occurred during those times then we may determine that everything contains a bit of its own truth. Martínez's novels simply aim at unveiling different interpretations of the past. Martínez continued, "If those in power have the right to imagine a history that is false, why then shouldn't novelists attempt with their imaginations to discover the truth?" (Fox 3). Uncovering a deeper knowledge of who Juan Perón and Eva Perón were is exactly what Martínez aimed to do.

The Fine Line between Fact and Historical Fiction

"You know that when I hate you, it is because I love you to a point of passion that unhinges my soul." – Julie de Lespinasse. Some view love and hate as polar opposites on the emotional spectrum; opposing forces of energy never to converge. Others, such as Julie de Lespinasse see that the similarities between the two energies are so much so that they are completely comparable if one looks at the responses that are evoked from them. They both rely on passion and heart rather than the rational thinking mind and they both have the ability to intertwine to a point where one becomes lost in his/her own intentions and/or understandings. Fact and fiction engage in the same fateful tango. After all, fact- especially historical fact- is merely a subjective compilation and interpretation of data. Subjectivity surrounds what we deduce as steady truth. It is presumed that data is gathered from "-trusted and secure sources-" by capable, competent and honorable professionals. The general population, as receiver of this data, assumes its truth is inherent in the validity of its initial source and naturally acknowledges the events and the manner in which they unfolded as real; when in reality only the written word exists to vouch for it. One must take into consideration who/what the sources of the documents

are. When we really consider the paper trail regarding the passage of information it is necessary to be objective. There is a chance that these documents were collected by inevitably subjective persons who depended upon other subjective persons to have documented real events precisely. “...when a story has gone through twenty mouths only an eighth of the remainder can be accepted as true” (Archbishop Whately as summarized in Sheppard 153). Whately wrote the previous statement in his satiric work, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoléon Bonaparte*, in 1819, twelve years before he was appointed Archbishop of Dublin. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Whately’s satiric work “attacked the stringent application of logic to the Bible by showing that the same methods used to cast doubt on the miracles would also leave the existence of Napoleon open to question” (Encyclopedia Britannica). Whately writes from within the frame of mind that history becomes more hearsay than fact as more people become involved in its circulation. This concept pertains to any historical information, including the historical information used to glean knowledge relating to Juan and Eva Perón.

When thinking of documents which historically have espoused factual writing several images are conjured: biographies, government data/paperwork/documents, newspaper articles, non-fiction books, quotations and interviews. In contemplating that list it is undeniably possible to question the validity of all items that compose it. “The fallibility of the historical record (and of the historian) inevitably distances historiography from the simple acceptance of such concepts as ‘essence’ and ‘truth’” (Davies 416). A biography is ultimately written from the individual bent of the author, who will inevitably and most unassumingly incorporate his own interpretations of events and people if not outwardly in the nature of the text, then within the structure and direction of the book. Government data, paperwork and documents have the potential of being largely falsified and doctored depending on the needs and controls of the administration and country they originate from (such doctoring would most often take place

under dictatorial/totalitarian regimes-such as Juan Perón's Argentina.) "The inaccessibility of the past is compounded by deliberate human manipulation and falsification of documentary evidence. Juan and Eva's marriage certificate, seemingly a correct official record, turns out to be more fictional than factual owing to the falsification perpetrated by both Perón and Evita" (Davies 416). "You see, in my part of the world, documents often were falsified by governments. There is almost nothing authentic. This was true during the Islas Malvinas dispute with England. A completely false history based on propaganda was generated as a pretext to pursue a war. The same is true during the so-called dirty war, and generally that principle is basic throughout my country's history. History is written by those in power" (Martínez cited in Bach). Susan Bishop asserts the same, "But for Martínez the undertakings are structurally and ethically linked, so that the promulgation of myth by way of generic hybridization is also the assertion of a political history that has been oppressed and manipulated by those in power" (Bishop 3). What Bishop is attesting here is that Martínez's work, albeit fictional and an enhancement of the myth surrounding Juan and Eva, offers a perspective on a political history that had not been previously explored due to government oppression of such notions.

Newspaper articles fall prey to the subjectivity of the journalist depending on the political leanings of the journalist himself/herself or of the paper itself. Whether the subjectivity is brought about unintentionally from an impassioned account of events or brought about as a result of turning a deaf ear to those events in order to remain faithful to a political affiliation/monetary contributor, varies based on the paper. "...Practically all newspapers are simply repetitions of one account. People are apt to believe what is often repeated..." (Archbishop Whately as summarized in Sheppard 153). Bishop also asserts in her article, "Myth Turned Monument: Documenting the Historical Imaginary in Buenos Aires and Beyond", that the newspapers and

the press did not consistently print factual articles and thus caused an early response by writers to rectify such known discrepancies in the truth and the further propagation of inaccurate information. “Literary response to false history and unauthenticated news press has an equally long legacy in Argentine letters...” (Bishop 3).

Non-fiction books are either written by referencing other non-fiction works and government data or by interviewing people of certain knowledge in the subject area. The validity of all three of those sources can be disputed because information always has the potential of being misconstrued or again, doctored, along the way. Quotations are inherently subjective based on that person’s own perception of events. They are no more legitimized when the person has witnessed an event directly, as each witness can interpret the happenings in his/her own way. Quotes taken from subjects who are speaking on an event whose knowledge may have been founded in documents, or if a large amount of time has elapsed since the event occurred, are no more reliable because the memory of that person and ultimately the credibility of the source automatically depreciates. “La memoria es propensa a la traición” (Davies 416).

It is impossible for anyone to vouch for truth being represented in all her clarity and righteousness via every historical document ever written. Humans are fallible and emotional beings and therefore inherently pre-disposed to sprinkling documentation with a touch of personal perception. It is due to this fallibility that historical fiction has gained a leg to stand on when striving to uncover different historical ‘truths’. Juan and Eva Perón did not die the same people as they were born. They constantly re-invented themselves along their life journey. Each reinvention was documented in some way shape or form as historical truth; which outwardly, it most certainly was. What Martínez endeavors to do is peel back the layers of their self-reinventions and look into the hows and whys of what they did, who they became and whether or

not the historical record is capable of portraying the inner truths of Juan and Eva; or if perhaps it is necessary to take a slight detour through fiction to arrive at other permissible conclusions of who they actually were.

Historical Fiction: From its origins through present day use

The early 20th century English novelist Arnold Bennett, along with several other writers who consider the nature of the historical fiction genre, believe that there is a necessary period of time that must elapse before an author should endeavor to write about past events from a ‘historical’ standpoint. Friedrich Spielhagen asserts, “The historical novel is one that portrays a time on which the light of the living generation’s memory does not fall any longer in its full force” (Spielhagen cited in Sheppard 17). Sheppard concludes that a time elapse of 50 years from the beginning of the event to the publishing of anything about the event is appropriate. In Martínez’s case, the time from which Perón first took office as President of Argentina in 1946 until the time which *La novela de Perón* was published in 1988 is 42 years. Not quite as long as Sheppard suggests is the most acceptable length of time, but close enough to render it within the ballpark of the time elapse. Also, a notable difference between Martínez’s writing of his historical novels on Juan and Eva and other more traditional historical novels, is his personal desire to decipher the labyrinth encasing the personas of Juan and Eva as well as their lives and legacies. His thirst for understanding Juan and Eva was shared by so many people that both of his historical novels, *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* became word-wide best sellers. Martínez’s determination in being able to offer an insight on possible truths of the Perón power couple, for not only himself but millions of Argentines who found themselves living through an

economic/political disaster in the wake of Peronism in the 1970s, renders the lack of time separating the actual occurrence of history and when Martínez wrote about it obsolete.

As far as determining what exactly qualifies a novel as historical in the judgment of those earlier writers and their critics we turn to Sheppard, who quotes Jonathan Nield. “A novel is rendered historical by the introduction of dates, personages, or events, to which identification can be readily given.” Sheppard himself delineates what he believes defines a successful writer of historical fiction, “The really great historical novelists, it seems to me, are those who invent and surround their characters- the men and women “of lost years” ---with the haze of wistfulness and glamour which is comparable to that gloss or film on pre-historic implements and weapons; time’s own work, not to be copied by any human tool or process” (Sheppard 17). Sheppard’s words not only legitimize the work done by historical novelists but clarify that the goal is not to distort or embellish upon past events, but to bring out their natural quality and beauty, such as a bit of polish may do for ancient artifacts. This not only allows for readers to experience a heightened flavor of past events, but also ensures that such events are accurately portrayed.

Martínez’s works accurately fit the definition of a traditional historical novel; however, his approach to writing his novels is unique from that of traditional styles. The dates, personages and events are all truthful, with the exception of the embellishment of secondary characters in some cases. The main characters and the accounts attributed to them have been proven accurate as well. Martínez provides an appropriate amount of gloss which finely polishes such a bizarre and turbulent portion of Argentina’s history. In slight contrast to the traditional historical novel, such as the “Waverley” Novels of Britain’s Sir Walter Scott or the “Episodios Nacionales” of Spain’s Benito Pérez Galdós, Martínez steers away from merely dressing his novels in an environment created from historical details. He instead uses the known historical details of the

time period as a starting point from which he can leap into the possibilities of unexplored terrain and perhaps discover new aspects of history as he goes.

Although some definitions of the historical novel and its rightful subject and treatment have changed, other concerns have not.

Historical fiction was developed during the 1800's under the wing of writers such as Britain's Sir Walter Scott and Italy's Alessandro Manzoni. Both led the surge with acclaimed fictional accounts of historical moments in history. Historical fiction is viewed by its opponents, which include Manzoni himself in his later years, as a disgrace in the face of real historic documentation. The main complaint is that historical novels do not present certain information as fact and other as merely invention, so how does a reader know the difference? Manzoni expands on this in the following quotation:

"Granting all this, when has confusing things ever been a means of revealing them? To know is to believe; and for me to believe, when I know what is presented is not all equally true, it is absolutely necessary that I be able to distinguish fact from invention. But how? You want to make real facts known, yet you don't give me the means to recognize them as real? Then why did you want these facts to play an extended, leading role in your work? Why that label "historical" attached to it like a badge and, at the same time, as an attraction? Because you knew very well that there is an interest, as lively and keen as it is singular, in knowing what really happened and how. And after arousing my curiosity and channeling it so, did you think you could satisfy it by presenting me with something that might be reality, but could just as well be a product of your own inventiveness? (Manzoni as quoted in Bermann 64).

The authors of historical fiction works, such as Martínez, are of the mind to distrust the intentions and desires of the recorders of our documented history; who believe fiction may be able to reveal certain aspects of human existence more so than historians. It is the assertion of

this thesis that historical knowledge can be acquired through the combined resource of known fact and conclusions derived from the sound hypothesis of details and occurrences surrounding undocumented/unexplained events in history.

Alessandro Manzoni was an Italian writer who lived and wrote during the 19th century. His writing flourished while he pioneered works within the newly created genre of historical fiction. “With his linguistic revisions of *I promessi sposi* in 1827 began a final period, during which Manzoni effectively abandoned the active writing of literature in favor of literary theory and nonfiction. What led him so preemptively to theory was a growing insistence on ‘truth,’ as he defined it, fueled by the concerted study of linguistics, history, and philosophy” (Bermann 2). Manzoni’s goal was to unveil history to readers through a different manner than mere presentation of information. Instead he wanted to engage his readers in the essence of the time period, way of life and setting of circumstances among which he would weave factual history. It would allow people to connect to that part of human existence by living vicariously via the lens of description and relatable characters. “I perceive historical novels as portraying a given state of society through facts and characters so similar to reality that one might think one has just come upon a veritable history (Manzoni cited in Bermann 12). Alfred Tressider Sheppard offers concurring ideas in his book, *The Art and Practice of Historical Fiction*, by quoting Macaulay,

“To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the presence of a great man, or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, or rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture, these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist” (Macaulay cited in Sheppard 156).

It is accepted by Manzoni, and historical fiction writers in general, that the works they write are not classifiable as history. These writers do not hope to replace the historical documentation of the world's archives. What they aim to do is bring about concepts of what history may have been like, what may have actually occurred, what thoughts, what desires the people documented by history actually possessed. "In a way you want him [the historical fiction writer] to put a flesh back on the skeleton that is history" (Manzoni cited in Bermann 68). History in and of itself is very linear. It does not stray from the black and white. Writing history from a prose perspective unhinges the gates to a deeper more profound view of history than that which common historical literature can provide. "The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen...(Bermann 15). Carlos García Guál echoes Bermann's view by including a quote from Aristotle in his own writing on the subject. "No es tarea propia del poeta decir lo que ha sucedido, sino que cosas podrían suceder y son posibles según lo verosímil o lo necesario [...]. En eso se diferencia del historiador, en que este relata lo sucedido, y él lo que podría suceder" (Aristoteles cited in García Guál 11). The question of verisimilitude is a popular notion among works of historical fiction. It is the poet whose task it is to ponder on the possibility end of the truth spectrum rather than on the solidly factual end. Does our recorded history represent the truth or does it merely appear as such? Does a poet's perspective on the documented past and what may lie beyond it have the potential to offer a deeper insight to possible realities surrounding past events and people?

Sandra Bermann, who wrote the introduction for and translated Alessandro Manzoni's work *On the Historical Novel* comments also on the fact that a work becomes either poetry or

history largely due to the intention of the author. The following expands upon the above quotation concerning the difference between history and poetry, "... poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (Bermann 15). If an author wants to simply recount what governments have presented as truth then the writing is classified as a 'historical' piece. If the author wants to expand his mind to conceive of what may have been truth had the historical truth been inaccurately documented by those same governments, the work becomes classified as a fictional imagining.

The question of what truth is and what it is not opens up a Pandora's Box of endless possibilities. Once a person decides to dismiss the government sanctioned version of history he allows for any amount of speculation to be given to any historical account. Truth in and of itself is highly subjective. It is a story of what certain people have experienced. But each experience is unique in that it is interpreted differently by all who have been involved with it. If we can't affirm the validity of our own truths then what truly divides history from fiction? "...history relates events, while poetry makes them come alive. But neither is relieved of having to seek truth; the one must be as firmly anchored in truth as the other, and each as firmly as any other serious genre. Just what is this truth? At one point Tasso identifies it with the historically verifiable, at another with whatever the audience takes to be true. Truth thus teeters precariously between a correspondence to the real and a coherence that merely convinces" (Bermann 18). The line in the previous quotation that reads, truth is "whatever the audience takes to be true" is a very compelling statement. It reflects on the strength that a strong popular opinion retains in promoting its validity. Martínez writes, "...the most important ideas are those that are written in history, the things that humanity remembers as history (Martínez, *The Truth in Fiction* 25).

Martínez's statement in this quote reflects similarly on Bermann's quote stating "the truth is whatever the audience takes to be true." What humanity remembers as history may not represent precisely what happened, but for all intents and purposes it qualifies as history in the sense of being the 'story' that is collectively regarded as true. In Sheppard's book on historical fiction he writes a brief abstract that summarizes Archbishop Whatley's book *Historic Doubts* written about Napoléon Bonaparte. In this summary he writes that, "People take things for granted, and believe what they are told by others and any story pleasing to the imagination is accepted without careful investigation" (Whately cited in Sheppard 153). If a populace is accustomed to being presented information by a higher authority and then blindly consumes it, why would said authority not take advantage of such narrow-mindedness to maintain the upper hand by providing the public with whatever information they feel? We can view the propagation of history as pre-prepared meals presented to the public by those in power. We therefore can view historical fiction as an alternative dish to choose from. If people have proven themselves less than capable in determining the true merit of government history, why not introduce another form to offer a discernment of the truth? Martínez writes in the journal article *The Truth in Fiction*, "In the past literature was the servant of power. Power wrote history" (Martínez, *The Truth in Fiction* 25).

In the present day literature is a servant to none other than itself; and historical fiction, or historiographic metafiction, as it is known contemporarily, has evolved far beyond that which Sir Walter Scott and Manzoni brought about over a century ago. The base genre of historical fiction has evolved through contact with the influence of postmodernism in art, which itself [postmodernism] has segued into several different (although similar in foundation) literary genres. These genres are: historiography, historiographic metafiction, the testimonial novel, new

journalism and new new journalism. (New journalism was developed during the 1960s and 1970s, giving a novelistic touch to journalistic articles. It allowed for a more descriptive/story-telling form of reporting. New new journalism is a genre developed by Robert S. Boynton which “places the author at the center of the story, channeling a character's thoughts, using nonstandard punctuation and exploding traditional narrative forms” Boynton). All of these genres offer a deeper, more specific insight into the manner in which Martínez wrote both of his historical fiction novels. Despite the fact that his works of *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* have been largely categorized as works of historiographic metafiction it is evident that within them are aspects of all the aforementioned genres. The compilation of such genres demonstrates the progression that historically-based literature has made from the birth of the historical novel through the present day.

According to the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary historiography is defined as: “the writing of history; *especially* : the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods.” A more pragmatic explanation for the term historiography is provided by Linda Hutcheon, writer and University Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto In her book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Hutcheon quotes Murray Krieger in writing, “It is a paradox which underlines the separation between “history” as what Murray Krieger calls “the unimpeded sequence of raw empirical realities” (1974, 339) and “history” as either method or writing: “The process of critically examining and analyzing the records and survivals of the past is ... *historical method*. The imaginative reconstruction of that process is called *historiography*” (Gottschalk 1969, 48)” (Hutcheon 92.) In using the term ‘imaginative reconstruction’ Hutcheon refers to our

understanding of the past and the manner in which we have arrived at such understandings. It has become very popular and respected for authors to write works that allow the author himself as well as the reader to participate in the determination of past aspects of human history that have not been fully researched or explained by documentation of traditional historicity.

