Malvinas Myths, Falklands Fictions: Cultural Responses to War from Both Sides of the Atlantic

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MALVINAS MYTHS, FALKLANDS FICTIONS:
CULTURAL RESPONSES TO WAR FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

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ABSTRACT

The Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982 brought two previously friendly nations into armed conflict – not only over the possession of a few small islands, but also over moral principles and national honor. Both Argentina and the United Kingdom had attached symbolic and mythic significations to the islands and to the struggle for their possession. These myths, closely tied to issues of national identity and pride, influenced national leaders and ordinary citizens alike to advocate what was seen on both sides as a just and necessary war for sovereignty and national dignity.

This dissertation uses Roland Barthes’s definition of myth as a constructed and superimposed signification, as well as Hayden White’s theory that history and literature share similar plot structures, to examine how Britain’s and Argentina’s nationalist myths were developed and applied to the Falklands/Malvinas dispute. While governmental speeches, media reports, and polemic essays play a supportive role, my analysis centers on Falklands/Malvinas myths as they appear in artistic texts, including poetry, novels, short stories, theater, film, music, and visual arts.

I compare many British and Argentinean texts that reiterate, endorse, question, or undermine nationalist myths in various ways, focusing the most detailed attention on ten central texts. Argentinean poetry from the anthology Nuestros poetas y las Malvinas (1983) and television playwright Ian Curteis’s The Falklands Play (1987) are examined as “myth-perpetuators” that endorse or reiterate nationalist myths. Griselda Gambaro’s Del sol naciente (1984) and Steven Berkoff’s Sink the Belgrano! (1986) are discussed as “demythologizing” theater works that question and undermine official myths. The satirical novels Las Islas (1998), by Carlos Gamerro, and Swansong (1986), by Richard Francis, function as “countermythologizers,” or texts that deploy their own myths to subvert and replace official myths. Finally both book and film versions of Los chicos de la guerra (1982, 1983) and Tumbledown (1988) are presented as ambiguous works that have escaped categorization and been assigned multiple interpretations. Although the
official Falklands/Malvinas myths continue to endure, they have faced stronger questioning and opposition from competing viewpoints and myths in post-war years.
INTRODUCTION

The Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982 was a relatively short war over a seemingly insignificant bit of property in the South Atlantic.\(^1\) However, for the combatant nations, there was much more at stake than whose flag would fly over a few inhospitable islands. Each side attached its own symbolic and mythic significance to the islands and to the struggle for their possession. These myths, or fictions, closely tied to issues of national identity and pride, influenced decisions to fight on the part of national leaders, as well as decisions to support those leaders on the part of their compatriots. The Falklands/Malvinas myths continue to inform attitudes toward the conflict and what it means; they have found their way into the media, and also into picture books, films, poetry, novels and short stories, music, and memoirs from artists, journalists, and soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Some cultural responses, what I term “mythologizers” or “myth-perpetuators,” endorse and perpetuate nationalistic myths, while others seek to label them as myths and dismantle them. I call those texts that challenge, question, or deconstruct official myths “demythologizers.” Some texts deal with the myths in more ambiguous ways, allowing some to slip through their texts unnoticed while challenging others, or by ignoring them completely. Other texts set up their own myths about the war that work to question or dismantle official myths – these works are “countermythologizers.” Through examining how some of the Falklands/Malvinas myths were developed and how specific British and Argentine artistic texts respond to them, I demonstrate that, in spite of vast cultural and historical differences between Britain and Argentina, their respective sets of myths follow similar patterns.

My definition of “myth” is taken largely from the writings of Roland Barthes. In his article “Myth Today” (1972), he discusses how a myth pushes aside or “alienates” the meaning associated with a particular signifier, leaving an empty form ready to receive a new concept. This in turn results in a mythologized signification that distorts the
meaning without completely erasing it. In other words, the mythologizers in question attempt to push aside whatever signified that the islands might have had, and replace it with the concept of their choosing. The same occurs with other elements of the conflict, from the soldiers, equipment and weapons, to the respective national leaders, and to the war itself. Because these mythic significations are intentionally imposed, and because they create an altered version of reality, I also refer to them as “fictions.” I have borrowed this term from Kevin Foster, who uses it as a synonym for myth in the Barthesian sense, and also from Nicolás Shumway, who gives the name “guiding fictions” to the national identity myths he discusses in his book *The Invention of Argentina* (1991). These fictions, or myths, are constructed ideas about national history and identity, which tend to influence present attitudes and actions. I will elaborate further on my definitions of myth and fiction, as well as provide a list of specific myths associated with the Falklands/Malvinas, in the methodology section of this Introduction.

As has just been noted, scholars from both Britain and Argentina have studied nationalist myths. A number of British scholars have also examined how Britain’s nationalist myths were applied specifically to the 1982 conflict. Kevin Foster explains why such a study is valuable. In his book *Fighting Fictions* (1999), he writes that Falklands War myths have set a dangerous precedent by making it seem that going to war can actually have a healthy effect on society. He suggests that his book can help readers to recognize the discursive strategies used by the government and the media to create these harmful illusions, and to resist them, thus helping prevent future destruction by warfare in the name of the public good (156). Foster’s demythologizing project is just one of several on both sides of the conflict. These texts explore different myths in various manifestations, through a number of viewpoints and methodologies. A synthesis of their discoveries, which I provide in this Introduction and amplify in Chapter One, will serve to create a more complete picture of the Falklands/Malvinas myths and how they have been generated and interpreted. I cannot say whether this will actually enable readers to recognize and resist war-promoting myths that emerge now or in the future. Nevertheless, this dissertation should give a clear picture of how the artistic intelligentsia, as well as some of the participants, would weigh the benefits in view of the sacrifices of the Falklands/Malvinas War. Readers both British and Argentinean might be surprised to
see the similarities between their respective myths about the islands and the war. A greater understanding of both their own mythic constructions, as well as those of the other side, might help them to see through the fictional and emotional buildup, and find more mutually acceptable solutions to their still-unresolved dispute. I hope that this dissertation at least provides the beginnings of this greater understanding.

I will begin with a brief history of the dispute. Knowing these events will enhance the reader’s understanding of both the primary and the secondary texts discussed in this dissertation. A summary of these texts is provided after the historical background. Next I discuss my methodology in more depth, followed by a brief sketch of how the dissertation is organized. I conclude this Introduction by listing and briefly explaining the major Falklands and Malvinas myths.

**History of the Dispute**

The reasoning behind each side’s decision to enter into armed conflict has been much discussed, and certainly there were more factors involved than the largely emotional symbolic meanings examined here, but the influence of the latter is still undeniable. One of the more commonly cited factors influencing both British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s and the Argentine military Junta’s decisions to enter the war was the dual desire to distract their citizens from domestic problems and to solidify crumbling support for their respective regimes. The Argentinean Junta could have been particularly motivated in this regard, since in the early 1980s it faced ever-increasing opposition for its violent repressive tactics, especially its role in the disappearances and deaths of thousands of dissidents and labor union people during the so-called “Dirty War.” This assessment, while partially true, oversimplifies the matter and hence can be misleading. For Argentina, there were often-overlooked geopolitical reasons for wanting the islands (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 4-7). The dispute with Chile over the Beagle Channel had ended badly for Argentina in 1980, and seeing that the hostile Chileans enjoyed a close friendship with the U. K. made Argentinean leaders worry that their position in the South Atlantic was in danger. They also saw potential wealth from exploiting resources in the area, such as krill and oil (Dabat and Lorenzano 79; Femenia
So beyond the chance to regain lost honor, the reoccupation of the Malvinas presented an opportunity to further strategic and economic interests, and to unify the nation in a common cause. On the British side, in addition to the obvious desire to save face after an embarrassing defeat, certain principles were invoked to justify military retaliation. Foremost was the principle that an act of international aggression – particularly one perpetrated by a dictatorial regime – could not be overlooked as it would set a dangerous precedent. Another principle that British leaders appealed to was that the rights of the islanders to choose their government had to be respected (although previous to the war the islanders did not have full citizenship or even a truly representative form of government [Monaghan 33]). The islanders and their representatives in the U. K. (the so-called Falklands Lobby) were adamant that they wished to remain British. One well-publicized reason behind their rejection of Argentinean sovereignty, as well as Parliament’s continued support for their wishes, was distrust of Argentina’s unstable military regime and its poor human rights record.

Each side saw itself as fighting to regain a lost sovereign territory. This confusion as to the rightful ownership of the islands goes back to the earliest days of their known history. When the islands were first “discovered,” and by whom, is still a matter of some debate. The British assert that John Davis first sighted them in 1592, and Richard Hawkins claimed them for Queen Elizabeth I in 1594, calling them “Hawkins Maiden Land.” Argentines are inclined to disregard these claims, saying that the descriptions given by these two mariners do not match the topography of the Malvinas and therefore they must have been looking at someplace else, perhaps even the mainland in the region known today as Patagonia (Canclini 12-13; Groussac 80-82, 84-85). Franco-Argentine poet and scholar Paul Groussac, who wrote the first comprehensive study of Argentina’s historical and juridical claims to the islands in 1901, cites British historian Burney as well as an article in the *Geographical Journal* to show that the British themselves have questioned the validity of these “discoveries” (85-86). North American researcher Julius Goebel also casts considerable doubt on Davis’ claim (ctd. in Gibran 23-24). The Uruguayan historian Rolando Laguarda Trias argues that the true discoverer of the islands was a Portuguese man, assumed to be Alvaro da Mesquita, who served as captain of the ship *San Antonio* under Magellan in 1520. Proof of his discovery lies in a map
which he drew and later gave to a French monk named Thevet, who in turn included it in a manuscript dated 1586 (Laguarda Tríás 53, map on 55). The map shows a definite resemblance to the actual shape of the Falklands and is marked with only slightly inaccurate coordinates. If one feels inclined to question Laguarda Tríás’s theory, there is convincing evidence that the next earliest true sighting of the Falklands/Malvinas was made by Dutch explorer Sebald de Weert in 1600 (Groussac 151; Gibran 22). The first recorded landing on the islands, in the year 1690, is without dispute credited to British Captain John Strong, aboard the Welfare (Gibran 24; Canclini 14). There are also records of many French sailors from St. Malo (hence the name by which they were later known, “Malouines” or “Malvinas”), who frequented and mapped the islands.

The first settlers of the islands were also French, under Louis Antoine de Bougainville in 1764. Spain saw this settlement as a violation of the Treaty of Utrecht, which had been signed by Spain, France and England in 1713. The treaty formalized Spain’s exclusive rights of navigation, trade, and sovereignty over its holdings in the Americas and the surrounding waters with their islands (Etchepareborda 35). Spain protested, France apologized, and Bougainville formally turned the islands over to the Spanish in April 1767. The British maintain that Bougainville actually sold Spain the colony, so as to lessen the implication that France had recognized Spain’s prior sovereignty (Rasor 92). There was indeed an exchange of monies, but Argentinean historians explain this as an indemnification to Bougainville for his lost investment (Canclini 22; Etchepareborda 38). Some French colonists chose to remain under the authority of Felipe Ruiz Puente, who was appointed the first Spanish governor at this same time.

At the beginning of the previous year (1766), the English had established themselves at Port Egmont, on what is now called Saunders Island/Isla Trinidad, just northwest of West Falkland/Gran Malvina. Neither France nor Spain protested the presence of the British until 1770, because, some maintain, they were unaware of their presence (Gibran 25). Groussac, however, contends that there is evidence to suggest that both Bougainville and Ruiz Puente were aware of British activity at Port Egmont (123, 127). It seems that the British, likewise, were aware of the French/Spanish colony on East Falkland/Isa Soledad (Groussac 118). In 1770, each made formal protests to the
other in the name of its respective sovereign nation. Why they waited so long is a matter of speculation. Later that same year a Spanish fleet arrived to remove the English by force. This event created such a stir in London that Spain, not wishing to provoke a war, apologized and allowed the English to return in September 1771. The nature of the agreement that was made has been debated: the Argentine view is that the British were allowed to return only to save face, and that Spanish sovereignty was recognized as still intact by both parties. The British deny that any such agreement took place (Gibran 26; Etchepareborda 40-41).

The British stayed fewer than three years after their return to Port Egmont. They abandoned the islands in May 1774, leaving a plaque to proclaim that the islands belonged to King George III. Meanwhile, the Spanish maintained their colony for the next thirty-seven years without any protest from Britain. In fact, representatives of the British government signed an agreement at the Nootka Sound Convention of 1790, stating that British subjects would not establish colonies in any of the American territories currently occupied by Spain, including “the islands adjacent” (ctd. in Etchepareborda 44). The British maintain that the agreement did not include the Falkland/ Malvinas Islands because Britain had made claims to sovereignty there prior to the Convention (Chenette 3-5). The Spanish colonists, who were mostly military personnel, abandoned Isla Soledad in 1811, when they went to Montevideo to fight for Spain against the rebelling South American colonies. At this time they also placed a plaque, claiming the islands for Ferdinand VII of Spain. One can see from this rather complicated chain of events why trying to resolve the issue of sovereignty on historical grounds has been more or less fruitless. Even back in the 1800s, neither Britain nor Spain was able to fully convince the other of its historical rights to the islands.

After gaining its independence from Spain in 1816, the nation at the time called the United Provinces of South America did not send a representative to reassert any claim on the Malvinas until 1820. The next attempt at colonization, in 1829, was headed by Louis Vernet, appointed commandant of the islands by the governor of Buenos Aires. London protested the colonization soon afterward (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse xxxii; Gibran 28). Vernet was troubled by the many boats, of various nationalities, that were fishing and sealing illegally off the coasts of his islands and detained two U. S.
ships in 1831. This action brought protests from the American consul in Buenos Aires, who claimed that the ships were engaged in legal activities. In reprisal, the U.S.S. *Lexington* landed on the islands and destroyed the colony, taking some prisoners back to Montevideo. Buenos Aires sent a garrison and a new interim governor (Esteban Mestivier) aboard the *Sarandí* to salvage the colony in 1832, but Mestivier was killed two months later in a laborer revolt. Captain José María Pinedo of the *Sarandí* returned to restore order. Soon afterward, on January 2, 1833, Captain John James Onslow of the British warship *Clio* arrived to inform Pinedo that he was reclaiming the islands for the British crown. Pinedo protested but did not fight, seeing that he was outgunned. Some British sources claim that the islands were left without “visible authority” after the *Lexington* attack in December 1831, leaving the Falklands available for the taking until Onslow’s arrival in 1833 (Gibran 29). Apparently they did not regard the presence of Mestivier or Pinedo as enough authority to warrant recognition.

In 1834 a small British garrison was sent to maintain order in the colony until the first British governor, Richard Moody, arrived in 1842. Despite frequent Argentine protests, the islands remained under British control for the next 140 years. In 1964, the UN Committee on Decolonization placed the Falklands/Malvinas on a list of territories in need of decolonization. This was followed in 1965 by Resolution 2065 of the UN General Assembly, which urged both sides to work toward a peaceful solution to the dispute, while taking the “interests” of the islanders into account. These two UN resolutions persuaded London to negotiate with Argentina. However, as the talks and the years dragged on, little progress was made. Britain seemed to have changed the rules in 1968, when it declared that the “wishes of the islanders” were paramount in the negotiations, as opposed to merely their “interests” as outlined in the UN Resolution (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 8). This declaration was the result of pressure from the Falklands Lobby, which also managed to thwart a potential leaseback arrangement in 1980 through lobbying and negative media coverage. Furthermore, the islanders demanded that their representatives be present in all future discussions with Argentina, and that the sovereignty issue be shelved. At this point, it was evident to Argentina that Britain was merely “talking for the sake of talking” (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 9). Buenos Aires judged that the British Government, at a time when economic pressures
demanded downsizing, would be pleased to reduce its commitments in the South Atlantic, but was dragging its feet because of pressure from the influential Falklands Lobby. Because Argentina had not exerted enough counter-pressure of its own, London did not take its demands too seriously and continued its delaying tactics (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 10). So Argentina increased the urgency of its demands for a settlement, adding a timetable by which a decision must be reached.

By March 1982, relations were strained between the two nations when the British delegation was unable to accept Buenos Aires’s timetable. Argentine Foreign Minister Dr. Nicanor Costa Méndez issued a unilateral statement that unless the British accepted the Argentine proposals in their entirety and soon, that Argentina would terminate the current negotiations and “choose freely the procedure which best accords with her interests” (qtd. in Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 28). It was into this tense atmosphere that crisis on the Island of South Georgia/Georgias del Sur erupted in the form of some Argentine scrap metal merchants led by one Constantino Davidoff. The party was under a valid British contract to perform salvage work, and Davidoff had duly informed the British Embassy in Buenos Aires that they would be arriving on an Argentine Naval vessel. However, the Argentineans maintained radio silence for the drop-off, failed to check in with the Magistrate at Grytviken, as the Embassy had asked them to do, and planted an Argentine flag on shore (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 47-8). Since the same merchants had done the same thing in December of the previous year and had been served with British protests, this repeat offense aroused British suspicions that Argentina was attempting to establish a permanent, perhaps military, presence on South Georgia/Georgias del Sur (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 49). Though this was not actually the case, with both nations tense and suspicious, an extremely complicated series of misunderstandings and misjudgments led the British to send a ship and threaten to remove the work party by force. This move was seen in Buenos Aires as an extravagant and insulting reaction to what was really a minor misdemeanor on Davidoff’s part (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 60). Buenos Aires responded by sending a ship with fourteen marines aboard to protect the workers, and by stepping up its plans to invade the Falklands/Malvinas (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 64). The Argentine marines arrived late on the night of March 24. The next
evening the British Ambassador to Argentina told Costa Méndez that if the work party would go to Grytviken and get their passports stamped, they could return to work without further disturbance. Costa Méndez did not reply, and before London could figure out what to do next, the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas was underway (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 67).

Argentine forces landed and retook the islands on April 2, 1982. Soon afterward, the British Government sent its “Task Force” – their largest fleet assembled since World War Two – to the South Atlantic, in order to provide extra leverage for negotiations and in the event that these didn’t turn out satisfactorily, to retake the islands by force. South Georgia/Georgias del Sur was retaken with no deaths on either side on April 25. Soon afterwards negotiations broke down, and armed conflict began on May 1 with some air battles, followed by the controversial sinking of the Argentine cruiser Belgrano on May 2. More doomed negotiations followed, and the British landed their forces on the islands on May 21. Argentine forces under Brigadier General Mario Menéndez surrendered to the British on June 14.

At the news of the surrender, thousands of furious Argentineans took to the streets and the central Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, calling for the end of the regime. Human rights groups renewed and intensified their demands for information and government accountability on disappeared persons. Army General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri was forced to resign his position as Junta president, and General Reynaldo Bignone took his place on June 23, promising open elections in the near future. Raúl Alfonsín won the presidential election held in October 1983, and assumed the presidency in December. He formed the Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas [National Commission on Disappeared Persons, or CONADEP] to investigate the regime’s human rights violations. Alfonsín’s attempts during the next several years to bring Dirty War criminals to trial prompted bombing campaigns and armed rebellions from the military and its supporters, and the president was forced to make concessions and suspend many of the trials (Rock 400, 402). Democratic government had returned in Argentina but remained fragile. Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Thatcher enjoyed newfound popularity for the victory in the Falklands. She and the Conservative party
won a sweeping victory in the next general election, allowing her to proceed with greater support for her economic reforms.

**Review of the Current Literature**

The current literature relevant to this dissertation has three general foci: the first is the artistic focus used in cultural responses to the war. Works in this category are those from which I draw my primary texts. The second focus is historical and political, and provides important background information that is necessary for a full understanding of the primary texts. The third category has a critical liberal-arts focus, which analyzes nationalist myths and/or cultural responses to the war from one or both sides of the conflict. This is also the approach of this dissertation. I will now discuss the different texts within each of these focus categories in more depth.

The primary texts examined in this dissertation are cultural responses to the dispute, including novels, stories, memoirs and testimonials, poetry, drama, film, music, picture books, and other visual arts. A fairly extensive list of potential primary sources is provided in the Primary Bibliography of this dissertation. I have selected five Argentinean and five British works to examine at length as the dissertation’s central primary texts. First I discuss works that support and reinforce official views and myths of the war, like Argentinean poetry. A number of poems, largely written in 1982, were read over the radio during the war and published in an anthology called *Nuestros poetas y las Malvinas* [Our poets and the Malvinas] (1983). I analyze selections from this anthology to demonstrate the depth of Argentine desires and hopes for the return of the Malvinas to the bosom of the fatherland. British poetry about the Falklands is scarce, so I chose Ian Curteis’s television screenplay *The Falklands Play* to discuss with *Nuestros Poetas y las Malvinas*, because its enthusiasm in reinforcing official myths is comparable to that encountered in the Argentinean poetry. *The Falklands Play* was published as a printed screenplay in 1987 after having been cancelled from production by the BBC in 1985 and sparking a media furor that reached the House of Commons. The play, finally produced and aired on BBC4 in 2002, centers on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and
the British governing elites’ efforts to solve the crisis with Argentina in 1982. Next I study two tragic stage dramas: Griselda Gambaro’s *Del sol naciente* [From the Rising Sun], which premiered in 1984, and Steven Berkoff’s *Sink the Belgrano!*, which premiered in 1986. Gambaro’s play examines issues of militarism, machismo, and the war’s living and dead combatants in an allegorical removal of the war from twentieth-century Argentina to medieval Japan. Berkoff attacks Thatcher and her policies, particularly her government’s decision to sink the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* early in the conflict. After the dramas, I look at two satirical novels: Carlos Gamerro’s *Las Islas* [The Islands] (1998), and Richard Francis’s *Swansong* (1986). Gamerro’s novel presents a complex criticism of wartime and postwar Argentina from a veteran’s perspective. *Swansong* weaves a fabric of interconnected characters and stories to create a broad and somewhat pathetic picture of Britain in decline, wallowing in nostalgia, and led by corrupt leaders bent on starting a war. Finally, I discuss two first-hand accounts of the war and the films that they inspired. Daniel Kon’s book of interviews, *Los chicos de la guerra* [The Boys of War] (1982) features testimony from eight Argentinean conscripts who served in the war, and reveals ambivalent and contradictory attitudes toward official myths. The film by the same name (1983), having eliminated much of the book’s ambiguity, initiated a controversy among veterans and other groups for its portrayal of the conscripts as victims of a sadistic and oppressive military machine. Scots Guards Lieutenant Robert Lawrence’s memoir *When the Fighting is Over: Tumbledown, A Personal Story* (1988) also deals with official myths in a contradictory way. The film *Tumbledown* (1988), based on Lawrence’s experiences, unexpectedly became the center of a media and Parliamentary debate about the war, BBC programming bias, national and military values, artistic freedom, care of veterans, and more. These are the works that this dissertation will analyze in depth. Other primary texts, listed in the Bibliography, will be discussed more briefly in conjunction with the central texts whose characteristics they share.

Secondary texts employing the second, political/historical focus include historical studies, investigative reports, and political essays on the sovereignty dispute, the war itself, and its aftermath. There is a vast and still growing collection of works of this nature. Many of them overlap a great deal, presenting only slightly different perspectives
on the highly polemical dispute. I have included selected works from this category in my Secondary Bibliography, which provides adequate background information for my study of artistic responses to the war. One of most valuable texts from this category is Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse’s *Signals of War: the Falklands Conflict of 1982* (1991). A cooperative effort by scholars from Britain and Argentina, this work presents events as they were perceived and interpreted by both Argentine and British leaders. The result is the most balanced and complete account of the dispute available. David Rock’s history *Argentina 1516-1987: from Spanish Colonization to Alfonsin* (1987) has also provided valuable information on the long trajectory of Anglo-Argentine interactions. I have consulted a great many other sources in this category, from Margaret Thatcher’s speeches and parliamentary debates, to journalistic exposés and interviews of Argentinean officials. These are too numerous to elaborate on here, however, but are listed in the Secondary Bibliography.

The third, liberal-arts focus of Falklands/Malvinas research that is relevant to this dissertation includes projects that are similar to my own. These works lay the foundation for my study by identifying the Falklands/Malvinas myths as manifested in public speeches by national leaders, the popular press, and artistic responses to the war. I will now describe these scholarly texts in more detail, in order to demonstrate how my dissertation builds upon, yet goes beyond their research. I begin with texts by British authors, including Kevin Foster, Jo Henderson, David Monaghan, Michael Skey, and James Aulich.

Kevin Foster’s *Fighting Fictions* (1999) discusses British myths of pastoral identity, national renewal, and heroism in connection with the Falklands War. His main texts in analyzing and deconstructing these myths are media reports, along with a few Parliamentary debates and speeches. He also discusses some memoirs and films in an analysis of soldier/hero myths. Foster’s featured “heroes” include Colonel “H” Jones as presented by the media and by fellow officers; Robert Lawrence in both his memoir and the film *Tumbledown*; Welsh Guardsman Simon Weston in his memoir *Walking Tall* (1989); journalist Robert Fox in his *Eyewitness Falklands* (1982); and Scots Guardsman Philip Williams in his memoir *Summer Soldier* (1990). In one brief section, Foster discusses Argentina’s own national renewal myth in connection with the recovery of the
Malvinas. His main texts in this analysis include a cartoon by Sábat,\textsuperscript{12} a memoir by Argentinean journalist Nicolás Kasanzew, and interviews of Argentinean personnel conducted by Vincent Bramley, Michael Bilton, and Peter Kosminsky (all British). He tries to show that the behavior of commanders and officers during the Falklands/Malvinas conflict replicated many of the divisive and brutal practices of the Dirty War, and therefore failed to achieve the goal of national renewal. Foster concludes by warning that the Falklands War myths created “perilous links between combat, national identity and the public good,” and the discursive means by which they did so must be recognized and resisted to prevent further unnecessary violence and destruction (156).

Kevin Foster has also published several articles in various scholarly journals: “Talking Up” (1989) deals with how the media and the government sought to emphasize the war’s abstract principles and universalize its significance, while glossing over its physical and historical reality. This thesis is referred to and amplified in “The Falklands War: Irony as Exposure and Coverup” (1990), which discusses various memoirs and first-hand accounts of the war in terms of their use of irony. Irony serves in some ways to expose mythic visions of the war as incongruent with reality, while in others it tends to hide or lessen the impact of war’s more gruesome aspects, thus preserving the cleanliness and purity of the “official history” of the war. Foster’s 1997 article, “To Serve and Protect: Textualizing the Falklands Conflict,” is a short introductory version of his book Fighting Fictions. “Signifying the Wasteland: Selling the ‘Falklands War’” (1991) deals with how the press and memoirists worked to make the barren wasteland of the islands “signify” treasured values of Britishness and thus make them worth fighting for. He also cites works that tend to belie this construction of the islands, particularly Samuel Johnson’s antiwar pamphlet of 1770, Jonathan Raban’s travelogue Coasting (1986), and some memoirs. To sum up Foster’s work in a sentence, he writes to expose and deconstruct Falklands/Malvinas War myths, relying mainly on media reports and memoirs to do so.

Jo Henderson’s article “The Falklands: National Identity and the Experience of War” (1996), discusses British nationalism as a mythic narrative which is periodically recycled “to save appearances” (192). She writes that “fading ideal” was brought out again to justify the war in 1982, and manifested itself in memoirs and television film She
contrasts the film *Tumbledown* and veteran Vincent Bramley’s memoir, *Excursion to Hell* (1991), which demonstrate the negative effects of nationalist and military myths on individual soldiers, with Curteis’ *Falklands Play*, which affirms nationalist myths and values as more important than any suffering that may result from defending them. Henderson also writes that Steven Berkoff’s play *Sink the Belgrano!* exposes the decadence of British mythology through its caricature figures shouting an “eclectic mish-mash of language” and “joyless mockery” in an “orchestrated riot” (199-200). Although Henderson deals with three of my central primary texts, her discussions are brief and relatively superficial.

David Monaghan’s *The Falklands War: Myth and Countermyth* (1998), as the title indicates, concentrates mainly on cultural artifacts which attempt to undermine and rework the “official myth” of the Falklands as put forward by the Thatcher Government. He first examines the making of this official myth in Thatcher’s speeches, parliamentary debate, and coverage by the media. After analyzing the official myth, Monaghan offers the following texts as “countermyths” to the official line: Berkoff’s *Sink the Belgrano*, Steve Bell’s cartoon strip *If . . .* (1982), Paul Theroux’s *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1984), Raban’s *Coasting*, and BBC films *The Falklands Factor* (1983), *The Ploughman’s Lunch* (1983), *Arrivederci Millwall* (1990), *Tumbledown, Resurrected* (1989), and *An Ungentlemanly Act* (1992). According to Monaghan, these works reveal the official Falklands myth as false and motivated by the Thatcher’s selfish ambitions (xiii). I respond to and amplify a number of Monaghan’s analyses in this dissertation.

Michael Skey’s online article, “‘Undue Reverence’: Questioning National Identity in the Media Coverage of the 1982 Falklands War” (2002), discusses national identity myths as created by the media, primarily the press. Drawing Barthes’s theories of myth, he discusses how media rhetoric makes national boundaries, national identities, and other aspects of nationalistic ideology seem natural and eternal. He relies primarily on generalized theoretical texts to question the national myths he discusses, while I look at artistic production that emerged in direct response specifically to the Falklands War. Skey does mention that some British films, including *Tumbledown* and *Resurrected*, challenge the popular imagination’s view of the war. This assertion, however, is limited
to two brief paragraphs, since his primary concern is the press’s role in propagating myths, rather than the artistic community’s role in responding to them.

Framing the Falklands War: Nationhood, Culture and Identity (1992), a collection of seven essays by various authors and edited by James Aulich, explores mythologized issues in connection with the war. Four of the authors examine the media, primarily the press: James Aulich, John Taylor, Nick Caistor, and Robert Hamilton. Aulich’s article looks at political cartoons and other graphic representations of the war, in which he observes elements of various war myths, particularly those of World War Two glories (97), and Thatcher as synonymous with the U.K.’s national interests (103). Taylor’s essay discusses the media’s use of human interest stories to guide readers’ perceptions of the war’s purpose and value. Heroic myth plays a major role in these stories, and though Taylor does not explicitly label it “myth,” he exposes it as such. Caistor takes a brief look at the Argentine press, and the myth of Argentina’s world importance versus their view of the war as one of imperial North versus colonized South. Hamilton explores various “levels of meaning,” some of them mythologized, given to the British Task Force in a variety of media portrayals.

The remaining three articles in Framing the Falklands War discuss the arts, and hence are more closely related to my own project. Jeffrey Walsh examines five films in terms of their ideological stances toward the war and some of its attendant myths, particularly the British and Argentine national renewal myths. Three of these films are British (Tumbledown, Resurrected, For Queen and Country [1989]), and two are Argentine (Veronico Cruz [1988], Argie [1985]). Tim Wilcox discusses British visual artworks and how they address national identity and war myths. Nigel Leigh briefly surveys British novels dealing with the Falklands Conflict, but he is more concerned with criticizing their literary effectiveness than with examining their responses to dominant war myths.

The above studies have helped me to identify British national identity myths, and to understand how these were invoked and modified to apply to the situation of the Falklands/Malvinas crisis. Other more general discussions of British national identity and myth include articles from the three-volume set Patriotism (ed. Raphael Samuel, 1989), Patrick Wright’s On Living in an Old Country (1985), and Anthony Barnett’s politico-
historical essay, *Iron Britannia* (1982). Nora Kinzer Stewart’s *Mates and Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War* (1991), a study of how both Argentinean and British military cultures affected individual units’ performance in the war, elucidates certain military myths. Since the above-mentioned works contain extensive research on the subject of these myths as elaborated in the press and in Parliament, I will draw on their observations to set the stage for my analysis, which will concentrate on cultural artifacts that are traditionally associated with “the arts,” as opposed to those associated with “the media.” Some of the analyses described discuss one or more of my primary texts. *Tumbledown* and *The Falklands Play* in particular have received repeated attention from various sources, so part of my project will include synthesizing the analyses that have been made of them before adding new insights of my own.

With regard to Argentinean sources on national and Malvinas myths, three writers discuss issues of national identity in the context of the Malvinas war. Martín Kohan’s articles are the only ones of these that deal directly with national myths in connection with Malvinas literature. Rosana Guber mentions some literary works, while Nora Femenia’s discussion is sociological in nature and focuses on speeches by national elites, as well as newspaper editorials.

Kohan, Oscar Blanco, and Adriana Imperatore write in “Transhumantes de neblina, no las hemos de encontrar” [Lost in fog, they cannot be found] (1993) that most Malvinas War literature has fallen into two categories: that which portrays the war in a “triumphalist” way, and that which “laments” it (82). These two currents of thought on the war actually “participate in the same logic,” according to Kohan and colleagues, because they adhere to official and nationalist myths surrounding Argentina’s identity, its role in the world, and its rights over the disputed islands. They write that the most successful literature against the war demythologizes by turning the myths’ own principles on their heads, and inverting their hierarchies (84). In a later article, “El fin de una épica” [The end of an epic], Kohan writes that these demythologizing works present the war as a “farce” (6). He contrasts this approach to the “epic” impulse of most testimonial works, which leaves the patriotic values of the “nationalist faith” intact (7). He discusses Carlos Gamerro’s novel *Las Islas* (1998) as having accomplished a simultaneity of the farcical and the epic, of the grotesque and the tragic (8).
Rosana Guber’s study, ¿Por qué Malvinas? De la causa nacional a la guerra absurda (2001), never mentions the term myth specifically, but it essentially describes the various myths that Argentineans have attached to the sign Malvinas through history, particularly around the time of the war and its aftermath. She discusses how the issue attained the status of national cause, and how the islands’ loss was interpreted early on as a symptom of internal politics and as a stain on Argentina’s national honor (89). Later, the islands became a metaphor for the Nation as usurped not only by the British but also by mutually hostile political factions and de facto regimes (102). According to Guber, the cause was perceived as one vestige of Argentineness that remained “uncontaminated by politics;” it became a standard of protest against injustice, accepted as legitimate by people of all political stripes (107). The retaking of the islands in 1982 was seen as a recuperation of Argentina itself; the achievement of national unity and continuity (30; 38-39). After the defeat, people felt betrayed because the military had misled them and “politicized a national cause” (114). Thereafter Malvinas meant only “absurd war,” associated with the dictatorship and its violent repression (165). Elected presidents Alfonsin and Menem both tried to rehabilitate the Malvinas war as heroic (140-41; 156), but Guber criticizes these efforts as validating society’s enemies (the military), while marginalizing the conscripts whose sacrifice earned Argentina’s return to democracy (166-67).

Nora Femenia’s book, National Identity in Times of Crises (1996), hypothesizes that a society with internal divisions and a diminished national identity might seek out an “other” for violent confrontation, in order to strengthen its members’ sense of identity and unity (38, 40). Femenia examines how both Britain’s and Argentina’s self-images and views of the other changed over time, and how these images contributed to the governments’ and the citizenry’s perceptions that war was necessary and even desirable. Her study of speeches by government and military leaders as well as newspaper editorials reveals several Argentinean and British identity myths that were invoked by national elites to justify first the Argentinean reoccupation of the Malvinas, and later the war to attack/defend that reoccupation.

These four works, like the British analyses listed earlier, present a useful survey of national myths as they apply to the Malvinas issue. Kohan’s articles, though their
subject and approach are similar to my own, list works that deconstruct national myths without discussing any one of them at length, except for Gamerro’s *Las Islas*. I discuss some of the works that Kohan and his colleagues mention in greater depth, and I also contest some of their assertions about the necessity of farcical impulses in a demythologizing work. Their list of Malvinas literature has helped to expand my bibliography, however, and Kohan’s insight into Gamerro’s novel is a helpful starting point for my own study of that text. My discussion of *Las Islas* goes into much greater depth, and reveals that Gamerro doubles more than merely the narrative mode in his complex countermythologizing novel. Since Guber’s and Femenía’s studies are primarily historical and sociological, they contain very little discussion of cultural artifacts that emerged in response to the war, and pave the way for my project without much overlap.

Other more general discussions of Argentine myth and national identity include Nicolás Shumway’s *The Invention of Argentina* (1991), a study of identity myths or “guiding fictions” developed during the nineteenth century in Argentina, Mempo Giardinelli’s *El país de las maravillas: los argentinos en el fin del milenio* [*The country of marvels: Argentines at the end of the millennium*] (1988), and Frank Graziano’s discussion of the military junta’s “Process of National Reorganization,” which he describes as a “mythopoetic project” in his book *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine “Dirty War”* (1992). Graziano exposes military myths and scapegoat myths that played a role in the Malvinas War. I provide a listing of these myths, along with those discussed by Femenía, Guber, and Shumway, in the methodology section of this introduction.

The studies that I have described thus far constitute the current research on my topic of myth in cultural responses to the Falklands/Malvinas War. There are also a number of sources that are relevant to my project because they discuss one or more of my primary texts. None of them interrogates these texts specifically for mythologizing or demythologizing strategies as I do, but many discuss issues of ideology, values, or identity raised and sometimes questioned in the texts that they examine. These issues lend themselves to mythologizing, and are closely associated with the myths that I will
study in my project. The following is a brief list of these sources and the primary texts they examine.


- Julio Schvartzman also discusses Fogwill’s novel, but as a “war picaresque,” which undermines the divisions between the two sides, as well as the values each invokes (3).

- Beatriz Sarlo writes about *Los pichy-cyegos* as a novel in which the characters concern themselves only with immediate physical needs. Questions concerning the war’s legitimacy, as well as the values of national pride and unity for which it was supposedly fought, are irrelevant for them (1-2).

- Marta Contreras B.’s “Diagnosis de la pareja” shows how various elements of Griselda Gambaro’s play *Del sol naciente* work to de-naturalize and deconstruct the accepted class and gender hierarchies of patriarchal and military social orders.

- Jean Graham-Jones’s *Exorcizing History* (2000) contextualizes *Del sol naciente* as an example of “theater of ‘redemocratization’” (131). She also discusses Aída Bortnik’s drama *De a uno* (1983) as giving a voice to the previously silenced victims of the *Proceso*. She points out that these plays and many others of the period portray society as morally corrupt and complicit in the excesses committed under the dictatorship.

Various other sources discuss individual artistic works that deal in one way or another with the conflict. Some provide important historical or other background information about these works. However, they do not deal with myth or related issues, and in some cases they address artworks that I will not discuss in this dissertation, so I will not elaborate on them here. They are, however, listed in the Bibliography, in order to supply an exhaustive list of information on Falklands/Malvinas cultural responses.\textsuperscript{19}
Methodology

In this dissertation I will first synthesize the analyses that have already been done and then pick up where these left off, examining some of the cultural objects which have not yet been discussed, and comparing attitudes toward the conflict’s mythology in both of the combatant nations. There is a need to more fully examine the voices from the Argentinean side of the controversy, which have been under-represented in the scholarly literature up to this point, particularly among English-language works. I do not presume to be Argentina’s cultural defender before the English-speaking world: I admit to being a novice and an “outsider” to Argentina’s vast and complex cultural production. But I am also an “outsider” novice to British culture, and perhaps that very outsider status will allow me to see parallels and similarities in the myths and cultural projects of each side that someone steeped in them from one side or the other might not see, or want to see. British authors speak very little of Argentine art and literature regarding the Falklands/Malvinas crisis. Argentine authors likewise speak very little of British cultural responses. Through this dissertation I hope to bring the two into dialogue, albeit mediated.

Every country has its own myths that it uses to define itself: its so-called national identity, or national self-image. There has been a great deal of scholarly research in the psychological and sociological fields regarding the origins and functions of such identity myths. Information from these studies, as cited by Femenia, provides a bit of theoretical perspective on the matter of myth. If I were to rely entirely on Barthes for my approach, I would see all myth as pernicious and in need of being exposed and destroyed. But Barthes himself admits that to engage in demythologizing with all of his ideological zeal would result in the social isolation of the mythologist (78-79). Femenia explains the sociological value of national identity myths, which she calls “mythological scripts,” citing dramatic script theories of various psychology/sociology researchers (Femenia 18). She indicates that a certain amount of identity mythologizing is necessary for individual and group self-esteem needs, again citing psychological scholars that support this idea. For example, Ronald J. Fischer theorizes that individuals have their basic needs met by the social identity group, which in turn needs recognition by other groups, security, and a sense of identity (ctd. in Femenia 36). In the preface to his discussion of Argentina’s
“guiding fictions,” Shumway suggests that, although the identity myths of a nation are
“often fabrications as artificial as literary fictions,” they are still “necessary to give
individuals a sense of nation, peoplehood, collective identity, and national purpose” (xi).
He cites Edmund Morgan’s *Inventing the People*, which states that in order for a
government to function at all, the governed people must willingly accept fictions about
the government and about themselves (xi). Of course it does not follow that all identity
myths are beneficial, either to the identity group or to other groups with which it may
interact; so these myths certainly need examination and questioning. Graziano’s study of
the myths the Argentine military invoked to justify the Dirty War demonstrates the
horrific extremes to which certain myths can be taken, and Femenia’s work suggests that
a perceived need to bolster a sagging sense of national identity can lead a country into an
otherwise unwarranted military conflict, resulting in many lost lives.

The myths surrounding the Falklands/Malvinas and the dispute regarding their
sovereignty are largely concerned with national identity: they are British-ness myths and
Argentine-ness myths. As such, they are loaded with history. Barthes explains that in a
myth, the secondary signified or *concept* displaces or overshadows whatever history was
previously implicit in the host sign. It brings with it a new history, which is “less reality
than a certain knowledge of reality,” or a particular perception thereof (46-47). Indeed,
historical scholar Hayden White proposes that *any* history represents a particular
interpretation of reality, rather than its complete, objective description (*Tropics of
Discourse* 51). He cites many thinkers, including Hegel, Nietzsche, Croce, and Lévi-
Strauss, who support his contention that histories are more constructed than they are
discovered (*Tropics of Discourse* 53, 55). For Lévi-Strauss, creating a historical
narrative involves selecting from an overwhelming multitude of events or perceptions
that may have occurred during any given length of time, and giving those simplified facts
coherence and significance by presenting them in an ordered sequence. Lévi Strauss goes
so far as to suggest that the facts themselves must be constructed out of an otherwise
meaningless welter of perceptions (White, *Tropics of Discourse* 55-56). Therefore,
interpretation enters into the process before the writing even starts, in the selection of
what data to include or exclude, which events will be emphasized, what events will open
the account, and what events will mark its end (*Metahistory* 5-7; *Tropics of Discourse*)
White theorizes that historians impart coherence and meaning to the data they have selected by “emplotting” or arranging it within an archetypal plot structure, such as that of a tragedy, comedy, romance, or satire (*Metahistory* 7-8). He says this is “essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation” (*Tropics of Discourse* 85). He is quick to add that recognizing fictive qualities in historical narratives does not at all lessen their value as a source of knowledge, because “the encodation of events in terms of such plot structures is one of the ways that a culture has of making sense of both personal and public pasts” (*Tropics of Discourse* 85).

White rejects the tendency born in the nineteenth century to define *fiction* as falsehood, and thus of no use in understanding the world of experience. On the contrary, he maintains that the imagined reality created by the writer of fiction coincides with “some domain of human experience which is no less ‘real’ than that referred to by the historian” (*Tropics of Discourse* 122-23). The word *fiction* has been used to describe narratives made up of imagined or possible events, which may or may not include real or actual events. If we accept White’s point of view, however, the important (and more interesting) issue becomes not the factual or imagined nature of the events themselves, but the manner in which they are described, arranged, and explained in a given text. This conceptualization brings history and fiction together by emphasizing those characteristics that they hold in common. Such a blurring of boundaries is useful for my project, since many of my primary texts are a mix of “history” and “fiction” as they are traditionally defined: they run the gamut from memoirs and testimonials (personal histories) through so-called “faction” (containing a mixture of “fact” and “fiction”) films and historical novels, to wildly fantastic or parodic visions of the conflict. Using White’s theories, however, I can examine them all on similar footing, as literary texts sharing the same kinds of fictional plot structures.