Using historiography as a spring board, Linda Hutcheon expounded upon writing history that is based purely on the “-critical examination of sources-” by tailoring the concept to literature. Through doing this she coined the term “-historiographic metafiction.-” In her own words Hutcheon defines those works which are written in the genre of historiographic metafiction as, “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* 5). Martínez’s *Santa Evita* would especially fall under this particular genre being that Martínez engages in considerable self-reflection throughout the course of the novel. Another key aspect of historiographic metafiction that can be directly applied to Martínez’s works is one which Hutcheon refers to Perloff for in commenting that this genre “is always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic ‘return’” (Perloff cited in Hutcheon 4). The historical time/event that is often being written about is adopted exactly as it was from the documented record. It always consists of the combination of that initial historical reference and notions of that historical time period that were not reflected upon in the provided documentation; in essence ‘a critical re-working’, as said by Perloff, of the past. “In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative—be it in literature, history, or theory—that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (*historiographic metafiction*) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of

the past (Hutcheon 5-6). This is a very important commentary on the ontological aspects of both history and fiction. Both are human constructs and therefore each is subject in its own right to judgment regarding its presentation of past events and people. Hutcheon continues with this line of thought in the next quotation which emphasizes how both history and fiction help us make sense of the past:

“What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past (“exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination”). In other words, the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past “events” into present historical “facts.” This is not a “dishonest refuge from truth” but an acknowledgement of the meaningmaking function of human constructs (Hutcheon 90).

Hutcheon is essentially stating that regardless of whether the past is presented via what is accepted as traditionally historical documentation or if it is presented via a historiographic metafictional work the question of which one represents the more truthful commentary is a non-issue. What is important is that different manners of organizing and making meaning of the past for ourselves in the present day are available. Neither genre is ‘dishonest’ or hiding from the truth; both represent ways in which people in today’s day can give meaning to a time that none of us personally experienced. “Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity” (Hutcheon 93).

Another relevant type of contemporary historical fiction with a special relevance for Latin America is the genre of the testimonial novel, defined by *The Encyclopedia of the Novel, Volume I* as “a narrative mode written from the point of view of the subaltern, usually a witness

to, or a victim of, various forms of oppression” (163). The term ‘subaltern’ is defined by Maier and Dulfano in their book, *Woman as Witness: Essays on Testimonial Literature by Latin American Women* as referring “to the mass of people without power” (Maier and Dulfano 9). In Martínez’s novels he writes from the point of view of a witness (which he qualified as being a journalist during both the Juan Perón and Isabel Perón administration and an interviewer of Perón himself) and a victim of (when he was nearly murdered by Isabel Perón’s death squad) to the social and economic oppression of both Peronist regimes. The purpose of Martínez’s works do not directly focus on oppressive systems/acts incurred by Perón or Isabel but they do reflect Martínez’s personal resilience in looking beyond himself to continue to write so extensively and passionately about the individuals responsible for the oppression. Maier and Delfano’s definition of the testimonial novel reflects perfectly Martínez’s personal situation that he experienced during the writing of *Santa Evita*, “a testimonial text arises from specific circumstances or events experienced or witnessed by the narrator who is compelled to document them” (Maier and Delfano 5). Martínez felt if nothing but compelled to write the story of Eva Perón. He stated in so many words that he needed to know Evita in order to not only know Argentina but to know himself. It is through the latter definition of the testimonial novel that Martínez’s works overwhelmingly fall into the category of the genre.

“Georg M. Gugelberger characterizes it [the testimonial novel] as ““-one of the most significant genres of Latin America’s post-boom literature-”” (Maier and Delfano 2). John Beverley continues, “It [the testimonial novel] has become an important, perhaps the dominant, form of literary narrative in Latin America” (Maier and Delfano 2). The testimonial novel solidified its footing in the Central/South American region due to varying states of military oppression that emerged throughout the region during the 1950s, reaching its climax in the 1970s

during such military repression as the Dirty War in Argentina and “the Chilean coup that overthrew Salvador Allende” (Maier and Delfano 3). Beverley is quoted as stating the following in relation to the latter commentary, “Testimonial literature per se emerged “-as an adjunct to armed liberation struggle in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World” in the 1960s-” (Maier and Delfano 3). Beverley also asserts that the testimonial novel is a genre which rather than being stationary and relinquished to representing a certain time period, is fluid and able to change with the times and the growth requirements of the literary genre. “*Testimonio* is a transitional cultural form appropriate to processes of rapid social and historical change but also destined to give way to different forms of representation as these processes move forward” (“Through All Things Modern,” *Boundary 2* 21). Hence, the essential mutability of testimonial literature may preserve its viability (Colás 170) (Maier and Delfano 4). It is evident that such cultural transition has been attained and put to work within Martínez’s historical novels. *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* do not epitomize the testimonial novel as it was initially defined, but they certainly do reflect core aspects of the genre; which is to confirm that the testimonial novel is in fact mutable and growing within the parameters of modern-day literature. Aníbal González, author of the book *Love and Politics in the Contemporary Spanish American Novel*, writes with a focus that speaks of what he claims has been the displacement of the testimonial novel towards the ends of the 1980s in favor of the new sentimental novel. González explains that “with the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the loss of interest in the revolutionary option, there arose in Spanish America a concern with healing and rebuilding of not only conflict-ravaged political and economic systems but also entire communities as well as individual souls” (González 3). Having said this there began to be a heavier focus centered on interpersonal relationships (essentially: ‘love’). Both of Martínez’s

novels adequately assume an aspect of this new genre of literature as well. The love stories between Perón and his wives in *La Novela de Perón* and between not only Perón and Eva, but the love both Dr. Ara and Moori Koenig held towards Eva's corpse in *Santa Evita* qualify the works as being part sentimental novel as well.

The testimonial novel “derives from and overlaps with other disciplines—anthropology, ethnography, history, *journalism*, literature, politics, sociology, and women's studies, crosses genre lines—art, film, music, narrative, poetry, theater” (Embedded Italics are of my placement, Maier and Delfano 4). The genre of our concern within the aforementioned list of overlaps is that of journalism- more specifically, New Journalism. It strongly brings up the tail end of our analysis of the modern-day formats of historical fiction and their relevance for understanding Martínez's work in the two novels. Robert Boynton, professor at New York University and author of the book, *The New New Journalism*, writes in one of his articles that explains the concept (relating to its development by Wolfe in the 1960s) of New Journalism. “Wolfe's New Journalism was a truly avant-garde movement that expanded journalism's rhetorical and literary scope by placing the author at the center of the story, channeling a character's thoughts, using nonstandard punctuation and exploding traditional narrative forms...”(Boynton). New Journalism in its definition and in its namesake mirrors much of how Martínez wrote his historical novels. In *La Novela de Perón* Martínez inserts himself into the story under the guise of Zamora, who doubles as the narrator and the journalist in charge of documenting the day's events upon Perón's historic return to Argentina after his 18 year exile in Madrid. In *Santa Evita* he serves a much more transparent role as he inserts himself directly, as Tomás Eloy Martínez the novelist/journalist, replete with all of his inner-musings, confusions, doubts and speculations periodically interspersed throughout the pages of the novel. Such self-inclusion of an author

among a historical fiction work overwhelmingly qualifies as “-exploding traditional narrative forms-.””

Boynton, who coined the term ‘New New Journalism’ differentiates between Wolfe’s New Journalism and this even more contemporary version of it. Boynton states that New New Journalism drills “down into the bedrock of ordinary experience, exploring what Gay Talese calls “the fictional current that flows beneath the stream of reality” (Boynton). Where the New Journalists “went inside his characters’ heads; the New New Journalists become part of their lives” (Boynton). It is almost as if these writers are classifying New Journalism as the literary occupant of the limbo area that hovers on the divide of reality and fiction for which no one can definitively say where the actual divide occurs. Boynton continues to describe what writers of New Journalism have in common regarding the manner in which they construct their works. “What they do share is a dedication to the craft of reporting, a conviction that by immersing themselves deeply into their subjects lives, often for prolonged periods of time, they can—much as Crane did before them—bridge the gap between their subjective perspective and the reality they are observing, that they can render that reality in a way that is both accurate and aesthetically pleasing” (Boynton).

Tomás Eloy Martínez’s historical fiction novels cannot be relegated to solely one sub-genre of postmodern literature. They maintain the unique trait of consisting of all the aforementioned historical genres: historiography, historiographic metafiction, the testimonial novel, new journalism and new new journalism. Back in the early 1800s Sir Walter Scott and Manzoni couldn’t have fathomed that the historical fiction genre could have developed and broken into such similar, yet varying forms over a century and half later. Moreso, it depicts how

literature (especially historical fiction) is a living, breathing organism; ever-changing with the times and needs of the writers and the learned public.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into two chapters, *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*. I will be discussing the use of the historical fiction (historiographic metafiction) novel in offering an in-depth study and explanation of aspects of the Juan and Eva Perón's personas and lives that were left untouched by traditional history. Juan and Eva Perón were unique in their own right. Their names, personal history and desire to effect certain change on the Argentine republic were surrounded as much by those brimming with adoration of their power and charity as those furious with disgust/distrust of their motives and 'hypocritical' methods of governing. The couple was, in effect, the authors of their own personal novel in that from as far back as history takes us they were inventing and re-inventing the people they had been, they presently were and wanted to become. It is due to the self-fictionalization of their lives that Martínez was able to so successfully pen a novel within the genre of historical fiction. There is such a want for information surrounding the Perón couple that is absent from the historic record that it is only natural for a renowned journalist/writer to undertake the job of attempting to fill the void. After researching the couple as if he were a historian yet writing about the undocumented aspect of who they were as a novelist, Martínez created *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*. It is the intent of this thesis to prove that the literature Martínez has created does offer viable alternatives to the historical record concerning who Juan Domingo Perón and Eva Duarte de Perón actually were.

Chapter 1 **La novela de Perón**

The Framework of the Novel

La novela de Perón by Tomás Eloy Martínez is unique in its presentation because it does not boast one single vantage point from which it is written. The novel is steered by a foundational narrator that guides and steers the course of the novel from beginning to end; however, throughout the novel each central character speaks from the first person perspective. Private as well as spoken thoughts are assigned to the characters so the difference in tone regarding the sincerity and intent of their tones may be emphasized. Such varying types of narration afford Martínez the ability to assign each character his/her own personality and thought process (which reflect upon both what historical documentation has proven them to be as well as what Martínez's educated speculations have inferred them to be) as well as incorporate himself, as journalist, into the story in the form of a character assuming Martínez's own professional role. This medley of perspectives in Martínez's writing creates what can be referred to as a collage novel; an open-ended forum for him to give a voice to each character, including the narrator and himself. Every angel of Perón's life has the potential to be reflected upon by using such a varied style of writing.

Analysis of Writing: Non-fiction vs. historical fiction

“When we speak of non-fiction, we are really talking about factual works. They may report on current issues or recount history, explore the latest avenues of scientific research or

provide an in-depth examination of people, places, or events, or simply provide a great deal of useful information. But in every case, non-fiction works talk about what is, was, or may become real. Every "character" who may appear in such a book will be a real person, identified by a real name. If dialogue figures in the work, the "speakers" will actually have uttered the quotations” (Robert E. Shepard Agency). Biographies are expected to uphold the characteristics of such non-fiction works, being that they are written to portray events and people as they really happened and actually were. Historical fiction exercises a combination of non-fiction traits and fiction traits. It includes characters that represent real people and dialogue that represents real events and actual utterances, while other characters may be invented for the purpose of supplemental description or inference driven expansion of true events. In the following sections we will look at the manner by which one of Peron’s biographers wrote his biography on Juan and Eva Perón and then at the manner in which Martínez penned his historical fiction novels. We will compare and contrast the choice of language used as well as the descriptions of people and events to determine by which genre the truth can be gleaned most effectively.

We will begin our analysis by first comparing the writing style used by Martínez with that of Joseph Page, a well-known Perón biographer as well as with Ricardo Herren, a writer for “elmundo.es” online newspaper. The two main questions to be answered are as follows: 1) Does the manner in which a work of literature is written affect the perceived credibility of the information presented within those pages? 2) Is one genre of literature more effective than another in determining historical truths?

When analyzing the historical fiction text of *La novela de Perón* by Tomás Eloy Martínez and the biography (non-fiction) text of *Perón: A Biography* by Joseph Page is it apparent that the style in which information is presented different. From the beginning to the end of the novel

Martínez weaves a very realistic story of Perón's personal life and public career. He creates very detailed descriptions of Perón's childhood, adolescence, military schooling, military career, personal endeavors (including romance) perceptions of family and friends, as well as the roles that those close to Perón assumed throughout his career and life. Stylistic traits of both non-fiction writing and historical fiction writing can be found in comparing the language choice and the structure used within both texts. It is through such writing styles that we observe the differences in delivery of information and can determine the effectiveness and legitimacy of both. In comparing and contrasting the writing of Martínez and Page we will focus our analysis on a specific facet of Perón's existence: his general relationship with women.

“Una vez más, el general Perón soñó que caminaba hasta la entrada del Polo Sur y que una jauría de mujeres no lo dejaba pasar” (Martínez 11). This quote is taken from the opening line in *La novela de Perón*. The statement with its reference to dreaming is fictitious in nature, but alludes to an observed quality about Juan Perón concerning his plight with women. Did Perón really have this dream about walking to the South Pole? Was there ever a pack of women preventing him from doing something he really wanted/needed to do in his life? In one line the novel unveils the style in which the -‘information’- will be provided throughout the rest of the book. Martínez writes in a descriptive, alluring fashion that hints at inherently truthful situations tucked into an embellished surrounding commentary. One page and a few paragraphs later the initial indication that Perón's relationship with women has been one of mental strain for him has been compounded. “Al General le habían aterrado siempre las mujeres que iban más lejos, abriéndose camino entre sus no sentimientos” (Martínez 12). The language used in this sentence is descriptively strong and novelesque. It is hard to prove a feeling of terror as well as in what context it is being ascribed without use of a direct quote from the subject being written studied.

Such a claim is less than factual and does not immediately lend itself to qualifying for inclusion in a biography. The concept of Perón's 'non-feelings' is subjective observation. It is evident from the very beginning of this novel that truths are already being inferred. Such truths could only be legitimized after further investigation and comparison with a non-fiction source. Having said this, however, the non-fiction source to be used does not necessarily imply a biography. As will be analyzed in the next few paragraphs, even works whose genre implies non-fiction fall into word choice trappings which fail to defend the nature of their intended truths.

In Joseph Page's biography *Perón*, Perón's relationship with women is also discussed. The following quote speaks of Perón's experience with one woman in particular, his second wife, Evita. "Given what is known about their personalities, Evita probably took the initiative in rapidly cementing the relationship. She found new quarters for them in a building on Posadas Street, behind the posh Alvear Palace Hotel and not far from Radio Belgrano, where she worked, although for the sake of appearances the couple rented adjoining apartments. Perón must have been fascinated by the uninhibited aggressiveness of his new companion. He did nothing to conceal their liaison. Indeed, on February 3 (1943), both he and Mercante allowed themselves to be photographed with her on a visit to the radio station" (Page 84). In contrast with Martínez's historical fiction writing style of the previous section, this statement about Evita taking the lead in the relationship is not descriptively written. Rather it is written in a direct manner whose purpose is simply to present information.

Interestingly enough, however, despite the contrast in descriptive vs. direct writing style between Martínez and Page's works, there are several word choices within Page's paragraph that collaborate, rather than contrast, with Martínez's 'raison d'écrire'; the notion that historical fact is not necessarily the sole representative of truth. The first line of the passage, in saying "Given

what is known about their personalities...” alludes to the fact that what is known about their personalities is not much. Reading a bit deeper into the phrase one may also determine that the means of acquiring the little knowledge that is had was most likely passed down to the press via select people. Continuing through the passage, “Evita *probably* took the initiative...” *Probably* is not a word used to illustrate fact. This is inference made by the biographer drawn from other elements of ‘fact’. “Perón *must* have been fascinated...” *Must* is again a conclusion drawn by Joseph Page based on prior knowledge of Perón’s persona and modus operandi. The lack of complete knowledge in the aforementioned quotes is a supreme example of how the lines between fact and fiction can be blurred. Joseph Page penned a non-fiction biography on Perón and still had to draw conclusions based on other factual elements because there simply was not enough information available pertaining to all facets of Perón’s life and personality. In discussing the two writing styles implicitly and their ability to portray truths, it is fair to state that both allow for questioning to take place as to the validity of their content. Martínez presents his information in a way that expands the imagination to other possibility. Page presents his information in a direct manner which aims at leaving no questions, but in actuality does the exact opposite thanks to his incriminating word choice which strips his conclusions of their accuracy.

It is important to note that the quote: “Perón must have been fascinated by the uninhibited aggressiveness of his new companion” from Page’s biography provides information akin to that of Martínez’ first pages describing Perón’s regard toward women. However, although similar in content, there is a major difference between the two. Page writes in a way which makes Perón out to be in awe of a woman such as Evita. In Martinez’ eyes Perón was more than intimidated by women who dared delve into his ‘non-feelings.’ It was a group of women who prevented him from entering the South Pole; which can be translated as saying it is women who prevent Perón

from achieving certain successes in life. So which author's perception is correct? Does the fact that Perón did not conceal his relationship with Eva indicate fascination and therefore comfort within Eva's aggressive nature? Or was the fascination tainted with an underlying trepidation of her and what her charisma and strong will were capable of? Neither perception of Perón's personality can claim truth in this circumstance because Perón's true feelings on the subject of women can never be known. This proves using this example as concrete evidence, that neither non-fiction nor fiction can know the "truth" with certainty. This is also to say the seemingly distinct genres of biography and historical fiction may not be as different in their purveyance of fact as might have been previously assumed.

To further expound upon the topic of stylistic differences in writing between non-fiction and fiction works, with a specific focal point on Perón's relationship with (fear of) women, Ricardo Herren, a journalist for the newspaper *El mundo*, in his article, "*Vida y muerte de Eva Perón*", writes about the intriguing relationship established between Eva and Juan Domingo. He speculates whether Perón may have been scared of Eva to a certain extent and was forced into marrying her via blackmail. "Eva era colérica y sus prontos, escandalosos. ¿Tenía miedo Perón a esas explosiones? ... Eva hablaba de casarse pronto, a lo que Perón se hacía el distraído, mirando para otro lado. Hasta que estalló: «¡Te conviene casarte conmigo porque si no voy a decir a todo el mundo lo que sé sobre vos!», amenazó la actriz. El coronel no reaccionó, «como un hombre que ha caído en la trampa», describe Marta Dujovne, una de las biógrafas de Evita. Imposible saber qué era lo que ella decía saber. ¿Sus tramoyas políticas con los nazis? ¿Sus inconfesables debilidades sexuales?" (Herren). The language used by Herren in this non-fiction newspaper article in the *Historia* section of "elmundo.es" is far from indicating any concrete fact concerning Perón's supposed fear of Evita. Herren himself phrased the potentiality of Perón's fear of Eva's

outbursts in an interrogative format. Herren then writes that when Eva mentions marriage Perón's reaction is that of looking distractedly from one side to the other. He could not have possibly known Perón's reaction to such a statement on such an intimate occasion. Herren is assuming that such a physical display of ambivalence on Perón's part took place. Being that Herren is a journalist, it is probable that he has done at least some prior research on the subject. However, there is no evidence, neither citation nor bibliography reflected in the article which could verify that the research was done. The only corroboration Herren mentions to defend his statements is that of prominent Evita biographer, Marta Dujovne. Dujovne states that the coronel reacted to Evita's marriage proposition/threat as if he had just been tricked. The manner in which Herren writes gives the impression that he believes what he is asserting to be the truth and he speculates on possible answers to real conundrums involving Eva and Peron, but he does not provide any evidence for his claims. He does quote Dujovne, who being a biographer, one would assume has done exhaustive research on the topic and whose statements are factual, but the statement chosen in and of itself assumes knowledge of Perón's personal thoughts during Eva's proposition of marriage and cannot possibly be proven.

My conclusion is that there is no stylistic difference that allows us to distinguish between history, journalism and fiction.

Historical Figures as Fictional Characters

In writing his analysis of Juan Domingo Perón in the style of historical fiction Martínez allows himself to delve into the description of situations and events and also to intuit the thoughts, desires, perspectives and rationales of the main characters. Such intimate knowledge of the people portrayed by these characters is simply not available via historical documents on the Perón administration. An in-depth analysis of the people most directly associated with

Perón, Eva, Isabel and the Perón Administration is essential in determining what the genre of historical fiction can contribute to understanding a figure like Perón. The next section of this thesis delves into the main characters in the novel, including that of Juan Perón himself, that are representations of the actual people whose namesakes they have been bestowed. Martínez built such strong and distinct personalities around these characters that they become affixed in readers' minds as having certain intentions, emotions and beliefs. These characterizations will be compared to and contrasted against a variety of historical documents/biographies/newspaper and journal articles written about each individual to compare whether Martínez's descriptions of who these people really were are comparable to the descriptions offered by the non-fiction sources or if they come across as over-exaggerations of the factual descriptions presented by my research. If it is determined that Martínez effectively portrayed the characters in an equal light to that of the non-fiction descriptions when writing of the lives, mannerisms and intents of the people so connected to Perón himself it will afford a definite assuredness towards validating Martínez's work as a source for understanding the truths of Perón at another level.

General Juan Domingo Perón: One man or many?

“General Juan Domingo Perón would have appreciated the paradox. In life, he achieved mythical status. As the central character in Tomas Eloy Martinez's brilliant "The Perón Novel," a chilling tale of power, decline and madness, he becomes human again” (Gonzalez). It has been stated by numerous researchers that Juan Domingo Perón, although just one man, has been perceived as many different men coexisting within the same physical body. Crassweller, author of the book, *Perón y los enigmas de la Argentina* writes: “The man who emerged to cope with the enigmas of Argentina at a critical moment was himself a repository of endless enigmas”

(Crassweller 10). Martínez describes him in his novel this way: “Había sido ya, el conductor, el General, el Viejo, el dictador depuesto, el macho, el que te dije, el tirano prófugo, el cabecilla del GOU, el primer trabajador, el viudo de Eva Perón, el exiliado, el que tenía un piano en Caracas. Quién sabe qué otras cosas podría ser mañana. Tantos rostros le vi que me decepcioné. De repente, dejó de ser un mito. Finalmente me dije: él es nadie. Apenas es Perón” (Martínez, pg. 261.) Robert D. Crassweller, “a noted scholarly author and expert on Latin America” (Duluth News Tribune) quotes the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges in his work “*Everything and Nothing*” as writing, “The story goes that, before or after he died, he [Perón] found himself before God, and he said: “I, who have been so many men in vain, want to be one man: myself.” The voice of God replied from a whirlwind: “Neither am I oneself; I dreamed the world as you dreamed your work, my Shakespeare, and among the shapes of my dreams are you, who, like me, are many persons—and none” (Borges cited in Crassweller 10). In the section of *La Novela de Perón* where Martínez describes Perón’s meeting Evita and the subsequent affair and unraveling of history, Martínez adds to Eva’s own quotes about how Perón made her who she was. In her autobiography, *La razón de mi vida y otros escritos*, Eva states in the prologue: “Por eso ni mi vida ni mi corazón me pertenecen ya nada de todo lo que soy o tengo es mio. Todo lo que soy, todo lo que tengo, todo lo que pienso y todo lo que siento es de Perón” (Eva Perón 14). Martínez writes a very similar statement in *La novela de Perón*: “A tal punto quería negar su pasado que antes de que el General dijera “Yo la hice”, ella dijo “Perón me hizo”. No era cierto. Todas las personas son a cada instante otras. ¿Pero cómo podrían ser otras, si en el fondo, no siguieran siendo las mismas? Eva ya era Eva cuando Perón la conoció” (Martínez 305). Even though Martínez speaks on behalf of Eva, his words reflect the ideas being expressed about Perón in this section. Can a person be more than one person within? Is that the norm? Or was

that simply the norm for figures such as Perón, and evidently Eva, who lived their lives in a state of constant re-invention; endlessly expanding on their inner selves.

History, biographies and documents accounting for all phases of his life have presented a picture of his power, politics and grandeur yet very few of these accounts have delivered much information on the man behind the uniform. Who was Perón *really*? What made him tick? Where did his knowledge, ideas and principals originate? Who were his heroes and motivators? All human beings are a compilation of the lives they have lived. No man just emerges as is without a past to attribute himself to. The intent of this section is to study some of the ‘truths’ that Martínez puts forth and compare them with compounded research of various historical.

Martínez alludes to the fact that we already know about the man of whom the history books have written. We know his life’s timeline spanning from his childhood through his death. But it is not this Perón that Martinez seeks to uncover. “El Perón oficial ya estará vaciado. Hay que buscar al otro” (Martínez 37). The man that the public recognizes and who Martínez initially describes is one of stature, physical dominance, and steadfast beliefs regarding military virtues and governing. “He was tall, handsome in a masculine way, wore his uniform well, and was generally charming and ingratiating; and his smile was a splendor. He worked hard and he possessed the discipline and the physical vitality necessary for political performance at the highest level” (Crassweller 11). The man beneath that familiar exterior is the one that Martínez concentrates his novel around. This deeper Perón is an unemotional chameleon who has long ago trained himself to adapt his feelings to situations. He puts on and subsequently removes feelings as simply with as much ease as if he were simply changing his clothes. He intuitively knows what he should be feeling and then immediately conveys that expression outwardly. "I sensed," says Martínez in his cameo as journalist, "that he always guessed how the other person saw him and

immediately projected the anticipated image" (Gonzalez). In his novel Martínez writes about how the ability to fake feelings was a trait Peron developed during childhood and subsequently mastered as an adult. "Para que se durmieran, la tía les contaba fabulas que tenían la misma moraleja: <Siempre hay un sentimiento / para cada ocasión. / Usa el que más conviene y quedarás mejor>. Así crecieron aprendiendo a quedar mejor..." (Martínez 40). It is suggested by Martínez that in spite of his ability to project feelings on the outside, Perón was hollow on the inside. He seemed to lack self-knowledge and awareness as well as solid ancestral/familial roots which could have helped him to determine a true heritage. In his later life, during his exile, Perón feels outside himself, as if he has no true home. "En la Argentina no hay más hogar que el exilio" (Martínez 13). "Y en el repentino vacío de su corazón descubría que sólo cuando se quedaba sin país tenía tiempo para la felicidad" (Martínez 13). Martínez ascertains throughout the entire novel that Perón is incapable of experiencing true feeling within himself, be it happiness, sadness, love, grief, etc. In the novel Martínez writes from the perspective of the character Baldomera, one of Peron's aunts, and says: "Pero no bien el chico se da cuenta de que lo estoy mirando, se pone un sentimiento encima como si fuera ropa: me acaricia, busca ternura, llora, suelta una carcajada. Jamás he visto una criatura así, tan oscura por dentro y con tanta luz por fuera" (Martínez 84). Martínez later writes, in the first person perspective of Perón: "Fui ascendido a teniente primero y destinado, el 16 de enero de 1920, a la escuela de suboficiales. Recuerdo aquellas días con tanta limpidez como si se tratara del presente. Yo era feliz, pero no me daba cuenta porque la felicidad es siempre algo que hemos dejado atrás" (Martínez 122).

The theme of Perón's inability to feel anything real within him is one that is perpetuated throughout the novel. It is consistent with Martínez's recurring commentary on what he believes to be Perón's perception of 'truth' and how much significance the truth really has in life and

history. The main point Martínez strives to make is that Perón was willing to sacrifice the reality and authenticity of his ancestry, childhood, speeches and eventual memoirs for the sake of creating what he believed the Argentine people and the history books wanted to hear/remember.

Referencing only those biographies, journal articles and informational pages written on Perón and his administration that I have read, it has been difficult to find much indication that anyone tried to discern who Perón actually was out of the context of the General and the President of the Republic. The pieces of him that Martínez alludes to in his novel are weaved together using pieces of scattered information and Martínez's own speculation. For example, the *Encyclopedia of World Biography* contains an article entitled *Juan Domingo Perón* and it covers his early life, education/schooling, first job positions in the military, his presidency, exile and return to Argentina. Although Perón seemed to have invented much of the man he was prior to his governance of Argentina as well as during and after his tenure as such, history has been able to more or less assert that certain aspects of the record concerning life details of Perón are correct. The following quotes are the only pieces of the *Encyclopedia of World Biography* article that allude to what has been presented by the historical record as Perón's true self. "In a status-conscious country, the fact of his illegitimate birth, may have been, in later life, a source of resentment" (Encyclopedia of World Biography). "There were a lack of schools in southern Patagonia, so in 1904 Perón's parents sent him and his brother to elementary school in Buenos Aires, the capital city. Far from his family and home, Perón learned to live by his wits" (Encyclopedia of World Biography). "It was in the closeness of the military barracks that Perón found the camaraderie that he had not had the chance to enjoy as a child" (Encyclopedia of World Biography).

In the quotations above we can observe two things. Firstly, the language that is used by the author of this piece mimics the language of uncertainty used by Joseph Page as was indicated in the analysis of writing style section of this paper. The lack of assuredness on behalf of the biographer in some of the statements made is evident. Direct evidence of this can be found in the first quote regarding his potential resentment. The key words ‘may have been’ were selected before daring to presume such resentment. Determining that there actually was resentment boiling under Perón’s seemingly calm exterior is speculative in nature. The second quote dictates that Perón learned to live by his wits. This may be inferred by his dedication to success during and after his time at the military academy, but it is not a direct quote from Perón or an anecdote provided by family members that would prove he indeed learned to live by his wits. The third quote is wanting in example of how his childhood was lacking in camaraderie. Juan had a brother, he had cousins. Martínez at one point writes of how it was when Peron was hunting guanacos in the countryside with a friend that he caught his mother having an affair. Is evidence of his lonesomeness printed somewhere or is it assumed based on the information provided from his childhood years?

Martínez, in his novel, provides the same general information, but uses more specifics as well as more description. Pertaining to the closeness of the military barracks and his newfound camaraderie, Martínez digs further by providing the name of a specific comrade who was with Perón when he was in military school, a fellow cadet in training, Santiago Trafellati “Se aficionó a la amistad de Trafellati. Durante los días de semana salían juntos a fortalecer las piernas corriendo por senderos de pedregullo y arena blanda y competían en los anillos y trapecios del gimnasio, para endurecer los bíceps (Martínez 157). Even though it may not be documented as to whether or not Perón actually trained with Trafellati on trapezes or running along paths or in

the sand to work out, it gives the reader a look into what his life may have been like; a life that we as people recognize. Does the lack of certainty in the language used by the biographer differ all that much from the added description provided by Martínez's novel? They are merely two ways of alluding to a truth that is just out of history's reach.

Perón: The Women behind the General

Perón's relationship with women was brushed upon previously in this thesis serving as the base topic for comparing and contrasting writing styles between non-fiction and fiction novels. There has been much speculation as to whether or not Perón was a sexual being and what the actual purposes of his relationships were. Did his relationships with women serve a larger political purpose by fulfilling societal expectations or did he engage in them for the companionship and love of a woman? In his novel, Martínez delves deep into Perón's psyche in an attempt to determine his true impressions of the female sex. He spends time describing Perón's love affairs and wives, but before he touches upon those portions of Perón's life he takes the reader back in time to when Perón was a boy and discusses the way he regarded women during that epoch. In so doing this, Martínez essentially asserts that Perón's childhood experiences with the female family members in his life had a direct impact on the nature of all his future interpersonal relationships with women. The manner in which a young man comes to understand the nature of women and respect their existence as well as their contributions to the passage of everyday life will affect the type of man he becomes as well as the type of mind-set he assumes in adulthood.

In a section dealing with this point Martínez writes from the perspective of Perón's first cousin, María Amelia Perón, as she reflects back to a time when Perón accompanied her to an opera. He was taking her as a chaperone upon Tía Baldomera's insistence, despite the fact that

he hated operas. The opera was very romantic and although María Amelia was overcome by emotion from it Perón was beside himself with irritation at having to sit through it. “Encendieron las luces. Te pusiste de pie con brusquedad y nos dijiste que esperarías afuera. Que te sacaban de quicio las mentiras del teatro: más aún las mentiras de una mujer como Manon Lescaut, que tan vilmente se burlaba de los hombres” (Martínez 150). A few pages later Martínez continues with his assertion that Perón in a sense feared women; at least he feared what they may do to him if he let his guard down in their name. Martínez describes a time when Perón bid his aunts and grandmother good-bye, leaving to catch a boat to Patagonia. Instead he was found by police officers, sleeping on the docks. Upon being woken up by a policeman he exclaimed, “Mamá, mamá! Y mi mamá, ¿dónde se habrá metido?” (Martínez 152). Within this one quote Martínez is placing the potential, for the world to see, that Perón indeed had ‘-mommy issues-.’ Martínez continues, from Tía Vicenta’s perspective, to describe what occurred when Perón finally accepted, upon her insistence, to return to her house to live in his childhood bedroom for the remainder of the summer. “Se baño con acaroina y se dejó rapar el pelo empiojado. La tía le puso sábanas de lino. Y aquella primera noche, al verlo casi dormido, sintió tanta ternura por él que se acercó a darle un beso. Juan estaba en guardia, como un erizo. La rechazó, manoteando. “¡A mi ninguna mujer me besa!””, lloró, “¡Nunca voy a dejar que una mujer me ponga la mano encima!”” (Martínez 152). Martínez has laid a serious claim within these pages, a claim that suggests Perón’s involvement in romantic relationships to be a feat accomplished against fate. Martínez gives a potential cause for Perón’s strange reactions to women’s affection. He writes about young Perón discovering his mother having an affair with a ranch hand. He was out hunting guanacos with his friend Alberto when he injured himself and went to look for his mother to help mend his wound. He looked in the house of the ranch hand

and found her with another man. “A la izquierda de la puerta, sobre la cola de caballo donde se ensartaban los peines, había uno blanco, de asta, con los dientes gruesos, que no era de la familia. A la derecha, sobre la cama de matrimonio, vio los bultos desnudos de un hombre y una mujer que corcoveaban. La cortina de cretona se había caído en la furia de la lucha... “Mamá,” volvió a llamar Juan Domingo. Alberto se volvió. Y sorprendió en la cara del amigo, bajo las costras de sangre, un rictus de sufrimiento inhumano...Durante una semana estuvo dando vueltas por el pueblo, taciturno.” (Martínez 88). Martínez finishes the episode by writing that Perón left to Buenos Aires after that week, with his wound open and untended, without saying good-bye to his mother. I have been unable to find documentation as to whether or not the affair between Doña Juana and Benjamín Gomez occurred. Therefore, it seems likely that Martínez created the story in an attempt to peek at a potential explanation for Perón’s odd history with his relationships with women. It is one example of the most fictitious parts of the novel, but still has the magical quality of making the reader think ‘hmm, I wonder if there could be some undocumented truth to that story.’