Many of the myths I examine take the form of narratives, structured according to an archetypal emplotment. They are interpretations of history which present themselves as “natural” truths or facts: according to Barthes, “Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact” (67). My methodology in the
dissertation will first be to identify and describe the Falklands/Malvinas myths as produced and/or reiterated at the time of the war by the ruling elite on each side of the conflict. I draw these myths from the writers’ observations I described in the previous section, such as Kevin Foster, Monaghan, Femenia, Shumway, etc. A list of these myths with their historical backgrounds follows in the next section of this introduction.

Once I have established the basic premise of each myth or narrative, I will examine myths as they are reproduced in cultural artifacts (my primary texts) and show how they are not natural or eternal, but constructed, historically contingent, and above all, motivated. In some cases the artist will have already undertaken this project of denaturalization, so I will point out how s/he accomplishes this. I will also discuss whether the myths are reiterated, celebrated, reformulated, criticized, dismantled, replaced, or some combination of the above. I have attempted to divide the primary texts into categories according to how they deal with the standard Falklands/Malvinas myths. There are a number of different approaches, and several different approaches may appear in any one text. Myth perpetuators accept myths and retransmit them through the text. Remythologizers recast an official myth’s concept in a different form, and they may also generate new myths that work well with the older ones. Demythologizers expose, question, or destroy myths in a variety of ways. Countermythologizers create new myths that work to subvert, and thus replace, the existing one. Countermyths are often self-consciously set forth, calling attention to themselves as myths and making no claim to represent absolute or natural truth. They are nevertheless effective demythologizing tools, as they also call attention to the constructed nature of the myths they challenge.

I will start with myth perpetuators, then move on to demythologizers, followed by countermythologizers. Most texts do not fall cleanly into one category or another, but rather tend to lie on a continuum between extremes of mythologizing and demythologizing, with varying proportions of each. Countermythologizers tend to be among the strongest destroyers of the official myths, and there are no countermythologizers that do not also demythologize. I see countermythologizing as a special kind of demythologizing: it performs a similar function but in a different way. For these reasons I discuss countermythologizers in a category by themselves that is parallel to, but separate from, that of demythologizers. My final category contains those
texts that escape categorization because of their ambiguity in dealing with official war myths.

I devote one chapter to each category, in which I examine two texts in depth: one British and one Argentinean. In most cases the two central texts are of similar genre; e.g., two demythologizing plays in Chapter Three, and two countermythologizing novels in Chapter Four. However, in some cases such generic pairing was not possible, as in Chapter Two where I read myth-perpetuating Argentinean poetry together with a similarly mythologizing British television play. In each chapter I will also briefly discuss other works of various genres that share a similar strategy for dealing with official myths. The following lists briefly outline the major official myths on each side of the conflict. I elaborate further on each of these myths, their backgrounds and nuances, in Chapter One.

**Argentine Identity Myths and Malvinas Myths**

- “La Gran Argentina” myth: Argentina is destined to be a regional leader, a great nation in terms of international power, prestige and prosperity (Femenía 66; Shumway 242-48). This myth is closely linked to racial and religious identity myths, which posit Argentina as “White,” European, Christian, and Western (Femenía 58-59).

- The scapegoat myth: someone or something “foreign” to Argentina is preventing its destined rise to greatness (Femenía 66; Shumway 244). Related to this is the international conspiracy myth, in which international forces of communism are infiltrating Argentina in an attempt to subvert the government and brainwash and subject its people (Graziano 121-22). Also related is the “international defamation campaign” in which Argentina’s government is falsely maligned for alleged human rights abuses (Femenía 74).

- The Argentinean identity myth: Argentina’s sense of identity (ser nacional) was lost along with the Malvinas. It is “out there,” waiting to be recovered (Femenía 87; Guber 102).

- The Malvinas national renewal myth: recovery of the Malvinas is the key to achieving a sense of national unity, and thereby the ability to achieve the goal of “La
gran Argentina” (Femenia 87; Guber 106). The war is emplotted as a crusade narrative (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 121-123; Stewart 88-89), in which the nation galvanizes and proves itself by confronting the enemy and redeeming the holy ground, thus achieving transcendence.

- **Military myths:** the military government and the armed forces are the “true guardians of our national dignity” (Femenia 99). The Military is portrayed as a savior figure, engaged in a Holy War to redeem the Nation (Graziano 120; Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 121-123). Malvinas recovery is a religious crusade for the individual soldier as well, through which he can prove his manhood, bravery, and moral superiority. The armed forces and the conscripts are like the righteous David, facing the giant Goliath bravely in spite of their lack of equipment and training.

- **Enemy myths:** The British are colonialist oppressors (Foulkes 81-82). By taking over the islands, Argentine forces would be liberating them from suffocating British domination (Foulkes 20,27,34). The British are also aggressive, piratical, overly prideful, contemptuous, and disproportionately violent when crossed (Femenia 108-11, 116-17). They are spiritually and morally bankrupt and therefore physically weakened (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 135-36; Graziano 122).

- **The just cause myth:** this myth conflates Argentina’s convincing case for historical rights to the islands with a moral and legal right to invade a disputed territory currently held by people loyal to another power. It justifies the use of force on April 2 and the refusal to withdraw on the basis of historical rights plus several other factors: the colonial and precarious state of the islands and their economy; UN resolutions calling for decolonization and resolution of the dispute; Britain’s presumed bad faith in negotiations; and a perception that a recovery of the islands was necessary in order for the nation to move forward. The reader will have noticed that these factors are drawn from previously listed myths.

**British Identity Myths and Falklands Myths:**

- **The “Great” Britain myths:** Britain’s essence or identity is one of greatness because of its heritage. To be true to themselves, Britons must strive to keep Britain “Great”
(Barnett 84). Tied to this myth are those of World War Two glories: the true British Spirit as revealed at Dunkirk and during the London Blitz (Barnett 48; Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 47-48; Monaghan 15-16, 21-22), and of course in the person of Winston Churchill (Barnett 55-56; Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 45-46; Monaghan 23, 25). Britain also sees itself as a “dictator-slaying warrior” nation (Femenia 39), moral leader, and defender of the Rule of Law (Femenia 122; Monaghan 8).

- The scapegoat myths: various internal Others have contributed to Britain’s decline (Skey 15). Britain’s identity (“the real England”) is in danger “of becoming lost, submerged, or forgotten,” due to the workings of its enemies, both internal and external (Monaghan 3).

- The pastoral idyll/British identity myth: Some aspects of British identity were formed and remain embodied in hallowed images of pastoral life in a faraway time: the country cottage, the sheep on verdant hillsides, the neatly tended garden. The “true” pastoral life is lost in Britain, but remains in the Falklands, and can therefore be recovered and preserved by redeeming the islands from Argentine “tyranny” (Skey 11; Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 28-29; Monaghan xiv, 8).

- The Falklands national renewal myth: by freeing the Falklands from the Argentinean invader, Britain will unite in a common cause, regain lost honor, strengthen its resolve to overcome current domestic woes, and re-establish itself as a world leader and moral force (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 93; Monaghan 8). There are elements here of Heroic myth, the romance quest, of proving oneself in battle and being made “a man” (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 83).

- Military myths: The Royal Navy is seen as the emblem of Britain’s power and world status (Aulich 4; Femenia 188). The hierarchy, efficiency and professionalism of the British armed forces are presented as a model for British society in order to regain former greatness and prosperity (Barnett 63; Monaghan 31). The military’s internal myths also postulate their role as enforcers of international Rule of Law, fulfilling Britain’s “destiny” (Stewart 55). Battle is viewed as a chance to prove one’s mettle and manhood, and to live up to proud traditions (Stewart 86-87; 91). This is like the romance quest of national renewal, but reduced to the scale of the individual soldier.
There are also military myths of regimental elitism and brotherhood, based on shared trials of manly performance and discipline (Stewart 36-8; 91).

- **Enemy myths:** Argentina is a Fascist dictatorship, defiant of the international community and the rule of law, and guilty of “unprovoked aggression” (Femenia 135, 142). The regime is brutal yet tawdry: a “tin-pot Fascist junta” or “a squalid military dictatorship” (Morgan 1, 255). Argentina’s role in dealing with U.K. was previously characterized as that of a compliant child. After April 2, the child image is suddenly replaced by that of a menacing enemy (Femenia 145). The Argentinean people are passionate ignorant masses, whipped into a frenzy by empty slogans and military posturing.

- **The just cause myth:** Like Argentina’s parallel myth, this one is made up of other myths already listed, particularly a substantial dose of enemy myths. This myth justifies counterinvasion by positing the islands and islanders as threatened damsels-in-distress in need of rescue, by appealing to Britain’s traditional role as slayer of dictators, and by a perceived need to prove the nation’s military prowess to itself and to other potential aggressors, thus maintaining international deterrence.

These are the major Falklands/Malvinas myths as set forward by ruling elites and the media. It can be seen from these lists that the myths are closely inter-related with one another, and there is a good deal of overlap. Some of the myths also contain inherent contradictions that demythologizing texts will emphasize in order to deconstruct them. The reader will also have noticed that there are significant parallels between Argentinean and British myths. Each nation has a sense of wounded or lost pride and identity, which it associates with the disputed islands. Each side sees itself as morally superior, and each side mythologizes the chance to fight for the islands as a means of achieving transcendence for the nation as a whole, as well as for the individual soldiers who do the fighting.

Chapter One will delve into each of the above myths more deeply: I will discuss their possible origins, their various manifestations before and after hostilities commenced, and ways in which they overlap with one another. The last four chapters deal with war myths as they appear in various artistic responses to the war, including
poetry, novels, short stories, picture books, films, theater, and music. Chapter Two will examine myth-promoters and perpetuators: those texts that reiterate the official myths more or less unaltered and uncriticized, or that celebrate or reinforce them. Chapter Three will discuss demythologizing texts, which question or oppose the official myths. Chapter Four will deal with countermythologizers, or those works which generate their own counter-myths which work to destroy the official ones. Finally, Chapter Five will examine texts that do not fit into this framework of categories. I will look at their ambiguities and contradictions, as well as at the varied interpretations they have been given by different writers and groups.
Notes to Introduction

1 The names of the islands are a part of the dispute. In general discussion I will use the combined names divided with a slash. For the sake of brevity, however, when dealing with specifically Argentine views or texts, I will use the Argentine term (Malvinas), and when discussing British views or texts, I will use the British terms (Falklands or Falkland Islands).

2 Dirty War (guerra sucia): Beginning in 1975 under the inept and rapidly deteriorating administration of Isabel Perón, the Army began to retaliate against guerilla violence which had been building over the past several months. However they soon used their efforts to control “subversion” as an excuse to target anyone who was suspected of thinking or speaking critically against the government (Rock 363). The military took control of the government in 1976, and intensified its terror tactics. People were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered; most simply “disappeared,” unacknowledged by the military, without a hint to their loved ones as to whether they were still alive or dead. The very randomness and unpredictability of the repression made it that much more terrifying to the populace (Rock 368). The official cipher of disappeared persons given by CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas) is 8,960 (16), but most agree that it is much higher. Rock numbers the victims at at least 10,000 (368), and Graziano gives 12,000 as a “scholarly estimate based on extant evidence;” he also notes that human rights groups claim that the actual number approaches 30,000 (241). Rock cites an “authoritative report” issued in 1978 which estimates that fewer than 20 percent of the campaign’s victims were actually guerillas. Some 37 percent were union leaders (368).

3 British officials have questioned not only the legitimacy of the early discoveries discussed here, but also of Britain’s entire claim to the islands. Anthony Barnett cites official memos and papers from 1910, the 1930s, and the 1940s that suggested that the British claim was untenable and that Britain should consider returning the islands to Argentina (24).

4 Argentine naval historian Hector Ratto is one among those who question the validity of Laguarda Trias’s arguments (ctd. in Gibran 22-23).

5 Etchepareborda offers some plausible reasons for delay on the part of Spain: Spain’s navy was ill-equipped to confront its British counterpart should England decide to fight for the islands. Spain had also been occupied with expelling the Jesuits from its territories, and with quelling the ensuing conflicts (39).

6 British claims to the islands have their strongest legal basis in a principle of international law known as “prescription,” which states that a territory that is occupied for a certain uninterrupted length of time automatically becomes sovereign territory of its occupiers, regardless of the legality of the original occupation (Gibran 42). Argentina rejects this claim because it continuously protested the occupation. Gibran suggests, however, that Argentina’s failure to submit its protest to the International Court of Justice once this was established in the 1920s seriously weakens the strength of its claim under international law (42; 44).

7 This was actually a third offense if one also takes into account an Argentine team who set up a station on Southern Thule (a dependency of the Falklands) in 1976 and did not leave in spite of British protests (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 41; Thatcher 151-52). This incident was later shown to be part of a military initiative (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 50). There had also been a plan to covertly place military personnel with the Davidoff expeditions to form a permanent presence on South Georgia (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 40-42). This plan, known as project Alpha, was officially postponed because of fears that the British would become suspicious and increase their military presence in the South Atlantic, thus making the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas more difficult (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 44). These details help to explain why the British overreacted as they did to the South Georgia/Georgias del Sur incident. Explanations as to why the Argentine party refused twice to
check in with the Magistrate in Grytviken could include the ship’s captain being in too much of a hurry to get on with his regular maneuvers, and of course reluctance to register with a foreign authority to enter what they viewed as their own sovereign territory (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 47). Such an act would implicitly legitimate the British claim to the islands.

Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse devote two entire chapters (4 and 5) to unravelling the complexities of this incident. Their discussion gives explanations from both Argentine and British points of view.

I use two of Rock’s text in this dissertation. For the sake of brevity, when I cite Rock’s *Argentina 1516-1987: from Spanish Colonization to Alfonsin*, I will merely write “Rock” and the page number. When I cite *Authoritarian Argentina*, I will write “Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*” and the page number.

Although many journalistic pieces, political cartoons, and polemical essays comment on the Falklands/Malvinas war and its myths, I do not study them as primary texts in this dissertation (with the exception of one Argentinean cartoon that has aroused considerable attention on both sides of the Atlantic). Some of them are, however, listed in the Bibliography as secondary sources. The main objects of my analysis will be fiction, drama, poetry, film, and music. Argentine visual art about the Malvinas has proved elusive; however, information on British visual arts is listed in the Bibliography.

For a more complete bibliography of historical, military, diplomatic, and legal studies of the war, see Rasor, Eugene L., *The Falklands/Malvinas Campaign: a Bibliography*. Bibliographies of Battles and Leaders 6. New York: Greenwood, 1992. This bibliography claims to be exhaustive (It is not actually exhaustive, even for its date, but it is a good start). Rasor gives useful descriptions and comments on every text he lists.

I discuss this cartoon and Foster’s analysis of it in Chapter Five.

Monaghan uses the terms *countermyth* and *countermythologize* differently than I do. For him, countermyth works “reframe the official Falklands myth as a network of lies constructed by a self-interested politician willing to distort language and history in order to advance her own political agenda. Thus reshaped, the official myth is made to function as a metaphor for a neconservative Britain utterly lacking in the integrity fundamental to the fulfillment of Thatcher’s promises of national rebirth” (xiii). I would define this process as *demythologizing*, rather than *countermythologizing*, since the myth is shown to be false and thus betray its makers’ lack of integrity. The official myth made lame is the “new” myth deployed by the demythologizing text, in Monaghan’s definition. In my definition the *countermythologizing* text must create its own myth which works to discredit the official one.

Obviously there is some overlap in these artificially imposed categories, as in the case of cartoons that appear in newspapers, and films and music which air on television and radio. I do discuss one political cartoon, as well as some souvenir photograph books which overlap into “media” territory.

The article’s title is a play on lyrics from the “Marcha de Malvinas,” a patriotic song taught to Argentinean school children. The original lyrics read “Tras su manto de neblinas, no las hemos de olvidar” [Beneath their misty mantle, they must not be forgotten].

Works they discuss that fall into this category are Osvaldo Soriano’s novel *A sus plantas rendido un león*, Fogwill’s novel *Los pichy-cyegos*, Osvaldo Lamborghini’s short story *La causa justa*, Rodrigo Fresán’s short stories “El aprendiz de brujo” and “Soberanía nacional,” Daniel Guebel’s short story “El amor a Inglaterra,” and Juan Forn’s “Memorándum Almazán.” They write that these works dismantle the bases of national identity and question the relevance of sovereignty over the Malvinas, while works that bemoan the war do not (83). They write that the anti-imperialist slant of serious anti-war testimonials and fiction ends up supporting the “Great National Story” in a way that the farcical fiction of the war does not (83). Unfortunately, these assertions do not hold true for all of the works that they discuss. Soriano’s novel, for example, portrays the cause of the Malvinas as just, and celebrates anti-imperialist activity of every sort – including terrorism. Eckhardt’s novel *El Desertor*, which Kohan
discusses in a later article as a farcical demythologizer, also denounces British (and North American) imperialism, though it rejects war as a means to destroy it.

17 The articles discuss a number of demythologizing strategies, and they mention extremely brief examples from one or more texts to illustrate each strategy they discuss. They do not even indicate the specific source text of any of the examples they provide. They only imply that each example comes from one of the texts that they list, near the beginning of the article in Kohan et al., and in the endnotes of the article by Kohan alone.

18 “Process of National Reorganization,” also referred to as the Proceso or the Proceso Militar: the military’s euphemism for its dictatorship and the associated programs of repression, kidnap, torture, and murder.

19 These sources include Collier, Fernandez Bitar, Garcia, MacKenzie, Magnarelli, Mathieu, Reeves, Scherer, Valero-Covarrubias, Vila, and Wilcox.
CHAPTER ONE
THE MAKING OF FALKLANDS AND MALVINAS MYTHS

In this chapter I examine the Falklands/Malvinas myths from both Argentina and Britain in more detail. By the time the Falklands/Malvinas crisis erupted in 1982, the disputed islands had been the subject of Argentinean mythmaking for some time. UK leadership, on the other hand, had to develop its Falklands fictions on the spot, but they had an ample supply of old identity myths on which to draw. Both nations settled on a romance-quest emplotment for their respective roles in the struggle for the islands, and both nations fit their respective arrays of myths into this structure. In 1879, Argentine poet and dramatist Martín Coronado wrote the allegorical poem “La Cautiva” [The Captive], demonstrating in its stanzas that several of the myths invoked in 1982 had been circulating in Argentina, in romance-quest form, for over one hundred years (In Müller 67-71). The poem arranges identity, military, just cause, and enemy myths into a challenge to the potential romance hero to embark on his quest of rescue.¹

The first three stanzas describe the conquest of the Argentine islands by Britain, called “the giant” [el gigante] (line 2). The next three stanzas relate that the very waves, having come from the Rio de la Plata and arrived on the shores of the Giant, will tell the usurper the story of the islands, which are personified as a woman. The story told by the waves takes up the bulk of the poem, and relates that the land of Malvinas was born Argentine, kissed by “the sun of May” (a reference to Mayo, the May revolution and the foundation of Argentine liberty), and now she cries for her absent love (34-40). The Argentine lover is the personified liberty of Mayo, variously referred to as a soldier or an athlete. At this early date, Argentina’s military (the soldier) is used to personify Argentina itself, its liberty and greatness. The soldier/athlete’s ashes, “dust of victories” [polvo de victorias], are in a blue urn guarded by Argentina’s blue and white flag on the islands (3-5). In these images, it becomes clear that Britain has stolen more than just land; it has stolen and desecrated the glory of Argentina’s history, symbolized by the flag.
and the urn. Here we see the identity myth that locates Argentina’s *ser nacional* in the islands themselves.

The story continues with the pirate chaining up the Malvinas-woman. She moans, trying to break free “with the blush of the proud Roman woman / when the slave clasped her in his arms” (54-55).² Here the enemy appears not only as a pirate (a favorite Argentine image for Britain) but also as a slave, a debased being compared with the proud Roman heritage claimed by Argentina. One sees in this image a trace of the *Gran Argentina* superiority complex. The accusation of rape is also implied here, as in a later image of the red British flag, like a hook, impaling the island/woman’s breast (73-5). She dreams of rescue, she wishes to die and have the blue waves, blue like her own flag, as her shroud (81-95). The romance-quest scenario is now set up: the damsel has been kidnapped and ravished, and is hoping to be rescued or die.