Each of Perón’s relationships gives insight to his personality. From his marriage to his first wife, Aurelia Tizón, to his scandalous affair with a young Nelly Rivas, Perón’s relationships are as unique and intriguing as can be. The only thing all have in common is the age of the women when Perón first came to know them and the physical beauty that they all possessed. Crassweller sums up the nature of all Perón’s romantic relationships throughout his life perfectly, “His relations with women abound in enigma. He found much happiness with his first wife, a very private homebody. Was he the same husband whose second wife, an actress, wrought changes in the entire political and social order? Was either of these husbands the one who made his third wife, a nonpolitical dancer of minor public skills, the vice-president of Argentina and,

as his successor, the first female president in the Western Hemisphere? One Perón valued women more for their company than for their bodies, and another at the age of fifty-eight took a fourteen-year-old mistress, perhaps in subconscious search of the child he never fathered. One part of him was traditional male and another part defied the mores of a male-dominated society” (Crassweller 11).

Martínez writes that Perón’s first marriage to Aurelia ‘Potota’ Tizón was one born of need rather than want. Perón’s commanding officers advised it was time he take a wife, as it was not regarded highly for a thirty-year-old military officer to be unwed. “Ese teniente coronel ha dicho que usted pasa el día metido con los deportes, y que no entiende como ya casi a punto de cumplir treinta años, no se preocupa por sentar cabeza. La logía desconfía de los oficiales solteros” (Martínez 214). One of Perón’s commanding officers, Bartólome Descalzo, whom Perón looked up to and regarded as a protector, and his wife recommended Aurelia Tizón as a suitable potential wife for him. “Desde la ventana de una confitería, Juan Domingo vio llegar a la esposa del teniente coronel con una muchacha bajita y menuda, que hablaba sin alzar la mirada y se reía tapándose los dientes. Antes de que se la presentaran supo, sin la más leve incertidumbre, que ella lo aceparía como novio” (Martínez 216). Many historians and biographers assert that Aurelia (Potota) was Perón’s great love. “He found much happiness with his first wife, a very private homebody” (Crassweller 11). Crassweller continues, “The pleasures of Perón's life in the 1930s owed much to his marriage, which was almost coterminous with the decade... She was small and attractive, with wide-set eyes and an expression faintly melancholy or wistful... Some who knew Perón well have believed that of his three wives, Potota was the only one he truly and deeply loved” (Crassweller 83-84). Crassweller continues his description of the Perón’s marriage describing how Potota took pleasures in more domestic affairs and

music. She had a teaching accreditation also. He mentions how Perón liked to cook and would sometimes do so for dinner guests. Nowhere in Crassweller's account of the marriage was Potota's supposed discontent mentioned.

In *La Novela de Perón* Martínez describes a relationship between the Perón's that is very different from that of Crassweller's description. Martínez describes Potota's existence as extremely lonesome and almost completely cut off from society. It is a notion of domestic discontent that was not publicly spoken of or admitted to in the time of Peron and Potota's marriage. In creating the scenario of domestic unhappiness within the pages of his novel Martínez not only offers a potential of what the relationship might really have been but he also exposes a reality that many women were forced to silently endure over the centuries. Aurelia was not allowed out of the house on her own, not to shop nor to visit family or friends. She stopped playing piano and engaging in the things that used to bring her pleasure. Her heart was set on having children, which would have been her only possible escape from the seclusion she endured on a daily basis. However, even those dreams were dashed when doctors informed her of Perón's impotence. "Durante los dos años puntales de noviazgo, ella creyó que era locamente amada; es decir, con respeto, visitas infalibles y cartas de cumplido. Pero el último día de la luna de miel la introdujo en una rutina tan espesa que las señales del amor se le confundían" (Martínez 217). Despite Martínez's contrasting take on the marriage, Crassweller is not alone in his assertion that the Peróns enjoyed a happy marriage. Paul H. Lewis in his book *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* states, "The couple had no children, but their marriage is said to have been a happy one" (Lewis 132). Arnold Blumberg in his book "*Great Leaders, Great Tyrants? Contemporary Views of World Rulers who Made History*" writes that "At age forty-three Juan Perón could have been proud of his modest achievements, but with the death of his wife in 1938,

he felt adrift” (Blumberg 228). Perón’s feeling ‘adrift’, detached, is evidence of the effect Aurelia’s death had on him. But again, it is speculation on Blumberg’s part. Crassweller, Lewis and Blumberg all paint a picture of a happy marriage between Perón and Potota. Lewis writes that, “their marriage is *said to have been a happy one.*” Neither historian nor biographer could ever confirm such a thing. Such commentary on feelings is virtually never found in documents or historical evidence. Of course Perón would have wanted to present a picture of domestic bliss. After all, according to Martínez, it is for the outside world that he married in the first place. In his novel, Martínez strays from the widespread beliefs that Perón’s first marriage was mutually happy. Perhaps for Perón it was, because he was able to continue leading his life, solitarily working up the power grid towards greatness. But for Aurelia? What was the marriage like for her? The history books do not comment from her point of view because they can’t possibly do so. Martínez decides to delve into the potential that she was not happy. Based on what we know about Perón’s personality, it seems uncharacteristic for him to be able to emotionally care for a woman in the way she would need when not one history book has been able to document him having real emotions in general. Therefore, although the evidence among the non-fiction works support the notion of a happy marriage between Perón and Potota, such happiness cannot be proven. This lack of historical documentation not only allows for Martínez’s version of the truth to be legitimately considered but it also allows for him to supplement and even question accepted historical consensus in search of more complex realities.

During the time that elapsed between Potota’s death and Perón’s first encounter with Eva, he was living with a young 16-year-old girl whom he affectionately referred to as ‘Piraña.’ Martínez describes this living situation from Perón’s character’s point of view, the description of which is inserted among the section of the -‘memoirs’- that cover the beginnings of his and Eva’s

relationship. Martínez explains that Perón gave the young girl the nickname ‘Piraña’ because she had big front teeth. He also explains the Peronist camp’s reasoning for why Piraña happened to be living with Perón. According to Perón, a cowhand from Uspallata asked Perón to care for his young daughter because he couldn’t afford to do so. Perón maintained that he did not have a romantic relationship with Piraña and that anyone who claimed otherwise would be lying. “Pero que tuve amores con ella, no. Son embustes. ¿Cómo, si era mi ahijada? ... Hombre de instintos fuertes si soy, hasta donde se debe. Pero las degeneraciones no se acomodan a mi temperamento” (Martínez 300). Martínez goes on to document how ‘Perón’ admits to taking Piraña on outings to Luna Park and to boxing matches, but that the time they spent and enjoyed together was not of a sexual nature. Despite his claims of self-preservation, the rumours continued to fly. “Y sin embargo, esos infundios se colaron en los libros de historia” (Martínez 300). It is especially evident in this section that Martínez as much as sets the stage for a debate among the historians reading the novel and those readers who may approach the subject with more of an open-mind as to the true nature of Perón’s relationship with Piraña, who she really was and how he came to know her. Although Martínez writes about the ‘affair’ in his novel he does not directly accuse Perón of engaging in unlawful, pedophilic behavior. He leaves the issue open for the reader to consider the possibility and probability of either point of view representing what actually occurred.

Martínez also includes mention of Piraña in Ch. 15: *La fuga: parte 4 “La fuga, según Maidana*. Right below the title of section four Martínez affirms that the information is real and was obtained via a tape-recording: “Desgrabación. Literal. Salvar las traiciones de la sintaxis” (Martínez 275). These tape recordings were made of Lt. Colonel Augusto Maidana, who Martínez asserts was a friend of Martínez’s parents and who knew Perón long before he became

Perón. The following is the excerpt quoted from Martínez's tape-recording in which Maidana describes the situation involving Nelly, who he refers to as "Piraña". - "Una vez, cerca de Uspallata, un viejo montañés le cedió la hija para que se la criara. La chica iría para los catorce años, y, según las malas lenguas, ahí nomás Perón se amancebó con ella. A lo mejor es la misma chica que apareció con él en Buenos Aires, y a la que presentaba como ahijada. No me consta. De lo que si me acuerdo es que aquella y esta se llamaban Piraña...De tales cosas sé porque muchas veces me pidió que lo acompañara, ya en 1942, al cabaret Tibidabo de Cangallo y Carlos Pellegrini" (Martínez 276).

The relationship that Martínez sheds light on between Perón and Maidana via his tape-recordings is historically defensible. The camaraderie and closeness that Maidana mentions in his tape-recordings is affirmed by the friendly nature of a letter that Perón wrote to Maidana on April 8, 1939. The contents of the letter are of a mere informational nature; the heading and closing indicate a real friendship between the two men: "Mi querido Maidana" ... "Bueno querido Maidana, le encargo saludos para todos y mis deseos de felicidad y tranquilidad. Con mi gran abrazo reciba mis saludos. Firmado: Perón" (Perón cited in *Vence al tiempo*).

The relationship between Perón and Piraña is well documented by in non-fiction books. For example, Crassweller mentions it in his book *Perón and the Enigmas of Argentina*. The relationship is also mentioned in an article by the 'Los Angeles Times' in 1987 by Daniel Drosdoff entitled: *There are wives and children, but a parallel private life is more the norm than the exception. : Latin Leaders Also Live Up to Reputations as Lovers*. It was one of the initial catalysts into the speculation of who Perón really was under his armor of feigned feelings and strong leadership. Crassweller writes the following concerning Perón's relationship with Piraña:

“Perón had been living with a young mistress nicknamed Piraña, an adolescent of sixteen from Mendoza who was said to be silent, plain in appearance, and sometimes bored with her secluded role as Perón's "daughter"” (Crassweller 131). Crassweller does not comment directly on the historical assumption that Piraña was not an innocent young girl who happened to be under the care of Peron in a -‘paternal’- way. He does, however, insinuate as much a few pages later when he comments on the potential options in which Evita’s being a mistress to the general could be unveiled to the public in a socially acceptable manner. During those times, even though it was not socially frowned upon for an army officer to keep a mistress, it was unacceptable for the mistress to cohabit with him. “The mistress would customarily have her separate small apartment where she could be visited and from which she could be brought forth for discreet appearances. Or she could be introduced as a daughter, as Piraña had been” (Crassweller 134). In that last line Crassweller confirms that the pro-Perón version of the situation maintains that Piraña fulfilled the role of a daughter figure to him. This corroborates the first-person reflection in Martínez’s novel that she was his goddaughter and nothing more. Although the interpretations differ slightly as to the title used to link the girl to Perón, both authors provide mention of the same general story. Crassweller also, however, indicates how this version of the story has not been taken for granted and that many historians and writers of non-fiction books do not accept it as truth.

Ricardo Herren, in his article for “elmundo.es”, offers insight into the more disturbing aspect of the relationship. “Desde entonces Perón no había tenido compañía fija. Cuando conoció a Evita en el festival por las víctimas del seísmo de San Juan, empero, no vivía solo. En su piso estaba alojada una adolescente apodada la Piraña, confiada a Juan Domingo por su padre en Mendoza «para que la educara». Extraña relación que, como fuera, delataba una de las

debilidades de Perón a la que daría rienda suelta en los últimos años de su segundo gobierno: la pedofilia” (Herren). Although the claims concerning how Perón came to be in guardianship of Piraña are similar, they do vary in stating why the girl was entrusted to him in the first place. In Martínez’s novel he has a witness say that the cowhand asked Perón to take the girl and raise her because he could not. In Herren’s article he notes that the girl was given to Perón by her father so Perón could educate her. The inconsistencies in the versions arouse suspicion about the case. Also, at no point is it noted who this cowhand was and why Perón all of sudden decided to take over rearing this specific 14-year-old girl when there are countless other children in the same position who would have undoubtedly relished the opportunity to be cared for and educated by a man of such high standing in the government. Such bizarre realizations and lack of concrete names and information logically tilt towards the negative assumption that there was something inappropriate going on behind the scenes.

In addition to the pro-Peronist version of what Perón and Piraña’s relationship consisted of, the more sinister version is presented by Martínez as well. Martínez uses his two main revolutionary characters, who direct the anti-Peronist revolution at Ezeiza in the novel, Nun Antezana and Diana Bronstein, to address the widespread notion that Piraña was a mistress, not an -‘adopted daughter’-. In the novel Nun and Diana are a politically charged, romantically involved couple who discuss one night while lying in bed what Perón’s sexual habits may have been. “¿Cómo habrá sido Perón en la cama? ... ¿Con quién se había enganchado entonces? Aquella, Nun, la que tenía un apodo de la más sensual. Eso. La piraña. Vaya a saber por qué la llamarían Piraña. Tendría el apetito abierto entre las piernas” (Martínez 279). In this section Martínez takes a completely different perspective on the nickname given by Perón. He

practically suggests that giving someone such a nickname is more akin to calling someone a ‘Tigress’ in the bedroom than it is an innocent, playful commentary on her big front teeth.

It is to be concluded that Martínez’s commentaries in his novel do a fine job of portraying the truths behind both the Peronist rationalization and the opposition’s claim of pedofilia in relation to the Piraña relationship. Both versions of the situation have been widely discussed, however the assertion of a sexual relationship has been propagated more as the truth. In an article of the “L.A. Times” from 1987 writer Daniel Drosdoff sums up nicely Juan Perón’s tendency towards having mistresses (and young ones at that), specifically referring to his relationship with Piraña. “Three-time Argentine President Juan Domingo Perón consistently flouted society’s conventions both in and out of office. And he never seemed to suffer from it at the polls, even though his nation is one of Latin America’s most Roman Catholic countries. Before becoming president for the first time, Perón, then an army colonel, lived openly with a teen-ager nicknamed “Piranha.” But she was forced out of Perón’s apartment when a flamboyant radio actress named Eva Duarte moved in” (Drosdoff).

The relationship between Juan Perón and Piraña is one whose truth has been conflated by government and situation. There are two differing perspectives on what went on, the official being the one that shows Perón in the best light. Martínez showcases both potentials in his novel, which provides the readers with the necessary history to weigh the perspectives and deduce for themselves what Peron’s relationship with Piraña really consisted of.

Eva Duarte represents a 180-degree change in personality from Potota. From the beginning she was very vocal as to how she felt about Perón and what she wanted from him. Whereas Potota could barely bring herself to make direct eye contact with Perón, Eva would

make demands. It is a source of mixed opinion concerning the nature of Perón's second marriage to Eva Duarte. She adored him and spoke publicly of him all the time, giving him 100% of the credit as her maker and her true Prince Charming. It is speculated by biographers that her love was not one of sexual attraction but one of infatuation for what her relationship with Perón afforded her. "Después del primer encuentro, Juan Domingo y Eva quedaron atrapados el uno por el otro: ¿Enamoramiento? ¿Atracción sexual? ¿Alianza para el poder? ¿Unión de intereses? Es difícil determinar qué los unió" (Herren). "The two fell in love (mutual ambition seems to have played a role in their mutual attraction) and married shortly before Perón gained the presidency" (Sherman 73). Thanks to her marriage to Peron Eva was able to live the life that rivaled that of a queen as well as give her famed 'descamisados' continued hope for a better life. In the chapter, *Si Evita Viviera*, Martínez prints the words of what is claimed that Evita had said to Perón in private; words which would eventually be broadcasted for the public to hear: "Hubo un tiempo en el que yo no supe mirar la desgracia, el infortunio, la miseria. Cuanto más ciega estaba, más me rodeaba la injusticia. Por fin llegaste vos, Perón, y me abriste los ojos. Desde aquel día te amo tanto que ni siquiera sé como decirlo. Te siento aquí, a mi lado, príncipe azul, y pienso que estoy soñando. Y como nada tengo para ofrecerte sino mi alma, te la doy toda. Pertencerte es una gracia de Dios" (Martínez 305). Such a profession of love is extraordinary. It comes off sounding almost desperate, desperate to display her adoration so outwardly in order to evoke a surge of emotion and perhaps an equally impassioned response from Perón. It is doubted whether Peron was capable of reciprocating such fervent desire/feeling. "Yo no se si de veras me enamoré. En mis tiempos los hombres no se rebajaban a decir "te quiero". Las intimidades sucedían o no sucedían, sin necesidad de palabras empalagosas. Solo sé que cuando una mujer nos ama mucho, como Eva me amó, no hay forma de resistirse" (Martinez 299).

Martínez describes Perón's first and lasting impressions of Eva in terms of her character, her kindness and her ability to propel him into the powerful leader he became. He focuses briefly on her physical appeal, but does not hone in on the -'sexy'- qualities she may have possessed, but rather the -'delicate'- ones. The following quotations exemplify these impressions and are taken from the novel having been written from Perón's point of view. "Me impresionaron sus manos, finas, ahusadas. Sus pies eran iguales como una filigrana. Tenía los cabellos largos y los ojos febriles...No fue su físico lo que me atrajo. Fue su bondad." "Era tan inteligente y sensible que no podía quitarme la de la cabeza." "Tenía un corazón enorme y una noble imaginación. Cuando un hombre sabe cultivar esas cualidades, la mujer aprende a servirle mejor que el más sofisticado de los instrumentos" (Martínez 297-298). Martínez maintains that Eva's mind was of more importance to Perón than her lack of classic beauty. Of greatest concern to Perón was what Eva could do for his career and public image. Munson and White provide a similar description of Eva's wit outweighing her physical attractiveness. "Evita was attractive, intelligent, dynamic and calculating. She developed a superior talent as a demagogue and a devotion to Perón that endured until her death, which was caused by cancer in 1952" (Munson and Weit 42). However, such intense *devotion* is not an exact equivalent to the emotion of *love* itself. Both Herren and Crassweller in their separate works quote Arturo Jauretche, a "writer, historian, intellectual" who knew both Perón and Eva personally, as saying, "Por más que se hubiera metido en el teatro, Eva era una chica asexual. Esa era su afinidad con Perón, porque tampoco él era muy sexual. En esa unión se juntaron dos voluntades, dos pasiones de poder. No fue una unión por amor" (Crassweller 133; Herren). Martínez and the non-fiction writers referenced in this section have remained unanimous in their claims that Juan and Eva's relationship was not one based on love. It is very probable that Eva was so overcome by

emotion and gratitude for Perón and what their union allowed her to do for the people of Argentina that she mistook that feeling for love. Perón himself, being a man devoid of normal human emotion, may have assumed that his awe-struck reaction to the degree of infatuation that Eva displayed towards him could be nothing other than love. However, in the end all indications point towards the conclusion that what Eva and Juan Domingo shared was not love, but a union based on mutual respect, political need and common goals.

Isabel Martínez de Perón, born María Estela Martínez Cartas, met Perón during his exile in Panama in 1955/1956. She had been working as a nightclub dancer and decided to adopt her confirmed name of Isabel as her stage name. She later made Isabel her legal name. She left her dancing behind after meeting Perón during a dance troupe tour of South America. Soon after, Perón appointed Isabel as his personal secretary. When Perón was exiled to Madrid Isabel went with him; they married there in 1961. From then on she would serve as ambassador to Argentina during the 1960s and 70s for Perón, building support for him politically throughout the country. Upon their return to Argentina, after 18 years in exile, Isabel became the world's first female president on July 1, 1974, following Perón's death from a heart attack in June of that same year. (Isabel had served as vice president under Perón in his third and final presidency.) The relationship between Juan Domingo and Isabel is portrayed by Martínez throughout the novel as safe and nurturing, but there is no mention of any romance or flirtation. It can be assumed that Perón was physically attracted to Isabel, being that she was a dancer and very beautiful, but Martínez does not include any insight to that aspect of the relationship in his novel. Martínez writes, in a straightforward, biographical manner, about Isabel's dancing career. He attests that she danced in Gustavo de Córdoba's Spanish ballet company and then in famous Caribbean artist Señor Joe Herald's company as a second ballerina. Martínez documents the beginnings of the

relationship between Perón and Isabel by quoting the following magazine caption that acknowledges Isabel's existence in a less than flattering light: "La misteriosa secretaria del tirano depuesto" (Martínez 31). Martínez also makes a brief commentary on Isabel's looks; how she put on weight during her time in Herald's dance company and did not look as beautiful as she had in her youth. "...don José les mostró las fotos de una revista donde la joven, disfigurada por la gordura y la permanente, apareció junto al General Perón en un hotel de Caracas" (Martínez 31). Encyclopedias.com boasts a several paragraph biography on Isabel Perón's pre-Perón days through her marriage to Perón, her vice presidency and presidency and her over-throw but it also states that "there is no adequate study of Isabel Perón in either English or Spanish" (Encyclopedia.com).

An author whose research has delved into the formation, sustenance and nature of Isabel and Perón's marriage is Crassweller. He confirms what Martínez alludes to early in his novel; that Isabel and Perón shared a comfortable union, but passionless nonetheless. He explains how during the last two years of Perón's exile in Spain Isabel's personality and assumed role as wife began to change. "She began to move beyond the horizons of the hostess, the greeter, the walking companion, the household sprite who appeared at teatime." ... "Soon after her return to Spain, Antonio received a letter from Perón referring to changes in Isabel that he described as ". . . of great importance" (Crassweller 341). And indeed they were, for they marked the beginning of a political ambition that would change her view of Perón and of herself. She would not become another Evita, probably not even in her own imagination, but she would see herself as a woman who had a mission as the wife of a remarkable political leader and as a political actor of some importance in her own right ... The vistas now opening changed the relationship of Isabel and Perón. Her sentiments at first had been those of respect and consideration, while Perón's had

been almost paternal. The extreme difference in their ages and Perón's preference for unions based upon comfort and company rather than upon passion almost assured this. But after 1965 there was a difference. Isabel, without abandoning her admiration, now began to see herself as allied in a political crusade with Perón, from whom she had learned much but to whom she was no longer subordinated by natural destiny. It does not appear that their mutual affection had ever been set aglow, but the marriage worked-most of the time, that is, for on occasion there were hard disputes between them, less dramatic, but much better authenticated, than those attributed by idle rumor to Evita's marriage" (Crassweller 341-342). Crassweller's description of the changes wrought in Isabel from when she first met and married Perón to years later when she assumed a more involved role as the great leader's wife lays the foundation for her future position as president of the country. It also serves to demonstrate the effect that Perón's power has had on the women he marries. Evita and Isabel both started off their life's adventure as show girls and found themselves in a position to yield great power over Argentina.

The only sense of affection between a husband and wife provided in Martínez's novel is when he writes from Perón's perspective when regarding Isabel, in which Perón calls her "Chabela" as a pet name. Aside from having Peron utter that term of endearment, Martínez's descriptions of Isabel consist mainly of her caretaking of Perón during his elder years, a brief description of her history in the beginning of the novel and some brief mention of her comings and goings to Argentina as Perón's ambassador in the 1960s and 70s. Martínez does not provide much direct information on Isabel's personality nor insight into her relationship with Perón. Aside from Crassweller there is not much documentation on Perón's third marriage either. From this we can assert that Martínez, despite how brief, was accurate in his description of Isabel and his insinuation of a respectful, yet romantically void relationship. Crassweller emphasizes the

lack of 'emotional commitment' between Isabel and Perón by quoting a delirious Perón when he was in the hospital recovering from a prostrate operation in the later half of the 1960s. "The anesthetic began to wear off, and Perón, still in deep lethargy, murmured, "Eva, please don't leave me alone, don't go, stay with me, I need you, I need you more than ever." And struggling to move his hand a bit, he touched Isabel's hand on the edge of the bed, murmuring again, "Evita, don't leave me" (Crassweller 342). This allows us to conclude that as sexless as Peron's second marriage was to Evita, it maintained a deeper emotional connection than was existent during his third.

Martínez subscribes to the theory that Perón was intimidated by women and was scared of allowing them to penetrate his inner shield, afraid that they would gain access to his 'non-feelings.' Still other authors and journalists try to piece together the pieces of Perón's romantic (or lack thereof) side. Perón's intriguing and sometimes bizarre relationships with women proved to be another enigma of the great leader.

"Perón mismo me lo advirtió con franqueza, cierta vez que hablábamos de Evita: "La utilicé, por supuesto, como a todas las personas que son utilizables y valen"" (Martínez 262). According to Crassweller Perón's constant shifting between one pole and the other was not limited to his political decisions or his effortless change in sentiment. Crassweller observes Perón's varying preferences in whom he took on as a female partner as well. His first wife, Aurelia Tizón, was the woman that many have claimed made Perón the happiest. Her own happiness was disputed by Martínez who described her existence as utterly desolate and lonesome. Eva was a companion who equaled Peron in their common interests in the political and social spectrum and Isabel was a companion who was a dancer turned politician.

In the book *Area Handbook for Argentina* Munson and Weit describe what the ideal Argentine woman should look like, dress like and be like. “The ideal woman also is expected to take great care in her personal appearance and to have an awareness of style and elegance in clothing. Girls are taught to be conscious of their femininity. Femininity and personal attractiveness are generally considered more important in a woman than intellectual ability or advanced education. Most people believe that the personality and role of women should complement that of men to produce a truly harmonious society” (Munson and Weit 182). Being that Perón’s initial impulse for finding a wife was the need to fulfill a societal expectation as an upper ranking military officer, it is accurate to assume he was looking for someone who assumed the qualities outlined in Munson and Weit’s book. In analyzing Perón’s three wives within this formula it is apparent that all three shared commonalities that reflect the above description of an Argentine woman: they were attractive in personal appearance, were aware of style and elegance (especially Evita) and, aside from Potota having a teaching degree, did not have any advanced education. They all complemented Perón in a harmonious way, the way in which any woman with a similar disposition, good intentions and a common interest in companionship can. Despite the fact that all three women shared in their possession of the aforementioned basic requirements of being a good Argentine woman, Evita and Isabel differ from Potota in the fact that, as opposed to Potota, they were not considered to have come from good standing in society before they became Peron’s wives. Both Eva and Isabel were performers, a career viewed by good Argentine society at the time as more or less equivalent to being a prostitute, so in this aspect they did not meet the requirements of society as being good Argentine women. The transformation that Eva and Isabel underwent upon transferring to the upper echelon of society,

rendered them changed, but never to the point where the public (especially Peron's opponents) forgot where they came from.

The final aspect of being good Argentine woman is that the woman should complement her husband to create a 'truly harmonious society'. All three women each complemented Perón's personality differently (as Perón maintained different personalities within himself throughout his life and career.) Aurelia was more modest, more educated than Evita and Isabel, but very complimentary to Perón being that she kept on the sidelines. Eva had an innate sense of style and elegance and complimented Perón socially and politically. Isabel was a dancer, physically beautiful and loyal to Perón until the end.

José López-Rega

The character of José López-Rega endeavors to unveil and pounce upon the weakness that engulfs Perón in his later years. Through this character we are given insight to how Perón operated and lived during his exile in Madrid upon his return to Argentina 18 years later. We learn of Perón's doubts, his flaws and his dependency.

Robert Reed, an "anthropologist who has studied the intersection of Latin American drug trafficking and politics" (consortiumnews.com) comments, "José López-Rega, then a police corporal, finagled a personal introduction, according to Perón biographer Joseph Page. López-Rega apparently had served as a bodyguard for Perón when he was Argentine president. López-Rega's favorite photo showed him riding on the running board of Perón's limousine" (Reed). This information proves that López-Rega was in fact in the picture as far back as Perón's first presidency serving in a close capacity. Martínez's writing that López-Rega claimed credit for

Evita's motorcade brace is a slight extension of the documented truth. When we corroborate this evidence with the following statement by Reed it becomes even clearer as to how Martínez deemed it fit to have López-Rega's novel character take such credit. "...He also possessed a dark charisma with a temperament that was described by other Perón cronies as devious, ruthless and egomaniacal" (Reed). The adjective "egomaniacal" is perhaps the most accurate, single word description one can make of López-Rega.

Martínez describes the character of José López-Rega as a man of manipulative powers, who has ingratiated himself with not one, but two of Perón's wives at two distinct points in his career. In the novel López-Rega initially serves as the head assistant to Evita up until her passing and then later on as secretary to Isabel Perón; a position that, by course of natural occurrence, transitions into Juan Perón's chief advisor. Paul H. Lewis in his book *Guerrillas and Generals: The "Dirty War" in Argentina* describes López-Rega's role similarly. When Isabel had travelled back to Argentina representing Perón in his political interests she was greeted by a committee, one member of whom was a man named Raúl Lastiri. Lastiri happened to be engaged to López-Rega's daughter Norma. López-Rega was then included in Isabel's bodyguard unit. During his tenure as one of her bodyguards he conducted himself in a very graceful way towards her, earning her respect. He used that position to ingratiate himself with her. "When Isabel was preparing to return to Madrid, López-Rega humbly asked to be allowed to go back with her, as a bodyguard and servant of the general. He produced old newspaper photographs showing him close to Perón, as proof that he had once performed those functions. Isabel agreed to take him along, and so López-Rega was installed in the Quinta 17 de Octubre" (Lewis 75). Upon returning to Spain López-Rega was attached to her side. He did for her what Peron could not; he took the place of the female friend she didn't have. "The general was

usually busy, plotting with his men, but López-Rega was always available to accompany her on her shopping trips, carry her packages, listen to her over coffee at the Café California, or just chat” (Lewis 75).

The style of writing that Martínez uses when focusing on López-Rega is not one which flatters the latter’s spirit and his integrity, but it is one which showcases the advisor’s ability to twist facts around in a way which creates a deep confusion within Perón’s memory base and ultimately in his sense of assuredness in recognizing what he is actually capable of in his old age. The following quotes exemplify the man that basically masterminded the degree of influence he alone would have over Perón’s final administration. In the subsequent paragraphs each quote from the novel is followed by a documented source that either legitimizes or disproves the validity of Martínez’s claims.

“Un par de veces, mientras el General dormía la siesta en el avión, López había tratado de medirle el espesor del aire en los alvéolos de los pulmones. Lo penetraba con el pensamiento e iba siguiendo, de un alvéolo a otro, la marcha lánguida y entrecortada de las corrientes” (Martínez 12). This initial description of López-Rega paints him to be much more than a secretary or personal advisor. He has effectively placed himself in the position to take on a profound, almost spiritual role to the General and Isabel, a role that is much different than the one initially assigned to him. He is described to presume an almost omniscient power over the General, believing himself to have the ability to control the inner-most workings of the General’s health.

Reed also wrote an article entitled, “*Juan Perón and <Cocaine Politics>*.” Throughout this article Reed includes information on various aspects of the Perón administration that mirror

Martínez's assertions throughout his novel. The following quote serves as evidence that López-Rega, whom Reed describes as "Perón's Rasputin-like personal assistant known as "El Brujo" or "The Wizard," (Reed, 1999) did indeed use his 'occult powers' to effect control and knowledge over Perón's body. "López-Rega nursed Perón and practiced his occult arts of healing. On one occasion López-Rega was overheard boasting how Perón had once died and was brought back to life by his magical powers" (Reed). "The NY Times", Lewis and Crassweller all substantiate Martínez's descriptions of López-Rega's influence over Isabel and Perón and confirm his interest in the occult and astrology. In the "NY Times" Obituary Section within López-Rega's obituary, he is described as, "a retired police corporal and practicing astrologer, was a bodyguard of Juan D. Perón in the 1950's. In 1965, he insinuated himself into the Madrid household of the exiled dictator, becoming his private secretary" (Flint). "He became a kind of spiritual confessor and piqued her interest with his knowledge of the occult" (Lewis 75). Crassweller writes of López-Rega, - "He was a failed singer of immodest dreams and modest ability. And he had taken to spiritualism and the occult as a career, writing several unintelligible tomes that he printed with his own small press. The title of the largest, *Astrología esotérica: Secretos develados*, Esoteric Astrology: Secrets Unveiled, suggests the nature of these works. The surprised reader is told that the material came from God, who wished to share it with the author, and that, in another case, the book was written in conjunction with the Archangel Gabriel, who descended to commune with López-Rega in his sleep" (Crassweller 342).

As with other central characters in Perón's life, Martínez has López-Rega speak for himself in the novel, recalling his role in the Peronist government when Evita was still alive. "Mande ahora mismo que le inyecten calmantes en los tobillos y en la nuca", - le dije. "Y que le fabriquen un corse de yeso y alambre para sostenerse de pie cuando desfile con el General en el

auto descubierto...” (Martínez 35). Evita was in severe pain and on her deathbed, yet she still wanted to ride the motorcade and wave to her people one last time. He takes the credit for suggesting to her to have the corset of cast made to hold her weakened body up during the parade.

Martínez writes of López-Rega’s strong influence on the general several times throughout the novel. The following quotation portrays Martínez’s description of the extent to which López-Rega influenced Perón’s mind during the latter parts of his life during his exile in Madrid. López-Rega affected Perón’s memory to the point that Perón could not determine for himself what actually happened in his past and what López-Rega had created. “¿Pero quién asegura que los veo tal como son? Alguien ha escrito por ahí que debo estudiar mejor los documentos. Aja. Aquí están los documentos, todos los que se me da la gana. Y si no están, López los inventa. Le basta con posar las manos sobre un papel para volverlo amarillo: así me ha dicho. Tanto me ha confundido que, cuando miro una foto de la infancia, no sé si de verdad estoy en ella o es que López me ha llevado hasta ahí” (Martínez 51). This quote is taken from Perón’s thoughts regarding López-Rega’s role in writing down Perón’s memoirs. Throughout the novel Martínez describes how López-Rega constantly embellishes the truth or flat out invents history according to what he deems would present Perón in the best light to his constituents and readers.

The following quotation is another example of the power López-Rega assumes over Perón. This quote is taken from the beginning of the novel when the General is on the flight back to Argentina from his exile in Madrid. Rega is in the bathroom, experiencing obvious indigestion and unleashing a series of bodily noises. Rega insists that every digestive issue he has just experienced, except for ‘las gárgaras’, are those of the General that Rega has taken on in

his own body to do away with for Perón. Despite the General's confusion and weak insistence on his always having a strong a perfect digestive system, López-Rega insists that this simply isn't true. "Su estómago, mi General, lo ha corregido López. Yo nada tengo que ver con eso. Son los vientos que se le cuelan a usted en la boca y usan después mi cuerpo para soltarse. ¿Cómo es posible?, le ha preguntado Perón. He tenido siempre una digestión perfecta. Pero el secretario insiste: las gárgaras si son mías. A los otros ruidos me los transmite usted" (Martínez 56). This quote serves a two-fold purpose for readers of *La Novela de Perón*. The first is to build Martínez's case against López-Rega as a controlling manipulator who takes advantage of an aging leader to bring about what he believes to be the best path for Argentina upon the General's return to the country. The other is to expose the madness that Juan Perón eventually succumbed to during his exile in Spain, which tormented him until his death on July 1, 1974. The controlling effect that López-Rega has over the General is one which should not have perpetuated had Perón been in his right mind to discern the ridiculousness of López-Rega's actions and explanations. However, Martínez describes Perón mentally trying to work out López-Rega's justifications, which in and of itself proves Perón's detachedness in his later life and last term as President of Argentina.