This is where the story of the waves ends, and the narrator’s voice resumes with a lament that the dead young man in the urn cannot hear the greeting brought by the Argentinean waves:

```
Oh! In the mute urn
Like a memory surely sleeps the athlete
that America greets,
But the secret of the frowning sea
The poet will tell in every ear.
[¡Ay! en la urna muda
Como un recuerdo dormirá el atleta
que America saluda,
Pero el secreto de la mar ceñuda
En cada oído lo dirá el poeta.] (101-5)
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Nevertheless, the poet takes up the waves’ story to tell “in every ear.” From the poet, then, “the war song will constantly go forth / . . . to waken the dawn” (106-110).³ The poet issues the challenge for Argentines to take up the quest and rescue the captive islands from the pirate, bringing the dawn once more, symbolized by the sun on the Argentinean flag, to the stolen lands. The cause is shown to be just, all that is lacking is the hero.
Argentina’s Malvinas Myths

As Coronado’s poem indicates, many of the myths surrounding and influencing the Malvinas War trace their origins at least as far back as the nineteenth century, a time of self-definition for the emerging nation of Argentina. Some, drawing on cultural paradigms inherited from Spain, go back even further. The following is a list of the major Argentinean myths affecting national attitudes toward the conflict, with sketches of their historical backgrounds.

The myth of “La Gran Argentina”

This myth (also called “Argentina Potencia”) states that Argentina is destined to be a regional leader, a great nation in terms of international power, prestige, prosperity, and culture (Shumway 242-48; Femenia 66). This myth is sometimes linked to racial and religious identity myths, which posit Argentina as “White,” European, Christian, and Western (Femenia 58-59). Among the promoters of this elitist image of Argentina were nineteenth-century liberal politicians and writers, such as Bartolomé Mitre and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who were content for Argentina to remain a “big farm” in the service of Europe, as long as it made them rich and powerful, and allowed high culture to prosper in Buenos Aires (Shumway 282). Liberal thinkers criticized the Native American, African, and Spanish races as inherently flawed, and aspired to make Argentina “white” and European by encouraging immigration from Northern Europe and Great Britain (by their definition, “Europe” did not include Spain). Opposing these views were early nationalist thinkers like poet Olegario Andrada and essayist Carlos Guido y Spano, who envisioned a “spiritual Argentina” embodying the nation’s glorious destiny (242). These thinkers saw nativist impulses and peoples, like the mixed-blood gauchos and their traditions, as central to the identity and the future greatness of Argentina. So even though I present the two myths together as somewhat interrelated, they originated from antagonistic ideological groups. In the mid and late 1800s when these myths emerged, the goal of a powerful and prosperous Argentina seemed within reasonable reach: the period saw a great deal of economic growth, and increasingly close economic ties with the powerful Great Britain (Rock 118-19). Increasing European immigration and
investment brought labor and capital for the building of railroads, sewage systems, and other improvements (Rock 146; 153). By the end of the nineteenth century, Argentina was wealthy, growing, and more prominent in the international arena than it is now. It was a major exporter of primary goods for Europe and the United States (Rock 168). Its per capita income was on a par with Germany’s and exceeded Spain’s, Italy’s, and Sweden’s (Rock 172). At the time, Argentina truly was an emerging power in the western world.

By 1940, the Argentine elites’ general view was that their country was indeed “white” and “European,” so apparently the immigration policies had accomplished their desired aim, at least in the elites’ estimation. Argentines also considered their country to be equal with the US and the UK, the “natural” leader of the South American continent, and developing steadily toward even greater prosperity and power. This attitude was countered by a relatively small opposition, who felt that Argentina’s self-imposed isolation and arrogance would hurt it (Femenia 58-59). Although their capitalist agrarian economy was highly dependent on Europe and especially on the UK, the landholding elites did not consider themselves to be colonized; on the contrary, they felt that they were in control of their economic destiny and were proud of their international position.

Argentina’s international position was declining by the early 1940s, and particularly after 1945, as Argentina’s defiant behavior toward the Allies during World War Two earned it the status of “international pariah” after the peace was achieved (Femenia 60). With the advent of Peronism (1946), the middle and working classes were granted more political influence. Perón pursued a more nationalist policy, encouraging and protecting local industry, and nationalizing foreign-held industries like the railroads, telephones, and power plants in the name of “sovereignty” (Rock 263-64). Foreign investment dropped, however, production slowed, and inflation rose (Rock 265-66). Author and social commentator Mempo Giardinelli suggests that Argentina’s false superiority complex may have become entrenched at this time, as a defiant compensation for Argentina’s declining world position (194, 262). He also cites authors Adriana Puiggrós’s and Jorge Luis Bernetti’s speculation that the 1982 decision to invade the Malvinas may have had it roots in the national arrogance born in the 1940s (194). “Benign neglect” from the United States during 1950s through the 1970s, and multiple
military coups from the 1940s to the 1980s, brought Argentina’s self-image dangerously low, especially when compared to the glorious destiny they had long claimed to be their rightful heritage (Femenia 64-65). Giardinelli also speaks of Argentine resentment and a sense that “life owes them something” (262). This sense of having been short-changed in terms of international status probably contributed to the Junta’s decision to fight for the Malvinas, and also to the overwhelmingly popular decision to support the war. It seemed a way to regain lost honor and to make the rest of the world notice Argentina’s bravery in the face of overwhelming opposition. Femenia warns that if Argentines cannot discard their compensatory “superiority complex,” they “will continue to look for quick solutions to their national problems and for scapegoats to explain why they never achieved or recovered the greatness that they felt was destined for them” (66). As Femenia implies, Argentines have often found scapegoats on whom they place the blame for their country’s failures, which leads to the next myth in this discussion.

The Scapegoat Myth

This myth posits someone or something “foreign” to Argentina that is preventing its destined rise to greatness (Femenia 66; Giardinelli 313; Shumway 244). It may have first developed in nineteenth-century nationalist thought as an attack on liberal policies which cooperated with foreign interventions and envisioned Argentina as little better than a colony, serving as the granary of Europe (Shumway 244). Nationalists described these policies and the landed oligarchy which supported them as “anti-Argentine”; in other words, they did not form part of the true, spiritual Argentina and its glorious future. Nationalist poet Olegario Andrade describes these Europeanist liberals as “apostates, hangmen and traitors,” who oppose Argentina’s progress in order to enrich themselves (ctd. in Shumway 244). In other nationalist writings, they are referred to as “the vendepatria” [the sellers of the Fatherland] (Shumway 244). According to Shumway, Argentine nationalism is full of “conspiracy theories”: later nationalists would name the CIA, the British, the multinational corporations, and international banks as conspirators against Argentina’s progress, usually with the aid of internal turncoats who benefited personally at the nation’s expense (244).

While the nationalists pointed to the liberal oligarchy as their principal scapegoat, the liberals had their own ideas about what was wrong with Argentina. Their version of
the scapegoat myth differed significantly from its nationalist counterpart in that it was a defeatist myth. There was no destined rise to greatness to hamper. The nineteenth-century liberals of the saw Argentina as doomed to failure, and they had their own, internal scapegoats. These included the Spanish cultural heritage, the “natural” dispositions of the races that make up much of Argentina’s populace, or even the land itself. Shumway names Sarmiento as one possible source of the liberal scapegoat myth: Sarmiento wrote that barbarism is Argentina’s great enemy, and that the pampa is the source of barbarism and must be tamed (134). Shumway suggests that Sarmiento’s writings may have sparked “a tendency to attribute Argentina’s problems to natural causes rather than human error – a concept guaranteed to deflect accusations of blame. That the country’s failure derived from an inherent organic weakness would continue to comfort disillusioned intellectuals for generations to come” (134-35). As an example, Shumway cites Ezequiel Martínez Estrada’s *Radiografía de la pampa* [X-ray of the pampa] (1933), which says that Argentina is like a person with an inherited disease and thus cannot succeed (135). The metaphor of the sick national body may have contributed to the willingness among Argentineans to accept drastic measures in order to “cure” Argentina’s problems, including the extermination and oppression of “sick” elements of society (natives, gauchos, and later, “subversives”), the grafting in of “healthy” immigrants, “messianic populism,” and repressive military dictatorships (Shumway 166). Giardinelli calls this tendency to believe in quick, miraculous fixes “magic thought,” [pensamiento mágico] a weakness of a desperate and disillusioned people willing to try anything, so long as it promises overnight salvation (265-67). The push to recover the Malvinas can be seen as yet another of these quick fixes, not only for the Junta’s position but also for Argentina’s as a Nation.

One fairly recent permutation of the scapegoat myth, used by the military regime of 1976-1982 to discount accusations of state-sponsored atrocities, is the “international defamation campaign,” in which Argentina’s government is falsely maligned for alleged human rights abuses (Femenia 74). The slanders are supposedly invented and promulgated by exiled Argentine subversives, in an attempt to discredit the regime and undermine its power through international disapproval, sanctions, etc. This myth is part of a larger scapegoat myth that describes international forces of communism infiltrating
Argentina in an attempt to subvert the government and brainwash and subject its people (Graziano 121-22). Graziano calls this “The Myth of International Conspiracy,” which the military Junta used as one of several justifications for its terror campaign against the Argentine populace. It states that Argentina has been chosen as the first battleground of “World War Three,” in which communists plan to take over the world by more subtle and dangerous means than simple armed aggression (122). The communist “infiltrators,” or “subversives,” though they may have Argentine citizenship, are seen as not truly Argentine in spirit, and are labeled “antipatía,” or “apátridas” [anti-fatherland, countryless], in an echo of the “anti-Argentine” label applied to the oligarchy scapegoats by the early nationalists (Graziano 135). Military Junta discourse compares the so-called subversives to “germs” that invade and consume the national body from inside, infecting the weak with evil foreign ideas, and drawing them away to destruction. These labels functioned to distance the scapegoats (the desaparecidos, or disappeared ones) from Argentine society enough to justify disposing of them (Graziano 135).

The Military Junta carried their version of this myth to its deadly conclusion with the ritualistic torture and murder of the designated scapegoats, in an effort to purge Argentinean society of the perceived evil which threatened it (Graziano 136). Graziano goes on to comment that a scapegoat ritual can only function effectively if the community at large believes in the victim’s guilt and remains unaware that the victim is being used as a scapegoat (219). For a while, the Argentinean populace attempted to deceive and comfort itself by accepting the presumed guilt of the desaparecidos with refrains like por algo será, [it must be for something], or Algo habrá[n] hecho [he/she/they must have done something], but eventually the myth broke down, and people recognized governmental violence for what it truly was, namely random atrocity against the community itself (220). Graziano names the Malvinas War as the military’s last-ditch effort to save the crumbling myths that helped maintain them in power, as well as the definitive blow that finally destroyed those myths (220). One can see that this myth is closely interwoven with other military myths, which will be elaborated on later in this section. It is also related to the myth that links Argentinean national identity with the Malvinas, in that the islands’ loss becomes yet another scapegoat or excuse for Argentina’s problems: in this case, the country’s identity crisis.
The Argentinean identity myth

Argentina’s identity myth says that Argentina’s sense of identity (ser nacional) was lost along with the Malvinas. It is “out there,” waiting to be recovered along with the islands (Femenía 87; Guber 102). The Malvinas were first lost to the British in 1833, right in the middle of an intellectual struggle to define Argentina’s ser nacional [literally, national being], as Shumway describes in his book The Invention of Argentina. The ideological and class divisions that plague Argentina today were forming and widening. For those on the nationalist/populist side of the divide, the ser nacional was popular, gaucho, lower-class or classless, native, free, and equal. For those with liberal/elitist views, the ser nacional was European, high-cultured, and determined by the enlightened few. Neither of these visions ever took hold across the board – there was no unity, no overriding ser nacional myth to give everyone a sense of belonging as Argentines. As a result, the islands lost during this bickering became associated with that seemingly lost, but actually never attained, identity and unity. Indeed, Guber notes that the early writers who brought the issue of Malvinas into the public consciousness all attributed the islands’ loss to Argentina’s internal problems (89). Later writers and activists continued in this vein, and though the accusations were levelled at different individual culprits, the central point was the same; namely that internal failings had cost Argentina its sovereignty over the islands (Guber 103). The Malvinas gradually became a symbol of internal disputes and exclusions; a metaphor for the Nation as usurped not only by “the English pirate,” but also by mutually hostile political factions, and especially by de facto regimes (Guber 101-102). Guber notes that the Malvinas issue consistently appears in the public eye during times of oppression, or at least when the executive power’s legitimacy is under question (105). To sum up, she says that Malvinas came to express the need to recover a Nation that was consistently represented as lost (106).

This idea of a lost identity spurs the Argentinean populists’ and nationalists’ desire to go back in time, to rescue whatever true Argentine-ness may have remained in the past. Shumway points out that the writings of early populists such as military and political leader José Artigas (1764-1850), poet Bartolomé Hidalgo (1788-1822), and intellectual essayist Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884), among others, assume a pre-existing Argentine character and identity, or ser nacional, embodied in the Gaucho and
other country folk (48-49, 123, 259). Later, José Hernández’ epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) would demonstrate a “nostalgia for a lost past” – a feeling that Argentina’s true nature has been pushed aside and forgotten, and “that a return to the past was somehow the country’s best hope” (Shumway 268). Says Shumway, “This nostalgia is a constant of Argentine populism, found in the country’s folklore, tango lyrics, revisionist histories, and antiliberal ideologies” (268). It is into this tradition that Atahualpa Yupanqui’s poetic lament for the Malvinas fits. “Hermanita perdida” [Lost little sister] (1971) calls the lost islands to return home, so that Argentina, her true family, can fill her with *criollos* [native-born Argentines], and tan her face to match the traditional aspect of her nation. Recovering the lost sister, restoring her to the way she would have been had she never been stolen, is a nostalgic urge toward the past, to the way things were before she was lost.

For the nationalists, the *ser nacional* existed in the past before it was persecuted and buried by vain imitation of Europe, by the eradication of the gaucho and the native inhabitants, by policies that inhibited development of the interior provinces. Argentina’s unity and sense of self had seemed attainable in the past but were lost. The Malvinas were lost around the same time, and so they are seen as the key for the recovery of that lost identity, unity, and prosperity that should have been Argentina’s destiny. Just before the Argentinean surrender, journalist Jesús Iglesias Rouco writes that Argentina had lost its heritage and identity through the terrible internal struggles of the last forty years, and the Malvinas presented the lonely and confused nation with the hope of rediscovering itself:

. . . in those miserable islands – as miserable perhaps as our own misfortune – Argentines found the only meeting point that was ours, that had not been annihilated or contaminated by the madness of our national history. That is why we went there, like one who goes in search of his roots. For us, the Malvinas represent the return to ourselves, to the origin of our rights, one of the last vestiges of identity that remained to us on April 2. (Rouco 14)

With the phrase “miserable islands,” Rouco gives a nod to socialist legislator Alfredo Palacios’ arguments for retaking the islands. In his 1934 book, Palacios advocates
freeing the “miserable” and unappreciated Malvinas from their unjust captivity and subjection under the boot of imperialism, just as he (Palacios) had worked his whole life to free laborers, single mothers, and orphaned children from oppressive poverty and exploitation (Guber 79-80). Palacios saw the cause of Malvinas as a cause of the common people, not just the state, and as a symbolic repudiation of the authoritarian government under which he served (Guber 78; 81). By equating the misery of the islands once again with the misery of the oppressed and rootless Argentinean people, Rouco joins Palacios in equating the freeing of the Malvinas with the release and rediscovery of the Argentinean identity. This leads to the next Malvinas myth: that of national renewal.

The Malvinas National Renewal Myth

This myth is really a continuation of the national identity myth discussed above. Since the ser nacional was supposedly lost along with the Malvinas, this myth states that their recovery will result in the restoration of the Argentine identity, and with it a sense of national unity. With the entire population united in a desire for the best interests of the Nation, Argentina will be able to achieve the goal of “La Gran Argentina” (Femenia 87; Guber 106).

As Guber writes in her study of the Malvinas, the islands had become part of the national consciousness; they mattered to everyone, regardless of political leanings or socioeconomic status (107). Their loss symbolized the loss of Argentina itself, and their recovery symbolized Argentina’s rediscovery of itself (30, 39). General Galtieri, head of the governing Junta at the time of the reinvasion of the islands, referred to the cause of the Malvinas as the “common denominator” for all Argentineans (ctd. in Graziano 47). In connection with retaking the islands, the government launched a public relations campaign with the slogan “United it’s easier” (Graziano 47), demonstrating the Junta’s belief in the unifying power of the Malvinas, and trying to reinforce that myth among the populace. Argentines’ newfound unity was supposed to have been applied toward exploiting of the islands’ resources, thereby boosting national production, prosperity, and eventually achieving regional leadership (Femenia 39).

Notwithstanding these somewhat logical steps toward national recovery that Femenia outlines, the identity and national renewal myths invest the Malvinas with an almost magical power that, once attained, will help Argentina to achieve its destined
greatness. This attitude is reminiscent of that held by early Christian crusaders toward the Holy Land. Graziano points out that the goal of the crusades was to capture the territory of the sacred tomb of Jesus. The tomb was like a magic amulet – they felt that if they had it in their possession it would be a source of divine power to their nation (Graziano 187-88). Like the land of Christ’s birth, the Malvinas are seen as sacred, especially to the military, because they are part of the patria [fatherland]. They are also presented as a territory usurped by the infidel: the British, who in their cultural and moral decadence are seen as no longer worthy of calling themselves “Western” and “Christian,” as Argentina is. Thus the fight to recover the Malvinas’ sacred territory is characterized as a crusade, particularly by the military’s chaplains, but also by military leaders like Mohamed Ali Seineldin. It was Seineldin who lobbied to rename the military takeover of the islands Operación Rosario [Operation Rosary] instead of Operación Azul, [Operation Blue] as it had been previously called. He wished to do this in honor of the “Virgen Generala,” the military’s patron saint in whose name the crusade for the islands was to be fought (Seineldin 62). Junta member Admiral Anaya also seems to support such an interpretation, as evidenced in his avowal to the American mediation team that he would be proud to know his son’s blood “had mingled with this sacred soil” (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 201). A crusade narrative is basically a variant of a romance quest, the format in which the British national renewal myth is presented. In a crusade narrative the damsel in distress or “threatened essential identity” (Wright 179) is sacred Christian ground. The threat itself is the infidel, the filthy nonbeliever who does not reverence the site’s holiness. The hero is the crusader, and fulfilment of the quest brings a restoration to the Natural Order of things, with glory heaped upon the heads of the worthy crusaders. In addition, an almost magical power for prosperity is gained through the redeemed territory.

Even after Argentina’s defeat on June 14, the national renewal myth continued to circulate, but in a somewhat altered form. It then stated that the unity achieved in the cause of Malvinas should be maintained and harnessed to advance Argentina in spite of the temporary setbacks brought by the surrender at Puerto Argentino. The following news item from a Buenos Aires tabloid is just one example of this sentiment’s
continuation after the end of the war. It summarizes a professor Roberto Repetto’s speech given at the National Academy of Moral and Political Sciences:

. . . the cause is just, because a demoralized and divided community has been transformed into a “nation” that assembles past generations with current ones, the dead who struggled for our rights since 1833, with those who fight today, and unites them in a superior totality that expresses the permanent values of nationhood. (La Razón 17 June 4)\(^{12}\)

This belief that Argentina has proved its worth and united itself in the face of a great challenge is reiterated by Galtieri in his post-surrender address. He virtually commands his listeners to remain united, to take upon themselves their newly acquired identity as resolute and brave Argentines, and press forward to “attain the fatherland imagined by our soldiers in their best dreams.”\(^{13}\) Admiral Carlos Büsser as well, in his book *Malvinas, la guerra inconclusa* (1987), combines a reworked national renewal myth with military myths to urge Argentineans to apply their newfound unity and resolve toward making Argentina a greater nation. This adaptation, as well as the portrayal of the war as a religious crusade, overlap into Argentina’s military myths.

**Military Myths**

Argentina’s military myths posit the Argentine military as the “natural” leaders of the the Nation (Graziano 109-10), and the “true guardians of our national dignity” (Femenia 99). Military leaders, particularly the governing Junta, present themselves as saviors, engaged in a Holy War to redeem the Nation and restore the “natural order” (Graziano 120; Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 121-23). Military myths present the recovery of the Malvinas as a religious crusade (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 121-23). Even after the defeat, military apologists continue to affirm that the military’s heroic role in the Malvinas has brought honor and glory to the Fatherland (Büsser 362).

Shumway finds an early predecessor to some of the Argentine military’s favorite myths in the writings of Mariano Moreno (1778-1811), a prominent nineteenth-century thinker and Unitarian Party leader. Moreno’s “Operational Plan That the Provisional Government of the Provinces of the River Plate Should Implement In Order to Consolidate the Great Work of Our Liberty and Independence,” a policy paper of uncertain date, was published posthumously in 1895.\(^{14}\) This document introduces some
fairly extreme guiding fictions, particularly a manichean view of political good and evil persisting in Argentine political thought to this day (Shumway 39). In Moreno’s view there is no grey or indifferent area. There are those entirely committed to Moreno’s cause, and everyone else is a traitor. The only way to deal with traitors is by killing them or exiling them (39). The idea “that progress and enlightened government would result if the right people were killed” was the Unitarians’ justification for ousting and then assassinating elected governor Dorrego in 1828 (Shumway 116), and it was the military regime’s justification for their actions in the 1970s. Says Shumway, “Even today . . . the term intransigente (intransigent) in Argentine politics connotes principle, morality, and uncompromising defense of truth; in all of this, of course, are echoes of Moreno’s self-righteousness, wherein compromise becomes sell-out and consensus becomes collaboration with enemies” (40). 

Actually though, as Graziano points out, this binary world-view of pure good versus pure evil is really a medieval idea. Thus Moreno was just reiterating and perpetuating an older idea that continued to influence Argentine leaders, from the nineteenth-century Unitarians to the 1976 Military Junta, and beyond.

The military in Argentina has long held a high opinion of its own importance. Graziano says that myths granting the Argentine Army a reality and status both prior and superior to that of the nation developed as early as the nineteenth century (110). David Rock’s Authoritarian Argentina traces these military myths back to the workings of a relatively small movement of anti-democratic and xenophobic intellectuals who called themselves Nationalists. Although they never formed a political party per se, they influenced people within the military through flattery, who then took up and promoted their ideas (xiv-xv). According to Rock, these Nationalists “encouraged the military to perceive itself as ‘the last aristocracy’ and the guardian of a ‘sacred territory and the western Christian way of life,’ which answered not to the people or the law but to ‘God and history’” (Authoritarian Argentina xiv). In these myths one can see that the army conceives of its role as going beyond merely protecting sovereignty against external threats to include a moral/religious role and also a leadership role of the government itself. Nationalist poet Leopoldo Lugones called directly upon the military to take over the government in 1924, declaring that the dictator should be above the law and should reform society after the hierarchical military model (Authoritarian Argentina 73).
1930, a military coup against the civil government would show that some factions within the military had taken Nationalist ideas to heart, though that particular regime only remained in power for just over a year (Authoritarian Argentina 94).

The dictatorial regime of General Onganía (1966-1970) continued and intensified the military’s role as guardian of “the moral and spiritual values of Western and Christian civilization,” (Onganía, qtd. in Graziano 19). This idea, together with the manichean mindset that interpreted differing political views as subversion, led to the micro-policing of society at absurd levels, including styles of dress and individual behavior. By the beginning of the Dirty War in 1976, “the military’s role as preserver of the moral and ideological wholesomeness of the people almost entirely displaced the conventional military mandate of protecting sovereignty from outside invasion” (Graziano 20). Rock also characterizes both the Onganía regime and the 1976 Junta as having significant Nationalist influence in their ranks (Authoritarian Argentina xxii).

The 1976 Military Junta worked to de-politicize its mythology and designate its agenda as “the Natural Order” (Graziano 109-10). This is yet another medieval idea dating back to such figures as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. Medieval religious philosophy is a major contributor to the military’s mythic concept of its role. As an example, Graziano cites Marcial Castro Castillo’s handbook of military ethics (1979), which affirms that punishing evil (i.e., “subversives”) is actually good, and a way to restore the “Natural Order.” (111). Of course this so-called “Natural” Order was really just the Junta’s idea of how things should be. Castro Castillo claims to instruct the officer or soldier in how to be “a perfect Crusading Knight for God and Fatherland” as part of the entity chosen by God himself to defeat the “enemies of order” (qtd. in Graziano 111-12). Here we see the crusade imagery, which will apply not only to the Dirty War but to the Malvinas recovery as well. Restoring the Malvinas to their rightful place under Argentine sovereignty was seen as another essential step in restoring that “Natural Order” which the military sought to restore and to defend as the source of its own legitimacy. According to Graziano, the military that had crusaded so long in defense of the “Natural Order” was unprepared to fight a real external army in a conflict over sovereignty. He describes their performance in the Malvinas as “a humiliating display of incompetence, impotence, and ruthless deployment of unprepared troops” (Graziano 20).
He writes that some of those officers, who had portrayed themselves as heroes in protecting Argentina from the internal threat, abandoned their troops and fled before the British (48).

Even after defeat in the Malvinas War, some apologists for the military tried to uphold crumbling military myths by construing Malvinas as an example of Argentina’s military prowess. Says Admiral Carlos Büsser:

In Latin America, [the war] left the image of a small country that was able to fight for what it considered its right and its territorial integrity, that confronted one of the biggest military, political, and economic powers on the planet, and that returned blow for blow and valiantly assumed its destiny. (360)  

Büsser writes that Argentina’s prestige has been increased in Latin America by its heroic confrontation with a greater power. Later he affirms that Third World countries around the world now look at Argentina with “admiring respect,” and that Argentina has gained a position of “moral leadership” because it stood up for its rights with courage (362).  

Here we see the development of a post-defeat “David versus Goliath myth,” in which Argentina, as the pure but small David, proves his valor and gains respect in the eyes of others by bravely confronting the overwhelming strength of Goliath. Civilians as well as military personnel subscribed to this idea, as is evident in this editorial from *La Prensa*:

Our national honor has been heroically defended by the three Armed Forces and the justice of our cause has been made manifest before humanity’s conscience. . . . The Republic confronted a power of the highest magnitude . . . and it did so without ostentation, demonstrating unwavering temperance and dignity, and by doing so it has earned widespread admiration. (*La Prensa* 15 June 1982, sec. 2:1)  

The defeat becomes irrelevant in the face of the courage and fortitude shown in being willing to fight at all against such odds. Büsser urges against “demalvinization,” or the acceptance of a negative view of the war as a failure (12). He says that Malvinas remains one of the few issues that can motivate all Argentines toward any national goal (11). Maintaining the “Malvinas Spirit” (or malvinization) is the key to achieving not only the
return of the islands, but also to making Argentina “a great Nation” (368). It is notable that for Büsser, an important part of maintaining the Malvinas Spirit is “setting ourselves spiritually against Great Britain” (368).\textsuperscript{22} For the renewal to occur, for identity to be asserted, it is necessary to have an enemy to repudiate.

**Argentina’s Enemy Myths**

These myths portray the British as colonialist oppressors (Foulkes 81-82). Argentine forces saw themselves as liberating the islands from suffocating British domination (Foulkes 20, 27, 34). They also see the British as aggressive, piratical, overly prideful, contemptuous, and disproportionately violent when crossed (Femenia 108-11, 116-17). They are considered spiritually and morally bankrupt, and therefore physically weakened. (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 135-36; Graziano 122; Verbitsky 31, 157). After the war, this myth is slightly altered to accommodate Argentina’s defeat. Britain is seen as a Goliath who, despite his moral decadence, has managed to win through brute strength combined with treachery.

Mariano Moreno called England “the most conniving of all nations” (qtd. in Shumway 38). At the same time, however, he seems to have admired the British: he sought to gain England’s favor in trade and in politics. In fact, at one point he recommended dividing all of South America up between Argentina and Great Britain (Shumway 39). This ambivalent attitude of admiration combined with suspicion and resentment has continued down to modern times. During the Malvinas War, the more positive attitudes toward the British were suppressed in favor of the negative ones.

The image of the British as pirates comes from the days of the Spanish Empire, when such corsairs as John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake terrorized and looted Spanish colonial port cities for their sovereign, Elizabeth I. Events from colonial times to the twentieth century have provided fodder for accusations of British colonial aggression against Argentina: among the most important of these are the “British Invasions” in the early nineteenth century. The first occurred in June 1806, before Argentine independence from Spain, and in the wake of Britain’s defeat of the Spanish and French fleets at Trafalgar. Under Sir Home Popham, British forces overwhelmed the Spanish militia in
Buenos Aires (the Viceroy fled) and invaded the city, with the apparent intention of subjecting the city to British rule. Although the British government had not authorized Popham’s action, when they received the news they gladly sent reinforcements under Lieutenant General John Whitelocke (Rock 72). After two months of British occupation, the city’s inhabitants rebelled: with an improvised militia of mostly common folk, the Porteños defeated and captured the British land troops while Popham was aboard his ship. When Whitelocke’s forces arrived in 1807, they, too, were attacked by the local army until they surrendered and left the city. These victories have been celebrated as evidence of the strength and patriotism of the Argentinean people (Rock 72). During the Malvinas conflict, the memory of the British Invasions served as a source not only of enemy-images of the British (Femenia 108), but also of positive self-images as underdog victors against the colonial usurper, encouraging the belief that Argentina could defeat the great power of the British once again.

In 1808 Napoleon invaded Spain, imprisoning Ferdinand VII. At this point, those still in power in the already disrupted viceregal government of the River Plate began to think seriously about independence. In May 1810, several of the area’s elite gathered in a cabildo abierto, or open townhall meeting, to declare the end of legitimate Spanish rule, and to establish a local ruling junta to replace the viceroy (Rock 76). In 1811 the ruling triumvirate sought economic patronage from Great Britain (Rock 87). Rock characterizes British business ventures in Argentina at this stage as “heavily disruptive. By flooding the markets with cheap manufactures, they fostered social dislocation and severe commercial deficits” (119). In 1825, with the wars of independence from Spain finally over, Argentina and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation. Although ostensibly a free trade agreement, it worked to create a basically mercantilist relationship between the two nations, and prevented Argentina from developing its own shipping industry (they agreed to use British ships). By not protecting early industry, the liberal government of the time essentially condemned Argentina to be an importer of manufactures and an exporter of raw materials, not much different than a colony (Shumway 99).

The nineteenth century saw two other major British aggressions against Argentine territory: the forcible takeover of the Malvinas in 1833, and the blockade of Buenos
Aires’ harbor and invasion of the Paraná River in 1845. Juan Manuel de Rosas, who was dictator of Argentina at the time, had blocked the Paraná River inland at Vuelta de Obligado, in order to control the Littoral provinces’ trade with other nations. This angered the French and the British, who joined forces to blockade Buenos Aires’s harbor and send men up the Paraná to remove the restrictions. Rosas’s men repelled the invaders, and in 1847 Britain ended the blockade (Rock 111). Rosas’s action, though hurtful to Argentina’s interior regions and beneficial mainly to himself, was later hailed by revisionist historians as patriotic resistance to “foreign domination” (Rock 230).

After the fall of Rosas, Great Britain and Argentina’s economic association continued to grow, and toward the end of the nineteenth century became a more reciprocal relationship. Britain became a major market for Argentine exports, and British investment brought rapid development to Buenos Aires and to the Interior, particularly through the building of railroads (Rock 119, 145). Although the partnership was certainly advantageous to both Argentina and Britain, Rock writes that it also approximated a neocolonial situation: “Argentine landowners and merchants came to epitomize the ‘collaborating classes’ of the ‘periphery’ in partnership with an advanced industrial power. As a specialist primary producer, Argentina became increasingly vulnerable to demand and price fluctuations in export markets, and it incurred foreign debts that at times threatened to overwhelm it” (119).

An even more maligned Anglo-Argentine trade agreement was the Roca-Runciman treaty of 1933. Rock writes that the United Kingdom gained much greater advantages from this treaty than did Argentina (224). Opponents to this treaty “flatly denounced it as a betrayal of national interests,” and fomented a series of “bitter propaganda campaigns against the British, campaigns that soon evolved toward economic nationalism” (Rock 227-28). One of the major forces behind this nationalistic movement was a new crop of “revisionist” historians, who worked to condemn Britain’s imperialist interventions in Argentina during the nineteenth century, from the invasions of 1806-1807, to their colonialist business relationships with Argentina’s oligarchy (Rock 230). Rock writes that “Propaganda of this kind made a deepening imprint on public opinion and helped sustain nationalist sentiments in the Army” (230), which would influence the military government’s mythmaking projects before and during the Malvinas conflict.
Argentineans have applied labels of *arrogant, contemptuous,* and *aggressive* to the British, particularly in their interactions regarding the status of the Malvinas. From the time of the British takeover in 1833 until 1888, Argentina had sent several requests to London for the return of the islands to Argentine sovereignty, but these were rejected (Etchepareborda 50-51). Afterward, complaints were aired in various public fora from the Universal Postal Union in 1927, to the Ninth Pan-American Conference in 1948. Britain responded only to this last protest with a document setting forth its own views (Etchepareborda 54-55). Britain was finally persuaded to negotiate with Argentina in the 1960s, not out of respect for Argentina’s claims per se, but because economic and international pressures were moving toward decolonization. Furthermore, adherence to the islanders’ “wishes” prevented London from making any concessions on the point of sovereignty. By the 1980s, it was evident to Argentina that Britain was merely “talking for the sake of talking” (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 9). While this continued put-off was more due to the islanders’ attitudes than to those of the British government, it appeared to Argentina that its complaints did not carry much weight in London. This was insulting, especially to a nation that considered itself a regional leader and an important trade associate to Britain. Even more offensive to Buenos Aires was the British response to the Davidoff incident on Georgias del Sur in early 1982 (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 60). The British threat to remove the Argentine work party by force was evidence that Britain did not respect Argentina as a valued partner, but sought to keep it controlled via military force, as with a rogue nation. Femenia theorizes that Argentina craved recognition from the United Kingdom as an equal; not as an inferior party to be endlessly put off. Britain’s procrastination and aggressive responses to Argentine activities only exacerbated the situation, humiliating Argentina and instilling a desire to retaliate in order to recover honor (Femenia 7-8). During the Falklands/Malvinas crisis, Galtieri and other leaders showed an awareness and resentment in their speeches that Great Britain was treating them as one would treat an importunate child (Femenia 68-69). These interactions between the two normally friendly nations helped to build up the negative enemy myths that fueled support for the war.

A submyth to the main enemy myth deals with the current inhabitants of the disputed islands. Argentine attitudes toward the islanders have changed somewhat over
the years. Early Malvinas poetry casts the British settlers unequivocally as usurpers and pirates, abusers of a stolen piece of Fatherland. As the years pass, the poetry continues in this vein, even though the descendants of the usurpers fit less easily into the enemy role, having had nothing to do with the usurpation themselves. The enemy submyth of Kelpers as invaders who hold the personified islands captive is particularly interesting for two reasons. One, it is almost ubiquitous in poems from different authors and time periods from the late nineteenth century to 1982; and two, it is apparently unique to poetry – this version of the enemy myth does not appear in other genres. Earlier in their history, the islands’ settlers could more easily be seen as usurpers, and so it is the land itself which is given the role of damsel in distress. The islanders are merely descendants of pirates, and so they play no role in the myth except that of enemy. During the war in 1982 this attitude changed, as the Argentine government sought to portray the islanders as innocent bystanders, or as damsels-in-distress themselves, needing to be freed from British oppression and protected by Argentine soldiers. This more moderate portrayal of the islanders may have come from the government’s desire to be seen as peaceful and protective in order to gain international sympathy for the Malvinas cause, while diverting attention from Dirty War atrocities. In addition, the islanders may have gradually become conflated with the captive islands, giving rise to the mistaken idea that the islanders would actually welcome the Argentineans as liberators.  

Certainly those Argentines who followed the news of the negotiations would have been aware that Falklands Lobby intransigence was a major influence in London’s continued stalling on the sovereignty issue. Argentine wartime poetry demonstrates an awareness of the islanders’ continued hostility toward Argentine rule in that it continues to concentrate on the land itself as the captive longing for freedom, as opposed to the islanders.

Once the Malvinas had been retaken, the military put out propaganda about Britain’s moral decadence and how the Argentinean forces’ spiritual purity would strengthen them to defeat the dissolute enemy. At this time, Argentine Colonel Esteban Solís gave British journalists a briefing in Patagonia (they were not allowed onto the islands). In the briefing he described the degeneracy of the British troops, their alcoholism and homosexuality, and explained the Argentine victory in terms of sexual morality (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 136). In a similar vein, the Junta’s official press
communiqué Comunicado 32, regarding the British attack of April 25 on Georgias del Sur/South Georgia, states that the British seem to have won the initial advantage, but that Argentine forces “continue fighting in interior zones, with the unbreakable fighting spirit borne of moral superiority” (qtd. in Verbitsky 157). The myth that the British (and most other Western nations) are morally bankrupt may have been motivated by the Western powers’ reluctance to endorse the Junta’s “Dirty War” tactics against alleged communist subversives. During the Carter administration in particular, US disapproval of military human rights abuses aroused the Argentine military’s indignation. After sending representatives of the International Commission on Human Rights to Buenos Aires, the US imposed an arms embargo on Argentina. Journalist Horacio Verbitsky writes that Brigadier General Rubens Graffigna denounced the international press, the US and Europe (this would include the United Kingdom), saying that they were “infiltrated by subversive ideologues,” and warning that these nations “were denaturalizing in a sinister way the sacred principles upon which their greatness was founded” (31).

Verbitsky elaborates on Graffigna’s opinions:

This brigadier saw the West rife with vice, corruption, decadence of traditions, and sexual licentiousness; Apocalyptic horsemen that announced its imminent destruction under assault of the marxist hordes. Faced with this defection of the leader countries, the Southern Cone stood tall as an example of virile purity, brandishing the foundational sword and cross so that the Devil would not prevail. (Verbitsky 31)

This assessment summarizes the moral decadence myth that was handed down to Galtieri and the military establishment, and from them to the soldiers and the rest of the country, to demonize the British and to grant Argentineans confidence that their righteousness would strengthen them and win them divine support in their fight against the enemy.

The Just Cause Myth

This myth conflates Argentina’s convincing case for historical rights to the islands with a moral and legal right to invade a disputed territory currently held by people loyal to another power. It justifies the use of force on April 2, 1982 on the basis of historical rights plus several other factors: the colonial and precarious state of the islands and their economy; UN resolutions 2065 (1964) and 3160 (1973), which called for
decolonization and resolution of the dispute; Britain’s presumed bad faith in negotiations; and a perception that a recovery of the islands was necessary in order for the nation to move forward. These factors are drawn from previously listed and analyzed myths. This myth also justifies Argentina’s refusal to withdraw its troops from the islands after the UN Security Council’s Resolution 502 called specifically for them to do so. The myth states that the Resolution had to be obeyed in proper order, and Britain had to demonstrate a cessation in hostilities before Argentina would withdraw (Büsser 104). Argentina interpreted Britain’s launch of the Task Force as hostility, and claimed it would not withdraw until Britain’s ships were recalled to harbor. Meanwhile, the Argentinean government considered itself justified in sending reinforcements to the islands in answer to Britain’s threatening Task Force (Büsser 105; 439). Although this myth is basically a hybrid of other myths, I have listed it specifically because it is invoked in so many artistic responses to the war, and thus needed to be defined.

Taken together, these myths set up the military as a righteous, God-chosen vessel to undertake the long-awaited crusade against the evil usurpers, to humiliate and punish the decadent enemy for his sins, and redeem the captive holy ground. The sacred land will lend its grace to the Argentine people who, rejoicing in their restored identity and unified in the cause, will advance Argentina to its rightful pre-eminence among the great nations of the world.

**Britain’s Falklands Myths**

British myths follow a broad pattern similar to their Argentinean counterparts, as the following excerpts from the Falklands emergency debates show:

**The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher):** . . . We are here because, for the first time for many years, British sovereign territory has been invaded by a foreign power. After several days of rising tension in our relations with Argentina, that country’s armed forces attacked the Falkland Islands yesterday and established military control over the islands. . . . I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning
totally this unprovoked aggression by the Government of Argentina against British territory. (Morgan 4)

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton): . . . our duty now is to repossess our possessions and to rescue our own people. . . . (Morgan 10)

The Secretary of State For Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Francis Pym): . . . The Falkland Islanders have reacted with courage and dignity to [the Argentines’] rape of the islands. . . . What we in Britain must now do, with the support and backing of all freedom-loving countries right across the world, is to see to it that Argentina’s illegal and intolerable defiance of the international community and the rule of law is not allowed to stand. (Morgan 29)

In parallel to the Argentinean poem, the British debate sets up a romance-quest rescue scenario and calls for the hero to embark on his quest. Other similarities are also evident: both sides have their myths of national greatness, as well as their scapegoat myths to explain recent decline or failure to live up to destined greatness. Both sides have a myth of a lost identity – in the case of Britain it is a pastoral identity, and in the case of Argentina it is a unified and whole identity. Both Argentina and Britain have a myth that regaining the Falklands/Malvinas will help to recover or unbury the lost national identity, resulting in renewed unity and socioeconomic revival. Both nations have developed myths about their own military superiority and heroism, and the righteousness of their respective causes. And lastly, although Argentina and Britain have enjoyed a mostly friendly relationship over the centuries, each managed to produce an enemy myth sufficient to encourage disdain, resentment, and a willingness to fight the other.

Once one looks beyond these broad similarities, the fine points of British myths appear quite different from their Argentinean counterparts, as the following, more detailed analysis shows.

The “Great” Britain myths

These myths state that Britain’s essence or identity is one of greatness because of its heritage. To be true to themselves, Britons must strive to keep Britain “Great” (Barnett 84). Tied to this myth are those of World War Two glories: the true British Spirit as revealed at Dunkirk and during the London Blitz (Barnett 48; Foster, Fighting Fictions
and of course in the person of Winston Churchill (Barnett 55-56; Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 45-46; Monaghan 23, 25). Britain sees itself as a “dictator-slaying warrior” nation (Femenia 39), and claims greatness from its self-designated role as international moral leader, and defender of the Rule of Law (Femenia 122; Monaghan 8).

In his collection of cultural essays *On Living in an Old Country*, Patrick Wright traces the past’s powerful influence over the present-day British imagination back to the nineteenth century, when history was first taught in schools with the aim of creating a national identity and encouraging patriotism (144). British children were taught to take pride in the Empire and the Royal Navy’s prestige and power, as well as institutions that made British domestic life special, like the jury system, representative government, and religious tolerance (Samuel 1:12-13).

In the early twentieth century, the preferred subject matter for schoolchildren consisted of heroic themes. One 1909 Board of Education guide recommends particularly dwelling on “events such as the Crusades, the Civil War, the reign of Elizabeth, the great wars for Colonial supremacy” (qtd. in Samuel 1: 13). Later on, Britain’s roles in the two World Wars would join the annals of what has made Britain “great.”

In modern times, the idea of “the national past” is comprised of stories, images, values, and sentiments drawn from and reiterated by the media, tourism culture, and political rhetoric (Wright 145). The generalized worldviews that result from such formation continue to influence how Britons interpret current events. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for example, interpreted the Falklands crisis through Churchillian rhetoric, thus justifying military retaliation (Wright 145). Echoing Churchill’s warnings that appeasement of aggressive dictators would only stimulate “a more ferocious appetite” (qtd. in Femenia 182), Thatcher proclaimed in the face of the Falklands crisis that “we, of all people, have learnt the lesson of history: that to appease an aggression is to invite aggression elsewhere” (qtd. in Monaghan 16). Her warnings against the dangers of appeasement were echoed by the press (Harris 39, 45).

Thatcher’s identification with Churchill began even before the Falklands crisis. Monaghan writes that she “had sought throughout her career to present herself as his successor” (23). He was an appealing figure to her, not only because of his popularity and heroic stature, but because
of his very Conservative ideology (Monaghan 23). Churchill had advocated the use of force against dictators, since they seemed to not understand the language of negotiation. The accuracy of his assessment was indelibly reinforced to British citizens who endured the London Blitz (Femenia 182). Since dictators cannot be trusted or negotiated with, they must simply be destroyed, and the British see this task as their calling and “historical duty.” This imaginary role as destroyer of dictators is “a source of pride for all Britons” (Femenia 182). In addition to the events of the Second World War, other confrontations with autocratic regimes have figured in creating this national self-image. For example, Britons take pride in their forebears’ opposition to Germany’s Kaiser during World War One, their defeat of Napoleon in 1815, and their destruction of Philip II’s Spanish Armada in 1588. It could be argued that this myth goes as far back as medieval times, since England’s patron saint, George, is legendary for having slain a terrible dragon that was holding an entire city captive. This ancient romance-quest story lays the framework or pattern for more recent national exploits to be remembered in terms of crusades against evil and heroic rescues.

Another aspect of Britain’s identity that political rhetoric often invokes in times of trouble is the so-called “Dunkirk spirit” (Barnett 48; Samuel 1: xxxiii). This phrase gives a historical name and legitimation to the idea that the British will pull together even in the face of overwhelming difficulties. The name comes from the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940, when British, French, and Belgian forces were surrounded by the rapidly advancing German army in a small area on the northern coast of France. British boats, including many civilian and privately owned vessels, crossed the English Channel from Dover to evacuate approximately 340,000 troops from Dunkirk and the surrounding beaches, facing fire from enemy aircraft, Uboats, and mines. The heroic rescue allowed the Allied troops to fight another day, and boosted British morale in spite of their staggering defeat at the hands of the Germans. The Dunkirk Spirit of unity and pulling together to support the troops was invoked during the Falklands crisis: the government and the media called for public and parliamentary support for the war effort, to show that the British still stuck together in hard times, to reinforce their national identity, to regain their national pride. These comparisons with World War Two, both explicit and implicit, not only make the Falklands War seem more important in the grand scheme of things, but
also imply that both wars were fought to defend the same principles of freedom and democracy (Monaghan 24).

After World War Two, the United Kingdom’s economic and military strength declined. However, according to Femenia, the nation’s leaders compensated for this loss by setting up “a moral national role script” or myth (122). Because of its historical role as a defender of freedom and its “apparently voluntary” gestures in granting independence to former colonies, Britain claimed moral leadership in the international community (Femenia 122). Perhaps alluding to these deeds, Thatcher proclaimed in the Falklands Debate of 14 April: “We have a long and proud history of recognizing the right of others to determine their own destiny. Indeed, in that respect we have an experience unrivalled by any other nation in the world” (Thatcher 164). Samuel writes that up until about the 1960s, “Britain was thought of as setting an example to other countries” in terms of its domestic safety, political stability, and its adherence to and defense of the rule of law (1: xxvii, original emphasis).

However, in the face of increasing domestic problems and decreasing world influence over the ‘60s and ‘70s, this myth could not sustain the illusion that Britain was still “great.” Particularly demoralizing were the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the contemplated downsizing of the Royal Navy due to economic pressures in the early 1980s. In spite of this loss of power, the British continued to interweave national interests with those of the rest of the world: maintaining Britain’s reputation as defensor of international law was seen as inextricably linked with maintaining “global deterrence objectives,” i.e., world security (Femenia 170). Thatcher praises the European Community for their support of Britain with economic sanctions against Argentina after the invasion, explaining their action as a recognition that “if aggression were allowed to succeed in the Falkland Islands, it would be encouraged the world over” (Thatcher 162). Barnett suggests that the government may have feared for other colonies or disputed territories that would directly affect Britain (as opposed to more altruistic concerns for threatened territories the world over), including Belize, British Guyana, and even Northern Ireland (32, 36). In a later debate, Thatcher insists again that “Britain has a responsibility towards the islanders to restore their democratic way of life. She has a duty to the whole world to show that aggression will not succeed, and to uphold the cause
of freedom” (Thatcher 187). In these quotes she connects Britain’s ability to defend the Falklands with the peace and security of the rest of the world, thus reinforcing the myth of Britain’s continued importance as world moral leader and peacekeeper.

Anthony Barnett criticizes this persistent myth of British greatness, and traces it back to an ideology born during World War Two, which he calls “Churchillism.” He writes that “Thatcherism” is a newer, “more extreme” variant of this ideology. Though it helped pull Britain through the hard times of World War Two, Churchillism produced myths that have ultimately been harmful to the nation:

if the crippling aspect of Churchillism were to be summed up in one sentence, it is that British politicians have been unable to articulate a programme of reform for the UK as a minor industrial power except in terms that seek to reassert Britain’s world greatness. The roots of this overambition, one that has led government after government to underachievement, lies in the wartime conflation, when the country was saved in the name of the Empire. (83, original emphasis)

Barnett contends that Britain’s fall from world power was inevitable, and caused by global changes that demanded decolonization. However, Britain’s decline has gone much further than necessary in terms of productivity and standard of living, because of a stubborn refusal to accept reality and modernize Britain’s institutions to better deal with its status as a second-rank country. For Churchillist or Thatcherite politicians, he laments, “to say that one wants the UK to be a northern European country like the others, is virtually treason. Britishness, the national essence, demands much more, in their view” (84, original emphasis).

Thatcher began her term in office promising to restore the lost “greatness” which she felt was Britain’s true national essence. Wright asserts that Thatcher’s definition of what had made the country great was based on Britain’s old imperial identity (2-3). To restore this identity to its former grandeur, her government sought to “revive the spirit of the Second World War,” and actually re-declared World War Two through its rhetoric, casting “socialism” as the enemy (45-46). So even before the Falklands crisis erupted, Thatcher sought to draw support for her policies from the public’s patriotic memories. In addition to declaring an economic war against socialism, Thatcher attempted to associate
her government with respect for and preservation of Britain’s history and tradition, with the passage of the The National Heritage Act in 1980 (Wright 42). The Act established a conservation fund to acquire and protect properties deemed to be of historical interest, providing a means for nobles to give or sell their old houses to the State instead of paying capital transfer tax and estate duties, and also to allow the public to visit “national heritage” sites. This act was met with much approval and fanfare, and so Conservatives continued to work in a similar vein. Indeed, Conservatives have associated their policies with the preservation of the national heritage from the early 1900s until the present (Wright 53). Although preservationism is not always a strictly class-determined issue, Wright suggests that Conservative apologists see preserving the monuments of the past as a way to symbolically preserve the old hierarchies and traditions that went along with them (52-53). This preservationist impulse underlies the pastoral idyll myth of the Falklands, as will be shown shortly.

These identity myths of Britain’s world importance, its imperial heritage, its national duty to defend freedom and the rule of law, its inner strength and resolve in difficult times, and its commitment to tradition and the preservation of history, all played a role in the Falklands crisis. The war was seen as a way to reassert Britain’s greatness, to strike down tyranny, to awaken the Dunkirk Spirit of unity, and to preserve the traditional pastoral British way of life. One can see that British identity myths, like Argentina’s, have nostalgic undertones. Wright is not the only author to accuse Thatcher of playing on popular nostalgia for a lost British identity in order to gain support for the Falklands War as well as for her economic policies (Monaghan 6; Barnett 80-81, 85-86). She, like many Argentine populists, hoped to renew her nation by returning to an idealized past. These myths are interwoven with and related to the other Falklands myths, as will be evident in further discussion. The absence of greatness in Britain, for example, has led to the development of scapegoat myths to explain away problems.

The Scapegoat Myth

Britain’s scapegoat myth, like Argentina’s, is nationalist in origin, and blames various internal Others for contributing to Britain’s decline (Skey 15). They further posit that Britain’s identity (“the real England”) is in danger “of becoming lost, submerged, or forgotten,” due to the workings of its enemies, both internal and external (Monaghan 3).
British society has long been suspicious of difference, as historian Raphael Samuel notes in his introduction to a collection of essays on British identity. He catalogues some of the internal “enemies” that were perceived as threatening the national identity, beginning with Catholics. These were some of the earliest scapegoats, and continued to be for several centuries after the 1534 English Reformation (II: xviii). In the twentieth century, feared and maligned groups included the Chinese, other foreign immigrants, Jews, and communists (Samuel II: xv-xx). Skey lists some of the internal scapegoats that various post-war governments have blamed for Britain’s failure to live up to its past, including immigrants, trade unions, rebellious youth, and single mothers (15). Samuel notes that the number of perceived threats increased significantly after the 1960s, and hypothesizes that Britain’s increasingly international and multicultural population has caused the idea of “the British nation” to be called into question, resulting in a renewed popular concern about the nature and future of British identity (II:xiv; xxxiv). He describes Thatcher’s government as particularly fond of portraying British society as embattled by “a whole succession of folk devils” such as “strike pickets and social security scroungers (‘bacteria of the body politic,’ as she described them in 1978), drug addicts and vandals, ‘muggers’ and ‘yobs.’” (I: xxxiv). He notes that Thatcher accepts “British characteristics” and “British instincts” as though they were natural and eternal attributes of a united collective identity, and that she posits this mythologized “Britishness” as “under threat” from the various scapegoats mentioned earlier (I: xxxiv).

Wright also lists immigration and striking labor unions as some of Thatcher’s scapegoats for national problems, but he insists that her main target is socialism, against which her government “declared war.” (Wright 179-80). A look through her book of collected speeches confirms this – she hardly lets a speech go by without condemning one or more failings of socialism. She calls the overgrown socialist government “the great mistake” that has triggered increasing British disillusionment and hopelessness (Thatcher 7-8), and in a later speech declared, “I will go on criticizing socialism and opposing socialism because it is bad for Britain. Britain and socialism are not the same thing, and as long as I have health and strength they never will be” (30). She blames socialism for Britain’s economic woes (31; 47), for eating away at “traditional values”
(54), for increasing crime and violence (38), and for a willingness to leave Britain defenseless against Soviet expansionism (43).

The fear of communist aggression would have been a major concern in influencing Thatcher’s and other Government officials’ decisions to send the Task Force. When Thatcher talked of appeasement as inviting further aggression, she was most likely implying the possibility that the Russians might exploit a perceived weakness on the part of Britain and NATO. Most of the scapegoats listed in this section were quickly forgotten when the Falklands crisis erupted, as British xenophobia and aggression were redirected against the Argentineans. The main scapegoat to remain in the public eye, however, was the threat of communist expansion, and it served well as part of the justification for going to war. It has been said that the socialism scapegoat was connected with the Falklands War and that Thatcher linked the quest for the Falklands with her domestic quest to vanquish socialism (Monaghan 8; Wright 186). This connection emerged clearly in Thatcher’s Cheltenham speech after the war was over, when she and the nation could once again turn its attention to internal as opposed to external enemies. In this speech, she suggests that Britons should imitate the wartime dedication and efficiency of the Armed Forces and its supporting industries in order to improve Britain’s entire economy (ctd. in Barnett 151).

The Pastoral Idyll/British Identity Myth

Some aspects of British identity were formed and remain embodied in hallowed images of pastoral life in a faraway time: the country cottage, the sheep on verdant hillsides, the neatly tended garden (Samuel I: lviii; III: xii). Geographer-historian David Lowenthal writes that the mere mention of the words English landscape conjures up ideas not just of a specific sort of scenery, but also of “quintessential national virtues” (213). He also writes that it is specifically the English countryside that is so mythologized, because of “centrist bias” against the UK’s other constituents (209, 213). The “true” pastoral life is lost in Britain: the landscape is still there, but it is “museumised” and treated more like a relic than a workplace or source of livelihood (Lowenthal 217). According to the Falklands pastoral idyll myth, however, vital country life as it used to be remains in the Falklands, and can therefore be recovered and preserved by redeeming the islands from Argentine “tyranny” (Skey 11; Foster, Fighting
British identity myths, like their Argentine counterparts, contain implicit elitist and racist elements. These have been pointed out by such authors as Monaghan (26-27), Wright (83, 125-26), Lowenthal (219), and Potts (166).

The British upper and upper-middle classes in particular have long been fond of their country’s natural beauties. The countryside has been owned in large tracts by wealthy families, and toward the end of the nineteenth century, preserving its more or less pristine state in the face of industrialization and the rise of the lower and middle classes became one of their major concerns. According to Lowenthal, the landed gentry have portrayed themselves as the only qualified stewards who can properly care for and preserve the English landscape as “heritage” (219-20). He cites The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty, established in 1895, as enabling the rich to keep living in the houses they can no longer afford to maintain, ostensibly in order to preserve “heritage” for the other classes to partake of through tourism (220). Wright also writes that the National Trust helped to solidify the relationship between landscape and history by presenting stately homes, together with their grounds, to the lower classes as the embodiment of the nation’s identity (55).

Aside from wealthy families and the heritage industry, other forces have influenced the formation of England’s rural identity myth, including education programs and the efforts of individual artists, critics, writers, and musicians. In his *Patriotism* essay “Village School or Blackboard Jungle?” Ken Worpole writes that the concept of the “real England” as rural and pastoral was inculcated in state education from the 1870s through the mid-1960s (139). Ruralist hymns like “All things bright and beautiful,” “There sheep may safely graze,” and “We plough the fields and scatter,” taught children to “associate spirituality with rural life” (Worpole 126-27). In addition, English was taught by copying country proverbs, because it was believed that passing on rural values would counteract the perceived immoral influences of the city and “the street” (127-28). At the dawning of World War Two, and for nearly thirty years thereafter, many schools adopted to an educational philosophy developed by F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson in *Culture and Environment* (1932), the journal *Scrutiny*, and a spin-off journal called *English in Schools* (129-31). This educational program is fraught with anti-urbanism and instead advocates
the values of “organic community” based on nineteenth-century village life (Worpole 130-31).

Art historian Alex Potts cites the efforts of art critic Herbert Read (1893-1968) to prove that there has been a coherent English tradition of landscape painting as contributing to the myth (178-79). John Constable’s (1776-1837) rural scenes played an important role in this tradition, as did Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), the Pre-Raphaelites (1848-late1800s), and more recently, modernist landscape painter Paul Nash (1889-1946) (Potts 178-179). The casting of pastoral and natural images as national heritage also got a boost from the rather unlikely source of the Shell Oil Company, whose highly successful advertising campaigns have focused on nature and natural preservation since before the first World War (Wright 60). Shell commissioned artists to paint landscape advertisements on the sides of their trucks in the ‘20s and ‘30s, and poets to write County Guides in the mid-1930s. These guides encouraged people to visit the countryside and appreciate the natural and historic sights that awaited them there. Potts also mentions the Shell guides as influencing the public’s conception of the English countryside (177; 179).

It is notable that the interest in national landscape and art demonstrated by Read and Nash, as well as Shell’s County Guides, flowered after World War One. Wright explains that the upheavals of the Great War brought a sense of loss and disorientation, inducing widespread nostalgia for the halcyon pastoral life of Britain’s past (104). He suggests that this nostalgia is what prompted many independent visual artists, composers, and writers to take up the theme of “the return to ‘England,.’” which was “one of the fundamental tendencies within the established public culture of the interwar years” (104). Potts also attributes the now-cliché image of the English countryside as checkerboard fields dotted with hedge sand quaint buildings to the interwar years. He cites H. V. Morton’s book In Search of England (1927) as the beginning of a wave of countryside books featuring illustrations and photographs that favored this image, even though it was not representative of much of the actual English landscape or even of the landscape’s past depictions (Potts 166). Some of the writers who described and praised the English countryside were John Buchan, Henry Williamson, Dornford Yates, T. H. White, G. K. Chesterton, and A. E. Housman (Wright 105).
Historian Alun Howkins writes that music scholars and composers took part in identity building foment by trying to create an English presence in the world of elite music (90). In the early 1900s, Folk song collector Cecil Sharp (1829-1954), composer Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872-1958), and others sought to create a uniquely “English” music by turning to folk songs and the elite music from before Charles I for inspiration (91). Vaughan-Williams’s famous “Fantasia on Greensleeves,” (1934), which combines nostalgic and rural elements, soon achieved the status of “an alternative national anthem” that “represent[ed] England and Englishness” (Howkins 94). Other composers of the period who wrote music inspired in the English countryside and the past include Frederick Delius (1862-1934), Edward Elgar (1857-1934), and Percy Grainger (1882-1961) (Wright 105).

During World War Two, many people from the cities took refuge from the bombing in the country. Wright indicates that books such as Harry Batsford’s *How to See the Country* (1940), and Edmund Vale’s *How to Look at Old Buildings* (1940) were published to help displaced city folk learn to appreciate their new surroundings. Books like these also played a role in the entrenchment of the pastoral idyll myth of British identity. As Batsford writes in the introduction to *How to See the Country*, “No-one is a true Englishman, or has lived a fully balanced life, if the country has played no part in his development” (qtd. in Wright 64). Worpole writes that popular British literature written during the war frequently uses rural scenes to evoke the nation and way of life that the British were trying to defend (138). Wartime propaganda films also, such as *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), connect England’s countryside with national values worthy of being defended and preserved (Worpole 138). Kevin Foster notes that this sort of pastoral propaganda appeared not just in films, but also in posters and photography, during both World Wars (*Fighting Fictions* 28).

As has been briefly mentioned, the myth of English rural identity is exclusionary, not just of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, but also of the large numbers of minority immigrants from Africa, India, the Middle East, and elsewhere who now live in the United Kingdom. Although as Samuel has noted, racism has plagued British society throughout the centuries, Alex Potts writes that landscape heritage acquired a particularly strong racial dimension in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century nationalism (166).
At this time, Englishness was seen as “an essence residing in a race which was to be found in its purest form in the country, preserved by an honest and traditional way of life” (Potts 166). Wright notes that many authors who have mused upon the “essential meaning of ‘England’” share an “in-group” quality that speaks to those who already understand; who are, as Wright says, “true members of the ancestral nation” (83). He compares their evocation of “Deep England” with the “essential” France described by Sartre as excluding Jews in his study of post-World War One anti-Semitism. Says Wright, “demonisation or exclusion can indeed be as intrinsic to Deep England as it was to Sartre’s France” (83). Monaghan has noted that Thatcher’s attempt to equate the Falkland Islands with the “authentic Britain” is also implicitly exclusionary of Britain’s minority citizens, especially when viewed in combination with her descriptions of the islanders as “British in stock and tradition” and an “island race” (Monaghan 25-26).

Britain’s attachment to rural scenes and values helps to explain why images of the Falklands shown by the media during the crisis had a powerful emotional effect on British audiences. Barnett opines that country nostalgia was a definite factor in garnering support for the Task Force from such a wide range of political sectors (102). Kevin Foster explains that since British journalists were expelled immediately after the invasion, most media images of the Falklands seen by the public at first were from file footage showing a landscape similar to the Scottish Highlands or North Yorkshire (Fighting Fictions 28). These established a sense of identification with the Falklands that quickly turned to rage once images from the Argentine occupation came through and the contrasts were so shocking. Pictures of hard hats and machine guns amid the rose bushes, picket fences broken up for firewood, ransacked cottages ankle-deep in excrement . . . indicated that the Argentine invasion constituted an assault on the symbolic heart of the country, the desecration of its most cherished icons of nationhood . . . (Fighting Fictions 29)

Skey makes a similar observation about media images playing upon contrast between the sight of the invading army and “images of a man walking a sheep and children playing in the street” in an April 4 ITN broadcast (11). These contrasts aroused public indignation against the Argentineans and bolstered support for a forceful response.
Adding to the myth, but also pointing to one of its flaws, Falkland Islands Governor Rex Hunt was quoted in the *Daily Mirror* soon after the invasion as saying that the islanders “have a quality of life which was lost in Britain 60 years ago” (qtd. in Skey 11). Skey indicates that the “quality of life” to which Hunt refers is really that of a “mythical Britain” located somewhere in the distant past, which consisted of more than just idyllic pastoral settings and “social unity”: the old rural lifestyle in Britain was also characterized by a rigid class structure (11). Of course social stratification, lack of representative government, economic dependence upon absentee landlords, dwindling population, alcoholism, and other social ills which were the reality in the Falklands are carefully ignored by the media in favor of the more positive and superficial images of country living that would appeal to viewers’ nostalgia for simpler times and Britain’s mythical past. For Monaghan, this pastoral myth served to justify not only the war to defend and reclaim British identity, but also the economic war that Thatcher had declared against the welfare state. Thatcher asserts that the Falkland Islands are unarguably British -- so British, in fact, that they embody the very essence of what Britain was when it was great: “a rural paradise . . . a model for the Britain Thatcher is seeking to liberate from the choking grip of socialist corporatism” (Monaghan xiv).

If the British think of their heritage as a combination of landscape and history, then Wright says, they also think of “the past” as some *thing* which simply *exists*. This conception implies that one can recover the past via “talismanic” objects or relics, or that the past is in a certain location and can be visited (Wright 74). This idea prompts a good deal of tourism – attempts to visit the past in the present, bring the two together, and thus experience the national heritage (Wright 75). The sites of national heritage are “like amulets to believers” in that they provide the means to escape momentarily from the humdrum of everyday existence and into the green world of the imagined past (76). This amulet-like status was assigned to the Falkland Islands during the crisis: there the pastoral lifestyle and essence of “Deep England” were said to be preserved. Thus the effort to recapture the islands could be seen as a quest to “visit” and recapture Britain’s past and its ancient identity.

**The Falklands national renewal myth**
Britain’s national renewal myth states that by freeing the Falklands from the Argentinean invader, Britain will unite in a common cause, regain lost honor, strengthen its resolve to overcome current domestic woes, and re-establish itself as a world leader and moral force (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 93; Monaghan 8). There are elements here of heroic myth, the romance quest, of proving oneself in battle and being made “a man” (Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 83).

By the early 1980s, the situation in the UK was grim. Unemployment, racial tensions, crime, the weakening of the social fabric, and the loss of international prestige were major concerns for politicians and media commentators (Femenia 123). Thatcher says in some of her speeches that the public is disappointed with the failings of socialism (33; 45; 55). Even Wright, a socialist himself, admits that the public was disillusioned with Labour Party socialism, its bureaucratic inefficiencies, and its lack of recent positive achievements (153, 184). He also notes that the British public found it difficult to conceive of a positive future for itself, which is why Thatcher presented the “future” to be attained by her projects in terms of the past (185). This climate of malaise verging on despair made the Falklands crisis an almost welcome opportunity to redeem Britain of its recent history (Dillon 125). Femenia writes that the decades-old longing for economic revival and the desire to reclaim the islands “drew upon similar political sentiments,” and the two ideas soon “became profoundly connected” (124-25). Indeed, both economic and military decline were sore spots in the British self-image. According to Wright, the Falklands War enabled Thatcher to use the national past and identity to justify her monetarist economic policies (186). Monaghan also notices the connection, saying that Thatcher presented her economic plan and the recovery of the Falklands as two integral parts of the same mythic quest to restore Britannia’s forgotten pride and world status (8).

In many ways, the U. K.’s effort to reassert itself in the 1980s was a mythic return to past glories – especially to shining moments of strength and resolve under Churchill in World War Two, but also to days of imperial might, and even to the chivalric romance of the medieval crusades. This wallowing in the past invokes what Wright refers to as “mythical history,” which flows backward instead of forward (176). Instead of seeing history as progressing toward a goal, mythical history:
establishes a national essence which is then postulated as an immutable if not always ancient past. In this chronically and sometimes violently mournful perspective the essential stuff of history remains identical through time – even though it is unfortunately all concentrated at an earlier point in the passage of time. Hence the passage of years becomes entropic, opening up an ever widening gulf between ‘us’ in the present and what remains ‘our’ rightful and necessary identity in an increasingly distant past. . . . Only an act of heroism will reverse this trend, checking the relentless passage of time and restoring to ‘us’ something that ‘we’ in our decadence may only just still be able to recognise as ‘ours.’ (176-77)

Because things simply are not like they used to be, the present is devalued, seen as un-historical – that is, unimportant, drab and pedestrian – and the result is a feeling of having been cheated. This feeling fuels the desire for that “act of heroism” which will restore the “lost inheritance” and in some way validate the mythical stance which values the past over the present and the future (Wright 178-79).  

This brings us to the heroic quest myth as it applies to the Falklands War. Just as historians “emplot” the historical events they recount into one of several familiar literary forms (White, Tropics of Discourse 58-59), ruling elites can emplot a current crisis in a similar way, in order to help make sense of what is happening and create expectations of what should happen next. As many scholars have noted, the Thatcher government, with help from Parliament and the media, emplotted the Falklands crisis as a romance quest. Northrop Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism describes the romance plot structure as “the successful quest,” having three main parts: “the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both must die; and the exaltation of the hero” (187). This emplotment is dear to the British soul, having been used repeatedly in the past in “diverse fables of nationalism” (Wright 179). Monaghan also sees the official “Thatcherite” myth of the Falklands as a romance quest narrative, and he describes the oft-repeated tale in these terms:

England, having been aroused from a deep slumber in response to the needs of a helpless victim deprived of liberty and democracy by an act of
villainy, once again dons the mantle of greatness and regains its destined position of moral preeminence amongst the nations of the world. (8)

A similar scenario is invoked in *The Times*, which proclaimed that the Falklands crisis had reawakened the British people and their will to defend themselves (May 14, ctd. in Barnett 63-64). This plot structure can be seen underlying not only the official interpretation of the Falklands War, but also Thatcher’s presentation of her ideas on economic reform.

The structure contains a few necessary elements: the first is an “essential identity” which is under “threat of violation” (Wright 179). The second element is the threat itself; and the third is “the forces of good,” which fight and vanquish the threat, and thus restore “the essential order of things” (Wright 180). This structure essentially mirrors Frye’s definition of Romance, as well as that used by Hayden White in *Metahistory*. In the case of the Falklands War, the threatened identity is embodied not only in the islands themselves but in the islanders, their lifestyle, language, and even their houses and gardens. The threat is of course posed by the Argentine army and the dictatorship that sent it. The “forces of good” are the British Task Force, who are presented as a model for Britain to emulate in regaining its true identity and former glory. This narrative structure can also be applied to Thatcher’s economic regeneration myth, with the threat being socialism rather than the Argentines; the forces of good in this configuration would have to be Thatcher herself, and any who chose to support her policies. The quest in this romance narrative seeks not just to free the Falklands from Argentine tyranny, but also to prove Britain’s valor and revive its confidence in itself. This done, the nation will be morally strengthened and enabled in its second quest, to defeat the domestic enemy of socialism and renew its economic vigor. Some proponents of the war even go so far as to invoke crusade imagery and language that implies divine approval for the British cause, as do their Argentinean counterparts: MP Peter Viggers calls the war “a crusade for freedom” (Morgan 331), and Richard Crashaw urges determination in following through with “what we believe to be a righteous cause” (Morgan 339). The medieval crusades are a model example of historical events framed as a romance-quest narrative: the heroic crusaders face great danger to liberate the holy ground from the infidel, and thus gain exaltation.
Not only will Britain prove itself and grow in stature as a nation by completing the quest, but the individuals who serve in its armed forces will as well. Individuals who embark on the Falklands quest, and especially those who die in battle, are mythologized as heroes and martyrs. Those who return, return as “men,” as opposed to boys. Those who die are said to have “given their lives,” as though they had presented this sacrifice willingly for the good of the nation. Monaghan points out how MPs and the press alike invoke this heroic myth in order to justify continuing the armed struggle after the first casualties have occurred. They subscribe to the “chivalric convention that completion of an armed struggle is a sacred trust owed to the memories of those who have been killed in battle” (19). This chivalric rhetoric is very effective in making war seem dignified and honorable (Monaghan 19). It also arouses nostalgic feelings associated with Britannia’s past glories, since so many of her exploits have been framed in this same plot structure.

Military Myths

British military myths enshrine the the Royal Navy as the emblem of Britain’s power and world status (Aulich 4; Femenia 188). Thatcher expands this reverence to include the entire British armed forces, and presents their hierarchy, efficiency and professionalism as a model for British society to follow in order to regain former greatness and prosperity (Barnett 63; Monaghan 31). Since the British military is separate from the government, it has its own myths about itself and its role. These include myths of regimental brotherhood, the “Queen’s shilling” approach to battle assignments, a chivalric myth of combat, and regimental superiority.

The myth of the Navy’s preeminence dates back to Elizabethan times when the Royal Navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588. This is still a “magic date” for Britons, as Samuel remarks (I: xxxii) Britain’s naval power soon helped make it into a world power. Another source of great pride was Admiral Nelson’s defeat of Napoleon’s fleet at Trafalgar in 1805. The Royal Navy had not only saved Britain from invasion, but it had also proven to the world that Britain still “ruled the waves.” The Navy continued to control the seas through both World Wars, though not without suffering setbacks and numerous casualties. Navy land forces (Marines) served in World War One at Gallipoli (1915) and Zeebrugge (1918). During World War Two, the Marine Commandos were formed as an elite unit and played a major role in the D-Day invasion of Normandy.
(1944). The Royal Marines and Marine Commandos also figured prominently in the Falklands land war, and they got the lion’s share of media attention and credit for the victory (much to the irritation of men in Army units).

The archetypal British sailor is known as “Jack Tar,” and represents not just the Royal Navy, but also the nation itself. He was invented in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, and is pictured as a jolly, likeable, working-class everyman (Samuel III: xxiv). Samuel writes that Britain’s eighteenth-century naval wars were probably what raised Jack Tar’s status into “a talisman of national strength and the ‘freeborn Englishman’ incarnate” (III: xxiv). He thus served a propagandistic function “as a form of symbolic reassurance” and a “means of projecting ideal strength” (Samuel xxiii-xxiv). World War One saw the creation of “the tin-helmeted Tommy,” who took Jack Tar’s place “as representative of the nation at arms” (III: xxiv). He was a grumbling anti-hero whose main attribute was his dogged determination to survive (Samuel III: xxiv). Britons both in and out of the military still refer to soldiers as “toms.”

Since World War Two, army toms have gained a bit more status – this may be in part due to the creation in 1941 of the elite Parachute Regiment. They fought ferociously in North Africa; this combined with their signature red berets earned them the nickname “Rote Teufeln” (Red Devils) from the Germans they confronted. They also fought in the Normandy invasion, Arnhem (1944 – a disastrous battle: only one in seven survived), and Rhine Crossing (1945). The Paras fought two of the bloodiest battles of the Falklands campaign: Goose Green and Mount Longdon. The history of a regiment’s battles and accomplishments is of utmost importance in British military myths. Recruits learn the illustrious history of their regiment and are expected to live up to that history. To perform poorly is to stain the honor of the regiment and betray one’s mates, as well as those who served bravely in previous wars (Stewart 86-87).

Living up to the standards of one’s unit includes taking care of each other. The regimental brotherhood myth says that the regiment is a family, and it faithfully looks after its own. US Military sociologist Nora Kinzer Stewart, who headed a study of Argentinean and British units involved in the Falklands/Malvinas War, writes that the British regiment forms “a complete social system” that “meets [soldiers’] psychological, honorific, intellectual, and social needs” (34). In return, the regiment expects complete
loyalty from its members. British fighting units remain stable over many years, allowing the men time to train together, develop teamwork, and form strong ties of trust and friendship (35). Caring for one’s men in and out of battle is heavily stressed in training, particularly for Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs), for whom it is “the founding code” (Stewart 114). The attachment of soldiers to their unit is so complete, that most men have difficulty naming any friends outside the regiment, and they even marry among each other’s families (35). Often men serve in the same units as their fathers and grandfathers before them, extending the ties of friendship and family back in time for several generations. Stewart quotes one officer whose assessment of his unit is not at all uncommon:

I am fourth-generation member of X regiment. My sergeants major knew my father and my father knew their fathers. Whole villages and nearly a whole generation died in the trenches of World War One. But my regiment and my family have fought as members of X regiment for hundreds of years. We know each other and we marry among ourselves. We are family, not just a group of strangers. But everyone knows his place and there is never any question of a lack of respect. (100)

This family connection adds to the soldier’s sense of belonging; of being part of the unit’s history. One also sees the weight of being expected to live up to the regiment’s history emerging here as part of regimental lore. A British soldier is bound to his unit with mythic ties of family and local history, in addition to those formed by daily association and interdependence. Stewart concludes that the myth of the regimental family is also one of the great strengths of the British regimental system, contributing to strong cohesion and high performance in battle (100).

While loyalty to Queen and Country are important, they seem to be somewhat taken for granted in military training. Loyalty to the cause of a given battle seems to have even less prominence in military men’s thoughts. Having interviewed both British and Argentine officers and soldiers, Stewart found that Argentinean officers were much more emphatic about the importance of loyalty to the nation’s values and belief in the cause for which they fought. In contrast, the “sense of exalted mission” that she had seen in Argentinean officers was missing in their British counterparts (82). Most British
officers and soldiers said that fighting wars was simply part of what they did for a living; it was what they “had signed up to do” (82). When asked about the political justification for their 1982 counterinvasion, British officers explained and expressed support for the reasoning behind Britain’s decision. The enlisted men, however, “were hard-pressed to describe their reasons for joining the Army or Marines or fighting the South Atlantic war” (Stewart 83). Even a leader like Brigadier General Julian Thompson seems content in his memoir to leave the mythologizing about identity, crusades to rescue the islanders, and crushing evil dictators to the politicians. The British have an old proverb about signing up for the service: when someone agrees to “take the Queen’s shilling,” which at one time was a soldier’s pay, he must go wherever the Queen sends him. Since the British military’s role does not include making the political choices that lead to war, this “Queen’s shilling” myth of combat duty is helpful in allowing soldiers to fight without worrying about whether they agree or not with the moral and political implications of the job at hand.

Notwithstanding this matter-of-fact approach to warfare, chivalric myths of combat certainly play a role in the military’s internal mythology. The view of battle as an adventure or a quest through which a young man can prove his manliness is surely one of the myths that lures young men into the armed forces to begin with. By maximizing the value of masculinity and heroism and minimizing the horror of war, this myth helps soldiers view the prospect of a battle with anticipation and high hopes. As the myth might predict, Stewart found that British soldiers were eager to prove themselves in a real battle (82-83). This myth also encourages a macho stoicism once the soldier has gone through combat and has learned that it is not at all like the movies: even after having experienced the awfulness of battle, some of Stewart’s interviewees still considered the Falklands War to be the high point of their careers or even of their lives (86-87). Most considered a second battle to be a particularly tough test of manliness, since the soldier may still be reeling from the first battle, and he now understands what the second will really entail (Stewart 91). Performing well in battle earns soldiers respect from their peers and adds to the status of the regiment.

Somewhat related to the combat heroism myth is the military superiority myth. Stewart writes that each regiment instills its members with a sense of “arrogant pride”
that their unit is the very best – better than other British units and far better than any unit from another country (36). This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that works quite effectively: “If British Marines or Paras or Blue or Green Jackets or Scots Guards think they are the best unit in the whole British Army or in the whole wide world, they will do everything in their power to be the best unit in the whole wide world” (Stewart 37). All British fighting units undergo rigorous training, and this, too, is a source of pride as well as strong cohesion within the unit (Stewart 129). This pride results in extreme competition between regiments and different branches of the service, which, according to former combatant Vincent Bramley, is extremely effective in motivating men to do their utmost to uphold that pride (Two Sides of Hell xi). The unpleasant corollary to the British soldier’s sense of superiority, however, is that soldiers can end up thinking of brother units as contemptible, and even treating them as such. One benign manifestation of this contempt is the tendency to assign derogatory nicknames to soldiers from regiments other than one’s own: Paras, for example, call all non-Paras “craphats” (Excursion to Hell 219), and Royal Air Force personnel refer to Army officers as “pongos” (Lawrence 20). Under the influence of this myth, soldiers who have not seen military action and civilians can end up looking inferior as well, as Bramley and Wright both imply.

Wright criticizes the valorization of soldierly toughness and combat heroism evident in the heroism and military superiority myths, especially when it is endorsed and enshrined by the government through national ceremonies in honor of the nation’s war dead. He argues that this militarist form of war remembrance works a

\textit{transfiguration . . . introducing order, solemnity and meaning where there was chaos, disorder and loss. Acts of commemoration re-present the glory of war, its transmutation of destruction into heroism and, above all, that precious sense of nationhood. In its contempt for society at peace, establishment remembrance tends to accuse the post-war present of mediocre survival, of ending up spineless and bent over a stick. (136, original emphasis)}

In this quote we see echoes of Barnett’s complaint regarding Churchillism – that the myths of Britain’s past glories cast a shadow over the present, making the current reality seem inferior and unacceptable. The equation of military might and valor with national
importance and pride contributed to the sense of loss at the downsizing of the Royal Navy in the early 1980s and to the public’s enthusiastic support of their military in the Falklands War.

Even Monaghan seems to implicitly subscribe to a heroic military myth when he expresses disappointment that following the war, Thatcher abandons the idea of military heroism having fueled Britain’s rebirth in favor of a more mundane appreciation of the armed forces’ “professionalism” and how this might be emulated and applied toward economic revival on the home front. Thus, in his discussion of Thatcher’s speech at the Cheltenham Conservative rally on July 3, 1982, he complains that for Thatcher,

The heroic feats of the task force are . . . reduced to ‘an object lesson’ in what can be achieved when everyone works together for ‘the success of the whole.’ The ‘brilliant leadership’ of the officers is worthy of mention only to the extent that it mirrors similar achievements in ‘our factories at home’ . . . Similarly, the lower ranks are to be praised not because of their success on the field of battle but because the unquestioning obedience required of them by their position in the military hierarchy serves as an example to British workers who must recognize that ‘true solidarity’ involves loyalty to their ‘country’ not to their union. ‘Professionalism’, which was only one of a number of qualities attributed to the armed forces during the Falklands War, now occupies a privileged position in both speech and interview to the almost total exclusion of more heroic values.

(31; internal quotes are from a reprint of Thatcher’s speech in Barnett 150-53)

Though his main point here is Thatcher’s inconsistency (she had previously promoted the military action as a crusade for Britain’s honor and status and now her emphasis is economic), his word choice reveals a certain amount of indignation that the accomplishments of the military should be so “reduced” in stature as to be applied to domestic situations. Of course this does not diminish his argument that Thatcher’s comparisons are faulty. As he indicates, one cannot expect entrepreneurs to run their factories like military units, and there is little similarity between the professionalism of a commando and that required of a businessman. Likewise, workers who had “put the war
effort ahead of their personal interests” could not be expected to “be similarly self-sacrificing when asked to help fatten their employers’ peacetime profits” (Monaghan 32). This is, however, what Thatcher seems to be asking for in her speech, where she presents the military’s dedication, hierarchy, and self-sacrificing hard work as a model for British society to emulate in order to achieve an economic revival.

**Enemy myths**

According to Britain’s enemy myths, Argentina is a Fascist dictatorship, defiant of the international community and the rule of law, and guilty of “unprovoked aggression” (Femenia 135, 142). The regime is characterized as brutal yet tawdry: a “tin-pot Fascist junta” or “a squalid military dictatorship” (Morgan 1, 255). The Argentinean people are passionate ignorant masses, whipped into a frenzy by empty slogans and military posturing.

Femenia suggests that throughout much of their centuries-long economic relationship, British officials treated Argentina as a sort of compliant child, too immature to manage on its own, and too naïve to suspect that Britain might be taking advantage of its weakness. After April 2, however, the child image was suddenly replaced by that of a menacing enemy, as is evidenced in Parliamentary debates (Femenia 145). I would suggest that the image change was not so much a reversal as a selection of what points to accentuate. Just as Argentina’s images of Britain included both positive and negative aspects prior to the war, so Britain held both positive and negative images about the nature of Argentina simultaneously, and when the tensions over the Falklands erupted into war, the positive images were suppressed while the negative ones were emphasized. Like the Filipinos (and, by implication, other colonized races) described in Rudyard Kipling’s poem “White Man’s Burden” (1899), the Argentines are viewed through a dual lens as “half devil and half child” (line 8), to be controlled, tutored, and thus improved by the superior nations.  

Accordingly, British literature, cartoons, and media coverage during and after the crisis tend to portray Argentineans and their government as simultaneously dangerous and petty, evil and ignorant, duplicitous and incompetent.

Among the general populace in the United Kingdom, people remained largely ignorant about Argentina, its politics, and its relationship with Britain. Most were not even aware of the dispute over the Falklands, or even of the islands’ location (Monaghan
14). Argentina and the Falklands issue were not as much of a presence in the lives of most Britons as Britain and the Malvinas were in the lives of Argentineans. However, British officials were aware of both the Falklands dispute and the Argentine military government’s human rights abuses. These were not emphasized, however, because Argentina remained a valuable trading partner and a bulwark against communism, which at the time was considered a major threat to world peace. Argentina’s government and its reputation were, however, factors in the islanders’ reluctance to accept any possible transfer of sovereignty to Argentina (Beck 43).

Following the invasion of the Falklands, British officials placed renewed stress on the facts of Argentina’s dictatorial regime, its human rights abuses, and its defiance of international law, as can be seen in the Parliamentary debates regarding the crisis. These images had great emotional resonance and were major influences in justifying and gaining popular support for military intervention. The idea of leaving the islanders under dictatorial rule was repugnant on a visceral level. That dictators cannot be trusted, negotiated with, or appeased was an accepted truth borne out by national experience, and the prospect that Britain might once again don the mantle of the dictator-slaying warrior was appealing to many. Thatcher, attempting to deflect calls for continued negotiation rather than military force, called attention to Argentina’s refusals to three previous British offers to seek an International Court of Justice ruling on the issue of the Falklands dependencies. She also pointed out that in 1977, Argentina had agreed to International Court arbitration on the Beagle Channel dispute with Chile, but had refused to comply with the Court’s decision when it did not favor Argentina (Thatcher 174). Her point was that Argentina’s government did not wish to negotiate, and even if it did, it could not be trusted to abide by its agreements. Indeed, she said that the negotiations over the current crisis had thus far gone nowhere, because Argentina had brought to them nothing but “obduracy and delay, deception and bad faith” (Thatcher 178). She concluded that “the Argentines do not want a negotiated settlement. They want sovereignty of the islands and they are using protracted negotiations to procure that objective. I do not believe that they are genuine in their negotiations” (Thatcher 186). According to Thatcher, the best way to negotiate with such an adversary was with threats of military force, and if necessary, actual use of force.
Enemy images of Argentina include negative ideas about Argentinean people themselves in addition to their leaders. The shouting crowds of people gathered in the Plaza de Mayo were interpreted in Britain as frenzied, ignorant masses, brainwashed by fascist demagogy. Argentinean journalists, interviewing Galtieri after the war, recalled the mass demonstration at the Plaza that was organized for the benefit of visiting U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig during one of his mediation attempts. They reminded Galtieri that photos of the scene, complete with Galtieri standing on the balcony of the Casa Rosada, had been interpreted in world newspapers as an indication that fascism was alive and well in Argentina. They also said that Haig’s own personal distaste had been evident at the occasion (Montenegro and Aliverti 43). The image of the Plaza crowds is mentioned by Thatcher in one of her speeches, in which she comments, “We may not express our views in the same way as the masses gathered in Buenos Aires, but we feel them every bit as strongly – indeed, even more profoundly, because Britons are involved” (159). Her disdain for such disorderly expressions of emotion are understated, but there. According to her interpretation, the British have greater depth of feeling on the Falklands issue than the Argentines do, and yet more self control.

The Just Cause Myth

Like Argentina’s parallel myth, Britain’s just cause myth is made up of other myths already listed, particularly a substantial dose of enemy myths. This myth justifies counterinvasion by positing the islanders as damsels-in-distress, threatened by a cruel and bloodthirsty dictatorship that would deprive them of their freedom, their rights, their customs, and their British identity. The myth calls for their rescue, by appealing to Britain’s duty to protect its people and territory, and its traditional role as slayer of dictators. An important part of this myth posits a need to prove the nation’s military prowess to itself and to other potential aggressors, particularly the Soviet Union. If Britain had allowed Argentina to invade the islands with impunity, this would have showed weakness and, it was thought, invited aggression from other sectors. By responding forcefully, Britain would fulfill its duty to its colony as well as its perceived role as a deterrent of potential international aggressors.
Conclusions

This summary of the Falklands/Malvinas myths from both sides of the Atlantic demonstrates a remarkable parallel in thinking on the parts of both governments. Though each side’s myths are not exactly the same, and though they are borne of very different national experiences, they bear significant similarities to each other. Both countries have a myth of national greatness: for Argentineans, that greatness lies in the future, while Britain’s glories are largely in the past. Both nations have scapegoat myths, in which their identity and/or greatness is threatened by enemies external and internal. Interestingly enough, both British and Argentinean governments declared war against their favorite scapegoats of socialism and communism, respectively. Wright suggests that Thatcher effectively re-declared World War Two against socialism in hopes of rallying patriotic nostalgia in favor of her economic reforms (45-46). Meanwhile, the Argentine Junta had declared “World War Three” against the international forces of communism in an effort to legitimize its state terror campaign.

Both Britain and Argentina have identity myths associated with the Falkland/Malvinas Islands as well. Nostalgia for an imagined past plays a large role in these myths: both nations assigned a talismanic status to the islands, which endowed them with an almost magical power to have preserved their very national identities in their purest and most ancient states. In spite of the fact that most Britons had been previously unaware of the Falkland Islands’ existence, during the crisis they were persuaded that a part of their heritage and identity was at stake there. The islanders were said to be more British than the British themselves -- the lost pastoral lifestyle and essence of “Deep England” were seen as preserved in the islands. Thus the effort to recapture them could be seen as a quest to “visit” and recapture Britain’s past and its ancient identity. A similar statement could apply to the Argentine identity myth of Malvinas: having been separated from the infighting and strife which has characterized much of Argentine politics since the country’s independence, the islands were seen as the seat of the Argentine identity, preserved pure and unscathed through the years to be returned to Argentina in 1982. The islands’ perceived mystical power extends notably into Argentina’s national renewal myth, in which the Malvinas’ almost sacred status will
revitalize the nation’s ailing pride and vigor. While the Argentine national renewal involves gaining an economic as well as spiritual boost from control of the disputed islands, Britain’s national renewal myth depends more upon proving its military valor and international relevance through an act of rescue.

Britain’s military myths involve pride in competence and professionalism, as opposed to the messianic mission envisioned in Argentine military myths. Even though both of them are based on the romance quest plot structure, Britain’s military myth of proving one’s manliness in combat is more personal and modest in scope than the Argentine military’s view of battle for the patria as a divine calling or national crusade. Britain does emplot its national role in the war as an heroic quest, but it is less religious and more chivalric: concerned with maintaining Britain’s role as the dictator slayer and enforcer of international rule of law.

Finally, both nations rely on enemy myths to fuel nationalist feeling and support for the war effort. Britain’s media and government fostered enemy myths about the Argentineans as ignorant, uncontrollable masses led by a cruel and tawdry dictatorial regime. Argentineans responded to British disdain and neglect with their own enemy myth of the British as arrogant and domineering. The enemy myths, together with elements of all the others, work together to form the hybrid just-cause myths on each side.

In the chapters that follow, some of these myths receive more attention than others. Myth-promoting artistic responses to the war have preferred just-cause myths and enemy myths. Enemy myths in particular are so compelling that even some demythologizing and countermythologizing works perpetuate them, and very few are effective in deconstructing them. Most artistic responses avoid dealing with scapegoat myths, but this is probably because once the crisis erupted, xenophobic and aggressive impulses were redirected away from previous, mostly internal scapegoats and toward the new external enemy. Demythologizing and Countermythologizing works utilize different strategies to challenge or dismantle official myths with varying efficacy. Countermythologizing works in particular suggest that all myths, histories, memories, and interpretations offer a flawed and inadequate approach to past and present reality.
Notes to Chapter One

1 The image of the cautiva, or captive (white) woman, was common in literature and political discourse during the nineteenth century in Argentina. Apparently there were historical instances of native people kidnapping women during raids on white men’s estancias (Taylor 35). Diana Taylor explains that the power elite used these abductions as a pretext to justify its efforts to exterminate Argentina’s indigenous peoples (229-30). The “liberation” and “avenging” of captive women was thus intimately associated with both territorial expansion and nation-building mythology (Taylor 230). In the case of Coronado’s poem, the cautiva is stolen not by savage natives, but by equally barbarous British pirates. The effect on xenophobic and nationalist fervor, however, is the same. The chivalric rescue called for in the poem would bring about territorial expansion, vengeance upon the aggressor, and aggrandizement of the ser nacional [national being].

2 The original Spanish reads, “Con el rubor de la romana altiva / Cuando el esclavo la estrechó en sus brazos.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Since wording is so important for poetry, I provide the Spanish original in the main text for large block quotations of poems (including song lyrics). For ease of reading, however, I place the Spanish original in a note when the quotation is shorter and embedded within the text of my discussion. For prose quotations, I use my translation in the main text and provide the Spanish original in a note. Translations of titles and single Spanish words appear in the main text in brackets.

3 “Saldrá perenne la canción guerrera / . . . Como la luz, a despertar la aurora.”

4 The term liberal has an entirely different meaning in Argentina from that which is generally accepted in the United States. Shumway describes the liberalist position as one of elitism, centered in the upper classes of Buenos Aires. Liberals sought to fashion Argentina after Western European models, in terms of culture as well as race. They belittled their Spanish heritage and the traditions of the mixed-race lower classes and provincials. Says Shumway: “Articulate and prolific liberals, from Moreno to the Rivadavians to Sarmiento to Mitre, promoted their exclusivist ideologies while stereotyping their detractors as barbaric, unprogressive, and racially inferior” (214). This line of thought and the leaders who promoted it were opposed by a mixed bag of groups with sometimes contradictory ideologies. Shumway groups these views together under the name nationalism (214).