In Reed's article he quotes a CIA cable: "Perón has lucid periods, interrupted by periods of depression during which he becomes a dependent old man. In these latter periods [he] refuses to talk to anyone but his wife ... and ... López Rega ... upon whom he becomes very dependent" (Reed). This dependence was exemplified by Martínez. It is documented that Perón, Isabel and López-Rega were all living in Spain together during Perón's exile. Rega left his wife and daughter in order to serve this position full time. Although López-Rega served under the title of secretary, he functioned more along the lines of Perón's right-hand man. Martínez took all of

these facts and elaborated, weaving them into a novel of what the facts could have alluded to in real life detail. Perón's dependence is illustrated by Martínez via his submission to López-Rega's insinuations and assuredness concerning the truthfulness of Perón's memoirs. There are several times when Martínez has Perón's character second guess himself and question the validity of some of the memoirs. Each time López-Rega has a justification for the embellishment and fabrication.

“Ahora que releo las páginas de los primeros días, Perón percibe con cuanto esmero el secretario ha reparado los deslices. Ha interpretado la historia verdadera: la que debió suceder, la que sin duda prevalecerá” (Martínez 55). This quote reasserts the aforementioned claim that Perón is dependent upon López-Rega. Martínez goes as far to include in his dependence not only on his memories but on López-Rega's ability to foresee possible truths that should have happened but didn't. It summarizes Martínez's impression of Perón's susceptibility and madness as well as the ability of López-Rega to re-write the history of the most famed leader Argentina has ever had.

Towards the end of the novel Martínez focuses in on the spiritual powers Lopez-Rega has believed himself to have. He describes a scene in which López-Rega transfers Evita's soul into Isabel's body to arm her with the leadership capabilities she does not possess within herself. Although the scene is supernatural and quite far-fetched, it is merely a novelesque way to shed light on what is beneath this crazed idea of soul transference. It serves to further perpetuate what Martínez believes to be an unnatural controlled closeness that Rega had with the Peróns while they were in exile. This control undoubtedly affected the way in which Argentina's government was steered during the final years of Perón's presidency and life. The following quote from the novel indicates how López-Rega felt that the key to Perón's success upon returning to the

fatherland was Evita, being that she was a huge factor in attaining his initial popularity twenty years prior. However, as Evita was no longer living, the only thing that could be done was transfer the soul which had won the hearts of millions into the body of Isabel, who would need to not only ingratiate herself with the people of Argentina upon Perón's return but eventually govern the country upon the General's passing. "Ya no me queda tiempo. Ahora me concentro. ¿En qué orden haré que fluya el moira de Evita hacia el otro cuerpo, cómo pasar a la ignara Isabel los árboles de soma, las alegrías de Kinvat? Húndete, sueña, húndete: aprende a ser, como la muerta, puente entre el General y los descamisados, abanderada del verticalismo" (Martínez 257).

Reed writes, "Like the Peróns, López-Rega was fascinated by the occult. With flinty blue eyes and a hawkish profile, López-Rega fit the image of his self-proclaimed status as a wizard. He divined astrological charts and authored 11 volumes on the supernatural" (Reed). Reed continues, "On September 23, 1971, Eva's remains were transported from Italy to Spain where they were turned over to Perón. Later, López-Rega moved the body to a second floor room at Peron's house and ordered Isabel to lie on the coffin. Amid burning candles, López-Rega reportedly performed rituals to transfer Eva's spiritual essence into Isabel" (Reed). This substantiates Martínez's in-depth description of the transference of Evita's soul to Isabel's. Martínez takes it further in describing why López-Rega wanted to do this and he also writes a preliminary bit about how Perón kept making commentaries to López concerning coming down from the cloister area and what is he doing up there. However, perhaps Martínez gives Perón too much credit in that he describes Perón's reactions to López's weird actions that morning in a way that leads the reader to believe Perón has no idea that Rega practices occult spells and believes in the occult powers. "(López, ¿qué lo impacienta? ¿A qué tanto trajín en el santuario? Yo

esperaba estar solo. ¿Ahora que hace, urdiendo de cuclillas entre las soledades de ahí arriba?” Nada es, mi General. Que ponga en orden todo antes de irnos...Huele a yerba usted, López. A canela. ¿Y aquellas serpentinas que anda cargando? Déjeme ver: la otra, la violeta. ¿Qué han escrito en el borde, con letritas tan chicas?... No sé, mi General. Son cintas que andan perdiendo las criadas cuando limpian...” (Martínez 253). Reed’s assertions conclude the opposite: “Behind the scenes, however, the Peróns drifted into increasingly bizarre personal behavior. They acknowledged an interest in occult phenomena, particularly spirit worship and séances. A U.S. embassy official told the story of Perón believing that he had made contact with the ghost of San Martín, the historic liberator of Argentina. President Peron's dabbling in the occult upset the potent Catholic Church hierarchy” (Reed). Another insinuation by Martínez concerning the occult tendencies of the Peróns is that Isabel indefinitely trusted López-Rega with decisions that were in her best interest, but he didn’t paint her as being a woman who in and of herself was an occultist. “A medianoche, López convocó a Isabel en el santuario. Beba una taza de té, señora, y disipe su miedo con gotas de hipnótico. Póngase una bata de seda, baje los pensamientos hacia el yo profundo, incorpórese y rece. Bien sabe usted que sufriremos en Buenos Aires los más terribles contratiempos, que allí morirá Perón y cuando quedemos viudos caerán los buitres sobre nosotros. Vamos a prepararnos” (Martínez 256). However, once again, Reed contests this notion of Isabel merely being a woman of dependence on López-Rega’s immeasurable wisdom and claims that she too, as well as Perón and Evita, had a sincere interest in the occult. “One of the dancers was a beautiful 24-year-old Argentine, called Isabel. She and Perón met at the party and immediately hit it off. The pair shared not only an Argentine background but a strong interest in the occult. Isabel had lived for 10 years as a housekeeper for a family of professional spirit healers” (Reed).

One more piece of information that proves interesting concerning the relationship between López-Rega and Perón is how The Chicago Sun Times defines this relationship in an article entitled "*Perón aide is extradited to Argentina*": "Known to his enemies as "The Witch," López-Rega was a collaborator in the last government (1973-74) of his friend and protector, Juan Domingo Perón, and of its successor, led by Peron's wife Isabel Martínez Perón, who was ousted in a military coup in March, 1976" (Chicago Sun Times). This newspaper states, perhaps unknowingly, that Perón was a friend and protector of López-Rega. This is a perfect example of how history can be jumbled by seemingly 'accurate' documentation. According to Reed, López-Rega was the mastermind, practically pulling strings on marionettes of Perón and Isabel. However the Chicago Sun Times paints an image of López-Rega being 'protected' in a sense by Perón. Or perhaps they are insinuating that Perón's power and prestige were protecting his job and his person. However, one would be assuming the previous statement; it would not be clear fact. The discrepancy in language in which information is presented on this history leaves a foggy idea of what really was, which again, opens the door for historical fiction to move in and assert possible truths.

What we can conclude about López-Rega from comparing and contrasting Martínez's description of López-Rega's persona, purpose and actions with what John Reed has researched is that Martínez's historical fiction has proved to be factual. The only contrasting information is that Martínez did not delve as deep into the history of the occultist leanings of López-Rega, Perón, Evita, and Isabel in his book as was documented in historical articles. What he did was expound upon what was known to be true and weave a storyline around that truth.

Chapter 2

Santa Evita

In this next chapter we will explore the ability of Tomás Eloy Martínez's historical novel *Santa Evita* to provide insights into Eva Perón's last days as well as the bizarre journey her embalmed corpse takes after her passing. Eva Duarte de Perón has become, over the last 60 years, a mythic being. The questions, confusions and unyielding desires to know her and the truths of who she really was, her thoughts, her reasoning and her existence have occupied the hearts and souls of Argentines from the moment she came onto the scene in 1946. Martínez intends again, just as he did in *La novela de Perón*, to extract 'truths' about Evita that could not have been determined otherwise. This work differs from *The Perón Novel*, however, in that this novel focuses on the intense transformation (or metamorphosis- being the term used by Martínez to describe Eva's change from a usual young woman to the 'queen' of Argentina) that Eva underwent from her childhood to adolescence to adulthood. It explores her desires, dreams and the role she assumed in the Peronist government as well as the 'truths' surrounding her life and afterlife. It will be determined whether such 'truths' can be deciphered via documented evidence or whether the historically based fiction of Tomás Eloy Martínez can make more sense out of and bring more closure to a subject which has mystified Argentina, and the world at large, for the past 60 years and counting.

How does the purpose and writing style of *Santa Evita* compare and contrast from that of *La Novela de Perón*

Both *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita* fall under the literary genre of the historical novel. Both maintain the foundational goal of determining the unwritten facts and holes left by history regarding each member of the Perón power-couple via the novel approach. However, Tomás Eloy Martínez's express purpose in writing each novel is unique. In *Santa Evita* Martínez dedicates pages at a time to his own commentaries and internal mental/emotional struggles in relation to Evita's effect on Argentina and more definitively on himself throughout the novel. Such commentaries serve as direct evidence to how Martínez emotionally entrenched himself in the research, writing and final production of the novel, which Scripps describes as being "virtually a biography of her corpse" (Scripps 1). He became intertwined with the relationship between Evita and Argentina. "A mordant, dark, and intriguing novel, *Santa Evita* is not just another fictional re-creation of Eva's life, but a penetrating examination of the collective psyche of the Argentine people" (Mujica 1). Evita's presence and effect on Argentina was great and in the wake of her passing left Argentina in poor condition. The evolution of the governmental system and the Argentine people that occurred in the years after Eva and Perón's rule left the economy crippled and Argentines searching for a national identity. The identity they had assumed with Peronism had been the one Evita had so readily given them. They were hers, they were her 'descamisados', her 'little greasers' and upon her departure from them they became lost.

In Martínez's mind, understanding Evita became tantamount to understanding both Argentina and himself. "If I don't try to know her by writing her, I'm never going to know myself" (Martínez cited in Howard 51). A co-dependent existence between all three was born from this novel. Martínez did not succumb to such personal involvement in the writing of *La*

Novela de Perón. Although he did include himself as a character in the Perón Novel, it wasn't to the degree of emotional involvement and personal necessity to discover the truth about Perón that drove him during the writing of *Santa Evita*. His goal in *La Novela de Perón* was to tell the untold story of the dictator; to discover the aspects of his personality that led him to lead the life he led. "*La Novela de Peron* dealt with Juan Perón's return to power in 1973; Martínez termed it 'a novel where everything is true,' citing years of research and several personal interviews with Perón in exile. *Santa Evita*..., appears to be the product of an equally extensive investigation - one that began with a midnight phone call Martínez received in 1989 from several military officers seeking to correct his account of the corpse's story in *La Novela de Perón*" (Howard 51). Martínez's goal in *Santa Evita* is not only to tell Evita's untold story, but to determine the lasting effect of her governmental and philanthropic presence in Argentina on the people, the mind-set, the country AND Martínez himself as an Argentine. "Martínez's *Santa Evita* is a prime example of historiographic metafiction. Here the author intends to construct or re-construct the character of Eva Perón. But it is not just her biographical person that he wishes to render; it is the complex set of signifiers that constitutes her image and her value as an icon of transcendent meaning" (Díaz 22). Young opines the following concerning his beliefs of what *Santa Evita* is concerned with. "Unlike the historical novels with which it might be compared, however, *Santa Evita* is not concerned with some ancient archive, but with living memory, and in this instance the imminence of death is something more than an impending moment of closure and an opportunity to re-assess the past" (Young). Barbara Mujica adds, "But what interests Martínez are not the unbridled ambition and the duplicity of the dictator's wife, which have been documented in other books, but the sincere fascination of the Argentine people with this amazingly charismatic woman" (Mujica 1).

Evita

“Una diosa. Las facciones se le habían embellecido tanto que exhalaba un aura de aristocracia y una delicadeza de cuento de hadas. La miré fijo para ver que milagroso revoque llevaba encima. Pero nada: tenía los mismos dientes de conejo que no le dejaban cerrar los labios, los ojos medio redondos y nada provocativos, y para colmo me pareció que estaba más narigona. El pelo, eso sí, era otro: tirante, teñido de rubio, con un rodete sencillo. La belleza le crecía por dentro sin pedir permiso” (Martínez 12). Martínez leads off his acclaimed novel with the above description of Evita, which he ascribes in the novel to having been uttered by the make-up artist on her last two films, *Alcaraz*. The tone of writing is that of shock, awe and a hint of bewilderment as to how such a waif-like young girl could have metamorphosed into such a thing of elegance, refinement and beauty. The last line in the quotation, *that her beauty grew from within her*, is a testament to how Evita’s persona and life evolved over time. She tirelessly worked towards bettering the lot of the poor in Argentina and through her intense passion grew the ‘queen’, the ‘saint’, the Evita the world has come to know.

The mythic status that Eva embodied overpowers that even of Juan Perón himself. A series of life circumstances led her to meet Juan Perón; a meeting which changed the course of not only her life but of Argentina forever. Eva’s incredible journey to the peak of Latin American ‘royalty’ began in Los Toldos, Argentina. It is a well known fact that Eva was born the fifth and last child of Juan Duarte and Juana Ibarguren. “...Evita’s illegitimacy bore a double stigma: she was the only one of her mother’s children whom Juan Duarte refused to recognize as his own” (Greenberg 2). The way in which this widespread claim of illegitimacy was digested among the public differs based on whether or not the individual held Evita in high

esteem or not. “To her supporters it added to the fairy tale quality of her life. Her detractors, in turn, used it to explain her “castrating” rise to power.” Her detractors believed that the rejection she endured by her father early on fed the fire within her to respond with a furious passion to those that would underestimate her and try to slow down her unflinching dedication to improve the lives of her beloved ‘descamisados.’

Such an accusation of accumulation of power can be attributed to the fact that Eva’s arrival in government was solely due to her association with Peron. She swiftly moved up the ranks past a whole government of men and military riding on the coattails of her very respected and influential lover (and eventual husband). She used her grit and her desire to maintain the treacherous climb to the top. It has been remarked on more than one occasion that Evita was so dedicated to helping the poor of Argentina that she did not engage in any intimacies that would be expected of a loving woman and wife. “The other thing people would notice, Peronists and anti-Peronists alike, was how devoid of sexuality she seemed” (Greenberg 3). However, seemingly in total contrast of this observation her dissidents also remarked that she had been a whore before meeting Perón and beginning her life as ‘Evita’. “There are stories of degrading sexual encounters and of a botched abortion that nearly killed her” (Greenberg, pg. 3.) Perhaps it was such traumatic sexual experiences early in her adult life that led to her indifference to them in her marriage to Perón. Another aspect of Evita’s personality that is mentioned in Martínez’s novel is her tendency to lose her temper quite often with people. In the segment where he writes from the perspective of Eva’s make-up artist, he writes, “A mi Evita nunca dejó de respetarme. Le gritaba a todo el mundo, pero conmigo se cuidaba” (Martínez, pg. 100). Caleb Bach quotes Martínez in his article, *Tomás Eloy Martínez: Imagining the Truth*, as excusing why he invented Alcaraz’s testimony in the novel. “After much delay she finally emerged on the platform and

delivered a long harangue, but Peron denied her candidacy [for vice president], thus there was nothing for her to accept. I kept asking myself: Why this empty drama before her many loyal fans? That's when I decided to imagine what had gone on behind the scenes by way of Julio Alcaraz, the hairdresser who fashioned her famous chignon. What I attributed to the man I invented completely. It was all false" (Martínez cited in Bach 6). Although Martínez himself admits that the testimony of Alcaraz was invented for the story, non-fiction writers, such as Michael Greenberg, also confirm this aspect of her behavior. It is such dichotomies in the popular perception of Evita as a saint and the real episodes of angry outbursts to her employees and even to Perón that leaves her life open for interpretation.

Evita founded the 'María Durate de Perón Foundation' in July of 1948 which was a direct response to her closing of "La Sociedad de Beneficencia" which had rejected Eva when she wanted to become a member. The main objective of this society was to bring awareness to "la educación de las mujeres, a la mejora de sus costumbres y a los medios de proveer a sus necesidades, para poder llegar a su establecimiento a leyes que fijen sus derechos y sus deberes y les aseguren la parte de felicidad que les corresponde (Sabreli). Her control over this foundation is further evidence of her 'castrating' assumption of power. "Evita's control over the Foundation was absolute: she administered its charity personally like some ancient, folkloric queen. Her philanthropy was aggressive, theatrical, and grotesque at times, as when she would hand out a pair of dentures to some toothless supplicant with the words, *'In Peron's Argentina the workers smile with none of the inferiority complex of the downtrodden'*" (Greenberg 5).

To the average person reading about Eva Perón, the historical information surrounding her method of governing point to her having governed in an emotionally charged manner drawing its continuous energy from the memories of her childhood. She was never able to

accept or find peace regarding the hardships she endured neither as an illegitimate, unclaimed young girl nor as a struggling actress. She made it her life's work to avenge the plight of the suffering, those like her, no matter what the sacrifice, no matter what the cost. It is the depth of her desperation to mend the wounds of Argentina's poor that makes her such an interesting political figure. Philanthropy is not a political system, but rather an act of charity, yet Evita manages to intertwine the two to the point that the framework of the entire governmental system is blurred to her discretion. The tantalizing dichotomies of politics and philanthropy, of general and wife, of burning political desire and lacking emotional desire, is what perpetuate the endless queries surrounding the Perón couple. It is what hurtled Martínez into tackling the whys and hows of such intriguing persons within the framework of a novel.

The following quotation is taken from one of Martínez's personal commentaries that he included throughout the writing of *Santa Evita*. "Tomé la costumbre de sentarme en la banqueta de la manicura, con el anotador abierto y un paquete de cigarrillos mientras Alcaraz iba dejando caer sus recuerdos. A veces tomábamos ginebra, para entonarnos. A veces nos olvidábamos de toda sed y deseo. Creo que en aquellos momentos nació, sin que yo lo supiera, esta novela" (Martínez, pg. 99.) This reflective, self-incorporative style of writing is the manner in which Martínez wrote much of *Santa Evita*. The narrative strategies Martínez uses in writing *Santa Evita* are similar to those used in *La novela de Perón* in that there is collage of a baseline narrator and first person point of view (in relation to the central characters that speak for themselves). However, the narrative strategy that differs between the two novels is that of Martínez's own involvement in the telling of the story. In *Santa Evita* Martínez fully inserts himself into the text; not under the guise of a specific character in the novel, as he does in *La novela de Peron* with the character of Zamora, but as himself; complete with his deepest thoughts

and musing on Eva, her corpse and the magical effect she has had on Argentina and Argentina's history. The reader, at times, feels like he or she is floating through the author's mind on a feather, blowing in whichever direction his thought processes and interpretations take him. It is these intuitive, inquisitive meanderings of Martínez's mind that serve to illustrate the fiction aspect of this novel. However, inclusive among these meanderings is the overt posing of questions within the text that have been born from the lack of mention of their respective subjects in history.

Martínez took on the writing of Santa Evita with the intentions of writing a biography. Plans didn't go accordingly however, perhaps because he found himself falling deeper into the rabbit's hole, desperately seeking to know the 'real' Evita; one which couldn't be produced by writing within the confines of 'documented' history. "Having originally set out to write Evita's biography, Martínez discovered that only a novel could get to 'the truth of her life.' His book, he insists, is a reconstruction of fact, and there is no reason not to believe him; much of it is based on interviews and original research. He turned to fiction, he says, because Evita had become a fiction, no longer 'what she said and did' but 'what people say she did'" (Greenberg 8). Was Evita ever what she said and did? Was what she said and did ever Evita? The person that Eva Duarte de Perón was had morphed into this other entity, Evita. The Argentine girl became the Argentine Queen/Saint. Were they same the person? Was either version of Evita the real Evita? How can biographies account for the truth when that truth itself cannot be effectively linked to anything factual? Martínez did not intend to head down such a subjective road when he thought he would be writing a biography. But down the road of subjectivity he stumbled as he further tried to understand and explain the enigma of Evita. "Yo no sabía aun -- y aun faltaba mucho

para que lo sintiera – que la realidad no se resucita: nace de otro modo, se transfigura, se reinventa a si misma en las novelas” (Martínez 101).

Karen Bishop, author of *Myth Turned Monument: Documenting the Historical Imaginary in Buenos Aires and Beyond*, summarizes, in her opinion, Martínez’s intentions in writing *Santa Evita*. “The author grafts literature onto history to provide for the cultivation and easy dissemination of the myth of Eva Perón, because a walking, talking, shape-shifting historical protagonist will far outlive any of Evita’s other incarnations, imaginary or real” (Bishop 3). This is an interesting take on the purpose of Martínez’s novel and long-term goals. Was Martínez trying to combat the documented ‘truths’ of Evita with his own interpretations? Will such a protagonist lay implanted in the minds of people more so than whatever history Argentina and/or the Peronist government offered? The question we constantly return to is: what is the truth? What is the reality? Being that Evita invented much of who she was in life in order to yield her own desired outcome, how do we know which Evita is the *real* one? How do we know that Martínez’s Evita does not come closer to exposing her as she really was or could have been had her life not taken the turn towards leadership/idolatry that it did?

Bishop continues, “The author identifies himself as a twentieth-century Charon, rowing up and down the River Styx between the blind shores of literature and politics that delimit our understanding of history. He is the ferryman who carries his cargo across to the realm of forgetting, but he never lands. He loses his way in between, so that the poor shade he transports survives the banks of oblivion and turns to myth, caught somewhere between her own legacy and the underworld.” (Bishop 3). The confusion concerning politics and literature seems to be a common point of conflict among historical fiction pieces as a whole, especially in relation to *Santa Evita*. They are viewed as opposing forces that once mixed will breed nothing but

suggestion. Yet although they remain separate in notion, politics, being the engine of government and literature, being the engine of freedom of thought and freedom of speech, are more similar than they seem. Both are highly subjective; both rely on impassioned emotional investment, both have the ability to educate/inform or deceive/confuse; both are used to determine history and lay the framework for future actions and thought-processes. Despite their similarities they remain foes. The writers, in this specific case, Martínez, believe literature is the only salvation for unmasking the lies perpetuated by corrupt politicking. Politics determine the historical record that the writers so heavily distrust. “Have archives been constructed by educated minorities and powerful politicians to serve their own version of history; and is that history ‘a book of marvels’ which conceals, hides and fictionalizes reality? Why should the novel,—which is an undisguised fiction, be denied the right to propose its own version of historical truth? Why do we find it hard to believe that through fiction—the lie that dares to speak its name—history might be told in a way that is also authentic or, at least as authentic as that found in the documents?” (Bishop 3). Martínez echoes this notion in his novel, within his own musings that are interwoven throughout the text. “Todo relato es, por definición, infiel. La realidad, como ya dije, no se puede contar ni repetir. Lo único que se puede hacer con la realidad es inventarla de nuevo” (Martínez 114).

Martínez endures to portray reality via his characters in *Santa Evita*. For the characters that were created in the image of actual people and for whom a fair amount of information is known, Martínez expands upon that information with dialogue that would best represent them as per the given historical record. For those characters who were brushed over by history Martínez digs deeper and creates a persona of them for the reader through inference that is based on the historical events/records that surround the person. He writes of the characters in a way that

removes them from his own creation and instead represents them as if they were entities in their own right before being used to not only represent but to explain truth in his novel. “Los personajes conversaban con su voz propia a veces y otras con voz ajena, solo para explicarme que lo histórico, que la verdad, nunca es como parece” (Martínez 76). Having given the characters their own voices and not overtly claiming those voices as his own creation and skillful storytelling, Martínez, perhaps unknowingly, constructs the notion that he was not writing this novel of his own free will. It was as if a deeper power was pushing him to pen a truth that was never told. For this reason it didn’t matter if the characters were invented or if their existence remained true to historical documentation. The characters of Eva, Perón, Dr. Ara, Doña Juana and Moori Koenig all speak from a place of depth. Each is designed to offer insight into the truth that Martínez is creating. Being that a large quantity of the information included in the novel is factual, despite the fact that Martínez is creating the characters’ feelings, identities and spoken lines, he isn’t inventing them from a store of nothingness. The same can be said for the historical record. That information is not born of nothingness, but is it any more true than what Martínez offers his readers? “The paradox is that more objective accounts can’t fully convey Evita either” (Greenberg 9).

The character of Evita, as depicted while she is still alive, remains true to all that is known about her. Her long professions of debt and gratitude to Perón for providing her the opportunity to become all that she became are accurate and documented. All of her public speeches contained segments which glorified Perón as the one who created her and through which all things were possible. In Moori Koenig’s reflections, in *Santa Evita*, he speaks of Evita’s daily activities, ones which she kept up with at an exhilarating, debilitating pace for two years straight. “...pronunciaba cada día entre cinco y seis discursos, arengas breves, estribillos de

combate: pregonaba su amor por Perón hasta seis veces en una misma frase, llevando los tonos cada vez mas lejos y regresándolos luego al punto de partida como en una fuga de Bach: ‘Mis ideales fijos son Perón y mi pueblo’; ‘Alzo mi bandera por la causa de Perón’; ‘Nunca terminaré de agradecer a Perón por lo que soy y por lo que tengo’; ‘Mi vida no es mía sino de Perón y de mi pueblo, que son mis ideales fijos’. Era abrumador y extenuante” (Martínez 20). This concept is mirrored by a quote that is taken from Evita’s autobiography (whose claims of being scribed for her by a ghost-writer while she lay on her deathbed have been heavily disputed themselves, but are nonetheless considered part of the historical record). Marysa Navarro writes,

“There are no indications that Evita ever attempted to undermine Perón’s power for her own purposes. Even at the height of her influence, there were no signs of rivalry or competition between them. She understood very clearly that she had become ‘Evita’ because of him. As she explains in the preface of her autobiography, when she met Perón she was a humble sparrow and he was a mighty condor...

<If it weren’t for him who lowered himself to me and taught me how to fly in a different way, I would have never known what is a condor and I would have never contemplated the marvelous and magnificent immensity of my people.

That is why neither my life nor my heart belong to me and nothing of what I am or have is mine. Everything I am, everything I have, everything I think and everything I feel belongs to Perón.

But I do not forget and will never forget that I was a sparrow and that I am still one. If I fly high it is because of him. If I sometimes almost touch the sky with my wings, it is because of him. If I see clearly what my people are and I love my people and I feel the love of my people caressing my name, it is because of him.> (Navarro 240).

Both Martínez’s fiction and Navarro’s fact are synonymous in their message and the emotion and raw grit by which Evita proclaims her gratitude to Perón for all he has done for her. Having asserted this, it is justly stated that the character of Evita portayed by Martínez in his novel, as she was when she was alive, is true to form to that of historical document.

The following is an exchange that Martínez wrote that takes place between Eva and her mother, Doña Juana:

-“Y cada vez que me has oído decir: quiero a Perón con toda mi alma, Perón es más que mi vida, también estaba diciendo: me quiero a mí, me quiero a mí.” [Evita]

-“Vos no le debes nada, Chola. Lo que tenés adentro es tuyo y de nadie más. Vos sos mejor que él y que todos nosotros.” [Doña Juana]. (Martínez 49).

Did this exchange ever occur? Perhaps not word for word, but drawing from what we know about Evita’s intense, public devotion and thanking of Perón, it is perfectly within the realm of possibility to propose such a conversation could have occurred between Eva and her mother. This conversation also represents the extent to which Martínez references the living Eva in the novel. He depicts her as extremely devoted to Perón and to her cause, then she passes on and the novel shifts course to focus on the long and restless journey of her corpse to its final place of repose.

The character of Perón is mentioned in *Santa Evita* to display the manner in which Evita regarded him and the decisions he made surrounding the embalming and safekeeping of her corpse. The way in which Martínez depicts Perón’s reaction to Evita’s illness and imminent death is one of initial concern and an attempt to accommodate her wish to never be forgotten. However, later on Perón seems to be avoiding the whole mess of dying. In the very beginning of *Santa Evita* Martínez writes a short dialogue between Evita and Perón that consists of Evita noting to Perón how he has put on weight and to stop worrying so much about her. Perón’s response is, “¿Como hago, Chinita? -- se disculpó el marido--. Me paso el día contestando las cartas que te mandan a vos...Tenés que levantarte rápido antes de que yo también me enferme” (Martínez 15). Through this line we see a bit of Perón’s emotional side, showing a combination

of concern/caring and exasperation in how to transfer such a massive job to his plate. However, later on, when Eva's sickness worsens, it seems the Peronist government is weakening alongside her. Perón does fulfill Eva's dying wish to never be forgotten by hiring an embalmer to preserve her body with formaldehyde. During this time Martínez paints Perón as more and more irritable and impatient with what needs to be done concerning Eva's remains in lieu of simply mourning her passing privately as a husband would. Perón's attitude towards Evita seems detached and preoccupied with his own business. It is such descriptions that cause one to ponder the level of intimacy held between the General and Evita and what kind of fondness existed between them throughout the years. There are many accounts that paint a marriage of convenience between the two. Both had goals which could only be realized through the partnership they had solidified. Martínez writes, "En junio, 1952, siete semanas antes de que Evita muriera, Perón lo [Sr. Ara] convocó a la residencia presidencial..."

-‘Dígame de una vez que le hace falta y se lo pondré a su disposición. La enfermedad de mi mujer no me deja tiempo para todo lo que tengo que hacer.’

-‘Necesito ver el cuerpo—respondió el médico--. Me temo que ustedes han acudido a mi demasiado tarde.’

-Pase cuando quiera –dijo el presidente---, pero voy a ordenar que la duerman con sedantes’ (Martínez 34).

Martínez portrays Perón as a man who despite having an affinity towards someone, never really commits his whole self to anyone or anything other than sustaining his political authority and popularity among the people. Even as his wife lays dying, Perón was more worried about how he was going to shoulder her philanthropic responsibilities and take care of his own work

than he was about spending the last minutes of his wife's life by her side, although, as we have seen, she did express to him that her ultimate wish was to never be forgotten by her people.

Dr. Pedro Ara and Colonel Moori Koenig

Dr. Pedro Ara, the embalmer, and Colonel Moori Koenig, “the man responsible for the whereabouts of the body” (Díaz, pg. 186) are central characters in *Santa Evita* in regards to the preservation and care-taking of Evita's corpse. Dr. Ara suffered the same fate as Evita, pertaining to his popularity, in that some adorn him for the amazing work he did in embalming Evita so beautifully and others discredit his work as a fake, a hoax pulled on the Argentine government. Evita herself was both loved and scorned during her tenure as first lady. Both Ara and Koenig, however, are said to have had an abnormal adoration/obsession with the corpse.

Dr. Pedro Ara

Dr. Ara is described by Martínez as initially declining the request to embalm Evita. He wanted no part in it, but eventually succumbed to the idea that destiny was calling him and that he mustn't turn his back on destiny. After he accepts the request to embalm Evita's body and he undertakes the embalming process he becomes very possessive over it and creates seemingly reasonable reasons as to why the corpse must stay in his care, to make sure everything is progressing well with the embalming, for much longer than the military thought would be

necessary. This initial reasoning of ensuring the success of the embalming procedure was eventually pushed aside. Martínez describes Dr. Ara as a man that has developed such an adoration/love for Evita that he does not want to let her out of his sight. “Jamás se le hubiera pasado por la cabeza la idea de embalsamar a Evita, escribe; más de una vez alejó a los que venían a pedírselo, pero contra el Destino, Dios, ¿qué puede hacer un pobre anatomista? ... Y había dicho que no cuando le suplicaron que examinara el cadáver de Lenin en Moscú. ¿Por qué diría que sí esta vez? Por el Destino con mayúsculas. Eso: El Destino. ‘¿Quién será tan fatuo y vanidoso que crea poder elegir?’ suspira en el primer capítulo [de *El Caso de Eva Perón*, written by Ara]. ¿Por qué, tras tantos siglos de desgaste, la idea del Destino sigue en auge?” (Martínez 32-33).

Christine Quigley, in her book, *Modern Mummies: The Preservation of the Human Body in the Twentieth Century*, writes that rumors began to fly concerning Dr. Ara’s embalming of the late Evita. The initial rumors can only be described as attacking his ethics with respect to the deceased regarding how soon after her death he began work on her bodily preservation. “Another source states that when Dr. Ara heard that Perón wanted him to embalm the body of his wife when she died, he went to Moscow to learn the technique used on Lenin’s body” (Sava cited in Quigley 44).

Within two texts are two completely different statements regarding what Dr. Ara thought and did concerning Lenin’s mummification. Martínez writes from Ara’s first person point of view, taking a quote from Ara’s own book, stating that he was pleaded with to examine Lenin’s corpse, but that he declined, only to say yes to embalm Evita’s corpse due to the force of destiny. Quigley, who wrote a non-fiction work on mummification in the modern age, cited another source that claims Dr. Ara went to Moscow to learn how to embalm bodies in the way Lenin was

embalmed. Martínez has claimed many times that his writing in *Santa Evita* is based on much research. Quigley cited her source as well. Given such contrasting information, both based on ‘reliable’ sources, it seems a question pertinent to have been posed to Dr. Ara himself.

Despite conflicting truths on the story pre-dating Dr. Ara’s arrival in Argentina to embalm Evita, what is definite about Dr. Ara is that he did become attached to her in a manner that went beyond that of an embalmer keeping a watchful eye on his work to ensure its quality and safekeeping for the future. Both Martínez and Quigley included commentary on Dr. Ara’s enchantment and possessiveness towards the corpse. In *Santa Evita* Martínez uses Moori Koenig’s character to respectfully confront Dr. Ara on a series of accusations that Perón had placed upon him. The first accusation revolves around the suspicion that Dr. Ara had kept possession of the corpse far longer than was necessary to embalm it because he had not yet been paid the \$100,000 dollars due to him by the Argentine government for the embalming procedure. This prolonged time period of watching over the late Evita is reflected by Arthur C. Aufderheide in his book *The Scientific Study of Mummies*, in which he writes, “Dr. Ara never revealed the nature of his embalming process, though he continued to carry out further procedures during the next several months” (Aufderheide 160). The second accusation that Koenig made against Ara is that he was in love with the corpse and touched it inappropriately. “El Coronel empezó a jugar con la pipa y a golpearse los dientes con la boquilla --... ‘El gallego está enamorado del cadáver’, dice... ‘Lo manosea, la acaricia las tetas. Un soldado lo ha sorprendido metiéndole las manos en la entrepierna’” (Martínez 38). The third accusation is that Dr. Ara had issues of possession regarding the corpse and that Perón believed the body should be removed from his care. It is documented by other sources that it seemed to be, by looking at Ara, that he was in love with the corpse. Quigley quotes Fraser in her book as saying the following about Evita’s

corpse and Dr. Ara: “-It was the size of a twelve-year-old-girl. Its skin was wax-like and artificial, its mouth had been rouged, and when you tapped it, it rang hollow, like a store window mannequin. The embalmer, Dr. Ara, hovered over it like it was something he loved-” (Quigley 46).