5 1946 was the beginning of Perón’s first presidency. His popularity began to grow somewhat earlier, however, and Peronism, now under the name of el Partido Justicialista [the Justicialist Party], continues to this day as a political force in Argentina. Perón began consolidating popular support soon after he took over and restructured the Labor and Social Welfare Secretariat, under the military regime of Army General Edelmiro Farrell in 1943 (Rock 253-54). He used his power and influence to establish new policies that improved conditions and benefits for workers, as a means to appease labor unions and prevent a possible socialist uprising against the government. (254; 256). After the demise of the Farrell regime, Perón’s numerous supporters won him the 1946 presidential election. He remained in power until 1955, when economic and political instabilities caused him to resign as head of the Peronist Party. Soon afterward, he was forced to resign the presidency and go into exile (Rock 316-17). He spent his exile in a number of different Latin American countries and finally in Spain. In 1973 he returned to Argentina and was elected to his third term as president with his third wife Isabel as his running mate. He died on July 1, 1974, leaving Isabel to assume the presidency.

6 Resentment at neglect by Europe and the US, and a desire to enhance waning international status are evident in the military’s delusional “Third World War” myth which it used to justify its actions in the Dirty War. According to its myth, the selfless military would give its all to win that first decisive battle against subversion, and save not just Argentina, but the entire world from communist domination (Graziano 122). Military leaders maintained that Argentina, by winning the Dirty War, “would assume new status as the stronghold of Western and Christian civilization, as the reserve of power and purity,
superseding Europe and the United States that – as evidenced in vice, corruption, the decadence of tradition, and sexual promiscuity – were sinister in their ‘denaturalizing’ of the sacred principles on which Western grandeur was based” (Graziano 122). By the early 1980s, this myth was crumbling as international attention was drawn toward the regime’s human rights abuses, and ordinary Argentineans were demanding answers. An awareness that the Junta’s and Argentina’s already diminished status was in danger of further tarnish because of the Dirty War was also a factor in the Junta’s willingness to take big risks in the Malvinas dispute.

7 The events of the Malvinas War itself may have partially dispelled this belief in quick cures: Rock notes that the generation of new voters that participated in the 1983 elections following the fall of the Junta “seemed to expect less from government and seemed less willing to believe that a change of regime alone offered a panacea. A quite novel air of caution and restraint was evident” (Argentina 1516-1987, 387). Giardinelli differs, saying that many believed that democracy would bring them a better standard of living automatically (275).

8 Differing from Shumway, Giardinelli interprets the division over self-definition as one of “dogma and catholicism” (the populist side, embodied by nativist leaders such as the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas and the provincial caudillo Facundo Quiroga) versus “science and democracy” (the liberal élite side, embodied by thinkers like Sarmiento and Moreno) (232-33). He sees the early liberal thinkers’ ideas as more democratic than does Shumway.

9 Giardinelli assigns the Gaucho’s enshrinement as a symbol of ser nacional to nationalist leaders in the late nineteenth century, around the time that Gauchos and people of African descent were sent to die by the thousands in the expeditions against the indigenous tribes of the Argentine frontier (126-27). As nationalistic xenophobia shifted from Argentina’s “barbaric” natives and Gauchos to the enormous influx of European immigrants, the Gauchos were suddenly admired, because at least they were “from here” (127). Giardinelli essentially condemns the idealization of the Gaucho as self-interested and hypocritical.

10 Atahualpa Yupanqui, arguably Argentina’s greatest folk singer, wrote this poem while in exile in Paris. He had been persecuted and imprisoned during Perón’s regime for his affiliation with the communist party and his outspoken criticism of the government. Though he left the Communist Party in 1953, he was also persecuted by the anti-Peronist military governments that followed. Given his experience, one would think that he would acknowledge that he himself has fled. However, the identity myth as explained by Guber makes the islands into a symbol for Argentineness usurped, not just by the British but also by de facto governments (102). Bringing the “lost little sisters” home to Argentina would be a symbolic restoration of Argentineness to the people and the nation, perhaps even in repudiation of the dictatorship. He does not actually want the islands to come under Junta rule – he wants them to be one with the nation and its people.

11 “. . . en esas islas miserables – quizás a la medida de nuestro infortunio – los argentinos encontramos el único punto de reunión que nos pertenecía, y que a la vez aún no había sido anulado o contaminado, en términos históricos nacionales, por nuestra propia locura. Por eso fuimos allí como quién va en busca de sus orígenes. Las Malvinas representan para nosotros el retorno a nosotros mismos, al punto de arranque de nuestro derecho, uno de los últimos restos de identidad que nos quedaban el 2 de abril.”

12 “. . . la causa es justa, pues una comunidad desmoralizada y dividida se ha transformado en una ‘nación’ que aúna las generaciones pasadas con las actuales, los muertos que lucharon por el derecho desde 1833, con las que luchamos hoy, y los junta en una unidad superior que expresa los valores permanentes de la nacionalidad.”

13 “Nadie apartará su conducta del esfuerzo colectiva para alcanzar la patria imaginada en sus mejores sueños por nuestros soldados.” On identity and national renewal he says, “It is time to assume our
identity and maturity as Argentines with all that this entails; anyone who does not contribute will be cast out and called traitor. [Es hora de asumir hasta las últimas consecuencias nuestra identidad y madurez de argentinos, quién no contribuya a hacerlo será apartado y calificado de traidor.” Speech reprinted in La Prensa 16 June 1982, sec. 1:1.

14 The unusual capitalization is as it appears in Shumway, and is ostensibly how Moreno capitalized the title himself (35).

15 Giardinelli also criticizes the persistent manichean divisions in Argentine thought, characterizing them as deceptive as well as destructive (274-75).

16 Rock’s authoritarian Nationalists could be seen as part of Shumway’s mix of ideological groups that he terms nationalist (with a lower-case n), in that they favored and valorized the native cultures of the Gaucho, and rejected (at least in name) European influences. They are a discrete subgroup, however, in that they espoused extremist and medieval ideas, including military dictatorship as part of a “natural” order ordained by God (Authoritarian Argentina 6-7), rabid xenophobia, and anti-Semitism (Authoritarian Argentina 22-23). When referring to this movement and its ideas I will use Nationalist with a capital N, to distinguish it from the more generic term nationalist, describing a stance that favors the home nation and its native forms over outside influences.

17 The internal quotations are from Isidoro Cheresky: “Argentina: Régimen político de soberanía compartida.” Punto de Vista, n.d. 19. The reference to the military as the “last aristocracy” ultimately comes from Leopoldo Lugones’ 1924 “Hour of the Sword” speech, quoted in part in Rock, Authoritarian Argentina, 72-73.

18 “En Latinoamérica quedó la imagen de un país pequeño que era capaz de luchar por lo que consideraba su derecho y su integridad territorial, que se enfrentaba a uno de los países más poderosos del planeta, tanto en lo militar como en lo político y económico, y que devolvía golpe por golpe y asumía valientemente su destino.”

19 “El prestigio y el coraje nacional de la Argentina durante el conflicto generaron posteriormente un liderazgo moral . . . Después de 1982, a raíz de Malvinas, y sólo a raíz de Malvinas, el Tercer Mundo nos mira con admirado respeto, porque en su momento nos mostramos como un pueblo capaz de levantarse para defender lo que consideraba suyo.”

20 The first person to voice this myth may have been Father Piccinalli, a Catholic priest who attached himself voluntarily to the Army and preached impassioned sermons to the troops, invoking the protection of the Virgin of Luján (Argentina’s patron saint) on their crusade for the honor of the Fatherland and Jesus Christ (Kasanzew 160). In early June as British troops quickly approached the capital, Father Piccinalli characterized the war as a fight between David and Goliath. He prayed that the war might end as happily as the Biblical story, but he worried that the Argentine people “had not purified themselves” sufficiently to earn God’s favor toward victory (Kasanzew 162). One mythologizing news item in the Buenos Aires tabloid La Razón characterizes the war explicitly as a confrontation between “David and Goliath” (19 June: 5). General Isaías García Enciso says that Argentine soldiers, like David, fought bravely but ultimately succumbed to the overwhelmingly superior power of Goliath. Major Luis V. Noailles writes that the enemy won due to its “modern and until-now unknown technology” (5). Argentinean journalist Horacio Verbitsky, and British sources as well, contest this claim as unfounded.

21 “El honor nacional ha sido defendido heroicamente por las tres armas y la justicia de nuestra causa fue exhibida ante la conciencia de la humanidad. . . . La República enfrentó a una potencia de primera magnitud . . . y lo hizo sin alardes, dando ejemplo de temperancia y dignidad inalteradas, y ha concitado por ello la admiración general.”

22 “Hay una responsabilidad ineludible para todos aquellos que aún creen que la nuestra puede llegar a ser una gran Nación, y ella consiste, una vez más, en enfrentarnos espiritualmente con Gran Bretaña” (368).
This belief may not have been as prevalent among Argentines as some British publications, such as the Sunday Express Team’s *War in the Falklands: the Campaign in Pictures*, would have us believe (17). Most Argentine sources demonstrate an awareness that the islanders were opposed to an Argentine administration. Of course most of these were also written after the war, so that experience would have already corrected any mistaken ideas of this sort. Edgardo Esteban is the only former conscript who writes that he had thought that he would be rescuing the islanders from oppression (128). He also writes that this belief was common at first among the conscripts but faded quickly as they interacted with the largely antagonistic local population. In Kon, however, only one conscript of the eight interviewed expresses surprise or disappointment at islander hostility. Though he had not expected a welcome, he is shocked and saddened when an islander tells him that he and his country have ruined the islanders’ lives (Kon 205).

Haroldo Foulkes, an historical essayist who visited the islands and interacted with the locals there on several occasions, demonstrates an attitude that the islanders *should have* welcomed the Argentines, and that Argentine administration would have improved their lives (74 días halucinantes en Puerto Argentino 20-22). He does see the Argentine takeover as liberating the islanders from colonialism, but he admits that they do not desire the liberation. He characterizes their reaction to the Argentinean forces as “stupidly hostile” (33).

I write “Falklands Lobby intransigence,” because this is not necessarily the same thing as islander intransigence. The Lobby was dominated by representatives of the Falkland Islands Company, which owned most of the property on the islands and controlled a portion of their local government as well (Betts, qtd. in Foulkes, 74 días halucinantes en Puerto Argentino 178; 180-81). Native-born Falkland Islander Alexander Betts, whose statement before the UN is reprinted in Foulkes’s book, suggests that a number of the islanders, particularly those who did not own property and did not have much voice in government policy, were lukewarm about remaining British. According to Betts, these might have been persuaded of the advantages of Argentine administration had they been given a clear idea of what it would entail (178, 181). If the islanders lacked democratic representation, then the Falklands Lobby’s opposition to Argentine sovereignty might not necessarily reflect the majority of the islanders’ views. Thus, even those Argentines who were aware of the Falklands Lobby’s intransigence might have continued to wishfully think that the islanders would welcome an Argentinean takeover, which would have offered them full citizenship as opposed to colonial status.

Fuerzas argentinas “continúan combatiendo en zonas interiores, con un inquebrantable espíritu de combate, basado en la superioridad moral.”

“. . . estaban desnaturalizando en forma siniestra los principios sagrados que cimentaron su grandeza.”

“Este brigadier veía a Occidente asediado por el vicio, la corrupción, la decadencia de las costumbres y el desenfreno sexual, jinetes apocalípticos que anunciaban su destrucción ante el embate de las hordas marxistas. Frente a esta defeción de los países líderes, el Cono Sur se erguía como ejemplo de virilidad y pureza blandiendo la espada y la cruz fundacionales para que el Demonio no prevaleciera.”

Britons have long liked to think of their society as a tolerant one, but evidence shows that the opposite is true (Samuel II: xvi). Catholics were persecuted for three centuries after the Anglican Reformation, particularly in the mid-nineteenth century (II: xviii). Jews also “were openly hated and despised” into the twentieth century (Samuel I: xx), and during World War Two, many were placed in internment camps (II: xix).

Those papers to take this view included the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Sun*. The *Sun* was the most infamously jingoistic paper during the war; it was also the leading tabloid in terms of copies sold (Harris 39). The *Sun*’s main competitor tabloid, the *Daily Mirror*, took a more pacifist stance toward the war (43-44).
Barnett contends that granting independence to colonies was done reluctantly as a result of the “self-determination” clause in the Atlantic Charter agreement between the US and Britain during World War Two (53-54). He also writes that Winston Churchill had agreed to that phrasing in the Charter only reluctantly, in an effort to secure American cooperation in the War effort, and that he had “later denied that this in any way related to the British colonies” (54). In spite of Churchill’s denials, however, the phrase and the Charter played a direct role in convincing the UK to relinquish its colonies later on (54).

This view is not unique to Thatcher. Labour leader Michael Foot voiced similar sentiments during the April 3 emergency debate: “. . . we are determined to ensure that we . . . uphold the rights of our country throughout the world, and the claim of our country to be a defender of people’s freedom throughout the world” (Morgan 9).

While in 1955, Britain was involved in nearly half of the world’s trade and its standard of living was comparatively high, in the ensuing years this influence and affluence dropped considerably. Samuel writes that by the end of the 70s, Britain was no longer great in either industry or trade. Its per capita income had dropped below that of much of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan (1: xxix). In terms of Empire, at this point the commonwealth was “no more than an historical souvenir . . . more of an embarrassment than a source of strength” (Samuel 1: xxviii).

Samuel also indicates that conservation and obsessions with national heritage tend to romanticize the rigid class structures of the past, even though recently (1960s-80s) the emphasis on heritage has broadened to include more plebeian objects representative of middle and lower classes such as decorative tins, steam-powered machinery, trains, Victorian furniture, potlids, and firescreens. Even early council-houses and farm-laborers’ cottages (formerly considered slums) are listed as “Buildings of Special Architectural and Historical Interest” and presented to tourist and local alike as emblems of “Englishness” (xlii-iii). Samuel writes that even though these preservation efforts had radical intentions “to champion ‘the industrious sorts of people’ against the idle rich,” at the same time they “[feed] on a nostalgia for visible social differences. ‘The World we have Lost’ is one where people knew where they stood, where classes were classes, localities localities and the British an indigenous people” (xlviii- ix). What is more, the griminess and difficulties of this past are glossed over and aestheticized in vintage photos and factories-made-museums, thus further glamorizing the past and its inequalities (xlix).

*yobs* is a slang term referring to socially disruptive male youths. It is simply *boys* spelled backwards.

Thatcher and Conservative MPs also launched a rather abrupt and short-lived attack on the BBC as a sort of “enemy within” for its seeming lack of support for Britain’s cause in the war, and for treating the Argentineans “almost as equals” with Britons (Harris 75). Harris details this attack and its outcome in chapter five of his book, *Gotcha! The Media, the Government and the Falklands Crisis* (73-91).

Lowenthal adds that many properties owned by the Trust do not open to the public at all, and some do so only once in a great while (220).

Potts criticizes Read’s so-called tradition as tenuous at best, and full of gaps – he contends that the styles and conceptions of the landscape offered by different British artists through time are too disparate to call a coherent tradition (178-79).

Historian Alun Howkins places the beginnings of this renewed interest in establishing Englishness in the late nineteenth century rather than the interwar years, citing trouble in the empire and a perceived urban and racial crisis in Britain (89-90).

This composition is based on 1) a tune attributed to Henry VIII, and documented to have been in circulation as early as 1580, and 2) a folk tune called “Lovely Joan” that Vaughan-Williams had collected in Norfolk (94). It thus combines the elements of returning to the past and returning to the country.
Howkins writes that although Elgar’s contemporaries tried to claim his music as a manifestation of Englishness, he and other recent critics would describe his style as more continental (91).

These include Patrick Cormack’s *Heritage in Danger* (1978), Stanley Baldwin’s *On England* (1926), and H. A. L. Fisher’s essay “The Beauty of England” (1933) (Wright 81).

This nostalgia for a lost heroic age is not unique to the twentieth century, however. To illustrate this point, Samuel cites medieval writer William Caxton’s “The Book of the Order of Chivalry” in which Caxton urges the reader to renew the heroism of old by reading of Lancelot, Gawain, and also by remembering Henry V (I: lix).

The British obsession with its navy as an emblem of its former greatness is illustrated by Wright in his discussion of the *Mary Rose*, Henry VIII’s prized warship that sank in the Solent estuary in 1545. The ship was discovered and excavated during much of 1982, and was finally raised on October 11. The event aroused interest among archaeologists and the media; books were published and celebrations were held. The general public was genuinely excited by it as well – not necessarily because of the ship’s archaeological value, but rather because of its nostalgic value as a remnant of the Empire’s glorious past (162). Wright connects the *Mary Rose* excavation and the Falklands War as symbolic compensations for “no longer ruling the waves or, for that matter, anything much at all” (163).

Kipling wrote the poem to encourage the United States in its newfound imperialist role in the Philippines.

A humorous illustration of ignorance, even on the part of an Admiral in the Task Force, is given in a letter from one Chief Petty Officer Gould to his girlfriend: The Admiral had visited Gould’s ship and briefed the company on the history of the Falklands dispute. Gould writes that the Admiral’s lecture “lost some of its impact due to a couple of minor inaccuracies in his facts, such as his insistence on calling our adversaries Chileans” (qtd. in Winton 16).

Argentine could accuse Britain of these same misdemeanors in its negotiations over the Falklands/Malvinas prior to 1982; It was Britain’s continued stalling that led the Junta to consider military action in the first place.

Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse corroborate this assessment, saying that the demonstrators had reminded Haig of those in Tehran during the hostage crisis. He had accordingly advised the staff at the US Embassy to make preparations to leave the country should the US be blamed for the outbreak of war (196).

Despite British eyebrow-raising at the Plaza de Mayo demonstrations, Welsh Guardsman Simon Weston remarks in his memoir that the crowds that gathered at the Portsmouth Docks to see off the Task Force’s ships looked much the same as those in Buenos Aires. He writes that had it not been for the flags, colored streamers, and banners, he would not have been able to tell the difference between one group and the other (79, ctd. in Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 145). Femenia also draws a parallel between the Portsmouth Docks and the Plaza de Mayo, as sites of public demonstrations of patriotism and pride (189). She does not acknowledge, however, that the Portsmouth Docks do not have a long history of these sorts of demonstrations, as does the Plaza de Mayo.
CHAPTER TWO
MYTH PERPETUATORS

In this chapter I will discuss myth perpetuators: those works that reiterate the official myths more or less unaltered and uncriticized, or who celebrate or reinforce them. Most of the texts I discuss not only reinforce nationalist myths, but also mirror the myths’ romance-quest plot structure. Kevin Foster has also observed that many literary and filmic responses to the war rely on traditional romance-quest discourse in their approach (Fighting Fictions 83).¹ It will be recalled that Hayden White, in Tropics of Discourse, describes historians as “emplotting” the events in the stories they wish to tell in terms of one of the archetypal mythoi or plot structures, such as romance, comedy, tragedy, or satire (58-59). In this way they “refamiliarize” otherwise difficult to comprehend events by presenting them in a familiar form – a form that we use to make sense of our own personal histories (Tropics of Discourse 87). This same literary process of “refamiliarization” via emplotment occurs in the texts I examine in this chapter. The romance plot structure transforms the chaotic events associated with the war into a familiar story-form of good versus evil, which helps the reader both make sense of what happened, and assign it a certain value or importance in the larger scheme of things. White notes in Metahistory that the categories he uses, taken from Northrop Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism, are not the only possibilities for discussing modes or mythoi in literature. They do not always work well for complex literary works, but White does find them effective in analyzing histories, probably because “the historian is inclined to resist construction of the complex peripateias which are the novelist’s and dramatist’s stock in trade” (8). Frye’s Romance category also works well for the texts in this chapter, perhaps because they are works that attempt to claim a basis in historical fact, though in varying degrees.

The Romance, according to White, is “fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his
victory over it, and his final liberation from it” (Metahistory 8). Frye describes it as “the successful quest,” having three main parts: “the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both must die; and the exaltation of the hero” (187). Patrick Wright, describing the basic formula underlying British “fables of nationalism,” says much the same thing; even though he does not specifically call it a Romance plot structure, his description of its basic elements shows it to be just that. Wright breaks the structure down into a series of “essential elements,” consisting of a threatened entity in need of rescue, the threatening enemy, the “forces of good,” who fight and emerge victorious, and the resulting restoration of the “essential order of things” (179-80). In this chapter I will discuss the myths perpetrated by various texts on both sides, and show how they fit to varying degrees into this romance structure. I will first give a brief overview of adventure novels, picture books, and the few musical selections from both countries that fall into the myth-perpetuator category. Then I will move into a more in-depth examination of selections from Argentine wartime poetry, which convey some of the most purposeful and romantic endorsements of Argentinean Malvinas myths. The British do not have much Falklands poetry, but they do have a similarly enthusiastic proponent of British myths in Ian Curteis’ The Falklands Play (1985). Both poetry and play share a similar degree of distancing from the fearful realities of armed combat, and a similar privileging of aggrandized identity and national renewal myths.

**Adventure Novels**

A number of adventure and thriller novels have been published on both sides, using the Falklands/Malvinas War as a backdrop for tales of bravery and daring exploits. For the most part, these books tend to reinforce official myths about the war, but their endorsement of these myths is more passive and occasional than in the texts I have chosen for my primary analysis in this chapter. For this reason I will not examine any one of them in great detail but rather will give a brief overview of what attitudes and myths generally prevail in this genre. Since the main emphasis in such novels is on adventure and the triumph of the hero over his adversary, they could be very loosely
categorized in the romance mode. Most simply take the legitimacy of their country’s cause in the war as a given fact. The myths that prevail in most of these novels are enemy myths, since the enemy must be appropriately evil in order to justify his destruction at the hands of the hero[es]. Some also contain national greatness myths. National renewal myths do not generally appear, as these books are concerned more with the adventure story than with any speculation about the state of their respective nations.

While most of the British novels do not depict their heroes as having achieved any moral transcendence through the completion of their quests, two Argentine novels incorporate the romantic element of spiritual growth for the hero. *Operación Algeciras* [Operation Algiers] (1989), a firmly pro-military adventure novel by Juan Luis Gallardo, depicts this moral transcendence as a conversion to the cause of government, religion, and bravery in combat against the colonialist usurper. Not only does it promote the Malvinas War as just and good, but it also attempts to show the Dirty War repression as a fight against godless evil. One protagonist, a professional military man, is depicted as rescuing a dissident guerrilla from his life of senseless violence by capturing him on a raid and resuscitating him after his attempt at suicide. He manages to convert the guerrilla to a pro-government stance, using his memories of family and religion to stir the last dying embers of his conscience. During the Malvinas war the two of them embark on a secret mission for the *Patria* together as military commandos. Interestingly enough, the secret mission fails, just as the heroic *gesta* in Malvinas fails. Nevertheless, the final message is that the heroes, as representatives of Argentina and its military, have ascended to a higher level and proved themselves worthy of respect by bravely facing a greater power in combat. The other Argentinean adventure novel, Oscar L. Aranda-Durañona’s *Ecos en la niebla* [Echoes in the fog] (1997), is also sympathetic to military leadership, though it does not actively promote the military as saviors and heroes as does *Operación Algeciras*. The story concentrates more on the narrator’s relationship and eventual reconciliation with an estranged friend than on the war’s outcome or its symbolic importance. Thus the narrator-protagonist achieves a personal spiritual triumph at the end of the novel, despite his country’s defeat in the war. Although the Air Force Major who narrates the story supports the war effort, he does not do so without occasional questions and doubts. His attitude toward the military’s role in repressing “subversives”
is also ambivalent, and receives only a brief, oblique reference. Argentine Military leadership is presented as conscientious, hard-working, and concerned for the conscripts, but quite simply outclassed by the more experienced British with their superior equipment. The fighter pilots are described as not caring a bit about the islands themselves, but as fighting bravely to protect their comrades on the ground (170). Some Argentine officers voice the enemy myth of the British as morally deficient, drug addicts, and homosexuals (68). British soldiers and civilian islanders alike are depicted as foul-mouthed, disdainful, drunken, and promiscuous, in accordance with standard enemy myths.

British authors have written several more adventure and thriller novels about the war than their Argentine counterparts. This is understandable, since most readers of adventure tales want their heroes to win the physical battle, and not just a spiritual one, as occurs in the Argentine novels. Adam Hardy’s *Strike Force Falklands* series (1984-1985) presents predictable and simplistic tales of a British special forces team performing various missions during the war. The team members, as heroes, are presented as tough, virile, professional, and loyal to one another. At one point in the first novel of the series, the protagonist thinks to himself that he and his team fight for each other rather than for some higher moral cause (22). Nevertheless, he takes for granted that Argentina’s “naked aggression” against islands that “were British before there was any such place as Argentina” requires a military response (21, 76-77). Argentine military personnel are presented as fascist torturers and cowards, without scruples of any kind. The British team, on the other hand, treats its prisoners humanely even when one of them is responsible for having tortured and killed one of their men. Alexander Fullerton’s *Special Deliverance* (1986), a better-researched and more interesting special-operations tale, still maintains the identity and enemy myths in their standard forms: the British Special Boat Service team is professional, united, and highly skilled. The British civilians are intelligent and kind, if perhaps a bit gruff. Argentine military personnel are deceptive, power-hungry, and sadistic, and many of the civilians are similarly grasping, selfish, and violent. One British character residing in Argentina, who helps the British team on its way, gives voice to part of the British dictator-slayer myth: he predicts that if Argentina were to win the war, the dictatorship would be so strengthened as to be
unstoppable. He predicts they would attempt territorial expansion in Chile and Brazil, and that the detention and torture camps would expand and multiply. He opines that Argentineans “should be bloody grateful to us – specially to Mrs. T – for saving ‘em from all that” (259). There are other British adventure novels and thrillers, but most tend to reiterate the same myths: that the war was justly fought to put down an aggressive dictator, that the Argentine career military is evil and barbaric, and that Britain and its military continue to be as great as their heritage demands them to be.\(^3\)

In sum, adventure novels on both sides of the conflict deal mainly with enemy myths and identity myths, if only to present a suitable backdrop situation for the actions of their protagonists. The behavior of the demonized enemy is accepted in and of itself as justification for military intervention, and national renewal myths and other large-scale implications are ignored or simply taken for granted, in favor of promoting forays into enemy territory, spying, and blowing things up as heroic and brave. Even the romance-quest structure inherently tends to promote heroism myths: it is through the perilous journey and battle that the protagonist achieves heroic status and transcendence. From this myth come the mistaken ideas that wilfully exposing oneself to great danger and possible death makes a person admirable, worthy of emulation, and “manly,” and that war is a romantic adventure and an opportunity to achieve such stature and recognition. Only the Argentine novels grant their heroes a spiritual transcendence; the British novels are content with the physical victory and do not attempt to bring in any personal or national renewal implications. The Argentines, having lost the physical battle, turn to spiritual triumphs not only to provide a “happy” ending to their stories, but also to justify their military’s efforts. They also imply that moral and spiritual victories are more important than military might, indirectly reinforcing the myth that the Argentine armed forces and society are purer and more righteous than their British counterparts.

**Photo Souvenir Books**

The photo souvenir books *Alerta Roja* [Red Alert] (1982), by official war photographer Eduardo Rotondo, and *War in the Falklands* (1982), by the *Sunday Express* Magazine Team, are more purposeful in promoting myths than adventure novels. These
books provide the reader with up-close views of events in the war itself, but they broaden their focus to include a wide range of individuals rather than the small group that adventure novels focus on. The individuals in photo books are so numerous that they eventually blend into the collective identities of “us” versus "them.” These books tend to reinforce feelings of nationalism and pride in the national armed forces, in addition to other official war myths, particularly enemy myths. Negative portrayals of the enemy strengthen the readers’ conviction that whatever their own government’s failings, it was right to make war against the reprehensible Other.

Rotondo’s book, although it features photos he took while on the islands during the war, shows no dead or wounded bodies, no actual combat, and strangely enough, very few clear views of human faces. The photos are mostly static images, often taken from a distance. Rotondo tries to make up for his bland pictures with dramatic captions that reiterate standard enemy and heroism myths. In spite of the fact that he was there, Rotondo’s photos and captions distance the reader/viewer from the action and present a simplistic and sanitized version of the conflict. The book works to present the Argentinean forces collectively as a David figure, a brave and pure entity fighting for a righteous cause against a militarily superior and morally deficient enemy. Argentine bravery and heroism are emphasized – in caption if not visual imagery – as are British ruthlessness and disregard for rules of fair combat. Argentinean religiosity, letter-reading/writing, and eating are frequently recurring subjects for photographs, in a pointed attempt to counter the reports that many conscripts went hungry, and many did not receive their mail from home.¹ Rotondo may have thought it necessary to contest accusations of military mismanagement in order to preserve the Argentine Army’s image as the virtuous and noble David – an admission of poor planning or disunity within the ranks would imply a degree of moral failure. In the Bible, David defeats Goliath precisely because of his righteousness and faith in God. God rewards his faith by helping him in his quest to defend the armies of Israel and their promised land from the wicked Philistines. The Argentine Army must be shown as wholesome and righteous in every way, in order to qualify for the comparison with David. In the Malvinas War, however, David/Argentina loses. The book deals with this discrepancy by characterizing the defeat as a temporary setback in an ongoing struggle that Argentina is destined to eventually
win. For Rotondo, maintaining the “Malvinas Spirit” of faith and unity is key to not only to achieving national goals for the future, but also to the survival of the Nation’s very identity. This is a reiteration of the official “malvinization” myth, a post-war adjustment of the national renewal myth that minimizes the defeat and praises the war effort for having united Argentina in a newfound sense of purpose and cooperation. The myth appeals to the public to apply their Malvinas Spirit toward the purpose of continuing the struggle for the islands and for Argentina’s growth (Büsser 11; 268; Montenegro and Aliverti 95).

The British picture book is a compilation of photos taken by combatants themselves as well as by journalists, selected and arranged by the *Sunday Express* Magazine editors, along with a simplified history of the war. Surprisingly, it is the only British souvenir photo book published in the wake of the war. The main myths in this book address the righteousness of Britain’s cause, the valor of its military, and the shortcomings of the enemy. In this sense, it mirrors the Argentine text’s ideological aims. It also sanitizes the confusion and horror of war, though not to the same extent as its Argentine counterpart. Some photos of wounded or dead people do appear, though they are relatively tame, and the narrative text glosses over such controversial issues as the sinking of the *Belgrano* with self-assured confidence that British actions were morally and militarily correct. The authors attempt to show the Argentine Armed Forces as internally divided, fascist, and in some cases incompetent. If these qualities reflect similar problems in Argentine society as the text claims (108), then Argentina as a nation appears unfit to govern the islands. Similarly, photos and written text work together to demonstrate the British Armed Forces’ cohesion, commitment to freedom, competence, and valor, which implicitly reflect the British nation’s cultural superiority. These myths do not appear in isolation, but are worked into the overarching romance-quest format of the British national renewal myth. In this way the authors attempt to establish Britain’s “natural” right to liberate and administrate the islands.

The photo books attempt to provide the generalized abstractions of nationalist myths with concrete evidence in the form of photographs and descriptions of events during combat. Since the authors work within the romance-quest form, however, they select those images and descriptions that will conform to the myths and the plot structure
in which they are to be arranged. Any image or event which does not fit the form is left out, and those which support national myths are given special prominence. In this way, even a more concrete representation of the conflict can perpetuate the official identity and enemy myths more or less intact. Fulfilment of the national renewal myth for Argentina is postponed to some future time, with an exhortation to maintain the Malvinas spirit as the key to that renewal. For the British text, national renewal is not specifically dealt with; it is implied only by the use of the romance structure. The heroic British military has successfully conquered the enemy and freed the islanders, so its exaltation along with the society it supposedly mirrors must presumably follow.

**Music**

While most of the music produced in response to the Falklands/Malvinas War is against the war and countermythologizing in nature, there are three notable exceptions. Dame Vera Lynn, Britain’s most popular World War Two-era singer who made famous such popular and patriotic tunes as “There’ll Always be an England” and “White Cliffs of Dover,” contributed to the Falklands War cause with a new song for the troops entitled “I Love This Land” (Kevin Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 41). Falkland Islander Bob Triggs composed his “Falklands Overture” (1982) in honor of the fallen soldiers in the conflict, and dedicated it to Margaret Thatcher “For the strength and courage she gave to the islanders and for her swift and unwavering action to free them.” This work is a multi-movement instrumental piece that Triggs performs himself on synthesizer. The liner notes give descriptions of how programmatic elements in each movement are connected to events in the conflict. Carlos Obligado’s poem “Marcha de Malvinas” [Malvinas March] (1941), set to the music of José Tieri (n.d.), is a standard patriotic song in Argentina, available on disc along with the national anthem, hymns to the flag, and the official presidential march. It proclaims that the islands’ true flag can never be removed, since its white is on the mountaintops and its blue is in the sea. It says there is no land more beloved of Argentines, and prays for the day that the “lost southern pearl” will sparkle in the *Patria*’s crown of glory. This solemn declaration is set to an incongruously perky little march tune that detracts somewhat from its message. Taught to
schoolchildren over many years prior to the war, the song helped contribute to national feelings for the lost islands, and to the myth that regaining them would restore glory to the fatherland. Many other poems, written before, during, and after the war express similar sentiments and promote a variety of Malvinas myths. I will now examine some of these poems in detail.

**Argentine Poetry: Nuestros poetas y las Malvinas**

 Argentinean writers have filled at least two anthologies with poetry about the Malvinas. The anthology that I discuss here was published in 1983, and contains poems from the radio series “Los Poetas cantan a las Malvinas” [The poets sing to the Malvinas]. Agueda Müller selected and read the poems for this series, which aired on Radio Nacional and on Radio Municipal de Buenos Aires in 1982 (Müller 16). Twenty-two of the fifty-four featured poets wrote about the Malvinas before the 1982 conflict, on dates ranging from 1833, just after the British takeover, to 1979. The number of writers and the range of dates suggest the depth of feeling in Argentina about the islands, as well as the continuity over time of their desire to regain them. Among the most common myths in these pre-conflict poems are enemy myths, including one version that posits the islands as oppressed and, as a personified entity, desiring reunion with the true Patria or fatherland. In the pre-1982 poems, expressions of faith in a future return of the islands to their rightful nation are almost as frequent as enemy myth references. Interestingly enough, however, while all of these poems characterize the anticipated repatriation as a joyous reunion for the whole nation and the islands alike, only one expands this belief into the national renewal myth by implying that recovering the islands will help Argentina to advance. More often the implication is that the Malvinas will be beautified and improved by their renewed association with the fatherland, rather than the other way around. This seems to indicate that the national renewal myth gained currency only as the prospect of a Malvinas recovery was imminent, or even after it had already occurred. Other myths that are dealt with in some of these poems, although much less frequently, include the identity myth, in which the islands are a repository of Argentine identity, a
religious myth in which God is on Argentina’s side of the conflict, and myths of Argentine military prowess.

The rest of the poems in this volume were written during the crisis and war of 1982 – many of them on April 2, the day of the Argentine takeover, or shortly thereafter. Only a few were written after the surrender. The poems written during the conflict concentrate on different myths than the pre-war poems do. While pre-war poems are more concerned with enemy myths and portraying the Malvinas as a captive woman, the wartime poems privilege the national renewal myth. Enemy myths are the second-most prevalent in wartime poetry, followed by the myth of the personified islands desiring redemption from British tyranny. Heroic and military myths also appear, as does the identity myth. In those poems written after the Argentine surrender, the national renewal myth is transformed into its new version as the malvinization myth. The myths in these poems, taken as a group, fit neatly into the romance-quest or crusade narrative format set out in Martín Coronado’s “La Cautiva” [The Captive] (1879), as discussed in Chapter One. Coronado and other poets had laid the groundwork for any recovery of the islands to be perceived in this format. Thus the national renewal myth, in its manifestation as a crusade narrative, appears most frequently in the 1982 poems.

I will discuss these poems using the crusade narrative’s elements as the organizing principle. The elements of the romance-quest structure likewise serve as the framework for my discussion of the other primary text of this chapter, namely Curteis’s Falklands Play. The first element is the threatened entity in need of rescue. In the case of the crusade narrative, this element appears as sacred Christian ground. The Malvinas are sacred because they are part of the Patria and because they embody its lost identity. The second element is the threat itself, the morally decadent enemy who does not appreciate the Malvinas’ value and desecrates them by his very presence there. These first two elements and their accompanying myths are so intertwined that I will discuss them together. Then I will discuss the Forces of Good, or the crusaders, the Argentine military and wholesome soldiers who fight to regain and defend the captive land, bringing glory, unity, and new hope to the Patria. Military and heroic myths describe the Forces of Good, and they work to bring about the restoration of glory promised in the national renewal myth.
In the Malvinas crusade narrative, the islands are not merely under threat of violation; they have already been violated, over the course of 150 years. These long-suffering lands are denigrated by the unappreciative British, who after ravishing them have left them to languish in a colonialist prison, undeveloped and neglected, “stiff and sterile” (Orlando Mario Punzi, in Müller 175). As Federico Peltzer writes in the prologue to this anthology, the islands are spurned by “the scornful inhabitants of old Europe . . .” and “Nothing hurts so much as contempt and disdain for that which is our own . . .” (7). The Malvinas are described as Argentine in their very essence, connected to the mainland by a physical and spiritual bond of identity.

Osvaldo Loisi writes in “Mi casa en las Malvinas” [My house in the Malvinas] (2 April 1982, in Müller 134-35) of a bond of memory linking the Malvinas with the Argentine identity. The speaker talks of his house in a far off place, “where the seas compete / for the the long nights, like the patience of God” (lines 3-4). The place is described in terms that give it an air of magic: it is

where the planet folds upon itself
to grasp at the stars and feel them
with majestic hands, castles of water
that rise and fall, in the south.
[donde el planeta se repliega
para asir las estrellas y palparlas
con manos magistrales, castillos de agua
que se erigen y caen, por el sur.] (lines 5-8)

With these images he establishes how special the place is, how close to heaven and to God, to be able to touch the very stars and feel them with its waves. Next Loisi describes his house as “a route toward childhood” and also “a flag” (15-16). Here the house is linked with childhood; i.e., personal identity, as well as national identity. This “strange memory” haunts the speaker with nostalgia: he reflects on how long it has been since he touched or tended the house (18-20). Finally the speaker clarifies where the house is: “I have a house in the Malvinas. / I had it and I did not have it. Now I have it” (22-23). The house may have been on land claimed by another nation, and though he did not in actuality possess it, it was in its essence his house. The last “Now I have it” refers to the
Argentine recovery, transpired the day of this poem’s composition. In the final stanza the speaker explains how everything he has described can be so:

The miracle has placed it [the house] in my memory
with all the strength of forgetting.
To know that never ever have I dwelt there
and yet to feel, that there is where I have been born.

[El milagro la puso en mi recuerdo
con toda la fuerza del olvido.
Saber que jamás nunca la he habitado
y no obstante sentir, que allí he nacido.] (25-28)

His memory is miraculous in nature – a gift from God, and so strong that it matches the power of forgetfulness which erases all but the most powerful of memories. The house in the Malvinas is his symbolic birthplace and thus part of his very identity. Even though he has never been there it has been a part of his soul that he has missed, and now he goes to get it back. The last two lines also imply a rebirth – that the speaker’s identity was born on the Malvinas that very day, the day the islands were recovered by the Patria. It is notable that Loisi uses the present perfect in “where I have been born” rather than the preterit tense, which is usually used for the verb nacer [to be born]. The present perfect brings the birth into the present, reinforcing the idea that the poet has just recently been reborn.

While Loisi’s identity link with the islands is a spiritual or mental one, Angel Horacio Parodi’s “Islas de nuestro hogar” [Islands of our home] (20 May 1982, in Müller 156) speaks of a physical and spiritual one. In this poem, the Malvinas and mainland Argentina are one body: “There is here. And the same birth / joins us by the navel and by the head” (lines 5-6).15 The “us” refers not to individual people but to the whole Argentine nation, including the land itself. Geographical proximity and geological unity, both physical connections, have long been part of the Argentine justification for its claim on the islands. With this metaphor, the islands and mainland are united from birth, physically and also mentally, as the joining of heads implies unity of thought. While the British occupation may have interfered with this connection, the union’s physical reality and inner essence is never negated. This is possible because Argentina’s attachment to
the islands is with their geological, physical reality, regardless of who is walking about on the land’s surface. Together, the mainland and the Malvinas make one “son of the people,” who, now without fear, moves “toward home and song” (9-11). The reference to freedom from fear in lines 9 and 10 implies the removal of the British threat to the islands’ true identity and unity with the Patria. With the invader gone, the unity is perfect, and the “people’s son,” personifying Argentina’s long-sought social unity, goes homeward at last. In keeping with the religious imagery later in the poem, this image could be seen as that of the Biblical prodigal son – a once lost and prodigal identity is now returning home to the embrace of his family and the Church. The union of islands and mainland also brings forth children who will apparently reinvigorate the nation spiritually, renewing its bond with God and heaven:

Islands that with their progeny, go
toward the suppers of the cathedrals
to revive the bread and our wine.
[Islas que con su prole, van camino
hacia las cenas de las catedrales
a revivir el pan y nuestro vino.] (12-14).

This last image of a reinvigorated Holy Communion also fits in with the crusade format, as the sacred territory endows its rescuers with heavenly favor.

The above two poems deal with the Malvinas as a geographical entity, containing elements of the lost Argentine identity or ser nacional: its symbolic home, its symbolic body and children, the unity and spiritual well-being of the peaceful Argentine nation-family. Other poets choose to personify the islands as a woman, in order to achieve the emotional response that the imprisonment of a loved-one can evoke over that of mere land or property. In all cases, the woman representing the Malvinas is in unwilling bondage, suffering physical and/or spiritual wounds at the hands of the invader. In most cases, the poem is a narrative consistent with the romance-quest or crusade form: the captive Malvinas longs for rescue and eventually is granted her prayer when the forces of good vanquish the invader. Fernando Giudice’s “Malvinas” (7 June 1982, in Müller 120), fits the standard mold with a bit of religious imagery added in, making it even more appropriate for discussion within the context of a crusade narrative. The poem is a
sonnet, an apostrophe to the personified Malvinas. She is “innocent of swords and chains,” and described as extending her hand – the implication is that she extends it to Argentina, in a plea for rescue (1-2). The first line contains a double meaning: she is too innocent to understand swords and chains, and yet at the same time she is surrounded by them -- she is an innocent from a place of swords and chains. The pain she suffers is described in the second stanza:

Irons of iniquity cut open your veins,
a north wind – not from God – tears your sky,
your name, your word, your sleeplessness
Hierros de iniquidad abren tus venas,
cierzo que no es de Dios taja tu cielo,
tu nombre, tu palabra, tu desvelo] (4-7)

Here the godless invaders from the north attack not only her body, but her identity, her language, and her peace of mind. If the identity of the sacred territory is threatened, then so is the identity of the motherland Argentina. The Malvinas’ hallowed status is confirmed in line 9, which calls her “Patient martyr in time and agony” (9). By remaining faithful to God and the sacred Patria under suffering and threat of annihilation, she has attained martyr status and is therefore sanctified. The final stanza speaks of her rescue from the infidel:

The dawn of April is the dawn of bells
rejoicing, in sisterly tears
and in the rose of courageous blood.
[Alba de Abril es alba de campanas,
en jubilo, en lagrima de hermanas
y en la rosa de sangre del coraje.] (12-14)

The bells connote religious celebration. and the rose is a symbol of the Virgin Mary, who has guided the crusaders to their victory.

It is notable that, continuing the precedent set by pre-1982 Malvinas poetry, poems written during the war give the damsel-in-distress role to the islands themselves. Early Malvinas poetry casts the British settlers unequivocally as usurpers and pirates, abusers of the stolen piece of Fatherland. As the years pass, the poetry continues in this
vein, even though the descendants of the usurpers fit less easily into the enemy role, having had nothing to do with the usurpation themselves. During the war in 1982, the Argentine government sought to portray the islanders as innocent bystanders, needing to be freed from British colonial oppression and protected by Argentine soldiers. This more moderate portrayal of the islanders is seen in the picture book *Alerta Roja* as well as conscript memoirs, and may have come from the government’s desire to be seen as peaceful and protective in order to gain international sympathy for the Malvinas cause, while diverting attention from Dirty War atrocities. The post-war poems in this anthology do not adhere to the new official line on the islanders, however. They demonstrate an awareness of the islanders’ continued hostility toward Argentine rule, in that they continue to concentrate on the land itself as the captive longing for freedom, as opposed to the islanders. This serves two purposes: the first is to achieve consistency with the crusade narrative, which deals specifically with the recovery of holy ground. The second purpose is to avoid the ideological messiness that inevitably follows by bringing the islanders into the picture at all. Since they are British, descendants of the usurpers, they cannot function well either as a damsel in distress or as part of the sacred ground. They must either be ignored as irrelevant, or cast as the enemy. Some poems in the anthology take the first option and some the second. In either case, the islanders do not appear as part of the rescued element in the poetic narrative.

In the crusade narrative, the sacred ground must be redeemed from the infidel usurper, who damages and desecrates it without appreciating its holy significance. This characterization of the British is seen in the above discussion of Giudice’s poem. Images of the British as cruel pirates is another favorite which appears frequently in both pre-war and wartime poetry. In the pirate image, the enemy’s evil and opposition to godliness is implicit rather than explicit as in Giudice. Another attitude toward the British that appears more in wartime poetry than in its pre-conflict predecessors is that of the decadent empire doomed to defeat at the hands of the vigorous young republic of Argentina. Romulad Brughetti describes the British forces as “Arms of an imperial / outdated egomania” (lines 1-2, qtd. in Müller 48). Rodolfo Fernández Castro, in his “Soneto a las Malvinas” [Sonnet to the Malvinas] (1982), warns Britain, the “Old rat-ruler of the seas,” that Argentina will cause her old ruins to shake for her failure to heed
to the Argentine nation’s voice (1; 5-7; qtd. in Müller 94).\(^{23}\) A few lines later the speaker calls Britain a “senile mouse fallen into the trap” for having forgotten Argentina’s power and resolve (8-9).\(^{24}\) In Gustavo de Gainza’s “Cuarta invasión” [Fourth invasion] (May 1982, in Müller 104-105), the speaker likewise warns Britain that its latest act of arrogance will cause its downfall at the hands of the vigorous young Argentina.\(^{25}\) He implies that Britain’s greatness was in the distant past, and that it should be content with that: “Take your Magna Carta, to study the essence / that made your history great, and your presence noble” (7-8).\(^{26}\) He continues by foretelling that this fourth invasion will end up like the first, in a reference to the failed British invasion of Buenos Aires in 1806 (9-10). Argentina will win, according to the poet, and have sole power over the region (21-22).

As has been noted with British identity and greatness myths, the identity of the hero is interdependent with the identity of the enemy. There can be no noble crusader without an evil infidel to defeat; indeed, without an enemy, there can be no crusade. Often, identity myths and enemy myths are seen side by side in cultural responses to the war. Fernández Castro’s sonnet, for example, juxtaposes the senile mouse of Britain image with one of Argentina: “noble glory of light and dove” (11).\(^{27}\) The word *light* connotes intelligence and righteousness, and *dove* implies peacefulness -- the Junta repeatedly stressed that Argentina’s intentions in retaking the Malvinas were entirely peaceful (Femenia 76). The above poem by de Gainza also features descriptions of the old and decadent British empire in close proximity to contrasting descriptions of Argentina as energetic and powerful (4-8, 15-20). This poem contains elements of the national renewal and “Gran Argentina” myths as well, boasting of the young republic’s power and future hegemony in the Southern Cone (20-22).

The heroism myths of Argentina and Britain alike bestow some degree of hero status on nearly all their soldiers who confront the enemy. There are a few individuals on each side, however, that are elevated to an even higher level of heroism and public adulation. Usually these individuals are dead: they are seen as having given their lives as an ultimate sacrifice for their country. In addition, it is easier to apotheosize someone who has no chance of committing any future gaffes that might stain his heroic honor. On the Argentine side, a favorite dead hero is Captain Pedro Giachino, who lost his life in the
attack on Government House during the initial invasion on April 2. He is admired for his
bravery and for his restraint – he was killed while trying valiantly to subdue resisting
forces without killing any of them. (The invasion force was specifically ordered to avoid
killing anyone, so that the takeover could be characterized as “peaceful.”) Two of the
poems in this anthology were written in his honor. Enrique Vidal Molina’s sonnet
“Mártir” [Martyr] (4 April 1982, in Müller 203) by its very title promotes the myth that
Malvinas recovery is a sacred cause. In the usual sense, a martyr is someone who is put
to death for remaining faithful to his or her religious beliefs or principles. The term
connotes purity, integrity, and often defenselessness. While Giachino certainly believed
in the righteousness of his cause, he was killed while armed and engaged in a violent
takeover. The term martyr is applied to emphasize that he did not wish to kill, nor did he
kill anyone, and also to confer upon him a saintly status for having “given” his life so
willingly to a sacred cause. The poem also perpetuates a common heroic myth that the
dead hero has achieved immortality through his actions: God himself decides that “this
Argentine . . . is not for the world” (7-8), and the wind sculpts his profile and courage in
the rocks (9-11). Here God and nature revere the hero and grant him a place of honor in
heaven as well as on earth (in the rocks upon the sacred ground for which he died).

Another common hero myth, for both sides of the conflict, is that the living owe it
to the dead to finish (and win) their battle. This myth plays a role in the national renewal
myth, in the sense that the heroic sacrifice of a few sanctifies the cause and galvanizes the
remaining forces to fight in their behalf and honor. The resulting mass-heroism is the
impetus for the nation’s growth and increased honor: as David Martínez writes, “Those
who are fallen did not fall. / They went to light our Tomorrow” (11-12; qtd. in Müller
138). Alfredo de Cicco’s sonnet “Capitán Giachino” (1982, in Müller 82) perpetuates
both of these myths. The speaker addresses the dead hero, saying that we, the rest of the
soldiers and the nation, will confront the enemy in your [Giachino’s] place, using your
equipment and inspired by your strength (1-4). The “heroic and supreme times,”
Argentina’s distant glorious past, will be revived by their struggle (7-8). It is as though
Argentina’s lost greatness is seen as inevitably connected to gaining victory in armed
conflict. The speaker in the sonnet promises Giachino,

And you will be helmsman or spars
now that the fatherland has increased its stature
and dresses itself with land [meaning the Malvinas] and soldier’s uniform.
[Y serás timonel o arboladura
hoy que la patria ensancha su estatura
y se viste de tierra y de soldado.] (12-14)
The hero will be immortalized as an integral part of the ship of state – perhaps the
helmsman, even, to guide Argentina to its destined greatness – as though bravery in
combat automatically qualified one for the complex task of leading an entire country.
According to the poem, Giachino’s example will be enough, however, since his actions
have brought about the recovery of the Malvinas, which has already increased
Argentina’s international stature. In view of such recent success, the rest of the country
follows Giachino’s example by willingly dressing itself as a soldier, to complete the
unfinished quest and follow the military path toward glory. This is the path that will lead
Argentina to its rightful place in the Natural Order as “La Gran Argentina.”

Another poem by de Gainza, “Soldado” [Soldier], also promotes military prowess
as the means to achieving national renewal and greatness (May 1982, in Müller 105-06).
In contrast to the poems dedicated to the officer Giachino, however, its crusading hero is
the ordinary soldier. It is written as a poetic “Carta al Soldado” [Letter to the soldier], as
the thousands of letters from patriotic citizens to unspecified soldiers were called. This
letter is not just from an old man, writes the speaker, but

It is the letter from the depths of history
formed by your rocks, your streams, your countryside,
and it is the long mystery that vibrates in your pastures
and is shouted by the waves of your agitated sea.
[Es la carta que viene del fondo de la historia
Que modulan tus piedras, tus arroyos, tu campo,
Y es el largo misterio que vibra en tus praderas,
Y que gritan las olas de tu mar agitado.] (3-6)
Thus the letter, and the myths within it, claim for themselves the authority and simple
truth of nature. Whereas most myths are made to seem “natural,” this one explicitly
claims to be so. So from this letter, deepest history and nature speak to the soldier to tell
himg that “[t]he old heroes are watching from the clouds, / and like yesterday commanding: Onward, soldier!” (7-8). The national heroes of the past, as emblems of the nation itself, look down from heaven with interest, and lend a hand by cheering the soldier on. It must be a righteous and sacred cause for them to interrupt their heavenly pursuits and take part. Dead heroes are not the only interested parties: condors, symbols of majesty and strength among Andean peoples, leave their mountain perches and “fly with you / for the glorious triumph that you are sculpting” (11-12). Even history personified and the angels of heaven do their part to strengthen the soldier and calm his mind for the trials ahead:

I hear the august murmurings of history
filling your soldier’s mind with heroism,
and a strange music, like a thousand white harps,
prepares tendernesses for you, for the long roads.
[Yo siento los rumores augustos de la historia
llenando de heroísmo tu mente de soldado,
y una música extraña, como mil arpas blancas
te prepara ternuras, por los caminos largos.] (13-16)

Thus the crusading hero is granted heavenly assistance in his holy quest to conquer the enemy and regain the sacred territory. In return, the soldier grants Argentina’s old heroes and historic identity new life and glory, by winning a great victory for the fatherland:

The ancestral pride that beats within us once again,
is from seeing how you watch over the glory of the past,
and how, from the heavens, the heroes of the fatherland
are up in arms over your heroic destiny,
as if new life, for their cold bones,
you had given them, with your heroic destiny.
[El ancestral orgullo que nos late de nuevo,
es por ver cómo velas la gloria del pasado,
y cómo, desde el cielo, los héroes de la patria
por tu destino heroico, están soliviantados,
como si nueva vida, para sus huesos fríos

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The soldier’s crusade for the Malvinas wins honor for the fatherland and imbues the old dead heroes of its past with new life, that they may fight alongside him to win a glorious future for the nation. His living compatriots at home also feel the ancient pride welling up within them once again, which will help the nation move forward and achieve its destined greatness. Another aspect of the national renewal myth appears in the lines saying that those at home stay awake at nights because of the soldier’s sleeplessness (17-18). The war was supposed to unite all Argentines in a common cause, and bring out the very best in their souls, to the betterment of the nation. Many soldiers believed in this myth, and hoped that people at home were indeed awake at night keeping vigil with the soldiers, keeping in mind their suffering, and behaving more altruistically as a result. These soldiers were disillusioned, however, as as they tell Daniel Kon in his book of interviews Los chicos de la guerra. They had expected the Malvinas recuperation to work a change of heart in the general populace, and make them less selfish, more united. One soldier who was sent home due to a grave illness was bitterly disappointed to find people still wrapped up in their own selfish concerns, squabbling over their place in line at the hospital or causing altercations over petty things (56-57). Other soldiers who had radios and were hoping to get some news were incensed that radio broadcasters continued to devote most of their airtime to football games, instead of to news of the war or thoughts for the soldiers in the Malvinas who were risking their lives for the glory of the Patria (32). In the poem, however, oneness between nation and soldier has been achieved, as has unity between Malvinas and mainland, and continuity between Argentina’s great past and its glorious future. This triumphalist version of the national renewal myth changes substantially in texts written after the defeat. In these texts, the victory is deferred until later, and it can only be achieved if Argentina maintains the unity and spiritual strength it attained during the first recovery of the Malvinas. This postwar adaptation is the “malvinization” myth. In it, the future victory may appear as the eventual recovery of the islands, or it may simply be the improvement of Argentina’s prosperity and international prestige in general, or it may be both, the one being the impetus for the other.
In sum, Argentine wartime poetry echoes and promulgates nearly all the official Malvinas myths in the most heartfelt and enthusiastic manner. This enthusiasm for the national myths is made possible in part by the poets’ ignorance of how badly the Argentinean forces in the islands were faring in actual combat. The defeat, and particularly news of the military leadership’s incompetence and cruelty toward the conscripts, caused many writers and other artists to reconsider the myths and question them. Still others persisted in promoting the myths, although slightly altered to accommodate the defeat as a setback along the road to eventual victory.

The Falklands Play

The British do not have much in the way of Falklands poetry to offer, owing in part to the fact that before the Argentine takeover in 1982, most British subjects knew little and cared even less about the islands (Kevin Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 23). Once the invasion had occurred, however, this indifference changed quite dramatically. Ian Curteis’ *The Falklands Play* makes a good counterpart to Argentine poetry in that it promotes national myths with similar patriotic fervor. Although it was not produced for television until 2002, the play attracted a good deal of public attention in the form of a media controversy. This was sparked by its cancellation from production in 1985 by the BBC, and the subsequent ruckus that its author raised in the press, accusing the BBC of left-wing bias. Suspicions of such a bias had already been simmering in some quarters and were stirred up further by Curteis’ complaints, giving rise to heated debate in the papers and even in the House of Commons. The BBC Director, Alasdair Milne, was eventually pressured to resign in the ensuing furor (Reeves 144). The play was finally produced for the twentieth anniversary of the Falklands/Malvinas war. It first ran as a radio play on BBC Radio 4, on April 6, 2002. Less than a week later it aired on the BBC’s new satellite television channel, attracting a record audience for that channel. The play’s relative success prompted another airing on June 4, this time on BBC2, a terrestrial channel with a larger potential audience. Reviewers found the radio version to be a “gripping” drama, if a bit biased (Vestey 1).33 Television reviewers gave mixed responses: they praised the acting but criticized the author for having “failed to develop
any level of empathy between the audience and the characters” (Jack Kibble-White 4). Gareth McLean of The Guardian defends the writing as having more “nuance, subtlety and more light and shade than many give it credit for,” though he criticizes the film’s “hagiographical” portrayal of Thatcher as unrealistic (McLean 1). Viewer responses e-mailed in to the Internet Movie Database are sharply divided along political lines. Those who admire Thatcher and supported the war have nothing but praise for the program, while Thatcher-haters and pacifists rail on it as thinly veiled and poorly written propaganda.

Although Curteis emphasizes his extensive research, and insists that “[e]very fact in the play is based on authentic printed sources,” including the Franks Report, House of Commons proceedings, and UN Security Council minutes of meetings (189), he also declares that his work is a drama, and not a historical account or a documentary. His choice of subject matter – the negotiations and decisions of the government elite – limits him a great deal. As critic Geoffrey Reeves notes, “He is not a free agent, able to develop his characters at will and construct multi-faceted scenes: he is bound by what happened” (157). Nevertheless, he is able to promote his own political point of view and the myths that go with it, in part by extensively quoting Margaret Thatcher, the central Falklands mythologizer, and in part by selecting and interpreting the events he chooses to depict. Interpretation also enters in the emplotment of the events in the Romantic mode, which is as White describes it, “a drama of the triumph of good over evil (Metahistory 9). Kevin Foster complains that the characters in the The Falklands Play are “mere acteurs in a fable of moral antagonism. The characters’ primary function is semiotic, to organize the elements of the screenplay into a meaningful structure of binary oppositions” (Fighting Fictions 142). Some of the BBC officials who favored the play’s cancellation also cite the two-dimensionality of Curteis’ characters as one of their reasons for disliking the play (Curteis 44). The very flatness of the characters is necessary for them to function as signs of good or evil in this romance-quest drama. Frye suggests that romance narratives, due to their “dialectic structure” tend to have a simplistic division of characters into those for and those against the quest. Those who support the quest are described as good and brave, while those who hinder it are either evil or cowardly (195).
Curteis’ play follows such stark binary divisions, and can be seen as a distorted romance quest. Instead of the Task Force playing the role of the questing hero, this role is taken by “England” and her primary representative, Margaret Thatcher. Curteis avoids making Thatcher appear as the hero solely for herself, by presenting her as the voice of Britain personified, and the mouthpiece of the entire British people. The Argentine foreign minister explains that “She knows what the British people think and feel, and by instinct gives to it a voice – sometimes against all logic . . . That is the root of her battle spirit – not out of her, but out of that instinct” (126, original emphasis). Churchill had been perceived this way, and Curteis compares Thatcher to him more than once, to reinforce the idea that she is his spiritual successor. This way, Thatcher’s combativeness is shown to be a channeling of the collective British will, rather than a dangerous character flaw. Curteis tries to balance this toughness with what he sees as the genuine private Thatcher: a human being with a motherly, tender side. The Task Force men are more like tools or pawns than the actual hero, as their visible role is minimal. Thatcher’s quest does not cover physical ground like that of the Task Force in other texts, but is a quest of the mind and the heart through debates with opposition doubters and negotiators. The enemy remains more or less the same, but at a higher level: instead of mere soldier-usurpers on the islands, England and her emissaries match wills with the dictators of the entire country and their double-dealing minions. The threat posed by this enemy is more catastrophic and broad than mere martial rule over the islands. In this play, as in the House of Commons debates, the menace is expanded to its full mythic scale as a danger to the British identity in general and to world security, not just that of the islanders. Restoration to the natural order will include not only freedom for the islanders-in-distress, but also restored British confidence in its own strength and greatness, and a restored international order in which Britain stands superior and aggression has been duly resisted and put down. The main myths promoted within this framework are enemy myths of Argentina as a Nazi-esque dictatorship and an untrustworthy, irrational country, as well as the British identity myths as dictator-slaying warrior, moral leader, and defender of the Rule of Law. For Curteis, the war was just and necessary, and the identity myths surrounding it are important values worth defending.
Notably, very little combat appears in the play, and no actual participants in the fighting have speaking parts. The play’s main action centers on the people in power and the negotiating process, with only a few brief forays outside the chambers of the involved governments. One of these few glimpses of life outside of government halls is the inspiringly patriotic montage glorifying the Navy, featuring “swooping aerial shots of the mighty ships of the fleet steaming south.” The imagery is complemented by Defence Secretary John Nott’s voice-over describing the ships and their weapons capabilities (117-18). This montage also includes shots of “energetic preparations of the voyage; practice strikes, helicopter manoeuvres, gunnery practice” (117-18), all calculated to elicit pride in the professionalism and training of the Nation’s Armed Forces without having to show any real hostilities or casualties. A few actions, such as the recapture of South Georgia, and the sinking of the Belgrano and the Sheffield, are dealt with in the form of reports given to Thatcher by her colleagues. This distancing mechanism mediates and sanitizes the horror of those events. Most of the action of the war itself is reduced to one brief montage of newsfilm scenes from San Carlos, Goose Green, public relations man Ian MacDonald, and the Pope’s visits to both countries (186). This montage appears just before the final scene in the House of Commons, in which Thatcher announces the Argentine surrender. In this way, the fighting and mayhem of war are diminished in scale, limited to a brief and mostly painless moment just before the announcement of victory. Curteis’ narrow focus on government officials’ interactions allows him to concentrate on simplified, abstract principles, without the messy intrusions of the fighting itself, the death and the maiming, and its impact on individual lives. In the following paragraphs, I will examine some of the principles or myths that Curteis defends and promotes through his play, using the romance-quest format once again as an organizing framework. The threatened element includes not just islanders as damsels in distress, but also Britain’s mythic pastoral identity and its status as defender of international peace and the rule of law. Copious reiterations of enemy myths form the threat element, which encompasses not just Argentina’s governing military, but also its people and its culture. The Forces of Good are represented by Thatcher and her ministers, as well as the faceless military. Myths of Thatcher as Churchill’s successor, of
“Great” Britain and its duties, and of Britain’s impressive military machine all have roles to play in describing the Forces of Good element.

Falkland Islanders are presented as emblems of Britishness in its purest essence, following the identity myth set up by Thatcher in her speeches during the crisis. Curteis accomplishes this by simply quoting Thatcher’s speeches, the most famous of which proclaims that the islanders, “like the people in the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. They are few in number, but they have the right to live in peace, and to choose their way of life and their allegiance. It is the wish of the British people, . . . and it is the duty of Her Majesty’s Government, to do everything we can to uphold that right!” (Curteis 104).36 This speech establishes the islanders as British, defined by their race and also by their homeland, which is an island. As islanders they are used to isolation from “outside” influences and thus, according to the myth, have maintained their pure essence as British islanders of the old tradition. Britain’s duty to defend the islanders’ freedom of choice and peaceful existence comes from this common heritage.

The threatened entity in the play, as well as in the actual House of Commons debates that the play quotes, is presented as much more than just the islanders, however. Just after Thatcher’s speech, Curteis has Opposition Leader Michael Foot agree that Britain must strongly oppose the invasion, not just because the islanders deserve government protection, but because “there is the longer-term interest to ensure: that foul and brutal aggression does not succeed in our world. If it does, there will be a danger not merely to the Falkland Islands, but to people all over this dangerous planet” (104).37 This concern, which hearkens back to memories of Nazi aggressions leading up to World War Two, is expressed multiple times in the play (as well as in the course of the historical crisis) as a justification for Britain’s military intervention. Britain’s mythic role as destroyer of dictators and defender of international Rule of Law depends on its ability to prevent that sort of thing from happening again. So the entity in need of defense in this play becomes not just British people or sovereign territory, but international order and Britain’s very identity and status within that order. Framed this way, the stakes in this crisis are seen as high enough to justify the shedding of blood.
Enemy myths are given a great deal of attention, particularly in the original, printed version of the play. When it was finally produced for television, the play’s budget was reduced to one quarter of the original, so the scenes of Argentineans and the involvement of the Pope were cut out. This may have actually improved the play by removing some exaggeratedly silly scenes of the Junta, which were probably intended to provide comic relief. Removing them reduced the amount of enemy-mythologizing, though this still appears in the form of comments made by British and American characters about the Argentineans. Although the television version does not put words into the Argentineans’ mouths, it does deprive them of their own voice: they are unseen and unheard, and anything they have to contribute to the story is mediated by the British or North American characters. For this discussion I will be working with the original printed version of the play. The Falklands Play vacillates between characterizing the Argentine Junta as evil and dangerous, and buffoonishly incompetent. Parallels between the military regime and Nazism are frequent, as are depictions of drunkenness, disorder, machista attitudes, deceit, and seemingly irrational behavior. The myth of the Argentine people in general as uncontrollable, emotionally volatile and potentially violent also appears.

The play’s action starts some time before the invasion, in order to establish the character of the governments involved. An opening scene features Nicholas Ridley (Minister of State at the Foreign Office)’s proposal for a leaseback agreement with Argentina for sovereignty of the Falklands, which is angrily shouted down in the House of Commons (55-56). Well before the threat of invasion is acknowledged, the British Government is shown a) to be committed to the Falklanders’ wishes of self-determination, and b) to deeply distrust Argentina’s government. Thatcher’s character, when informed of the proceedings in the House, is not surprised at the reaction. She explains for the reader/viewer’s benefit: “Even to consider just handing over two thousand of our own people to an evil regime like that! – their record on human rights is blood-curdling!” (56-57). Furthermore, any attempt at a leaseback agreement would be futile because, as the Prime Minister declares, “the Argentines would instantly dishonour” it (57). A subsequent scene shows a cabinet meeting where the Ministers discuss Argentina’s long history of “sabre-rattling” over the Falklands. In this context,
Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington says that the regime’s incompetence has made it unstable, and inflation there is raging out of control. In addition, he says that “It is a government of terror, torture and execution without trial, thousands of people a year, not unlike the Gestapo” (58). The first few scenes of the play thus establish the nature of the regime as Nazi-esque, abusive of human rights, and untrustworthy in international agreements. This comparison provides further justification for the view that world security would be jeopardized should Britain fail to respond firmly to the invasion.

Curteis, however, cannot be satisfied with just this, for the enemy myth of Argentina also includes a good dollop of scorn, as evidenced in a conversation in the same scene between Carrington and Deputy Prime Minister Willie Whitelaw:

WHITELAW (cheerfully): Argentina. Where the nuts come from.
CARRINGTON (grinning): No, no, that’s Brazil!
WHITELAW: Is it? It’s all Comic Opera Land, anyhow. Do you know, they haven’t fought anyone for over a hundred years, except each other? (60).

This exchange moves quickly from the sinister assessment given earlier to mockery. The last question is telling, in that it implies that the international importance of a country depends upon its fighting an external enemy – to prove itself, perhaps. One is led to wonder if this is why “England” feels it must go to war, because it has been too long since it proved itself in battle, and its perception of itself as important is beginning to fade? These derisive comments lead directly into what is said to be a clip of Argentine newsfilm, featuring a military parade and presidential inauguration, meant to corroborate the British assessment of Argentina. The stage directions call for the “blare of tin trumpets, . . . Weedy cavalry in bright Ruritanian uniforms . . . it is indeed close to Comic Opera Land” (60). The Junta inaugurates President Viola before the chanting crowd. This same scenario will be repeated just a few scenes later, for Galtieri’s inauguration. The dramatic device of repeating the action over again serves to demonstrate Argentina’s governmental instability, which simultaneously hides behind and is evidenced by the repetition of hollow ceremony. It also draws laughs from the audience.

British identity myths require, however, that Argentina be presented as evil and dangerous. In order to maintain that evil image and still allow for mockery, Curteis
personifies these opposing characteristics in different members of the Junta and other government officials. Admiral Anaya becomes the vehicle for the treacherous Nazi image: he is described as “vulpine and unsmiling, . . . a hard man whose voice betrays no flicker of warmth or humanity” (61). He is portrayed as the controlling figure in the Junta, and the main impetus behind the invasion of the islands. His treachery is aimed not only at British subjects in the Falklands, or at suspected subversives at home, but also at his fellows in the military Junta. He is shown to have set Viola up for failure, and Galtieri after him (62). At one point Galtieri rages at Anaya upon discovering some of the latter’s machinations: Galtieri shouts that he wants someone he can trust to run the Navy, “like Admiral Lewin [of the British Royal Navy]” (157). The Army’s General Galtieri takes the role of the swaggering fool, manipulated by Anaya. He frequently appears drunk, and his sometimes bewildering behavior is only partly explained by US Secretary of State Haig’s character, who describes him as “a simple guy, right out of his depth. [. . . ] Trying to do it all by the seat of his pants – and underneath absolutely shit-scared” (130). Air Force General Lami Dozo, “a crumpled teddy bear of a man, the most intelligent and liberal of the three” (61), remains quiet most of the time, except to voice the Junta’s rare flickers of moderation, which are quickly overturned by other members’ (usually Anaya’s) objections. These, then, are the figures who represent the sort of rule the islanders will be subjected to.

Argentina’s method of international dealings, on the other hand, is personified in the character of Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa-Méndez, who Curteis represents as petty, duplicitous, and manipulative. His two-faced character provides Curteis with further opportunities for eliciting feelings of both suspicion and contempt toward the enemy. During the South Georgia crisis, for example, Costa-Méndez is shown deliberately posing and “adopt[ing] an expression of heated indignation” before making a protest to British Ambassador Williams (75). He complains of an incident in which some islanders broke into the Argentine Air Force’s office on the Malvinas, covered the Argentine flag with a Union Jack, and wrote “Tit for tat you buggers” on the desk in toothpaste (75). Though Costa-Méndez describes the situation with wounded tones, Williams treats it as ludicrous: “what sort of toothpaste?” he asks, with mild interest (76). Beyond this, Williams’ only response is to remark, “Actually there are two G’s in
“buggers,” as he reads the formal complaint letter on his way out the door (76). This dry amusement at an Argentine’s unwarranted furor presents an interesting take on the South Georgia crisis, since according to Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, the Argentines saw the British as over-reacting to a minor incident, namely the failure of the Argentine scrap-men to check in with the authorities at Grytviken (60). Curteis chooses to present that incident through the eyes of Falklands Governor Rex Hunt, who suspects the scrap-men of being a front for establishing a military presence on the islands (73). Though this suspicion circulated in London as well, Hunt’s was perhaps the most extreme view of the situation. Were things truly as he imagined, then Britain’s belligerent reaction of threatening to remove the Argentines by force would have seemed less extreme. Thus Curteis’ choice of Hunt to describe the event presents the British as behaving reasonably in the face of a major Argentine affront, while the petty Argentines are in a snit over a rude toothpaste message on a desk. The reader/viewer, having thus been introduced to Costa-Méndez’s character, is prepared to see his speeches about British colonialism in the UN meetings as similarly calculated and hypocritical (101).

Again, during the Haig negotiations, Costa-Méndez’s character shows himself and the country he represents to be unpredictable and untrustworthy: in both shuttles to Buenos Aires, Haig is shown to have come to an agreement with Galtieri, only to have Costa-Méndez send him a little note to open on the plane which goes back on everything they had previously agreed to (134, 147). This tactic demonstrates not only fickleness, but cowardice, since the bad news is delivered only after Haig has no chance of responding directly. Twice, Costa-Méndez’s notes are labelled “Some personal thoughts on our negotiations. Not urgent” (133, 147), and yet the following day they are published the New York Times as Argentina’s official stance (138). Curteis relates this incident through the eyes of Haig, though with some alterations to make the Argentines seem even more unreasonable than the historical Haig had thought them. Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse clarify that the paper which Costa Méndez gave Haig on his first visit was from the beginning intended to represent the official Argentine position, and that Haig, misunderstanding the letter’s nature, had chosen to read it later on the airplane. It was not labelled “personal thoughts,” as Curteis indicates, but Haig had recalled Costa-Méndez saying that it contained his personal thoughts (181). Haig had also
misunderstood some statements made during negotiations to indicate a softening of the Argentine position which had not actually occurred. Furthermore, there was no initialed document to be contradicted by Costa Méndez’s letter, as Curteis indicates (179-80).\textsuperscript{40}

The second shuttle to Buenos Aires failed for different reasons. This time, according to Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, Costa-Méndez’s note (again, intended as official policy) did indeed renege on agreements previously reached. This was because even after Buenos Aires had made what it considered to be important concessions, Haig would not indicate to them where London was willing to compromise on its stance, and continued to press for still more flexibility from Argentina. It seemed to Argentinean negotiators that London was not making any concessions at all while all the pressure was on Argentina to give way. Fearing it was being taken advantage of, the Junta decided to revert to its previous position (Freedman and Gamba Stonehouse 210-12). In other words, “Argentina would not continue to make concessions if the British remained intransigent” (Freedman and Gamba Stonehouse 213). Of course, the view presented in Curteis is the precise mirror image of that; namely, Britain could not continue to make concessions while, in their view, Argentina remained intransigent, and particularly when it was given to suddenly negating the progress that had previously been made.

Later on, Costa-Méndez’s now thoroughly-established hypocritical image is transferred to the Argentine stance on negotiations following the British recapture of South Georgia and the bombing of Stanley’s airstrip: rejecting yet another mediation offer from UN leader Pérez de Cuellar, Costa-Méndez shakes his head sadly and says, “After the brutal and unprovoked attack by the RAF . . . Aggression should not be allowed to succeed” (169). This imitation of one of Britain’s favorite guiding principles is meant to draw incredulous laughter from the audience, though an Argentine may well have seen similar hypocrisy in British proclamations of the same principle.\textsuperscript{41} According to the historical record, Argentina actually welcomed the UN mediation offer (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 286), which came closer to reaching a solution than all previous attempts. However, each side had a few points it could not accept as they were, and each side assumed that the other had already rejected its proposals. So the effort died (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 318). The way Curteis portrays Argentina’s leadership, however, any agreement reached would have been of no value, for surely they
would not have adhered to its terms. As British Opposition Leader Michael Foot states, “Any guarantee from this invading force is utterly worthless – as worthless as any guarantees that have been given by this same Argentinian fascist junta to its own people” (104). Given the hypocritical and deceitful Costa Méndez, the evil power-grasping Anaya, and the drunken, unpredictable Galtieri, the fears voiced by Thatcher and others of future aggressions do not appear so ill-founded.

Curteis’s negative image of the Argentine nation extends beyond the government to include the people themselves. This attitude is by no means unique to Curteis; as discussed in Chapter One, Alexander Haig and Margaret Thatcher both exhibited distaste at the Argentineans’ Plaza de Mayo demonstrations. *The Falklands Play* depicts the Argentinean crowds as raving mobs, indicative of an uncivilized country, in much the same way as official myth-makers did. As Haig’s motorcade approaches the Casa Rosada, the stage directions indicate: “*The streets are jammed with surging masses of shouting men and women, who appear and disappear into a sea of Argentine flags in a kind of tribal dance,*” all shouting “AR-GEN-TIN-A!” repeatedly (127). The comparison with a “tribal dance” is of course meant to conjure up images of primitive barbarism to equate with the Argentineans themselves. Again, after British Forces have retaken South Georgia, crowds in the Plaza are shown as “hysterical, weeping and waving their fists and screaming at camera over the loss of South Georgia, frenzied with anger and bewilderment” (165). Words such as *hysterical*, *weeping*, *screaming*, and *frenzied* adequately summarize the British attitude toward Argentinean people in general: they are irrational and ignorant, bordering on barbaric, and almost uncontrollable in their passions. Surely such a nation should not, indeed *could* not govern British subjects in the Falklands.

“Great” Britain identity myths do not make an explicit appearance in the play until the enemy myths have been well-established. However, a space has been prepared for them by the enemy myths so that when they are explicitly dealt with, they seem to fit more naturally into the reality of the play – the degraded image of the enemy causes Britain’s goodness to stand out all the more clearly. The threat the enemy poses to British identity both in the Falklands and at home appears to justify a military response. Curteis arranges the play this way because the British identity myths rely heavily on
enemy myth for their existence. One cannot be a dictator-slaying warrior without an
appropriately evil dictator to slay. One cannot defend the Rule of Law if no enemy
threatens to undermine it. The hero is ultimately defined in terms of the villain he
confronts. The other inevitable result of these interconnected myths is that if Britain fails
to assert its own identity by forcing the enemy back down to its “proper” place, then
British identity will disappear. Thus Britain’s very identity and status are both defined
and threatened by the enemy.

Curteis presents a plain-dealing Britain that dutifully follows the rules of fair
negotiation and fair combat, to contrast with the treacherous, unpredictable, and irrational
Argentine Junta. He makes a prominent point of the fact that Britain has laid out rules of
engagement in order to keep military action under control and maintain ethical
integrity. When enemy reconnaissance planes are spotted following the Task Force, the
British do not shoot at them, because the rules of engagement forbid it. The military
leaders demonstrate strict adherence to the rules even though the planes pose a grave
threat – they send signals to enemy submarines which could approach undetected and
destroy a carrier, effectively ending the war in Argentina’s favor (149, 160). Curteis also
takes special care to show Britain’s justification in the controversial sinking of the
Argentine cruiser Belgrano. In addition to suspecting the Belgrano’s involvement in a
pincer movement on British carriers, Curteis’s text points out that British leaders thought
Belgrano and her escorts to be fitted with Exocet, against which British ships had no
adequate defense (172-73). He also provides the background for the event by first
depicting the War Cabinet making a decision to inform Argentina, via the UN, that
anything outside the Total Exclusion Zone will also be attacked, if it is deemed to pose a
threat to British forces (166-67). The message is sent clearly and explicitly in the play,
perhaps more so than it was historically, thus giving British forces even greater
justification for their action. Beyond this, Curteis has characters surmise that Argentine
forces are not restricted by rules of engagement like the British, so that the broadening of
Britain’s rules only places the antagonists on more equal ground:

   WHITELAW: If the Argies could sink one of our carriers, they’d go
   ahead and do it, no matter where it was!
   NOTT: So we’d be placing ourselves on the same footing as them.
WHITELAW: Yes, but doing it publicly, and giving notice. (167)

Thus he establishes the British adherence to rules and fair play, which has hitherto placed them at a disadvantage to Argentina’s less regulated forces.

In addition to following strict rules of fair combat, British leaders are shown restraining other possible military actions in order not to jeopardize the possibility of a negotiated peace: at one point a British submarine captain sends in a request for permission to attack an Argentine ship that is laying mines in Stanley harbor. His request is denied “because we are doing our utmost to achieve a diplomatic settlement” (136). Even when the Argentines are blatantly self-contradicting and uncooperative during the negotiations, Thatcher and her government are shown to maintain a calm and serious commitment to pursuing a diplomatic solution. After Haig explodes in exasperation, “Their entire strategy is prevaricational!” the Prime Minister character responds soothingly, “It still must be followed through, Al. Every avenue” (139). These scenarios are in direct contradiction to accusations that Thatcher’s government never took negotiation as a serious option and had planned to use military force all along. Curteis strengthens his image of a government committed to negotiating in good faith with his depictions of the British negotiating team. They are shown making concessions they had not wanted to make, while the Argentines remain intransigent. On the final peace initiative from the UN, they agree to consider even more major concessions such as abandoning sovereignty, and accepting UN governance for the islands. They are willing to do this because their desire to prevent further loss of life outweighs their desire for Britain to appear victorious (181-82).

When negotiations fail, Curteis demonstrates that the decision to fight was not entered into lightly. He includes scenes showing various Ministers, including Thatcher, struggling with the idea of risking young men’s lives over this confrontation. He has Thatcher’s deputy Willie Whitelaw make the audience aware that at least two people in the War Cabinet have actually experienced combat first-hand, and therefore “have no illusions” about the horror of war and the price Britain will pay by entering into one. Thatcher, though she is unfamiliar with fighting, is depicted as taking the loss of life very seriously, and indeed personally. She is shown worrying about possible casualties in the South Georgia takeover: she protests that “It’s terrible to send men in to fight, to risk
their young lives in those . . . atrocious conditions!” (160-61). She is depicted as visibly shaken and grieving over the loss of life in the Belgrano and Sheffield sinkings (178; 180), and it is said that she writes letters “in her own hand” to the families of every British serviceman who dies in the war (181). These more personal, compassionate depictions of Thatcher are meant to show that she, as the main representative of Britain and hence heroine of the play, is morally correct in terms of respect for human life and the feelings of individuals within the nation.

However, in spite of tender feelings, Thatcher and her Ministers must stand strong to maintain and defend Britain’s identity, not only as moral leader, but also as opposer of aggression and destroyer of dictators. Britain’s identity and duty to resist aggression are invoked in a telling exchange between Deputy Prime Minister Whitelaw and Foreign Secretary Carrington. The scene takes place in Carrington’s country garden, with the parish church bells ringing in the background. This setting evokes Britain’s pastoral identity myth, along with some religious overtones:

WHITELAW: Just listen to those bells! Sometimes England seems so close, as if you’re about to turn a corner and bump into her, putting shit on the roses. (He chuckles) Ugly old hag with a wall-eye, I expect. She’s not at all easy, always demanding things of you, saying I stand for what I’ve always stood for and it’s what you’re here for.

CARRINGTON: Noblesse oblige?

WHITELAW: It’s more than that. It’s recognizing the moment that justifies everything else. Winston said as much, in 1940.

CARRINGTON: You’re not seriously comparing this with 1940?!

WHITELAW: In size, of course not. But remember the March into the Rhineland four years before – that was about this size. If we had stopped that, there’d have been no Second World War. Just think of that! (109)

In this exchange one sees something of the “Great” Britain/Deep England identity myth side by side with the enemy myth. The essential “England” is personified, and she is a pastoral being – “putting shit on the roses” – and called to mind by the ringing of the parish church bells. She is also ancient, and demanding: she requires that she and her
people stand for what she has “always stood for,” and thus remain “Great.” She calls for noblesse oblige from her people, the obligation of superior beings (England’s ruling class) to set the moral example and take care of lesser beings. She demands that they watch for key moments in history, “the moment that justifies everything else,” in which to take decisive action and destroy evil as it emerges, like Churchill. Comparing the Argentine regime again with Hitler, and Thatcher with Churchill, is meant to stir up patriotic emotion and revive the dictator-slaying warrior urge in the British soul. Comparing the Falkland crisis to the Rhineland invasion again implies that catastrophic violence might well ensue if this one small incident is not stopped – that in addition to Britain’s image, world security could depend upon how Britain decides to deal with this crisis. The proximity of these two myths in the conversation also points to their interdependence; the British identity myths and national renewal myths depend in large part upon an enemy and a serious threat to the “natural order.”

Thatcher’s speech to War Cabinet in Scene 82 again evokes a personified spirit of Britain, this time the warrior spirit. Thatcher asks the Cabinet if that old Britain is still alive:

Do we still have the will to resist aggression by force of arms . . . ? . . . It may be we’re going to war; people will get killed, innocent people, young soldiers many of whom won’t understand what it is they’re fighting for. Are we really prepared to do that? Do we still believe what we certainly believed in, in 1940? Or is that now just the romance of history, nothing to do with the cold realities of Britain in 1982, part of a nation that has actually quietly died, as Greece died, as Spain died. Because if in our hearts we secretly believe that that Britain is dead, it would be a crime of the direst and blackest sort to send those men to fight – a crime of which the country would very soon find us guilty because their hearts won’t be in it . . . (113)

In this quote we again see the myth that resisting aggression, Churchill style, is Britain’s legacy and duty. Thatcher calls upon her Ministers to awaken the slumbering warrior-spirit and send him, but only if they believe in the myth. If they do not believe, then the
British warrior will fail, because Britain is a democracy, and without the support of its people as well as its Ministers, it cannot perform its duty or maintain its greatness.

Curteis writes in his introduction that he meant for the play to show that the Falklands War was fought “to resist aggression, and thereby in a long tradition of such resistance that we, as a nation, have manifested again and again since the sixteenth century” (25). He thus demonstrates a fervent belief that Britain’s identity myth as an international moral leader is both ancient and authentic. He sees this identity at stake and in need of defense, not only during the war itself, but also during his own mini-war in the BBC over its representation on the screen. Despite pressures from certain officials at the BBC, Curteis refused to remove or alter those parts of his play that perpetuate this identity myth, because he believes this would be falsifying the historical record (25). He was also pressured to imply that political motivations, including possible impact on upcoming elections, influenced War Cabinet decisions. Curteis rejected this suggestion as libelous to Cabinet Ministers (41), and again refused “to go substantially against the historical record under my own name” (26, original emphasis). He maintains his position that the war was fought selflessly to defend principles of self-determination and to show that no one may benefit from aggression. The self-imposed British duty to defend these principles is shown to have serious international implications, as Thatcher says that if one act of aggression succeeds, others will inevitably follow; but if an aggressor is resisted, peace can resume (120, 122). An appropriately firm response to this crisis is seen as indispensable to maintain security for vulnerable territories all over the world. Even the Pope is shown to privately side with Britain (against predominantly Catholic Argentina), musing to his aide that “no one should give way to force. The British are right over that” (135).

The Argentine poetry and the British television play both deal with the war primarily in terms of symbolic abstractions, rather than the actual combat and its effect on individuals. Both poetry and play frame the war as a romantic quest: to liberate sacred ground in one case, and fellow countrymen in another. The Argentinean poets did not have access to reliable information about the war as they were writing, so they relied on their imaginations and on their national myths. Partially because of their isolation, the
poets transform the Malvinas into an almost magical symbolic entity that is more human than geographical, and the combat to redeem it is deemed a small price to pay for the glory that will surely be won with God on their side. Curteis, though he could have delved into the actual fighting of the war, chose to set the action of his play away from the battlefield, among the elite decision makers. This limited view allows him, like the Argentine poets, to concentrate on abstract principles and thus promote the official myths without interference from the messy realities of combat. Many of the myth-promoting speeches in the play are taken directly from speeches by Margaret Thatcher and others in the House of Commons. These quoted speeches underline the fact that the actual decision-makers were as isolated from the fighting as the characters in this play, and that they, too, were dealing with the war in terms of abstract principles and myths of national identity and duty. From this perspective it is easier to accept that such principles, values, and myths are worth defending even if it costs lives and suffering. As Jo Henderson observes, Curteis’ play asserts that Britain’s traditional value systems are more important than the individual lives that may be spent in their defense (197). This sense of abstraction is to be expected from myth-promoting works; since getting closer in and viewing the grunge and gore, the waste of life in terms of recognizable human beings, tends to weaken such myths, or at least make them seem less valuable, less worth fighting for.

**Conclusions**

Writers, photographers, and musicians from both sides of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict have produced a variety of myth-perpetuating texts about the war. In most cases, the myth-promoting works on both sides of the Atlantic present the war as a conflict between good and evil, rightness and error. The romance-quest plot structure lends itself well to such a project, and provides a fitting framework for presenting identity myths, enemy myths, and national renewal myths. While studying these works, I identified three different focus strategies that were used within the romance structure. The first, employed by writers of adventure novels, uses a narrow focus on a small group of men in a combat or special-operations scenario. This enables the writers to actively promote
heroism and enemy myths with concrete, though fictional, personalities and actions, while accepting the broader implications of those myths, such as the legitimacy of the war itself, as simply given. Violence and mortal danger are glorified as exciting opportunities to develop and demonstrate “manliness” and valor. With these values in the foreground, the more generalized identity and national renewal myths do not receive much reinforcement. In fact, the setting of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict and any myths specific to that conflict, appear as secondary and incidental to the action.

Another approach, used in the souvenir picture books, employs a broader focus and a greater degree of abstraction. The photo books present selected images and concrete details about the combat, and seem to draw more generalized conclusions about the nature of the war, the heroes, the enemy, et cetera, from there. Even though the readers see individual faces and read about individual acts within the war, they experience each one so briefly and in conjunction with so many others that they all seem to blend together. The authors give prominence to details that support official myths, while avoiding issues that might cause readers to question them. The specific events and images provide the illusion that official myths hold up even for the individuals involved in combat. A judicious amount of blood and suffering is admitted, but the overall message is that the national cause is worth the price. This strategy is more thorough in perpetuating Falklands/Malvinas myths than the first, though it tends to leave the national renewal myth undeveloped.

The final approach is that of the poetry, music, and Curteis’ television drama. It favors the overarching abstract myths of identity and national renewal, and distances itself from the violent realities of combat. The texts that use this approach make the greatest appeal to patriotic emotion and promote the range of official myths most thoroughly; for this reason I chose them as the primary texts for this chapter. The poetry and music feature a broad focus which deals mainly with one country’s army achieving victory over the other’s and freeing the captive islands. The hero and enemy roles are played by entire countries or their armies, or a symbolic “everyman” soldier. There are no real individuals who suffer as a result of the war. Even the martyr-hero Giachino is an abstraction now that he is dead and has been taken over by the myth. *The Falklands Play’s* focus is upon a few key individuals, but they merely act as representatives of their
respective nations. The hero here is Britain, which has chosen Thatcher as its representation in the flesh. The Argentine Junta and Costa-Méndez are likewise presented as embodiments of the “essential” enemy in its various facets. They are all removed from the actual fighting, and are shown to be thinking in terms of broad abstractions rather than in terms of the concrete effects of the war on individual lives. In this strategy, the myths and their associated values take precedence over anything else. The suffering and hardships of individuals are insignificant and beyond notice compared to the grand tale of national redemption that they bring about. This strategy provides the most thorough promotion of Falklands/Malvinas myths. However, the works that use it are vulnerable due to their abstraction and isolation from the war they purport to be touting. They are far enough removed from the reality of the war that they begin to lose their subtlety and their illusion of naturalness. They begin to call attention to themselves as contrived, because they look so much like the fairy tales upon which they are modeled.
Notes to Chapter Two

1 Foster’s discussion of the romance quest form deals mainly with heroism myths, and he concentrates less on the overall plot structure than on certain aristocratic ideals in the traditional romance quest narrative (83). Citing Erich Auerbach and Paul Fussell, Foster characterizes the traditional romance hero as noble, while the other classes are downplayed or at least treated less seriously. In the case of Falklands War literature, Foster points out that those given hero status are officers. The rest of the soldiers are presented as “emblematic, though undifferentiated warrior figures” (85). He discusses Falklands heroes and heroic narratives in terms of this romance-quest elitism. My emphasis will lie more with the general underlying structure of the romance quest in Falklands/Malvinas literature, and I will be dealing with all of its elements, not just the hero.

2 The term gesta is often used by military apologists to refer to the invasion and subsequent efforts at defending the Malvinas against the British. It means a heroic deed or exploit, and is taken from the term for medieval French epic poems, or cantares de gesta (chansons de geste in French).

3 These include R. Holmes’s Firing Line (1985), O. Jacks’s Break Out (1986), five more volumes in the Strike Force Falklands series (1984-5), Bob Langley’s Conquistadores (1985) and Avenge the Belgrano (1988), Walter Winward’s Rainbow Soldiers (1985), and Jack Higgins’s Exocet (1983). The last two novels are exceptional in that they attempt to humanize Argentine officers by presenting some likeable Argentine military characters. Langley’s novels, though they feature Argentine characters and their points of view, tend to portray them along standard enemy myth lines, as sexist, violent, scheming, and power-hungry.

4 During the war, newspapers and other media were forbidden from printing any information that might lessen military credibility or contradict official communiqués (Blaustein and Zubieta 470). Because of these limitations, newspapers printed triumphantist, often invented news about British losses and Argentine victories, and refrained from printing anything about the rumors of starving conscripts. People became aware of food shortages and the fact that soldiers received little mail from their loved ones through conscript letters and word of mouth. Dalmiro M. Bustos writes in El otro frente de la guerra: Los padres de las Malvinas [The other front of the war: the parents of the Malvinas] (1982) that during the war, members of the parents’ support group that he founded came to meetings with news from their sons that they were not getting enough food or letters (43; 61-63). Those parents who had not received letters heard the news from other parents in the group, which was substantial in size: on one particular day, for example, three hundred people attended the meeting (65). After the war, however, the information became more public. In a brief list of memorable post-war events, journalists Eduardo Blaustein and Martín Zubieta note that on June 23, returning veterans from the 3rd Infantry Regiment had publicly denounced the military’s failure to provide adequate food or munitions during the war (468). In July, the news magazine Gente published an investigation of what really happened to the food that civilians had sent to the soldiers in the war. The investigation concludes that much of the food never arrived in the Malvinas (Gente advertisement, Clarín 15 July 1982. Reproduced in Blaustein and Zubieta 500).

5 There were several instant accounts of the war’s events that included photos, but the Sunday Express text was the only coffee-table style book of photographs available until 2002. In addition to the photograph book discussed here, British artists produced souvenir books of war paintings, such as David Cobb’s The Making of a War Artist (1986), and John Hamilton’s The Helicopter Story of the Falklands Campaign (1990), whose target audience consisted mainly of servicemen and Westland Helicopter Company personnel. Linda Kitson, the Official War Artist, also published her drawings in The Falklands War: A Visual Diary (1982). Yet another myth-promoting photo/history book, Task Force: The Illustrated History of the Falklands War (2002), was published for the twentieth anniversary of the conflict. Picture books of the war are scarce on the Argentine side, and Rotondo’s is the only one I know of that was published soon after the war. There were, however, souvenir photospreads published in Argentine
newstand magazines like *Gente*, while the war was still going and its outcome still uncertain. The only other Argentine photo book on the war, *Malvinas: Album de campaña* (1999), was published seventeen years later by the Fundación Soldados.

The colors of the snowy mountaintops and the sea refer to the white and blue bands on the Argentinean flag. The metaphor works quite nicely: an imaginary Malvinas landscape might show the blue sea on the bottom, the white mountaintops in between, and the blue sky above, imitating the flag with its blue bands on top and bottom with a white band in the middle.


“yerta y estéril”

“Esas remotas islas,... que ignoran los despectivos habitantes de la madura Europa,... Nada duele tanto como el desprecio y el desdén por lo que sabemos nuestro...”

“donde los mares se disputan / las noches largas, como la paciencia de Dios.”

For poetry, the numbers in the parentheses refer to line numbers. When referring to the poem’s page numbers in the anthology, I write “(in Müller 123).”

“una ruta hacia la infancia” and also “una bandera.”

“Yo tengo una casa en las Malvinas. / La tuve y no la tuve. Ahora la tengo.”

“Allá es aquí. Y un mismo nacimiento / nos une de ombligo y de la cabeza”

Together, the mainland and the Malvinas make one “hijo popular,” who, now without fear, moves “hacia el hogar y el canto.”