In response to being notified of the Colonel’s orders to take the corpse from his watch and care, Martínez describes a sincere Dr. Ara imploring Moori Koenig to not take the body so soon. “No es tiempo todavía, Coronel. Ella no está lista. Si usted se la lleva ahora, mañana no la va a encontrar. Se perderá en el aire, se volverá vapor, mercurio, alcoholes” (Martínez 39). Martínez writes of Dr. Ara’s threat of impending disaster regarding the corpse’s fate if it is removed from his care too early in a way which lends itself to the supposition that he is in fact possessive over the corpse. Having been caring for and treating the body for several consecutive months at that point, it is unrealistic to believe that all that work would just fall apart if the corpse was removed from its daily treatment. Martínez’s phrasing of Ara’s plea reflects his likely feelings towards the transport of the body he had so expertly embalmed. Martínez used an embellished prose to enhance the quality of the real, documented history to a level deemed ‘novelistic’ for its descriptive nature.

Colonel Moori Koenig

Colonel Moori Koenig is most remembered by history for having been the army officer who was charged with moving the corpse to various secret locations to keep the Peronists from being able to steal it until the government could decide where to lay Evita to rest permanently. The general position of the military government during that time (which was anti-Peronist) was

that Evita was more dangerous dead than she was alive; the Argentine majority so revered her that her mere presence in Argentina was threatening to the capacity of the government to maintain its chosen method of rule and order. Koenig, who headed the military's intelligence service, first served as an aid-de-camp to Perón when Eva was still alive. During the time when Koenig was in charge of safe-guarding Evita's corpse he became obsessed with her. In effect, this obsession as well as the duty entrusted to him of transporting the corpse to various different sites to hide it from the Argentine public culminated in Koenig's complete mental deterioration. Martínez chronicles the beginnings of Koenig's assignment to the corpse dating back to when Evita was still alive and Koenig was Perón's (and essentially Eva's) aide-de-camp. Martínez describes Koenig's extremely detail-oriented/borderline inappropriate assignment of keeping track of Evita's health, which included and wasn't limited to describing her monthly menstruation down to the ounce of blood lost. "Escribía partes tan minuciosos como impropios de su rango: 'La Señora pierde mucha sangre pero no quiere que llamen a los médicos. /// Se encierra en el baño de su despacho y se cambia discretamente los algodones. /// Pierde sangre a chorros. Imposible discernir cuando se trata de la enfermedad y cuando de la menstruación'" (Martínez 21). Detailing exactitudes of such an inappropriate nature does not lend itself to believable documentation. In my research I have not come across any documents that prove such mandates were assigned Koenig or that he carried them out. It is probable that Martínez's goal in creating such a bizarre aspect of the plot line is to affix a starting point to Koenig's downward spiral into the perverted obsession he eventually developed with the corpse. From the beginning of the novel Martínez created a relationship between Koenig and Evita that, albeit distanced and forced by order of Perón, was unnerving in its own right. Díaz also includes commentary in her article on *Santa Evita* of Ara's necrophilia regarding the corpse. "According

to Walsh, Koenig had photographs of Eva displayed all over his apartment: photographs of her suspended in the air, on a silk sheet, in a crystal urn and in a frame of flowers” (Díaz 185).

In the article “Evita, A Doll of Flesh and Bones; Evita: The Unquiet Grave”, Peter Paterson quotes the following from Koenig’s successor, Colonel Cabanillas, in relation to Koenig being fired “for becoming obsessed with the late Evita and committing ‘serious, even unchristian acts against the body’” (Paterson 2). Paterson continues to quote Cabanillas regarding Koenig, “I knew him from military college, a perfectly normal man. But when he was in charge of the body, he went mad” (Paterson 2). Koenig’s demise is associated with countless others who succumbed to Evita. “In death as in life, Eva seems to cast a spell over everyone who comes into contact with her” (Mujica 2).

The similarities between the way Koenig was depicted in *Santa Evita* as compared to the ‘factual’ documentation of his job title and involvement in the transportation and concealment of Evita’s corpse are strong. The manner in which Martínez depicted Dr. Pedro Ara was equally representative of the documented history (which in this case lends itself to being stranger than fiction) regarding his embalming of the corpse and his ensuing relationship towards it. Scripps writes the following describing Ara’s and Koenig’s affinity towards the corpse as being an embedded story within the larger story of *Santa Evita*. “...The novel is also a tender love story – Ara and Koenig both fall in love with their beautiful re-creation and reinvention of Evita – and a personal tragedy, as they are both destroyed by her” (Scripps, pg. 2.)

Martínez has made several statements over the years following the release of the novel which assured that his writing, although fictional, is largely based on considerable research on the topic; research equal if not more extensive to that required of a biographer. “In fleshing out details like these Martínez displays his gifts as a writer and the rewards of his long research”

(Howard 51). Martínez himself asserts that "en esta novela poblada por personajes reales, los únicos a los que no conocí fueron Evita y el Coronel" (Young). The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that Martínez's story does represent the facts surrounding Koenig very well. He does not stray from the data, he simply creates added storylines as hypotheses for explaining how Koenig devolved from that of an ordinarily functioning military colonel to a demoted soldier who lost his mind. That story is not offered to us by history and the space to do so was therefore adopted by Martínez's ever-present imagination. "...what Santa Evita has in common with the testimonial novel is its capacity *to make the inaccessible accessible*" (Young).

The author in his labyrinth

During the years after Eva's death it was rumored that all those who seek to know her and learn about her somehow become dangerously entangled in her existence as well as her interminable legacy, as we have seen in the cases of Dr. Ara and Colonel Moori Koenig. This entanglement has been said to have had a maddening effect on all who became a part of it, and death found many via strange circumstances; some say that Martínez did not escape this "curse" during his research of Evita and his writing of the novel. "Although guilty of all manner of deception in the staging of his novel, as a player in his own creation Eloy admits he, too, fell victim to the mythic obsession that consumed his country" (Bach 10). It is due to the inserted commentaries (which resemble episodes of venting/confessing) by Martínez that the work of historical fiction starts to feel more like the factual annotations of a witness to real events than descriptive educated guesses at the past.

In Martínez' own words he summarizes the style he used in writing *Santa Evita*. "In the more recent book I altered my strategy. Instead of narrating scrupulously real situations using techniques of the novel (as in the case of Capote's *In Cold Blood*, for example), I've invented situations that I related as a journalist would. The effect is the reverse. I inserted myself as a player and said I was there, I saw, I read the files. Thus one emerges believing the events really occurred." (Bach 6).

Martínez's own commentaries within the text of *Santa Evita* point to another dimension of the novel, a meditation or rumination on the nature of the writer's role and relation to history. In this next section I will examine the implications of three of the more significant moments of reflection on these matters:

In the first quote, Martínez mentions the name and ideas of Walter Benjamin--: "Pensé, siguiendo a Walter Benjamin, que cuando un ser histórico ha sido redimido se puede citar todo su pasado: tanto las apoteosis como lo secreto" (Martínez 74-75). Martínez's annotation of his own commentaries with the views of other thinkers/philosophers reflects upon the abstract quality of this 'novel.' There is much reality weaved within the pages of this fictional work, which warrants consideration as to where the fiction lies as compared to that of the fact. Walter Benjamin was a literary critic and essayist whose writings largely maintain a philosophical basis. This reference to Benjamin tempts the question as to whether this novel bears a more biographical than fictional bent as it does name actual philosophers among Martínez's own conceptions of truths associated with Eva Perón. It seems he was reaching into the realms of other intellectual minds to corroborate his own inferences on a woman so elusive yet so available for inquiry.

The context in which Martínez used Benjamin's ideas was in that of history; and Benjamin had a unique concept of what history actually was. "Benjamin set out to construct novel conceptions of historical time and historical intelligibility based on the relationship, not between the past and the present, but between the 'then' and the 'now', as brought together in images of the past. Each historically specific 'now' was understood to correspond to (in a Baudelairean sense), or to render legible, a particular 'then'" (Zalta 2011). This concept that the past, present and future are simultaneously occurring can most definitely affect perceptions of history and within that the perception of historic figures. Evita's hold on the mentality and emotion of the Argentines was redeemed after her death. However the apotheoses and secrets were not desirable attributes of her redemption for the masses, only to those who pondered the truth behind her entire existence and persona. "The true picture of the past *whizzes* by. Only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognizability, is the past to be held fast," Benjamin wrote in his essay 'On the Concept of History' in 1940. This interpretation of the past, as a continuum rushing by only to be delayed momentarily as if it were a flash of a picture, recognized and lost in the same instant can be compared to Martínez's views on the lack of true knowledge in relation to historical events and people. If we view Eva and Juan's selves and that of Argentina during their reign as a past 'whizzing' by it is fair to assume that we as a people were not able to actually recognize and interpret what history documents as truths of that time period. "To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "-'how it really was.'-" It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. For historical materialism it is a question of holding fast to a picture of the past, just as if it had unexpectedly thrust itself, in a moment of danger, on the historical subject. The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients" (Benjamin). The first line in this quotation epitomizes the

ideological connection between Martínez and Benjamin. “To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.”” Well then how do any of us know how it really was if we can’t rely on documentation of the past? If you are Martínez, you take some personally authenticated information and combine it with your own mind’s meanderings around the subject. If historical documentation is rendered internally flawed, it does give one pause for reflection on how much less authentic a historically-based inference can be.

The second excerpt taken from the novel focuses on Martínez’s dip into slight madness surrounding Evita’s intrigue.

“Si esta novela se parece a las alas de una mariposa –la historia de la muerte fluyendo hacia delante, la historia de la vida avanzando hacia atrás, oscuridad visible, oxímoron de semejanzas—también habrá de parecerse a mí, a los restos de mito que fui cazando por el camino, a la yo que era Ella, a los amores y odios del nosotros, a lo que fue mi patria y a lo que quiso ser pero no pudo... el texto es una búsqueda de lo invisible, o la quietud de lo que vuela” (Martínez 76).

Such madness was rumored to afflict the most steadfast and rational of minds. The concept of death flowing forward and life advancing backward speaks in line with Benjamin’s concept of history; the absence of present, past and future, the manipulation of time in relation to progress. When Martínez refers to the “*I* who was *she*, to the loves and hates of that we, to what my country was and to what it wanted to be but could not be” he is combining his sense of self with that of Evita, intertwining the differences of opinions in loves and hates and personifying the unattained desires of a country unspoken for. It is at points such as these where his phrasing not only loses footing in that of a pure novel piece but also lends itself to criticism by those who

do not deem the piece a credible speculation of possible realities. Martínez's work hangs in limbo between genres at several junctures of this book and leaves the reader to ponder the nature of each phrase. Truth both embodies and escapes all facets and can either be seen emanating from within the work or lost among a sea of descriptive and passionate wanderings of an intellectual mind. However, the most remarkable trait of this work is that it allows the reader to ponder the presence of truth within the phrases and make decisions on reality based on such. Martínez creates a place where truth is not created and sold by a single party allowing no room for doubt. Instead he creates a story in which situations and analyses are presented so that the reader may determine and contemplate for himself where the actual history lies. "...As is characteristic of historiographic metafiction, he [Martínez] weaves reality with fiction leaving the distinction between the two to the imagination of the reader" (Díaz 183).

In the third, the Martinez narrator notes: "Los personajes conversaban con su voz propia a veces y otras con voz ajena, solo para explicarme que lo histórico no es siempre histórico, que la verdad nunca es como parece (Martínez 76). Martínez speaks of the characters in his novel as if they were actual people apart from his own creation. Martinez's mind was fragmented between what he knew and what he inferred. His characters were poised to feel the direct effects of this fragmentation. It can be safely stated that the voices Martínez references in the above excerpt refer to the voices of the actual historical figures that the characters represent, a few of whom he interviewed and all of whom he thoroughly researched. What is up for interpretation is what exactly Martínez meant when he added that the characters sometimes spoke in other people's voices. Simply speaking Martínez concludes that the knowledge and opinions held by certain characters (and inherently the actual people in whose image the characters were created) did not merely grow out of their own cognition; that they were influenced or perhaps even

manipulated by another's views. People's perceptions and realities are equally determined by personal circumstance as by deference to the knowledge of trusted family and/or expert sources. Not knowing if the opinion or understanding being voiced is coming from a completely pure place begs for determination of where the naked truth ends and subjective hearsay begins. Also, the manner in which Martínez inserts himself into that passage makes him out to be a prisoner of his own mind. He phrases that passage as if he were having a serious/philosophical conversation with himself. "...Merely to explain to me that what is history is not always historical, that the truth is never what it appears to be." Martínez was essentially writing his own version of early 20th century Argentine history. The characters that HE created were in fact helping him with his own understanding of history. In the end, all of his understanding came from his own mind.

Truths told by people who lived this story were not necessarily documented and kept on public or private record. Truth as it appears to be is usually the truth presented to the public via documentation. Truth as it really is is the undocumented realities. Martínez illustrates this notion of truth as it really is in passages such as those aforementioned.

When reading *Santa Evita* one feels as though they have finally stumbled upon real documentation on the events surrounding Evita's final days as well as the journey her corpse took in death. What differs from *La novela de Perón* is that the style of writing has been given the journalistic energy and directness which makes a reader feel like he is turning on breaking news. It feels real. So how does a reader who has not researched, read or even heard very much about Eva Perón know which parts of the novel are fact and which parts are created by Martínez? "Tomas Eloy Martínez gives Eva a voice in his text through the testimonies of the witnesses and people who knew her. Martínez alludes to the multiple interviews he carried out, but in true New Historical fashion, the boundaries of fact and fiction are blurred, since those characters he

interviews are both historical and fictional figures. It is impossible to verify whether these interviews actually took place and Martínez invites the reader's active participation in disentangling Eva's and ultimately the novel's complexities" (Lavery 251).

To take a deeper look into the fusion or confusion of fact vs. fiction in Martínez's *Santa Evita* it serves us well to take a look at what may be deemed the most famous quote associated with the Perón couple. The following phrase is quoted in biographies on the couple and sworn by countless pro-Evita groups to have been uttered by Eva herself upon first meeting General Perón: "Gracias por existir." The words have become immortalized as part of her legacy as well as a part of the glorified history of the couple's romance. It speaks early on of the intense love (bordering on idolatry) that Eva would maintain for the General until her death. However, the warmth and romantic historical appeal become upsettingly mundane and obsolete after Martínez affirmed that he indeed invented the phrase because it could not be made out through lip-reading what Evita actually said when she leaned towards Perón in the video of their first meeting.

"At one point she leans over and says something, but there is no sound and you can't read her lips, so I asked myself repeatedly, 'what could she have said?' And then in my imagination I invented an exchange in which Evita says, 'Coronel' and somewhat distracted, Perón responds with '¿Qué hija?' and she continues by saying 'Gracias por existir.' That phrase later appeared in a novel by someone else, also two biographies of Evita Perón, one by Alicia Dujovne Ortiz (1995) and another by Fermín Chavez (1990). It kept multiplying like the bodies of Evita! Finally, a few years ago, at the Museo de Peronismo in Buenos Aires, they installed carved marble plaques bearing famous quotes by the Perons. Included was the phrase I made up, 'Coronel, gracias por existir' attributed to Eva Perón. I wrote an article in the newspapers explaining I had invented the quote, but it wouldn't go away. The fanatic Peronists, in particular, insisted she really said it, thus it entered the language. Myths are born like this!" (Martínez cited in Bach 5).

This is a perfect example of how history may have been created in the past and how it is still being created in the present day. Inherent to the word, history is really a *story* which we remain unwaveringly faithful to due to lack of a better alternative. The lines between fact and fiction blur yet again; despite Martínez's admission, a mythical phrase has been crowned as truth by the masses.

Another mythical phrase that was crowned by the truth of the masses was “Volveré y seré millones” (Martínez 77). This is Evita's most acclaimed phrase yet she never uttered it. In Evita's own autobiography she wrote, “Pienso que muchos hombres reunidos, en vez de ser millares y millares de almas separadas, son mas bien una sola alma” (Evita cited in Martínez 77). According to Martínez's novel mythologists picked up on the phrase about the ‘thousands’ and converted it into the ‘millions’ phrase, determining on their own that it sufficiently fit who she was and what she would be capable of upon her ‘return.’ As Martínez expertly points out however, it is never stated from where she will be returning or what exactly –“I will be millions” is in reference to. The interesting point of fact among all this created history is that after Evita passed on she did indeed become millions. Millions of Argentine women endeavored to dress like her and do their hair like her and the rest of her faithful dotes merely wished to live in the eternity of her essence, which remained undeniably in the Argentine air.

It is apparent via these two circumstances, where quotations were created in the image of Evita that fiction does not only have the capacity to determine truth but in some cases it literally becomes truth. In the case of the first quote, “Gracias por existir”, this quote was admittedly contrived based on assumption and the public turned a deaf ear simply because living in the non-reality of that quote was better than living with the knowledge that it was never said. In the case

of the second quote, “Volveré y seré millones”, this was a hybrid between an actual utterance of Evita’s and, in the minds of some mythologists, an inflated perception of what the quote was capable of illustrating.

“Eloy believes that *La novela Perón* and *Santa Evita* are much more authentic than any traditional historical treatments of mid-twentieth-century Argentina.”... writes Bach, who goes on to quote Martínez on the comparability of his own beliefs on historical novels and “Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s great nineteenth-century study of caudillismo...” (Bach 2). Martínez says, “although he had no access to pertinent documents, he was able to imagine a country, a history, a political ideal using language that is so strong and powerful that the real Facundo Quiroga emerges” (Martínez cited in Bach 2). This idea of using a language so strong and powerful that truth emerges from within it is what happened to Martínez when he invented the quote “-‘gracias por existir’-” and it is what happened when he wrote both *La novela de Perón* and *Santa Evita*.”

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