Though he wrote this poem just seven days prior to the surrender, Giudice, like most of the Argentinean populace, would have been unaware that his country’s army was near to defeat. The media had given the impression that Argentina was winning right up until the surrender. For other poems that personify the islands as a captive woman, see Nicolás Cocaro, “Canto malvinero” (May 1982, in Müller 61-62), Juan Carlos Gatell “Poema a las Malvinas” (May 1982, in Müller 116-17); Tomás García Giménez “Malvinas argentinas” (May 1982, in Müller 108); Matilde Lafuente “Romance de las Malvinas” (April 1982, in Müller 131); Hector Villanueva “Malvinas” (1982, in Müller 207).

“Inocente de espadas y cadenas”

“Mártir paciente en tiempo y agonía”

The islanders bring in ethical questions that the poets are not willing to deal with. Because of international laws of prescription and adverse possession, the islanders’ rights could not be ignored or
denied without risking international disapproval. Some Argentines may have thought that the islanders, like the islands, wished for liberation from British colonial oppression (Esteban 128). At the same time, those who were educated enough to be writing poetry were probably also aware that many islanders were opposed to an Argentine takeover. To acknowledge an element of the islands as hostile to Argentinean sovereignty would detract from the righteousness of the Argentinean cause. The solution is to ignore the islanders completely and concentrate on the captive land itself, which longs to express its true identity as Argentine.

Some other poets describing British as pirates: Mateo Rossi (July 1982, in Müller 180); Gatell (May 1982, in Müller 116-17); Yupanqui (1971, in Müller 210-11); Ortiz Behety (1946, in Müller 148-50); Gonzalez Trillo (1970, in Müller 126); Anonymous (1833, in Müller 21-22).

21 “Armas de una imperial / egolatría caduca”

22 “Antigua rata dueña de los mares”

23 “Cenil ratón caído en la trampera”

24 The first two British invasions of Argentine territory occurred in 1806 and 1807, when British troops invaded Buenos Aires, and the third was in 1833, when the British took the Malvinas.

25 “Toma tu Carta Magna, para escrutar la esencia / que hizo grande tu historia, y noble tu presencia,”

26 ‘noble gloria de luz y de paloma”

27 “no es para el mundo –dijo– este argentino”

28 “No se cayeron los que están caídos. / Se fueron a alumbrar nuestro Mañana.”

29 “tiempos heroicos y supremos”

30 “Están los viejos héroes mirando de las nubes, / y como ayer mandando: ¡Adelante, soldado!”

31 “volar contigo / por el glorioso triunfo que estás tu, modelando.”

32 Vestey is the source of the quote. Other radio reviewers are Michael Hubbard for BBC News, and Nigel Deacon for VRPCC Newsletter.

33 The Franks Report is an official document entitled Falkland Islands Review: Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, by Baron Oliver Shewell Franks. Franks headed the public inquiry into the Thatcher Government’s handling of events leading up to the invasion. The report clears Thatcher and her ministers of any blame connected with Argentina’s decision to invade the islands. The House of Commons proceedings from April through June of 1982 records all debates held during that period of time. Curteis has a few scenes take place in the House, and actually reproduces some speeches word for word in his play. He also consulted the minutes of the UN Security Council meetings that were relevant to the Falklands/Malvinas dispute, from April 1, when an emergency meeting was called over the impending invasion, through June 4, 1982. Curteis cites the first meeting in his play and includes a scene of the Security Council voting on Resolution 502, which demands a cessation of hostilities and a complete withdrawal of Argentine troops from the islands.

35 Curteis’ depiction of a private, emotionally sensitive side of Thatcher to balance her well-known combative side seems to have been particularly objectionable to certain BBC officials who were instrumental in cancelling the play’s production (Curteis 25). One such official, then Head of Plays Peter Goodchild, admits in interview that he wanted to avoid any “sentimentalized” portrayal of Thatcher’s character, given the number of enemies she had (“The Falklands Play Row,” BBC 4).
Curteis quotes portions of Thatcher’s emergency debate speech on April 3, 1982 in the House of Commons. The emphasis in the play’s text is his (Thatcher 149-57).

These are Foot’s exact words, and his speech also immediately follows Thatcher’s in the transcripts of the emergency debate. Although Foot supports taking action to free the islanders from their predicament, he also criticizes Thatcher and her government for having mishandled the Falklands/Malvinas dispute up to this point. These comments are not included in his lines for the play. Besides interfering with Curteis’s ideological project, including them would have made this portion of the play much too tedious.

According to David Rock’s *Argentina 1516-1987*, Galtieri and his followers were Viola’s primary opponents, and Galtieri was responsible for deposing him in December 1981 (374-75). Rock does not mention Anaya as playing a role in any disputes within the military junta. He also attributes the decision to consolidate public support through an aggressive foreign policy – against Chile over the Beagle Channel, communist foment in Central America, and Britain over the Falklands/Malvinas – to Galtieri rather than Anaya (375-76). He does, however, write that Anaya planned the details of the invasion operation of April 1982 (377).

It is implied that the Argentineans misspelled *buggers* in their report, while the islanders who perpetrated the vandalism would have spelled it correctly.

In Haig’s defense, Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse write that “While Haig exaggerated the extent to which the Argentines were reneging on a concession, he had some grounds for complaint in that the Argentine proposal had not been discussed during his visit to Buenos Aires and reflected none of the ideas brought to the negotiations by his team” (181). Later they add that Haig’s frustration at a “series of confused and at times contradictory messages” was caused mainly by “lack of co-ordination between the Argentine negotiating team, President Galtieri and the rest of the Junta. This meant that apparent concessions did not always survive the scrutiny of the Military Committee. At least twice this put Costa Méndez in the position of delivering last-minute messages to Haig as he left Buenos Aires which substantially qualified the most recent understanding and helped to weaken the credibility of Costa Méndez as an interlocutor (239).

In an interview on BBC1’s *Panorama*, Argentine journalist Eduardo Crawley explained Argentina’s guiding principles in this way: “The principles involved are clear. Let me put it like this. Principle number one is that one cannot tolerate the occupation of part of one’s territory by a foreign power, and it is perfectly legitimate to expel the intruder; principle number two is that one cannot negotiate sovereignty under duress, namely while somebody else is occupying part of one’s territory; principle number three, it is wrong to flout a resolution of the United Nations Security Council, this puts one out of international law, so to speak. [. . .] Now, odd as it may seem to the British public, these are precisely Argentina’s arguments.” (qtd. in Foster, *Fighting Fictions* 144-45).

Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse explain the nature of British rules of engagement: “in order to maintain some political control over military operations, the forces were required to follow rules of engagement. These varied in scope from strategic to detailed tactical instructions. They defined the freedom of action of the commander on the spot rather than controlled matters directly through precise instructions. The military interest is normally to encourage the enemy to assume that the commander’s freedom is greater than it actually is. So in addition to the rules sent to the task force command, the British Government issued a series of public statements which defined the terms under which it would take action against Argentine forces. In general the rules under which British forces were actually operating were more restrictive than those communicated to the outside world” (248). Argentine forces also worked under rules of engagement but these are not laid out in Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse (258).

The MEZ statement was modified on April 23 with the notice that any ship or aircraft “which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of the British Forces in the South Atlantic will encounter the appropriate response” (qtd. in Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 250). The wording of the TEZ
declaration also included a clause stating that this notice did not exclude possible attacks on any ships threatening to the Task Force (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 248-50). London would later cite these statements to defend its decision to sink the Belgrano. However, it should be noted that these statements were not enough to justify the sinking at the time, and the rules of engagement still had to be changed to allow it (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 261). The change in the rules of engagement allowed British forces to attack any Argentine naval ship “on the high seas,” but this change was not passed along to Argentina right away (267). Curteis does not mention these last bits of information, as they would have weakened the justification for Belgrano’s sinking.

44 Stopping the Rhineland invasion may or may not have prevented World War Two. Failure to stop the Falklands invasion would probably not have started World War Three – at least not over Argentina’s ambitions. The real fear may have been that the USSR or other communist bloc countries might take advantage of a perceived weakness on Britain’s part to make more territorial grabs. At the time, fear of communist expansion was very real. This is evident in Thatcher’s 1976 Kensington Town Hall speech, urging the maintenance of a nuclear arsenal in Britain as a deterrent against communist aggression (Thatcher 39-47).
When Argentineans learned that their armed forces had retaken the Malvinas, poet and fiction writer Jorge Luis Borges was among the minority that was not pleased. He characterizes the Malvinas War as absurd and wasteful in his poem “Juan López y John Ward” [Juan López and John Ward] (1982; in Müller 39), one of the few demythologizing poems written in its wake. Although written by one of Argentina’s most internationally recognized authors, this poem is not mentioned in any English-language studies of Falklands/Malvinas War art. It is, however, cited in Argentine works – documentary film, novel, and critical article. The poem tells a tragic story of two men, one Argentinean and one British, who spoke each other’s languages, read each other’s literature, and probably would have been friends, if they had not been forced to meet and kill one another as soldiers in the Falklands/ Malvinas War. Borges not only challenges the war as pointless, but he also dismisses cultural and political divisions and the nationalism they engender as arbitrary and ultimately harmful constructs. To do this he describes the world and its partitions as might an alien anthropologist or xeno-historian, seeking to understand how this strange human planet is run:

The planet had been parcelled into diverse countries,
each one furnished with loyalties, with little memories,
[. . .] with
offenses, with a peculiar mythology, [. . .].

This arbitrary division was conducive to wars.

[El planeta había sido parcelado en diversos países,
cada uno provisto de lealtades, de pequeñas memorias,
[. . .] de
aggravios, de una mitología peculiar, [. . .].}
Esa arbitraria división era favorable a las guerras.] (lines 2-9)

With this final comment, Borges the “alien” commentator draws conclusions from his observations and prepares his readers for what will inevitably happen to his two protagonists.

Next he carefully describes López and Ward, not as citizens of a specific named country, but as coming from places distinguished by their geographical features or by individuals who lived nearby; hence, López was born “in the city by the motionless/river,” and Ward, “in the outskirts of the city where/Father Brown had walked” (10-12). He shows that they as individuals were not limited by the arbitrary boundaries of their world, but that they had studied and loved the languages and literary icons of each other’s cultures – López read Conrad, and Ward had studied Don Quixote.

Borges emphasizes what these two have in common, and then describes the wasteful fate that a nationalist war brought to these two potential friends:

They would have been friends, but they saw one another only once face to face, in some islands that are too famous.

and each one of the two was Cain, and each one, Abel.

They were buried together. Snow and corruption know them.

[Hubieran sido amigos, pero se vieron una sola vez cara a cara, en unas islas demasiado famosas,
y cada uno de los dos fue Caín, y cada uno, Abel.

Los enterraron juntos. La nieve y la corrupción los conocen.] (16-19)

Again, Borges refrains from using the mythologized and loaded names for the islands, referring to them only as “too famous.” His description of the two combatants as both Cain and Abel removes blame from any one party: they are both the killer and they are both the innocent victim at the same time. This technique blurs mythologized identities that were assigned by either side to themselves and to their enemies, while maintaining the sense of tragedy that these two fine young men should be made to kill one another. He concludes his poem with a final emphasis on the absurdity of the whole episode he
describes: “The event that I refer to happened in a time that we cannot / understand” (20-21). Like the characters in his poem, Borges had cultural ties to both the UK and Argentina: he learned Spanish and English together at a young age, having had both a grandmother and a tutor of British origin. His upbringing was cosmopolitan and international, and his poem is part of an anti-war tradition that appeals to supra-national values like mutual understanding, forgiveness, and human solidarity, to oppose the nationalist identity myths so conducive to war.

Martín Kohan, Oscar Blanco, and Adriana Imperatore write that Borges’s poem and the pacifist tradition to which it belongs fail to escape completely from the “Gran Relato Nacional” [Great National Story], a name they give to the conglomeration of national identity myths that define who is us and who is them, what Argentinean values and traditions are, and what the nation’s destiny is or should be (83). They maintain that the most successful literature against the war deconstructs the Great National Story by turning the myths’ own principles on their heads, and inverting their hierarchies (84). Their article briefly lists works that deconstruct the identity myths with “Argentine” soldiers who turn out to be Chilean, English, or Japanese, and “English” soldiers who are really Welsh, Scottish, or Gurkhas (84). The British radio plays Argentinean folk and tango music, while the Argentinean soldiers smoke British cigarettes and drink British whisky (85). The idea of the “just cause” and the issue of sovereignty over the Malvinas are shown to be irrelevant, and the “heroes” are only interested in getting away with something and surviving, forgetting national honor (83; 86). In a later article that he wrote alone, Kohan groups these works together under a single generic name: they all present the war as a “farce” (6). Kohan and colleagues seem to advocate the idea that only a farcical (or humorously ironic) treatment of the war can truly deconstruct official myths. Perhaps this is why they write that Borges’s poem fails to escape from the myths it purports to attack. However, in my estimation, the poem functions in many of the same ways that Kohan and company’s “farcical” demythologizers do; for example, it calls attention to the myths’ arbitrary nature. Unlike farcical works, however, it shows that these arbitrary myths have led to tragedy. If nationality and identity myths are arbitrary, then certainly whose flag will fly over the disputed islands is an unimportant issue for the speaker in the poem. The poem also gives a brief reversal of the “us-versus-them”
construction in that it shows that each soldier appreciates and participates to a degree in the other’s culture. That is, the identity endowed to each by his national literature is not exclusive of the other; the “other” is not as entirely other as he may have appeared at first. This is basically the same device that appears farcical in other works that present Argentine soldiers consuming British whisky and cigarettes and British radio playing tangos (Kohan, et. al. 85).

In this chapter I will discuss demythologizers: works that question or oppose the official myths. I hope to show that a demythologizing work can deconstruct war myths without necessarily resorting to farce. In the same vein, I hope to show that narrating the war as a “drama” – as do testimonial accounts of the war – does not always “leave the foundations of the nationalist faith standing” (Kohan 7). In fact, the two plays on which I concentrate my in-depth study are basically tragedies, as are many of the films. Before dealing with this chapter’s central primary texts, however, I present a survey of some of the other demythologizing texts from both sides of the conflict. First I discuss literature, much of which contains elements of the farcical. Next I provide an overview of demythologizing music from both sides; some of the songs discussed take a humorously ironic approach, while others attack official myths in a more sober style. Next I will briefly discuss five films; three British and two Argentine. Each of these genres provides at least one example of an effective demythologizer that does not portray the war as farcical. Finally, I analyze two tragic plays: Griselda Gambaro’s Del sol naciente [From the rising sun] and Steven Berkoff’s Sink the Belgrano! Both of these works utilize a tragic emplotment to encourage their audience to purge itself of harmful official myths.

**Prose Fiction**

British literature does not have much to offer in terms of strictly demythologizing works. There are, however, a few countermythologizing works that will be discussed in Chapter Four. Argentine demythologizing fiction abounds, however, and much of it is humorously ironic in its approach both to the war and to its official myths. There are exceptions to this generalization, however, as will become apparent. Martin Kohan and his colleagues focus on the “farcical” fiction that attempts to deconstruct the myths of
national identity and just cause. They do not, however, discuss any one of them at length – in fact, my brief discussions in this chapter are more detailed and specific than theirs. These works, almost without exception, tend to view the war from a distance. Few take place in the islands themselves, and those that do take place in the islands deal with the combat only briefly and abstractly, like the short combat scene that precipitates the protagonist’s travels in Marcelo Eckhardt’s sardonic youth novel *El desertor* [The deserter] (1992). Some narratives are removed from the conflict in time as well as space, like Juan Forn’s short story “Memorándum Almazán” [The Almazán memo] (1991), which takes place at the Argentinean Embassy in Chile long after the war is over, and Daniel Guebel’s short story “El amor de Inglaterra” [Love of England] (1992), which occurs in an imaginary time and place. The only exception to this removal from the action is Fogwill’s novel *Los pichy-cyegos*, which is neither farcical nor strictly demythologizing. I will address this work in the next chapter on countermythologizers.

“Memorándum Almazán” mocks Argentineans’ acceptance of heroic myths associated with the Malvinas conflict. The characters are humiliated, and one is even destroyed, because they naïvely embrace a Chilean swindler posing as a Malvinas war veteran. Their responses to the fake ex-combatant range from pity to paternalism to hero-worship, but they all look terribly foolish in the end. The implication is that their behavior would have remained foolish even if their pet veteran had been authentic. Guebel’s “El amor de Inglaterra” tells the story of the war in reverse: it is Argentina that has colonized an island off the coast of Great Britain, and the British who attempt to reclaim it (Kohan 11). The protagonist of Rodrigo Fresán’s “Al aprendiz de brujo” [The sorcerer’s apprentice] (1991) volunteers to fight in the Malvinas in hopes of being taken back to Britain as a prisoner so he can meet the Rolling Stones (Kohan 11).

*El desertor* questions the value of nationalistic myths of any kind, including those of the Dirty War, the Malvinas War, and the Cold War, proposing instead a value system based on pacifism, ecology, and rock-and-roll philosophy. The self-deprecating protagonist/narrator, who refers to himself as “yo perro garcía” [I garcia dog], rejects the idea of heroism as a silly invention and chooses to desert the battlefield during the Malvinas War. He dismisses the Argentine career military as “covert murderers” [asesinos encubiertos] who are all talk and have no real strength (26). He also criticizes
Borges’s poem as false, because real war is not the “historical chess game” [ajedrez histórico] that the poem makes it out to be (15). Yo perro garcía thinks Borges is also mistaken in that his poem’s characters participate in a “Great Culture” [Gran Cultura], an overriding international identity of the privileged and educated (88). García says bluntly that he is excluded from Argentina’s share in Great Culture because he is just a “half-breed Indian, drunken and lazy” (90). His criticism of Borges as elitist and exclusionary points out the one part of the “Great National Story” that his poem has perhaps failed to escape from: Argentina’s image of itself as a cohesive unit, and as a participant in Great Culture. Despite Eckhardt’s humorous demythologizing efforts, he still subscribes to and promotes enemy myths of the British as bloodthirsty imperialist oppressors: the protagonist deserts with a Gurkha who decides to flee his enslavement as an imperialist mercenary assassin (45, 82-83).

Osvaldo Lamborghini’s short story “La causa justa” [The just cause] (1988) features an insane Japanese immigrant who volunteers to fight for the Argentine forces in the war, because he sees the struggle as a “just cause.” Tokuro takes his definition of “just cause” from a propaganda pamphlet issued during World War Two under Emperor Hirohito, and he is every bit as serious about defending the Malvinas as he is about holding several of his co-workers hostage in a dressing room until the one agrees to make good on a joking “promise” to give a co-worker a blow job. To pair the just cause of the lost islands together in importance with a facetious offer of oral sex significantly reduces the usual solemnity with which the issue is generally regarded. That Tokuro is obsessed with obsolete World-War-Two era values and the honor of his defunct empire is also significant, and probably constitutes a jab at the British.

Martín Kohan mentions Gustavo Nielsen’s novel La flor azteca [The Aztec flower] (1997) as another farcical deconstructor of war myths, because it “de-centers” the story from the Malvinas to an office in Buenos Aires (6). Fabio, the protagonist and narrator, is a conscript who manages to spend the war in Buenos Aires running errands for a group of officers who are obviously inventing work for themselves in order to avoid combat duty. As he diligently “serves” the fatherland by fetching crackers and drinks, Fabio is showered with adulation from passersby in the street, and given free bus fares and movie tickets (91). His admittedly farcical existence is countered by the tragic
experience of his best friend Carlos who, unlike Fabio, is determined to serve his country properly. The futility of such a desire is shown through the fact that he endures beating and repeated cruelty from his naval superiors, only to die of cancer shortly after the war is over. Kohan and colleagues do not mention that this novel balances farce with an opposing tragedy, which also does its part to challenge myths of military superiority, heroic duty, and machismo. The structure of farce combined with tragedy itself works to invert hierarchies of national values: egoism and cowardice are rewarded as valuable assets by the corrupt military, while honesty and devotion to the patria bring suffering and destruction.

In all of these books, the action is significantly removed from the war itself. The farce could not function if set directly in the middle of a combat situation. Kohan himself writes that the demythologizing laughter of a farcical work of fiction would be “impossible” and indeed “intolerable” in a testimonial work (7). This is due in part to the focus of a testimonial, which places the reader in much closer contact with those who suffer and with the actual experience of war. There are British memoirs and testimonials, however, that belie this assertion by resorting to ironic humor at horrific moments. In his article “Irony as Exposure and Coverup,” Kevin Foster argues that although irony can effectively point out incongruities between the mythologized concept of war and the actual experience, it can also dull or even hide the horror of combat realities (147). In his own memoir, Lance Corporal Vincent Bramley corroborates Foster’s assessment by explaining that soldiers’ use of humor in battle may seem disrespectful and callous to the wounded and dead, but that it is a necessary psychological defense to prevent despair and even madness. He says that war will either send you “nuts or numb,” and one of the ways that soldiers numb themselves is by “laughing and joking” (133). Reducing a harrowing experience of terror and carnage to an ironic joke can actually make it less shocking and less likely to disturb one’s heroic or chivalric preconceptions about the value and purpose of the fighting. For works that focus closely on the combatants and their experiences, then, the most effective demythologizing strategy is simply to describe the events in all their horror.

An uncompromising and completely humorless look at combat from the middle of things does have its own powerful demythologizing effect, as Carlos Gardini’s eerie and
disturbing collection of short stories, *Primera línea* [Front line] (1983) shows. The collection contains two stories that refer to the Malvinas conflict: “Fuerza de ocupación [Occupation force]” (23-39) and “Primera línea” (149-69). Others deal with war in general, and still others respond to Dirty War atrocities or to mythologized concepts like heroism. In each case, the focus is narrow – upon just a few soldiers – as well as close-up on the war experience. The reader sees the gore and the destruction up close, and feels the protagonists’ disorientation and terror. This very sensation of proximity to the horror is what works to destroy chivalric and heroic notions about combat. In Gardini’s vision of war, just cause, national renewal, heroism, honor, and other such mythologized concepts are so remote as to be nonexistent. Admittedly, he does not deconstruct them from within as do some farcical works. He does, however, show them to be completely irrelevant in a combat situation where nerves are on edge and animal instinct, or sometimes insanity, replaces rational thought. Gardini’s fiction does partially deconstruct identity myths in terms of the “us-versus-them” construct of war: in most of his war stories, the enemy is unidentifiable and indistinguishable from one’s own people, resulting not in a farcical or humorous situation, but in a nightmarish world of confusion and madness where no one is sure what to do or whom to trust, and few have hope or even desire for survival. Certainly no one wins, and none of the questions posited are ever answered.

It is notable that there are so few humorously ironic demythologizers from Britain. Perhaps this is because it is easier to mock a losing army and/or government than a winning one, and it is more comfortable to cling to one’s nationalist fictions once they appear to have been confirmed and strengthened by glorious victory. Britain’s armed forces performed, on the whole, in accordance with society’s expectations of them. They were strong, brave, and efficient. Although there were difficulties, mix-ups, and mistakes, soldiers were the first to laugh at themselves and then “muddle through” – indeed, adaptability and creativity amid the inevitable confusion and unpredictability of war are traits that the British military cultivates and takes pride in (Stewart 58, 60, 118). Britain’s government likewise gained enormous popularity from its handling of the Falklands War. Those works that question the wisdom of the war or that in any way point to a deficiency on the part of the military, even without mocking, have been
labelled unpatriotic and insulting to the self-sacrifice of the armed forces. For British audiences, earnest criticism may be easier to swallow than outright mockery.

Music

Popular-style musical responses to the Falklands/Malvinas War tend to be primarily demythologizing on both sides of the conflict. On the British side, many artists have sung criticisms of the war: The Exploited, Crass, Lindisfarne, and Elvis Costello are some of the artists I discuss. The Exploited’s “Let’s Start a War (Said Maggie One Day)” is a straightforward accusation that Thatcher started the Falklands conflict in order to distract attention from the unemployed masses. It questions the myth of patriotic heroism in the succinct lines, “You fight for your country / You die for their gain” (8-9). Crass’s vitriolic songs “Sheep Farming in the Falklands” and “How Does it Feel to be the Mother of a Thousand Dead?” also blame Thatcher for taking the nation to war for personal political gain. “Sheep Farming” is the smarter and more demythologizing of the two. It puts an imperialist label on Thatcher’s supposedly romantic rescue tale of the war: “Friggin’ in the riggin’, another imperialist farce, / Another page of British History to wipe the national arse” (lines 3-4). Line four exposes Thatcher’s use of “Great” Britain myths to arouse patriotism and a desire to prove Britain’s still formidable military might, and her desire that her adventure be added as “another page” in that illustrious history. It is clear from the lyrics what value the band places on such manipulations of history. They call Britons “sheep” and “Brit-wit[s], hypocrite[s]” for accepting such myths as justification to go to war, concluding that “the bulldog,” or Britain’s mythified historical identity, “turned round and crapped in our eyes” (11; 53-54). These songs, by fringe punk bands with a harsh and angry sound, were not as hugely popular with mainstream listeners as were their Argentine counterparts. “How Does it Feel,” however, gained in sales after a media furor over the scathing lyrics. Lindisfarne, a moderately popular band with a Beatles-esque sound, recorded a much milder pacifist song called “Malvinas Melody,” which also faced heavy criticism and unofficial censorship (McSmith 6).
Perhaps the most famous British artist to criticize the war is Elvis Costello, whose “Shipbuilding” (1983), like the punk songs discussed above, treats the war as a self-interested gamble for power rather than a heroic rescue drama. Costello sings about the war from the point of view of an individual dockyard worker who had just been served with a redundancy notice, only to be recalled for the work to prepare the Task Force. The song begins with the question, “Is it worth it?” The dockworker wants to believe that it is worth it, talking of being able to buy a bicycle for his son’s birthday, and maybe a new coat for his wife (2-3). He protests that “It’s just a rumour that was spread about town / . . / that people get killed in / The result of this shipbuilding” (10; 12-13). The song puts a human face on the laborers who suffered unemployment and other setbacks under Thatcher’s economic reforms, and questions the national renewal that was supposed to have resulted from those reforms and from the war. The anonymous dockworker who speaks in the song is faced with a moral dilemma: working on the ships (i.e., supporting the war) will help him financially, yet he is concerned that people might die as a result of his work. The song implies that he and Thatcher both face a choice between self-interest and taking a moral stand. While poverty leaves the dockworker no real choice, Thatcher has freely chosen self-interest and placed him in his predicament. Costello’s later song “Tramp the Dirt Down” (1989) is a fierce condemnation of Thatcher, which lists the war’s dead and maimed on both sides as one of many ills for which the singer holds her responsible. The sharp lyrics are mismatched, however, to a dragging, moaning, lifeless excuse for a tune, which makes it less likely to capture much of a listening audience.

Despite their obvious stylistic differences, all of the British songs discussed here fall within the pacifist tradition of Borges’s poem, placing universal human values of life and peace over nationalistic ones. Crass’s “Sheep Farming in the Falklands” is the only song here that utilizes some of the ironic demythologizing strategies discussed by Kohan, in demoting hallowed figures of national myth like the Royal Family and National History to the same status as toilet paper. It would also perhaps be the most powerful demythologizer of all the songs, if its painfully noisy style and repellent language did not limit its listening audience.10 Again, for the humor of its hierarchical inversions to function, the focus of the text has to be distanced from the fighting itself. When Crass
chooses to focus on the people who did the fighting, as in “How Does it Feel,” then the humor disappears completely to be replaced by sadness and outrage over so much death.

On the Argentine side, popular singers who opposed the Malvinas war include Alejandro Lerner, Charly García, León Gieco, and Raúl Porchetto. National rock music enjoyed great popularity during and immediately after the dictatorship. Rock music gave young people in Argentina the feeling that someone audible and visible was voicing their concerns. It gave them a sense of belonging and collective identity in the face of the government’s suppression of other possible group identities for them, like the student movement and political organizations for youth (Vila 87-88). For these reasons, it became broadly influential during dictatorship years, in spite of government efforts to repress it by various means (Vila 87-88). The Malvinas War further boosted Argentine and other Spanish-language rock music because radio stations stopped playing English-language music at listeners’ insistence (Fernández Bitar 101). The war also prompted the military government to invite rock musicians to perform at a group concert with the Malvinas War as a theme. Musicians responded with the “Festival de Solidaridad Latinoamericana” [Festival of Latin American Solidarity], in which artists sang of pacifist sentiments instead of supporting the military’s actions in Malvinas (Vila 90). Fernández Bitar also writes that artists and attendants did not condone the war (103). Sixty thousand young people attended to hear, among others, the popular folk singer León Gieco perform.\footnote{Gieco set the tone with his song “Sólo le pido a Dios” [I Only Ask of God], which he had released in 1978 in response to Dirty War horrors (Vila 90). This song, essentially a sung prayer which pleads that we not allow ourselves to become indifferent to war or to the suffering of others, was beloved and regarded by many Argentineans as their theme song for the Dirty War and Malvinas War years.\footnote{Vila argues that the Rock Nacional movement did not support the Malvinas War while other anti-dictatorship groups did, and that it truly represented the interests of those that the Proceso and the Malvinas War hurt the most (90-91).}

While the rock movement as a whole refrained from supporting the war, some songs question pro-war myths better than others. Porchetto’s album \textit{Reina Madre} [Queen Mother] protests the war in a number of its songs, but it is ambivalent in terms of how it deals with Malvinas myths. For that reason I discuss it along with other ambiguous
works in Chapter Five. I argue that Lerner’s “La isla de la buena memoria” [The island of good memory] functions as a demythologizer, even though Kohan dismisses it as leaving the heroic mythology of the war intact (7). Kohan and I both agree that García’s “No bombardeen Buenos Aires” [Don’t bomb Buenos Aires] functions like the farcical myth-deconstructors of Argentine literature in its ironic treatment of the war.

Alejandro Lerner’s ironically titled song, “La isla de la buena memoria,” concentrates on the suffering that war brings upon those who fight. It rejects the value of war in general and thus appeals to the pacifist tradition of Borges’s poem. The speaker in the lyrics is an Argentine soldier who addresses his mother. He protests his lack of experience and training, an issue used by myth promoters and destroyers alike (lines 7-10). This soldier’s situation, however, is more pathetic than heroic. His comments about the cold and the fear are repeated three times, in a hesitant and plaintive voice with only the piano to accompany him (5-6; 20-21; 26-27). The speaker is not the brave David who faces Goliath with confidence in spite of his lack of experience; he is instead a reluctant youth betrayed by his government and taken to an inhospitable land to die. His words to his mother indicate that he is not sure whether he will fight or not, nor is he sure who he should fight against:

I don’t know who to fight
perhaps I will struggle or resist,
or perhaps I will die there.
[no sé contra quién pelear
tal vez luche o me resista,
o tal vez me muera allá.] (lines 3-4)

Not only does he lack the conviction to fight, but he is not sure who his real enemy is, undoubtedly a reference to testimonial accounts of officers betraying and abusing their men. The soldier’s pitiful situation is further developed when the singer almost whispers the lines that describe his death (22-25). The elegiac tone in these lines is perhaps the only element that perpetuates official myth – in this case the view of the Argentine soldier as martyr. The cause for which he dies, however, is not vaunted or even mentioned in this song. In this sense, his death is meaningless rather than epic.
Also unlike a proper martyr, the speaker questions and then ultimately rejects his faith in God, one of the most touted virtues of the Argentine army in the David myth. In the fourth stanza he implores, “Is there anything bad that does not afflict man, / is there no God to pray to?” (11-12). Then in the ninth stanza he repeats the same words, only as a statement rather than a question (28-29). In both these instances, the music rises to an angry crescendo with wailing electric guitars. Lerner belts out the words with an initial growl to his voice, followed by wailing to match the guitars. This is not the voice of a faithful martyr, of one who dies proudly for a noble cause. It is rather the sound of rage at feeling abandoned by humans and God alike, for no good reason.

Part of the song also addresses the national renewal myth that says the recovery of the Malvinas will unite Argentinean people together:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Since I arrived on the island,} \\
\text{I have no one to talk to} \\
\text{we are thousands united} \\
\text{by the same solitude.} \\
\text{[Desde que llegué a la isla,} \\
\text{no tengo con quien hablar} \\
\text{somos miles los unidos} \\
\text{por la misma soledad.] (13-19)}
\end{align*}
\]

In this description, not even the soldiers have felt united by their cause; the only thing that they have in common is their isolation from one another. The sparse instrumental accompaniment emphasizes that loneliness. Lerner closes his song with a despair that further belies the national renewal myth: in his loudest furious wail, accompanied by electric guitar and synthesizer, he affirms that there is no God, that there are no brothers, no soldiers, no one to decide who was right or wrong, “There is only one more war” (29-33). The guitars and other background music ceases suddenly for Lerner to quietly intone this last line unaccompanied, to emphasize that war stands alone and brings nothing positive with it. The war for Lerner has accomplished nothing other than to confirm his doubts that the human condition will ever improve. In a poignantly ironic postlude, the piano plays a solo rendition of the hymn “Silent Night” in a style reminiscent of a child’s music box. The hymn speaks of the peace brought by Jesus to
the world, but the style relegates this sort of faith to the naïve realm of childhood. The piano ends its solo on a minor chord, indicating doubt that the message offered by Jesus will ever be heeded or fulfilled.

Lerner’s song may not completely invert mythic hierarchies from within, but it does attempt to break down some of their elements: the dramatic is not reversed to become silly, but it is reduced to become wretched and pitiful. Lerner’s eulogy for a martyred soldier does not perpetuate the myth that his death was glorious or valuable. It is rather portrayed as pathetic and wasteful. The cause of Malvinas is not supported – in fact, the “cause” of the war is conspicuous in its absence: there is nothing but one more war. The enemy is not demonized to support enemy myths. Instead the soldier/speaker is not sure who his real enemy is, in a jab at the Argentine career military. The mythic idea of divine support is not mocked but it is rejected. The much-vaunted Argentine unity is not necessarily reversed in farcical fashion, but is simply shown to be nonexistent.

Charly García, one of the central figures of Argentine rock, addresses the war with tongue in cheek in “No bombardeen Buenos Aires” [Don’t Bomb Buenos Aires] (1982). The song opens with a whistling bomb sound effect, followed by an announcer reading an official *Comunicado*: “We are winning. We continue to win.” Charly gives a little hissing laugh, following by a few ironic guffaws as the synthesizers and drums take up the tune. “Don’t bomb Buenos Aires / we can’t defend ourselves,” he chants in an energetic rap-like style, indicating right away that the Argentine military is not well-equipped to do its real job, i.e. to defend the nation’s territory in case of attack (lines 1-2). He describes his fearful neighbors as hiding in the sewer pipes, wearing helmets, and – incongruously – dancing mambos to “the Clash,” a popular left-wing British band (3-6). He links the Malvinas war with military misrule in lines 7-14:

I fear the blond guy right now
I don’t know who I’ll fear next.
Terror and suspicion because of the games
The scams, the cops,
The bellies, the anxieties,
The rotten seats of power
Seats of power
Seats of pooooower!
[Estoy temiendo al rubio ahora
no sé a quién temeré después.
Terror y desconfianza por los juegos
por las transas, por las canas
por las panzas, por las ansias
por las rancias cunas de poder
cunas de poder
¡cunas de podeeeeer!]

The singer admits here that the British (blond guys) are dangerous but there are plenty of people to fear at home, especially those in power and the cruel “games” they play with the public. The “seats of power” that he accentuates with repetition and vocal emphasis can refer to both British and Argentine government alike; each causes terror and suspicion among Buenos Aires residents in its own way. The line about bellies adds a bit of bizarre humor to what would ordinarily be a grim subject, like the people dancing mambos in the sewer waiting for the bombs to fall. Other criticisms of the military government come through distant shouts of people crying out that they are hungry after the singer complains about his inability to have sex or enjoy a nice steak because of the uproar that the country is in (22-24). The military is not only responsible for terrorizing the populace and getting the country involved in a war it can not win, but it has been unable to control the economy, resulting in continuing problems of poverty and hunger. The singer continues, saying that as the Gurkhas continue to advance and the workers demonstrate in the plaza, the military leaders “drink whisky with the rich” instead of dealing with either problem (25-30). Garcia pokes fun at the British in his song as well, offering in a cheeky high-pitched voice to listen to the BBC and to give a Brit a kiss, if only they will not bomb Buenos Aires (15-19).

As can be seen by this discussion, Garcia’s song deals with very serious and even tragic issues with black humor. His laughter does not diminish the seriousness of the problem, but it does point out the grotesque absurdities that have resulted from military mythmaking. Though it uses humor, “No bombardeen Buenos Aires” does not
necessarily deconstruct military myths from within. Instead it attacks and mocks the military leadership from without, with familiar accusations of repression, corruption, and incompetence. The humor and the oblique references with dual meanings make the difficult situation he describes easier to deal with for listeners, while protecting the song from censorship.

Of all the songs discussed here, British and Argentine, García’s is the most humorous and “farcical,” even more so than Crass’s angry sarcasm in “Sheep Farming.” García also would have reached a much larger and more diverse audience than Crass. Gieco, Lerner, and García were – and still are – enormously popular artists in Argentina, more so than their British counterparts discussed here. Taken together, they appeal to a broad section of the Argentine public, representing as they do three different musical styles as well as three different approaches to protest music. Gieco’s acoustic folk style deals with the war in the most abstract and general sense – it had to, having been written before the crisis ever started. “Sólo le pido a Dios,” once applied to the Malvinas War, essentially equated it with the Dirty War about which it was originally composed. It is a prayer for help in resisting all forms of violence, seen as a “huge monster” that “tramples hard / all of the poor innocence of the people” (lines 11-12).¹⁸ Lerner’s melodic pop style song, like Costello’s “Shipbuilding,” enplots the war as a personal tragedy for an individual – in this case, a soldier. Putting a more specific human face on the suffering brought by war questions its overarching heroic and renewal myths, by showing its unheroic and untranscendent effects on a concrete individual life. García’s more rhythmic rock (and in this case, rap-influenced) style makes an energetic and humorous attack on the failures of the military government and its effects on ordinary people at home on the streets of Buenos Aires. These prominent musicians reached a large audience with their pacifist and anti-military messages, creating a sense of solidarity among young people that was desperately needed and enthusiastically embraced.

Film

British films dealing with the Falklands have been discussed at length by several different scholars. The Argentine films, however, have been mentioned only briefly. This
section will briefly synthesize and respond to the British critical assessments to their Falklands films, and also provide some insight into the demythologizing strategies of the Argentine films, *Veronico Cruz* (1988) and *Fuckland* (2000).

British films that deal with the Falklands War include *Tumbledown* (1988), *Resurrected* (1989), *The Falklands Factor* (1983), *An Ungentlemanly Act* (1992), *For Queen and Country* (1989), *Arrivederci Millwall* (1990), and *The Ploughman’s Lunch* (1983). In this section I will briefly discuss the demythologizing films *Resurrected*, *The Falklands Factor*, and *Tumbledown*. *Resurrected*, loosely based on the experiences of Scots Guardsman Philip Williams, addresses myths of heroism, military values, and, indirectly, national renewal. Jeffrey Walsh writes that *Resurrected* tends to belie heroic myth. Monaghan also discusses this film as an attack on chivalric myths of heroism and death. The protagonist, Kevin Deakin, is taken for dead and turned into a “hero” by the villagers and the press who subscribe to the chivalric myths. When he returns alive from the Falklands after having wandered lost in a state of shock for several weeks, his very presence works to question the adequacy of a myth that makes all dead soldiers into heroes. Even though Deakin rejects this myth, his fellow servicemen, his family, neighbors, and the press are unable to accept an interpretation of the war that is not heroic and chivalric: if Deakin is not a hero they inevitably label him a “deserter.” The other soldiers in his unit harass and brutally attack him out of a need to vent their own traumatic emotions from combat – to admit that Deakin is anything other than a deserter “would be to accept the existence of trauma, thereby calling into question their own fragile military identities” (Monaghan 170). Despite Deakin’s attempts to create an alternative role for himself outside the mythic binary of hero/coward, society forces him first into one and then into the other, resulting in his physical and emotional destruction. *The Falklands Factor* is actually about Samuel Johnson, and the events surrounding his efforts to avert war over the Falklands dispute with Spain in 1770. This film draws comparisons between past history and current events in an effort to show that the war is unnecessary and wasteful. Monaghan’s insightful discussion of this film demonstrates that it also exposes political discourse, be it pro- or anti-war, from Johnson’s time or from 1982, as motivated by self-interest rather than moral principle.
"Tumbledown is perhaps the best known and most controversial Falklands War film from the UK. I comment at length on the many conflicting views of this film and its associated memoir in Chapter Five. Here I will limit my discussion to a brief overview of its demythologizing characteristics. The film is based on the experiences of Robert Lawrence, a Scots Guards lieutenant who was wounded in the battle for Mount Tumbledown near the end of the Falklands/Malvinas War. It deals mostly with the after-effects of Lawrence’s near-fatal wounding, and his struggle to obtain the rehabilitation, compensation, and recognition for his sacrifice that he craves. The film questions official myth’s romance-quest emplotment of the war by distorting the hero’s journey into a circular form in which, although he undergoes severe tests of his mettle, he never attains either personal or public transcendence. David Monaghan also points out that the film attacks the chivalric interpretation of heroism and death that Thatcher and the media attempted to impose on the Falklands War (151-52). The film emphasizes individual, concrete wounded or dead bodies, to counter ‘the old Lie’ of chivalric myth in which the body is deprived of its vulnerable materiality by absorption into a system of disembodied beliefs about glory and heroism and by the promise of eternal life for the battlefield dead. (151)

Monaghan argues that Tumbledown presents a war veteran unable to recognize how military ideology has both turned him into a brutal killer and made him incapable of accepting and learning from his own fragile and wounded body (164). Through the incomprehension and blind bureaucracy that Lawrence struggles against during the course of the film, British society is also shown to be both un-renewed and incapable of interpreting its own shortcomings as they are revealed in the maimed bodies of wounded soldiers.

From Argentina, Miguel Pereira’s film La deuda interna [The internal debt] (1990) shows the negative impact of the military regime’s activities, including the Malvinas War, in the lives of an orphaned boy and his school teacher in a remote provincial village. The film, shown in Britain and the US under the name Veronico Cruz, emphasizes the harsh living conditions and isolation of Veronico’s village. Yet the military takeover of the government manages to reach even this remote outpost, bringing
unreasonable controls, fear, and suspicion. The teacher, who embodies gentle kindness and culture, is forced to destroy some of his books, and the incompetent police chief is given authority over the mayor. At one point, Veronico and his teacher go to the provincial capital in search of the boy’s missing father, who has apparently been “disappeared” by the military for his union activism. The teacher asks too many questions at the police station and is subjected to a frightening interrogation. Shots of the dark interrogation room and the abusive policemen are cross-cut with scenes of Veronico, who wanders the opulent government buildings and gazes in awe at the statues, seals, flags, and other symbols of the great republic. In this telling sequence, the nationalistic myths embodied in the patriotic trappings of government are linked with military violence and abuse of power. Later, Veronico becomes a victim of the military government like his father: he dies as a conscript on board the doomed cruiser Belgrano. Jeffrey Walsh sees Veronico Cruz as deconstructing machismo myths (47). Interestingly enough, Walsh also claims that the figure of the teacher embodies the ideals of “the English gentleman,” revealing a somewhat ethnocentric attitude that such virtues are proprietary to his own nation (48).

José Luis Marqués’s irreverent film Fuckland, filmed clandestinely in the islands in 2000, is indeed a farce, which pokes fun at islanders’ and Argentineans’ obsessions with each other, Britain’s Fortress Falklands policy, and the quality of life in the Malvinas. The film’s protagonist, Fabián Stratas, develops his own strategy to regain sovereignty over the islands: Argentine tourists like himself should visit and impregnate as many islander women as possible, thus populating the islands with Argentines who would be more amenable to rule by the patria. He surreptitiously films his own exploits in the islands and posts them on the internet, urging his countrymen to imitate him. What the viewer sees in this film is the actual footage taken by Stratas’s camera. This arrogant character and his scheme are by themselves a parodic critique of machista attitudes, smug superiority, and continuing insistent desires to impose Argentine sovereignty on an unwilling people. Part of the publicity for the film included an actual website supposedly posted by Stratas detailing his trip and the film he has made. What is truly revealing is the number of sincerely pleased and encouraging e-mails that were sent to the website from people who did not realize that the scheme was a joke. The plan
and its adherents demonstrate a naïve belief in the concrete “naturalness” of national identity and loyalty – it is so “natural” for them, that they believe it can be passed along by means of genetics alone. Furthermore, Stratas’s plan is portrayed as a parodic romance quest in which the hero braves great dangers (customs officers, military police) to redeem the Holy Ground. In this case he accomplishes his quest by conquering not a formidable warrior, but a vulnerable and unsuspecting woman, with his anatomical weaponry rather than a traditional sword.

In the course of his farcical quest, Stratas and his camera observe the islanders’ obsession with the war as a source of their own identity. He mockingly attends and films their solemn commemorative parade. His camera dwells on the minefield warnings, the large military presence in the islands, and a sign in a home’s window informing all Argentines that they will only be welcome “when [they] drop [their] sovereignty claim and recognize our rights to self-determination.” He ridicules the poverty of their entertainments and their apparent religiosity and prudishness – he visits several stores in search of condoms before finally locating some. He exhibits racism and misogyny, passing over possible sexual targets because their skin is too dark or they are overweight (Bernades 27). He finally hunts downs his chosen (white) target (played by actress Camilla Heaney) with the cold-blooded calculation of a military strategist. After his conquest, he returns home triumphantly, imagining Camilla pregnant, and singing exultantly along with Charly García’s rendition of the Argentinean national anthem. The film received mixed reviews from the Buenos Aires press; most seemed to misunderstand the film’s intent. Only Horacio Bernades of Página 12 seemed to appreciate the film’s ironic self-criticism. Director Marqués acknowledged at a question-and-answer session in London that Argentines “are not used to seeing self-criticisms,” and that they find it difficult to see themselves depicted as others see them. “We don’t want people to think we’re like that,” he said.

Marques’s farcical approach works well in highlighting the constructed nature of nationalism and its reliance on enemy others to exclude. It also works well as an overarching parody of the romance-quest structure behind much of nationalist myth. It does not deal with military myths or national renewal, however. These myths have more serious implications in the lives of individuals, particularly combatants, and are dealt with
more effectively by an individualized tragedy such as Veronico Cruz. Likewise, Britain’s heroism and national renewal myths are shown to have negative and destructive effects on individual British soldiers in the films Resurrected and Tumbledown. Though irony certainly enters into these films, they are predominantly tragic in their treatment of the war. The Falklands Factor is removed from the war in time and place, and undermines war myths on a more abstract and generalized level. Using a serious tone, dramatic irony, and intellectual argument, it questions the value of war, the value of the Falklands themselves, and the motivations behind all political discourse.

Theater

Three plays, two Argentinean and one British, function as demythologizers.25 Aída Bortnik’s De a uno [One by one], which premiered in the Teatro Abierto festival of 1983, focuses on the paralysis and denial of ordinary citizens when faced with the disappearance of acquaintances and loved ones under the military regime.26 One character dies in the Malvinas War, which is presented as just another variation in the military Junta’s repertoire of killing methods. Griselda Gambaro’s Del sol naciente [From the rising sun] (premiered in 1984), though ostensibly set in Japan, addresses mythologized issues relevant to 1980s Argentina. These include the power and prestige of the military, machismo, and the war’s veterans, living and dead. Both Argentinean dramas were written and staged during the country’s transition from dictatorship to fragile democracy. As a result, they deal with the war in an indirect and somewhat veiled way. In contrast, British playwright Steven Berkoff is at liberty to attack Thatcher and her policies point-blank with his scathing play Sink the Belgrano! (1986). This last work, in spite of its harsh satire and occasional grotesque humor, is not a farce but a tragedy. I have chosen to analyze Berkoff’s and Gambaro’s plays in depth, since they both use a tragic structure in an effort to “purge” belief in the pernicious myths of war from their audiences.

Sink the Belgrano!

Sink the Belgrano! premiered in September 1986 at the Half Moon Theatre in London to mixed reviews, and some in the Conservative press were particularly negative
Berkoff had opposed the Falklands War from the beginning and was especially outraged by the Belgrano incident and the carnage that followed. He was inspired to write the play after reading Arthur Gavshon and Desmond Rice’s exposé, *The Sinking of the Belgrano* (1984). He writes that the play presents his personal views of the episode, which are unabashedly leftist and contradictory of the conclusions made by an investigative board on the incident. In Berkoff’s estimation, the handling of the Belgrano incident, along with Thatcher’s economic, defense, and civil policies, demonstrate “an abnormal disregard for human life and values, plus an overwhelming and religious belief in the sanctity of the marketplace” (Berkoff 145).

Jo Henderson devotes a few paragraphs to *Sink the Belgrano!* in her article “The Falklands: National Identity and the Experience of War.” She writes that Berkoff’s “eclectic mish-mash of language,” his stripped-down structure, and his two-dimensional characters expose the decadence of British nationalism, and mirror the confusion and ugliness of the experience of war (198-200). Monaghan discusses this play primarily in terms of its attack on the character of Margaret Thatcher. He argues that any attempt to discredit the official version of the Falklands war must address the Prime Minister’s character and image, since she was both “maker and hero of the Falklands myth” (39). The play does this “by substituting a grotesque and deliberately offensive caricature for the almost regal figure familiar to the public during the Falklands War” (40). Before embarking on his study of the Maggot character, Monaghan briefly notes how Berkoff inverts not only Thatcher’s character but also other aspects of the Falklands myth: he substitutes vernacular and even obscene language for heroic diction, praise for weapons instead of heroes, and goals of death and destruction in place of lofty moral principles (62-63). Berkoff inverts more than just these elements in his play: he also subverts the entire romance-quest emplotment of the war that is presented in official myth. The play presents a reversal of Curteis’s romantic/comedic *Falklands Play* that was discussed in Chapter Two. Both concentrate on the elite decision makers of both sides for much of their action, but Berkoff creates a more prominent role for the people who did the actual fighting, while Curteis writes them out. The disputed holy ground is a contemptible rock, its inhabitants reluctant to be “rescued.” In place of the evil enemy, the President of Argentina is presented as a basically reasonable character with valid arguments for his
position. In place of Curteis’s romance-hero version of Thatcher, Berkoff gives us the grotesquely evil figure of Maggot Scratcher, analyzed effectively by Monaghan in his study. The battle of good versus evil is reduced to a cynical hunt for an unsuspecting victim, and the exaltation of the questing “hero” is presented in terms of political self-promotion. In addition to these reversals, Berkoff gives a prominent “hero” role to the sailors. They are not evil characters, nor are they romance heroes. Their role helps to transform the romance tale of the war into a tragedy, reversing not just individual elements of the romantic myth, but its entire emplotment as well.

The Chorus opens the drama and provides the background information for the drama about to take place on the stage. In doing so, it addresses the pastoral idyll myth, along with several others that will be discussed later. The Chorus talks of the Argentine enemy sneaking behind Britain’s back to steal the Falklands. Britain is “Outraged its precious garden overrun / By foreign, greasy, dark unholy scum” (147). The Chorus’s role here is similar to that of the chorus in classical Greek tragedy, of representing the prevailing social ethos and reinforcing the status quo. In these brief lines the crusade theme and pastoral idyll myth are linked together, as the “unholy” infidel has defiled the “precious garden,” the hallowed territory equated with Eden. To further clarify the islands’ sacred status, Pimp (Berkoff’s fictionalized version of Foreign Minister Francis Pym) speaks immediately following the Chorus, calling them “our Falkland / Paradise” and “our/ Holy God-gave Promised Land” (147). Simply by linking the two concepts together explicitly, Pimp’s comments cause the audience to question the pastoral idyll myth. The official pastoral myth as set forth by Thatcher and the media postulate the islands as a rural unspoiled paradise, a preserve of the old British Way of Life as it was before industrialism, immigration, and the modern age altered the economy and the social fabric of the nation. The islands are never referred to explicitly as holy, for that would sound absurd to modern ears. Nevertheless, the idea remains that regaining them will restore and preserve the pastoral identity and way of life for the people who live there (and for future generations of British tourists). The desire to preserve “national heritage” can be seen as a secularized version of the desire to claim and preserve a sacred religious site. In a different myth, that of national renewal, the effort to reclaim the islands is emplotted as a romance-quest narrative. The crusade version of the romance narrative
implicitly confers the role of the threatened holy ground upon the islands. However, the myth was generally framed as a crusade to rescue the *islanders*, not just the islands themselves. General Jeremy Moore summed up this attitude by saying, “They fought for the islands,” meaning the Argentines, “We fought for the islanders” (qtd. in Sunday Express Team 140). To admit that the Falklands hold a mystic/religious significance in and of themselves is to admit to harboring the same anachronistic and fanatical impulses generally assigned to the Argentineans’ position on the islands. By calling the islands holy, Pimp admits that Britain’s desires are not as purely altruistic as they claim to be.

Having thus carried the pastoral idyll and national renewal myth to their logical combined conclusions, Berkoff shows that they begin to deconstruct themselves. He then proceeds to further tear down the pastoral idyll myth: in the next scene, the Falkland Farmers describe the islands in terms of the concrete reality that they experience day in and day out. That reality is far from pastoral paradise: the farmers lament their colonial state, their poverty and toil that brings money not to them, but to the Falkland Islands Company, which owns more than forty percent of the land and resources on the islands. To the farmers, the islands are “this pisspot, this dreary rock/ Where no one has invested, not a jot” and “this wind-spat spit of rock” and “blasted heath” (149-50). They also question the supposedly charitable aims of the governments’ efforts to free them from Argentine control:

They chat about our future rights
And say our wishes must be paramount
Bollacks and lockjaw, scum and dregs!
[. . . ]
You think the Government has a heart
In thinking of the welfare of us men?
When really their souls couldn’t give a fart. (150)

The farmers point out that the British Government has made no effort over the years of peace to improve the living conditions on the islands. They have not built roads or hospitals, and when islanders are seriously ill or injured they must go to Argentina for treatment. Scratcher’s real interests are probably in oil or Antarctic territorial rights, they reason (150). Maggot herself says that she has no real interest in “saving” the islanders
from Argentine tyranny: “Who cares about the rotten Islanders! / [. . . ]/ You think the
wishes of those few / Will dictate how and what we do” (172). Beyond this, she reveals
that her interests are even more cynical than the Farmers suppose: she just wants an
excuse to fight a war (173). She does not even know where the Falkland Islands are
located (149).

The Chorus, representing the general views of British society, characterizes the
Argentineans as hiding like cowards, and “crawling behind the skirts of the UNO [United
Nations Organization].” Notwithstanding their cravenness, they are dangerous in that
they are “greedy scavenger[s]” who steal, and “foreign, greasy, dark unholy scum,” who
defile British land and property (147). Again, by calling the Argentines “unholy,” the
Chorus imposes a crusade interpretation on the generally secular and altruistic image that
official mythmakers have sought to give to Falklands myths. At the same time it makes
the official enemy myth look overblown, by taking it one step beyond the secular evil
image to a literally demonized image as “dark satanic forces” (147).

Berkoff calls attention to the hypocrisy underlying the Parliamentary and media
outcries against the Argentinean dictators, their human rights abuses, and defiance of
international law, by having Scratcher admit to what Thatcher and other MPs would not:

How dare they, how simply do they bloody dare
When we’ve been so damned good to them
Never complained when their death squads
Got rid of opposition in mass graves . . .
Nor publicly showed our disgust at torture
For those that disobeyed (since naturally we
Wish to trade). (148)

Since the Argentine Junta’s horrific human rights record is a concrete reality that
reinforces certain enemy myths with hard evidence, Berkoff cannot simply debunk it or
reverse it as he does other aspects of official Falklands mythology. Instead he points out
the self-interest that motivated the myth as well as the self-interest which induced the
government to overlook Argentina’s human rights problems before the Falklands crisis
had erupted. In a similar vein, Pimp laments the British policy that had allowed arms
sales to anyone who would pay, including Argentina -- “Who cares who they kill, it’s
their war, / We only manufacture death, no more.” This indiscriminate sale of arms to a known dictatorship had backfired, as the Argentines used British-made weapons against British soldiers (158).

Having called attention to the ugliness and self-interest behind the standard enemy myths, Berkoff presents a side of Argentina’s government and its claim to the Malvinas that is unusually sympathetic for a British work. Pimp apologetically informs Scratcher that the British took the islands from the Argentines by force in 1833, in an act of unprovoked aggression very similar to the one they condemned Argentina for in 1982 (148). He thus grants their claim more legitimacy than most British officials were willing to admit to. Later Pimp insists that the Argentines are willing to negotiate but they want

A recognition of their claims . . .

Historic rights when Spain left Argentina

How Malvinas are to them their symbol

Of the time when they kicked Spain

Right up the ass and now they want

To introduce the boot to us . . . (156)

Again, the character Pimp gives the Argentine claim more credence than did the historical Pym, at least in public. This accomplishes two aims: first, it sets forth the Argentine claim and some of the symbolic and emotional power that the Malvinas hold for the Argentine people. Second, it shows British government officials as aware of, but willfully ignoring or denying the legitimacy of the Argentine grievance against the UK.

The President of Argentina is given a chance to speak as a character in this play as well, which he does in a generally reasonable manner. He explains to Pimp that Britain stole their land in 1833, and had ignored the frequent Argentine protests as well as the United Nations anticolonialism resolution of 1965. He suggests that Britain has continually ignored Argentina because in the British perception “we’re foreign scum” (163). Yet even for their own people in the islands, the British have done little or nothing to improve conditions or develop the land. Instead, they just “suck it dry.” Argentina, on the other hand, has been supplying the islanders’ needs (163). He insists that Argentina does not want a war, but he wants British recognition and a real settlement to the dispute (163). This short speech allows the Argentine leader to appear not as a
power-grasping, bloodthirsty dictator, but as a person with genuine concerns for his country’s rights and international honor.

There is more to Sink the Belgrano!, however, than simply turning the official myth’s elements upon their heads. Berkoff does not simply reverse Thatcher the romance hero into Scratcher the villain. He also introduces a second, collective hero, namely the sailors. Their role is that of tragic hero, and the play changes the war’s emplotment from romance to satirical tragedy. The reader will have already noted that the play is written in (somewhat erratic) iambic pentameter: it thus approximates the poetic form of some of the most revered works in the English literary canon, such as Milton’s Paradise Lost and Shakespeare’s tragedies. Within this “high” tradition, the use of the “low diction” mentioned by Monaghan is an even more jolting contrast, a device to indicate the decadence and vulgarity of the society depicted. The play concentrates on one episode of the Falklands/Malvinas war, rather than the whole conflict from start to finish. By choosing to end his play with the sinking of the Argentine cruiser Belgrano and the subsequent destruction of British ships, Berkoff removes the element of triumph from his work. Instead, he concentrates on the death and destruction that preceded the British victory. The events that more romantic interpretations of the war gloss over as obstacles on the path to glory become for Berkoff the main focus and final catastrophe of his drama. Berkoff also employs a chorus, as in classical Greek theater. The chorus, the poetic form, and the structuring of events in this play indicate that Berkoff has recast Thatcher’s victorious romance myth as a tragedy.

Sink the Belgrano! is structured in such a way as to invite analysis using Augusto Boal’s neo-Aristotelian theory of drama. In his book Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal postulates theater, particularly theater based upon Aristotelian poetics, as a political tool for manipulating the values of the viewing public. He synthesizes Aristotle’s artistic and political philosophies as found in the Poetics, the Nicomachean Ethics, and the Magna Moralia to demonstrate that Aristotle’s dramatic theory was politically motivated. Boal explains point by point the poetics of an Aristotelian theater designed to cleanse its audience of politically undesirable attitudes or desires. This “coercive system of tragedy,” as he calls it, is not limited to classical Greek drama but continues to be used in the present, in television and movies as well as on the stage (xiv). Since Berkoff utilizes
Aristotelian elements, and openly discusses his political leanings and motivations in writing *Sink the Belgrano!*, it seems appropriate to analyze his work using Boal’s politically oriented theory.

Boal notes that Aristotelian drama usually pits one or more tragic protagonists against the state or the society in which they live. Because classical Greek theater is calculated to maintain the social status quo, the society and its institutions are usually shown to be perfect as they are (23-24). Drawing on Aristotle’s terminology, Boal calls the sum total of the society’s values, institutions, and actions the social ethos. The protagonist also has an ethos, which consists of his or her values and habits (33-34). These are shown to be virtuous in every way except for one. This single flaw or mistake, called hamartia, is what sets the protagonist at odds with the virtuous society and what ultimately causes his or her downfall (34). The spectator is meant to initially accept or identify with the protagonist’s hamartia, in part because the protagonist is so appealing in every other way, and in part because the hamartia has helped him or her to achieve a position of good fortune at the play’s beginning (28). The protagonist then suffers a change of fortune, the peripateia, sending him or her down toward the eventual catastrophe, which amounts to his or her physical or emotional destruction (36-37). The spectator, through empathy, vicariously experiences the hamartia, the peripateia, and the catastrophe that befall the protagonist. The protagonist must also recognize his or her mistake, in a tragic element called anagnorisis, which indicates to the spectators the flaw they must eliminate from their own souls. The pity and fear experienced by the spectators promote catharsis, that is, a purging or cleansing of their offending trait, so that they may avoid a similar catastrophe to that experienced by the protagonist (36-37).

Boal gives a number of possible variations to the basic formula described above, including one in which the social ethos is negative. This tragic structure, rather than seeking to repress possible rebellion against the socio-political status quo, is intended to encourage social change by showing the society to be flawed or corrupt (Boal 44). *Sink the Belgrano!* is a work of this type, that seeks to purge the audience of its negative social ethos. Britain, which has been portrayed as the “good guy” in the romance-quest version of the Falklands War, is here presented as a sick society in need of moral cleansing. The tragic hero role is played collectively by the British sailors, who are spiritually destroyed.
at the end of the play. The chorus reflects the ethos of the common people, in both
Boal’s theory and Berkoff’s play (Boal 33). In Sink the Belgrano!, the Chorus’s opening
speech sets forth some of the violent, jingoistic, and xenophobic attitudes that Berkoff
sees as having been stimulated and encouraged by the Falklands War and its apologists.
The speakers rejoice in their nation’s ability to humiliate and destroy others, and rage
against the shame provoked when the tables are turned:

   We smashed the damned Spanish might . . .
   We put the Hun upon the British rack,
   The Boers we kicked to kingdom come
   And now the Argies sneak behind our back.
   Oh blasted glory for a few frail days
   [. . .]
   But once aroused, oh ho! Old Albion snorts
   The Bulldog, start-eyed, drools for Argy blood
   [. . .]
   We put the greedy scavenger to flight
   With fists of steel and hawk-like Harrier jets
   Our submarines like silent hungry sharks
   Went hunting for the juicy Argy game. (147)

Here the image of Britain is literally that of a bloodthirsty dog, and the attitude toward
going to war is one of hungry anticipation for revenge and a reassertion of superiority.
The Chorus continues, railing on the cowardly enemy for sneaking in when Britain was
distracted by unemployment, “strikes and social strife” (147). Berkoff brings up these ills
several times in the play because they, like the chorus’s pride and violence, can be seen
as symptoms of a dysfunctional society.

Later chorus speeches demonstrate similar attitudes, phrased in such a way as to
make the official myths seem extreme and negative: the second speech is a paean to
Britain’s fleet and armory, “One hundred thousand tons of freight / To concentrate our
Scratcher’s boys / Into one deadly fist of hate” (152). The third chorus prays for “a brace
of Exocet,” (164-65), and the fourth describes “The voice of England” sounding in every
pub and dining room, expressing anger over the loss of the Falklands. It adds ruefully at
the end of this speech, however, that “You’d never believe until last week / They didn’t know Falklands from Leigh-on-Sea.” (167). The fact that many British people were unaware of the Falklands’ existence before the crisis makes their outrage over their loss seem a little absurd.

The vicious state of British society is further emphasized by the speech and actions of their elected representatives: Maggot Scratcher and her cronies, as well as the various Members of Parliament. Much of Maggot’s evil comes from her willingness to cause hundreds of deaths in order to achieve political popularity. For Berkoff, the difference between the historical Margaret Thatcher and his grotesque character Maggot Scratcher is very small (Monaghan 69). His play supports the theory that Thatcher ordered Belgrano’s sinking to scuttle the peace talks and continue with a war that she needed to improve her public approval rating. 31 Berkoff’s character Maggot refuses to accept the Argentines’ treaty even though it offers everything the British negotiators had been asking for. She explains that she wants the war above all else, in order to maintain her position and keep the Socialists out of power (173). Pimp, who up to this point has been trying desperately to negotiate a peaceful solution, finally understands Maggot’s reasoning. His dawning comprehension of her plan is summarized in a speech that parallels the national renewal myth:

OK . . . I see the danger, ma’am . . .
The troops return . . . the drooping flags
[ . . . ]
No medals, no heroes lined up . . .
Before the Nation’s TV screens
No celebration of the deed
That spells out British victory
No revenge for the filthy slur
No hands in mouths waiting for news
No photos in the Daily Muck
Of Tommies clambering up hills
With smiling faces, British flags,
Atop a craggy mount . . .
[...]  
Wide-angle lens of history  
Being made by Fleet Street hacks  
Who follow us with hungry lens  
Ready to frame for all the world  
The conquered lying in the dust  
And Maggot Scratcher raised up high  
And then, vote Tory . . . written in the sky. (173-74)  

Here Pimp realizes that the war will help to boost national pride and Scratcher’s popularity. He understands that the media will play into their hands and provide nationalistic images of the war to make Britons feel important again. He sees the war as a chance to create a myth of national renewal, though here in his assessment, the grotesque elements of personal ambition, media manipulation, and national rejoicing over spilled blood are worked in. Scratcher weeps for joy now that he has finally got it, and adds that the war is not about the islands or their inhabitants, but about “England,” and its ability to assert dominance and maintain its image (174). Here again is indication that not just Scratcher, but the whole state that she purports to defend and strengthen, has misplaced its values – this society needs to assert its superiority through military conflict with an outside other, and knows no other way to maintain or renew itself. Berkoff reverses not just the noble romantic hero here, but also the very nature of her quest.  

Monaghan writes effectively on Maggot’s despicable character, her scorn for human dignity and her casual indifference toward the death and suffering of others (65-66). He fails to mention, however, that the British press eagerly devours Maggot’s foul stew of lies, and that the war is what the British people want. If the war does not occur, then the public will see Maggot and her party as weak, and elect “Feet” (Berkoff’s version of Labour Leader Michael Foot) to office instead (Berkoff 166-67). So it is not just Maggot who is bloodthirsty – she is the reflection of the British public and media who are just as hungry for prey as she is. Most other Members of Parliament seem to share Maggot’s war-mongering attitudes, as is evident in their booing and heckling of “Reason,” the only character in the play beside the sailors that speaks in favor of a
peaceful solution (169-70). These characters, along with the Chorus, suggest an entire society that is infected with a negative social ethos, and in need of spiritual cleansing.

At one point in the play, Maggot, her military advisor Tell, and the head Admiral Woody all meet at Chequers to discuss the possibility of sinking an Argentine ship to scuttle the peace talks, while they eat roasted lamb and mint jelly. Maggot’s conversation jumps from sinking a ship to offering her guests more lamb from one line to the next, juxtaposing images of the doomed Argentine sailors and the meat that she and the others devour hungrily (176-77). This is no coincidence: the sailors are here equated to a sacrificial lamb – a blameless victim destroyed in the name of personal advancement and national pride. The Argentine sailors are not the only sacrificial victims in this play: the British sailors, through their own initial mistake or hamartia, place themselves in a position to become victimized as well.

Boal’s theory of this type of tragedy pairs the negative social ethos with a negative hamartia; that is, with a tragic protagonist who is as corrupt as the society with the exception of a single virtue. That one virtue allows the spectator to identify with the protagonist. The society then destroys the protagonist because of his or her virtue, and the resulting outrage felt by the audience is meant to purge them of the negative social ethos. Boal’s example of this type of tragedy is *La Dame aux camélias*: Marguerite the prostitute is in harmony with the decadent social ethos except for her one virtue (negative hamartia), which is that she falls in love. Society destroys her because of that one virtue, and the audience is purged of the negative social ethos (43-44). In the case of *Sink the Belgrano!*, the sailors are iconic characters with no depth and little development – they are not even given names. As a result the spectators have little chance to see what all of their virtues and vices might be. It could be argued that their own ethos is as corrupt as the society’s, except for the negative hamartia (i.e., virtue) of human sympathy and reluctance to kill. I will argue instead that the sailors are meant to be seen as mainly decent people who have made the mistake of buying into the national identity and heroism myths that the Thatcher government has promoted. I read them this way in part because it is not the sailors’ virtue that causes their catastrophe, but rather their acceptance of part of the negative social ethos: their desire to be heroes, to wield
weapons and feel powerful. This flaw is what has led them to join the Navy to begin with, as their leader, named simply “Command,” explains:

[. . .] you volunteered, you came aboard
Because you like the adverts on TV
You want to be a hero, fire a gun . . .
Wear fancy helmets in your jets
As you ascend into the sky like Zeus
Like a god, omnipotent, a silver bird.
[. . .]
Or else beneath the deep as deadly sharks
your finger on the button, death all round
You deal your piercing strike [. . .]. (155)

Their desire to be part of the myth of “Great” Britain, part of the myth of the heroic dictator-slaying, Armada-crushing Royal Navy, led them to sign up. Once they have done so, their destiny is no longer theirs to decide. Early on in the course of the play the sailors’ fortune changes – that is, they suffer a *peripateia* -- and as they are sent to war, some of them realize that they are now pawns of the Government, sent to “kill or die” at the bidding of their superiors (Berkoff 155). Before being sent to war, however, the sailors can be seen as having achieved a fortunate position due to their flawed heroic desires: they have not only a steady job in times of high unemployment and economic hardship, but also the respect of a nation that has traditionally held its navy in high esteem. “Jack Tar,” the archetypal British sailor, is a fondly regarded symbol of Britishness. With this in mind, the sailors can be seen not only as tragic characters in and of themselves, but as representations of British identity, which also suffers a blow during the course of the play.

From their very first speech, the sailors’ flaw is evident. They have bought into official heroism myths, enemy myths, and British identity myths.

All right we’ve heard the news, let’s get stuck in,
And sail our deadly turd-shaped tube
That will unleash pure havoc when
Upon the surface of the deep we spy
Some vessel filled with Argentines
And shit some pain as it glides by. (153)

These lines demonstrate a vulgar pride in their power to destroy. Yet even as they speak their willingness to hunt and kill Argentines, the sailors reveal their motivations to be purer than those of Scratcher and other Government officials: Most feel that they are acting in defense of British soil and people. Sailor 1 hesitates to kill at all, and wonders if his mission is as righteous as is claims to be. When he asks the others to think about what they are doing before they “Become a murderer’s right hand,” the others emphatically reply that they are defending British people and land, particularly the Falkland islanders’ right to self-determination. Here they reveal their belief in their righteous role as rescuers and defenders of international law (153). When Sailor 1 retorts that Hitler could have used the self-determination argument to justify his invasion of the Sudetenland, Sailor 3 accuses him of having “no guts,” and suggests that Sailor 1 should either trust the state and “believe in England’s green / And pleasant or fucking emigrate” (154). Sailor 3 thus reveals that he, like many who subscribe to heroism myths, can conceive of only two possible identities for a soldier or sailor: either he is a hero, or he is a coward. Either he wholeheartedly supports the nationalistic myths and the current rescue project, or he is unpatriotic. There are no other possibilities for him. Since Sailor 1 is reluctant to accept or apply heroic myth to his own mission, his mate concludes that he must be a coward. In doing so he affirms his conviction that his own patriotism and military fervor are virtuous and heroic.

Other evidence of the sailors’ basic virtue and humanity comes from their “letters,” which they recite in turn at various intervals in the play. The sentiments expressed in these missives home give the impression that the sailors are just naïve young boys with adventure-story dreams in their heads and no idea of the horror that awaits them. Sailor 3 assures his girlfriend (and himself), that he’s having fun and “We’re not going to kill anyone / We’re just keeping the Argy on the run” (162). Some write about the weather, their drills and shifts, and about what they ate for dinner. Others complain of boredom and homesickness (170). Sailor 5 is the most hearty supporter of the “Great” Britain myth as well as heroism myths: he writes that he feels proud “To be part of this great Fleet / [. . .] And each man will say . . . ‘I was there that day’” (162).32 Later this
same sailor writes “I’m dying for us to make a hit” (170). This character’s words are a reminder that amid all this boyishness, the sailors still harbor the negative influences of war myth. Other sailors are more honest with themselves: one writes, “Dear Mum, I can tell you I’m scared / Don’t know what we’re facing down here / It’s so quiet beneath the surface and still” (162). Another wonders what would happen if they had to swim in the ice-cold ocean, and the last, Sailor 9, somberly avows “Dear Judy, I don’t want to kill / In fact of war I’ve had enough” (162).

When orders from London come through to torpedo the Belgrano even though it is outside the designated Exclusion Zone, the Command character is taken aback:

Can we attack them from the rear
When they’re outside the lines you draw?
That just ain’t cricket, is it, dear?
Or they may say, and it will be true,
Britain doesn’t rule the waves
She simply waives the bloody rules! (171)

Here even the submarine’s commander, who is more hardened and gung-ho than his sailors, expresses some reluctance to attack without justification. Still, once he has the Belgrano in his sights he notes the cruiser’s two potentially dangerous escorts, and coldly makes ready to fire. One sailor begs mercy for the Argentines:

They’re only blokes like us . . . don’t fire . . .
Not fire one off . . . like in cold blood . . .
Not warn ‘em first and fire a warning shot?
Like shift over, boys, you’re getting close
It’s not the Second World War . . . is it? (182)

In this plea the sailor demonstrates his own humanity as well as his belief in the humanity of the “enemy,” in spite of the official enemy myths. He also questions the parallels that official mythmakers were so fond of making between the Falklands War and World War Two. This sailor does not think the situations are comparable, but the myths are so compelling that he is unsure of his assertion, and seeks validation for it. He does not receive any from either his mates or his commander: the order is given to fire, and the sailor prays to God, “Let them not feel any pain . . . !” (182).
Most of the sailors do not realize their mistake until after they have sunk the *Belgrano*, and retaliatory attacks sink several British ships. The sailors now suffer guilt not only for the deaths of hundreds of Argentine sailors, but also for those of their own mates in other ships. They must also fear for their own lives as the violence escalates. At this point, just before the end of the play, the sailors acknowledge their mistake, and they and the spectators together experience *anagnorisis*:

SAILOR: The dead men did not pay the price
Of peace, for others died in the selfsame
Way, when two days later in revenge
Our ships were sunk, and many died
Or were simply burned alive. . . .
SAILOR: Somebody threw the first stone
When the Belgrano was going home. (183).

The sailors here acknowledge that the British side “threw the first stone” and started the violence that would claim hundreds of lives both Argentine and British. His use of the pronoun *somebody* in place of *we* implies that the guilt lies with more parties than simply the sailors. This assignment of guilt is meant to include Scratcher/Thatcher and her supporters who ordered the sailors to fire, a point reinforced by the projection of text on a screen behind the actors: “‘I would do it again’ . . . Margaret Thatcher” (183). This is the final image that remains with the audience, as it is followed by a blackout signalling the end of the play. In Boal’s model the tragic hero is supposed to suffer because of his or her virtue, which the decadent society cannot tolerate. In Berkoff’s play, the society is so depraved that it attacks even those who are in harmony with its corrupt values. The sailors’ mistake is to allow themselves to become pawns of the society and its government, which then ruthlessly use them as tools of destruction. The spectators are meant to feel pity and fear for the sailors, and realize that belief in the official myths led them to their terrible end. With the final catastrophe the spectators are intended to reject and be purged of their negative social ethos, which the play has revealed to be little more than jingoism, self interest, and an atavistic hunger for violence.
Del sol naciente

Griselda Gambaro’s play Del sol naciente [From the Rising Sun] can be read as yet another example of a tragic play seeking to purge its audience of a negative social ethos (Graham-Jones 133). It premiered in 1984 to appreciative audiences. The critics, however, did not care for it (Graham-Jones 132). At this time, democracy in Argentina was still fragile, as military uprisings a few years later would prove. Gambaro veils the anti-military message of her play by choosing a setting far from Argentina’s reality: medieval Japan. The play’s title refers to Japan’s designation “Land of the rising sun,” as well as to its flag, whose red disk represents the sun. In an interview, Gambaro says that the play does not attempt to portray Japanese social forms, but rather Argentinean ones. She calls the play “a piece of Japanese transvestism” (Magnarelli 123). The title Del sol naciente can also refer, then, to the sun on Argentina’s flag, and to Argentina’s idea of itself as a nation with a bright and glorious future. The action represented can be interpreted as a parallel to Argentina during and after the Malvinas War, which was seen as a means to achieve that bright future -- the elusive goal of La Gran Argentina. In general, Gambaro’s work fits Boal’s model more loosely than Sink the Belgrano!, though it adheres to it in that the tragic heroine Suki suffers because her virtuous compassion places her at odds with the corrupt social ethos. One divergence from Boal’s formula is that the tragic heroine willingly seeks her own fall from fortune, finding that preferable to remaining as an accepted part of the corrupt society. Suki endangers herself on several occasions by deliberately acting against the wishes of her “master” Obán in order to show kindness. Her moral independence in a society that rejects the destitute and places women – particularly courtesans like herself – in a subservient role to men, causes her suffering at the hands of the jealous Obán. That said, by refusing to subscribe to his worldview, and by remaining unperturbed in the face of his threats and cruelty, she shows herself to be the stronger of the two characters. In the final “catastrophe,” she abandons her profession and her finery to keep company with the outcast dead – not because Obán makes her, but because she wishes to accept and include those that the corrupt society has excluded.

Like Sink the Belgrano!, Del sol naciente presents a war-mongering social ethos, paired with callousness toward the dispossessed and the common soldier who must bear
the brunt of the suffering brought by war. The negative social ethos in Gambaro’s play is represented by the elite warrior Obán, and by Suki’s servant, called simply ama [maid or housekeeper]. Obán is prideful, domineering, and violent. He lives to fight, to exert control over others, and to demand obeisance. In terms of Argentine society, he represents the military leadership and government. His first words upon his arrival at Suki’s house in Scene I demonstrate his egoism, as well as his similarities with the Argentine military elite:

Suki: Good day. Do you always bring so much light?

Obán: “I am” the light. (117)

The quotation marks around “I am” appear in the original text, and call attention that phrase’s referential status. It is reminiscent of two statements by God in the Christian Bible: the first is where he declares his name as God of the Old Testament: Jah Weh or “I AM” (Exodus 3.13-14). The second statement is made by Jesus Christ, that same God made flesh in the New Testament: “I am the light of the world” (John 8.12; 8.9; 8.5). In this brief assertion, Obán reveals his sense of self-importance by comparing himself to God. He makes similar comparisons at other times, saying that he personifies divine grace [la gracia] (129) and that the warrior is more important than anyone else because he “is called” [está llamado] (131). The Argentine military establishment also granted itself godlike status. Military leaders made a point of emphasizing their own religiosity, and presented themselves as chosen of God, and even as playing a messianic role in saving the world from the communist threat (Graziano 120; Foster, Fighting Fictions 121 - 23). Also like the Argentine military, Obán seems to think that the whole world needs him personally to defend and redeem it:

Obán: I come from nearby. I never leave those who need me.

Suki (intrigued): And who needs you?

Obán: Without vanity, I believe everyone does.

Suki (softly): Without vanity, I believe no one does. (117)

Here we also see Suki’s resistance to the military’s myth of its own usefulness and importance.

In addition to his exaggerated sense of self-worth, Obán possesses an extremely limited understanding of life. His only way to relate to anything is through the lens of
violence and domination. The scope of his experience and understanding is symbolized by his costume: he says himself that he has no other clothes, but that since the day he was born he has worn the armored suit of a warrior (118). Suki thinks this is a pity, but Obán, because he cannot imagine that he might at some point fill a role other than that of warrior sees no need for different clothes (118). His rigidity of dress reflects his inflexible views about social roles and hierarchies. His costume shows that he is a warrior at the top of the social hierarchy, and this is so important to him that he wears it all the time. Obán is also obsessed with war, and from his first appearance he speaks of it. In Scene I, he promises to win the war. When Suki is puzzled and asks what war, and against whom, he dismisses her question, saying it does not matter against whom he fights – there will always be an offense to avenge (119). Though he does not say it directly it is evident that he is content with any excuse to fight a war; the full nature of the provocation or of the enemy is irrelevant to him. His statement could be taken as an indictment of the Argentinean military regime that truly did not care to make distinctions between whom it would attack and whom it would “protect.” The atrocities of the Dirty War were remarkable for the very randomness of their victims, and some critics saw the Malvinas War as merely an extension of the Dirty War – more senseless killing in an effort to assert and maintain legitimacy of power over the country.39

Obán also fights his war on a pretext, in an effort to gain prestige and recognition. When he returns from war clean and dry, the account of his experiences bears a remarkable resemblance to events and myths from the Malvinas War.

    Obán: . . . If I did not bury myself in the snow and mud it was so I could command. So they could see me clearly in the midst of the battle!
        That unskilled band that I had!
    Suki: Who took them to war?
    Obán: I took them! To fight against battle-hardened men, armed to the teeth!
    Suki: Facing them with picks and hoes?
    Obán: Because the spirit can accomplish everything and valor is the best armor!
    Suki: In those wars? Did you win?
Obán: No. You could embrace me. (134)

The fact that Obán as leader did not get wet or dirty is reminiscent of conscript complaints against cowardly officers who took care of themselves while neglecting their men. Suki calls attention to flaws in the David-versus-Goliath myth about the war. If the Argentine army’s conscripts were poorly trained and did not have as good equipment as the British, who sent them to war in that condition? The fault lies with the commanders themselves, as Suki points out. But Obán does not understand the implication of her question. His excuse that the spirit can do everything and that bravery is the best armor is similar to harangues given to conscript soldiers before the British arrived, to reinforce their belief that they were David, that their courage and goodness would be sufficient to protect them from the enemy in spite of their lack of training. Of course the most glaring flaw in the David-Goliath myth is that David won and Argentina did not; their spirit did not strengthen them sufficiently, nor did their courage protect them. Suki raises this point as well, making Obán eager to change the subject. It is evident from his description that he imagines war as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement, but that he will not accept any responsibility for failure. Argentine military leaders, like Obán, insisted even after the defeat that the war had earned respect for Argentina in the eyes of the international community. Violence is the only way that they or Obán can imagine to increase either their personal prestige or that of their nation.

Obán likewise thinks that mere participation in a war should have made his soldiers into “heroes.” His version of the hero myth is similar to that of the characters in the film Resurrected: either one is a hero or a coward – there can be no middle ground for the soldier. When Obán discovers a dead soldier named Oscar in Suki’s house disguised in a kimono, he immediately asks if he had served in the war – this is Obán’s only way of measuring another human being. Suki says that Oscar is her brother and he that he did not fight, but this is not enough for Obán. He soon recognizes the dead soldier for who he is, and shouts, “I know who he is! A hero!” Oscar does not have a chance to respond with his own version of his identity, because Obán interrupts his tentative “I am, I am. . .” to say, “Here there are either heroes or morons. If you aren’t a hero, what are you?” (158). Again, Obán denies Oscar a chance to respond by drawing his sword and violently imposing a new label on him: that of “martyr” (158-59).
By “killing” Oscar three times during the course of the play, Obán hopes to impose his heroic myth on Oscar by force while depriving him of the voice he needs to speak his own identity. Though Obán seems obtuse at times, he at least understands the value and power of having that voice: during his second attempt to kill Oscar, he rants that the dead expect too much in wanting to have a voice:

What does this carrion intend? What voice does he want that he did not have when he was alive? The levy sent them after me like cattle, before me like grass to be trodden underfoot. And now that they are dead, they want to have a voice. (150)

In Obán’s estimation, the soldiers were too lowly in the social order to deserve a voice when they were alive, so he certainly does not want to concede them one now that they are dead. To allow such a thing might disturb the social order, and particularly his position at the top of it. Obán then vows that even if the dead acquire that voice and learn to yell with it, he [Obán] will “have the last word,” because he still believes that the sword is the all-powerful giver of power and authority, more powerful than the voice could ever be (158-59).

Obán’s unwavering faith in the supremacy of the sword makes him unable to conceive of resolving differences between people or nations in any way other than by armed violence. His limited view is evident when Suki playfully suggests with a caress that she will erase any offenses that irk him: he angrily pushes her away and shouts, “No woman’s hand will erase anything!” (119). He is so centered on war that he cannot comprehend the possible efficacy of compromise, patience, generosity, or love. His idea of love is reduced to an act of sexual violence and domination, as he demonstrates when he forces Suki to have sex with a tubercular beggar. When she and the beggar both hesitate, Obán asks if he needs to teach them how: “With a single act I can teach you both, like when I run someone through with the sword, I learn power and the other learns death” (129). His comparison of sex to a stabbing is only the beginning: when Suki tenderly encourages the beggar, and they both retreat from Obán’s imposed humiliation into their own peaceful communion, Obán is infuriated and throws the beggar out. He does not understand what they felt, but he realizes that it excluded him; indeed it “erased” him (131). He asks why Suki did not ask him to kill the beggar, again
indicating that he has no regard for others’ lives, and cannot comprehend compassion (131). On this and other occasions he tries to force Suki to “love” him by threatening to kill her, and is frustrated but unenlightened at his lack of success (131-32; 141; 154). Obán’s attempts to coerce Suki into loving him parallel his attempts to win back lost territory by violence. He does not care about Suki’s true feelings or about the feelings of the people who live where he went to fight. His interest lies in the “riches” he thinks are there, in a reflection of the national renewal myth, which suggests that the Malvinas could bring new prosperity to Argentina (135). Like Obán, Argentina’s military government tried to compel the Malvinas’ inhabitants to “love” Argentina by forcibly invading. Official discourse emphasizes the land and its rightful identity as part of Argentina, and tends to ignore or exclude as unimportant the islanders and their wishes. Obán also cares nothing for the inhabitants of his disputed land: “And what do we care about those?” he laughs, using the word étos [those], which implies objects rather than people (135).

While Obán represents the negative ethos of the society’s ruling military class, the ama represents the ordinary people. Specifically, she personifies that portion of society that accepts domination and humiliation, and feeds the military’s egoism with submission and adulation. The ama does this in hopes of gaining favor and also out of fear. She is a selfish character, obsessed with material possessions and with gaining Obán’s attentions. She cares for Suki mostly because Suki supplies her basic needs. She resents Suki’s generosity in giving rice to the hungry, and in sharing her fire with the cold, dead soldier Oscar. She participates in Obán’s cruelty by not opposing him, and by meekly fulfilling his commands even when they are morally repugnant. At Obán’s command, she buries Oscar after Obán has tried unsuccessfully to drown him. When Suki reminds her that Oscar was breathing and his eyes were open, ama fails to realize that her act was unethical. She simply says that the dirt has covered his eyes now, as though hiding him and his open eyes under the dirt will erase his existence and comfort Suki as it comforts her (152). On other occasions, the ama tries to ignore or “forget” having seen the results of Obán’s violence: she wants Suki to forget about the beggar that Obán has killed, and she forgets to tell Suki about Oscar’s reappearance after Obán’s first attempt to kill him. When Suki asks her if there are dead soldiers like Oscar in other peoples’ houses, the ama
responds that she does not know, nor does she wish to (147). The ama participates in
what Diana Taylor calls “percepticide,” or selective blinding, as a form of defense against
the possibility that she, too, might become a victim of Obán’s violence (Taylor 119,122).
She pretends not to see what she thinks she should not, and is preoccupied with looking
at the “given-to-be-seen,” that is the spectacle that Obán makes of himself to be admired
and adored.

The public’s misguided attitude toward the war’s veterans seems to be of
particular concern in this play, as Oscar the dead soldier plays a prominent role in five of
its seven scenes. Gambaro herself says that her play deals with “war and the victims of
war” (Magnarelli 123). She is particularly concerned with the dead:

What I say is that warriors have a place conquered by the sword, in a
country also conquered by corruption and repression, but we don’t know
what place our dead have. One has to know where in the memory to place
them, in order to not be ashamed of those deaths. (Magnarelli 123)

Both the ama and Obán want to ignore the dead soldiers – bury them and forget them.
By making them not behave like proper dead people despite Obán’s repeated efforts to
corral them, Gambaro shows that they are a reality that must be dealt with and will not go
away if it is ignored. This device also suggests that the play is concerned not only with
the war’s dead, but with the wounded survivors as well. They are victims of war as well
as their dead peers. As much as society tries to forget (bury) the war’s veterans, they are
still around, carrying the wounds both physical and emotional that remind people of the
embarrassing failed adventure in the South Atlantic, and the embarrassing deaths that
resulted. It is easier to deal with dead people who behave like dead people – one can put
them in a fancy cemetery, call them heroes, raise a monument to them. They will not
come back to question or belie the myth or to complain that society has misused and
forgotten them. The wounded veterans, on the other hand, are dead in the fact that they
are permanently changed from their former pre-war selves, but they do not fit neatly into
little boxes of meaning or forgetting. Many have difficulties finding and keeping jobs.
Many need medical and psychological care. They do not meekly hide away when society
no longer wants to deal with them. Obán’s plan to corral the dead soldiers and leave
them exposed to the elements until they rot away is like Argentine society’s desire to
ignore the war’s survivors until they are meekly and quietly dead. Then, he says, “we will make an enclosed cemetery – a pretty one – and the earth will fall on top of them, with honor and forgetting. Amen” (149). 46

Despite her compassion and interest, even Suki has difficulty deciding what to do with the living-dead soldier Oscar, who appears repeatedly in her house and refuses to die or go elsewhere. At first she gently tries to convince Oscar to go and join the other specters, who appear to have left town:

And if you all go together, sensibly, no one will attack you. On the contrary. They will regale you with flowers and ribbons . . . and even . . . my lord will honor you. (144, original ellipses) 47

Suki’s hesitations show that she is not convinced of the value of what she and society have to offer Oscar for leaving, and Oscar confirms that he does not care for honor, particularly not from the warrior: “What is the . . . honor!, of your lord?” he asks disdainfully (144, original ellipsis). 48 Suki appeals to other excuses for war that she has heard Obán use. Again, she betrays her own doubt in the myths she speaks even as she speaks them. First she says that the war was necessary, and there were not too many who lost their lives: “That is what happens in war. Some . . . die]” (144). 49 Later she tries to comfort him with heroic myth:

Suki: It is good to defend what is ours. Are you content?  
Oscar: Content? (With a harsh and unbearable laugh) There it is! There it is! In the-grave! What lie-did they take us to-defend,-if they had sold what was already-ours in-every-hungry-person?! (146) 50

Again, Oscar rejects the myth that Suki tentatively offers in her efforts to comfort him. The warrior-leaders had willingly sold what remained to the nation in the way they had neglected their own people. According to Oscar, the war was only a lie to cover up the other, greater loss that the military leadership had brought upon them. Suki’s indecision on how to help Oscar is her only vacillation between moral independence and society’s myths. During the course of the play she questions, resists and finally rejects those myths and the society that produced them.

At one point in the play, Obán hears a noise and goes searching the house for intruders. Suki hopes that he finds no one because he will kill whoever he finds. When
the ama asks why he would do such a thing when no one could possibly compete with his beauty, Suki replies, “Es difícil resistir una costumbre [It is difficult to resist a habit]” (137). The word costumbre supplies her statement with a double meaning: it can mean both personal habit and group custom or tradition. Suki means that it is difficult for Obán to change his habit of killing people, but it is also difficult for anyone to resist his (and society’s) customs of machista domination, not only of men over women, and men over other men, but also of one nation over another. Suki has apparently taken this difficult task upon herself: she resists the social ethos in nearly everything she does. She gives generously to the hungry, she welcomes the diseased beggar into her home. She is not easily impressed by outward shows of authority, or by threats. She doubts that avenging perceived slights with violence is necessary or helpful, as demonstrated by her offer to soothe Obán and erase the offenses he talks of with caresses. When he says war is necessary against those who would take away “that which is ours. That which is yours,” she responds that all her things are easily replaced (119). She thus rejects the revenge ethos of Obán together with the materialistic ethos of the ama. Her interest in the dead demonstrates doubt as to whether disputed territory is worth the price paid in lives. When Suki questions him about the dead, Obán brushes her off and shifts the subject to a favorite mantra of Argentine postwar myth promoters: “We lost the battle. But a battle is not the war” (135).51 Suki’s response, “Except for the dead” (135), points out a flaw in Obán’s myth: for those who died, the war really is over, and it is lost as well.

Obán quickly loses patience in Suki’s interest in the dead: “Enough of them [the dead]! The land is ours and will continue to be ours. That is what matters” (135).52 Suki’s answer to his statement questions the view of the disputed territory as holy ground, or even as important at all: “The land does not exist,” she says. Compared with human lives, the land is irrelevant. When Obán mocks her for stupidity, she elaborates: “The land is nothing more than what we are, my lord. If it lives on its own account we do not know what it lives. We could suspect that perhaps the land enjoys having trees and flowers more than craters and dead bodies” (135).53 This statement can be seen as a response not only to the ethos which gives territory a higher importance than people, but also to the common poetic idea of the Malvinas as personified entities desiring to be Argentine. Here Suki challenges the view that the land has any wishes at all, other than
perhaps a preference to remain unscarred by the war machine. She also suggests that the land is only as valuable as the people who are in it. Suki reminds Obán that his desired territory contains not only riches, but also people “who hated us” and who felt “usurped” (135). She calls attention to the people who are usually excluded in the mythologized view of the islands. She then offers a non-violent way to right the situation: “It would have been good to win them over in a different way, for what we are. Attract them with what we are” (135). Suki understands that the best way to gain respect and cooperation is to earn it with one’s good qualities, without disguises and without coercion. She tells Obán that this is also the way to earn her personal affection, “by letting me go, my lord. Hoping that at some time I have a desire to kiss you” (141). Both of her suggestions, of course, are immediately rejected by Obán, who remains firm in his conviction that the sword reigns supreme as the source of power and honor.

Suki resists Obán’s ethos of domination not only on the level of territory and nation, but also on a personal level. When he tells her he has come “for my homages,” instead of paying him homage as he expects, Suki responds, “I accept them” (120). When he commands her to bow to him, she does so over and over in a mocking little dance (120). Even her attitudes toward dress and ornamentation reflect her growing antipathy for her society, its values and hierarchies. As Gambaro’s remark about transvestism suggests, costume is one of the elements that she manipulates to question social positioning. Obán limits his wardrobe to demonstrate his place in society, and he expects others to do the same. Accordingly, his gifts to Suki are clothing and accessories that befit her role as a courtesan. Suki, however, breaks the rules of costume by not wearing the kimono and parasol that Obán has given her, and by allowing the lower-class ama to use them instead. She even goes so far as to disguise Oscar in a kimono to protect him from Obán. The latter discovers his identity, however, and angrily shouts that Oscar’s only dress should be dirt: “That is your glory! Call yourself content” (159). Suki’s *peripateia*, when she first incurs Obán’s anger, occurs in Scene II when she dares to transgress the rules of costume and give the gifts he has given her to the ama. She also gives rice, which Obán has presumably paid for, to the tubercular beggar. Obán perceives Suki’s generosity as ingratitude and as a challenge to his authority and position, especially when she fails to show emotion at his announcement that he is going to war.
(126). That she would bestow such attention and gifts on people that society ignores, while refusing to recognize him as superior, provokes him to fury. He responds by forcing her to make love to the beggar. After this first offense Suki’s life becomes more difficult, because Obán in his jealousy forbids anyone else to visit her, which makes her completely dependent upon him for her survival (137). He is also ever vigilant for any excuse to punish or threaten Suki for not paying him adequate attention or granting him sufficient importance.

Marta Contreras B.’s article “Diagnosis de la pareja” [Diagnosis of the couple] (1993) points out that the play deconstructs accepted class and gender hierarchies by repeating the same scenarios in a frequent, almost ritual-like sequence which gradually breaks down over the course of the play. This gradual falling apart shows that the social dynamics as they stand are untenable (160). In every scene, Obán tries to assert his authority and gain Suki’s respect and love. The ama fawns, and Suki obeys to a point, but her rebellion increases as the play progresses, and Obán grows more and more frustrated. In Scene II she tells him that no woman, including herself, would enjoy having sex with him (131). His version of sex is subjugation, and by rejecting his version of sex, she also rejects his attempted subjugation of her. By Scene VI, she goes so far as to physically attack Obán and call him a “coward” and a “beast” (159). Suki also denies Obán the desiring look that he wishes her to give him. As mentioned before, she “erases” him when she caresses the diseased beggar in Scene II. In Scene IV, when he asks if he does not dazzle her, she responds “Yes, that is why I cannot see you” (140). When he bathes in Scene VI, Suki refrains from looking at his body, prompting Obán to ask, “Do I not merit a look?” (154). She obeys and looks briefly, but quickly changes the subject to tell him that he smells like a dead body (155). She chooses not to see, or recognize him, and instead chooses to see or recognize those people he would have her ignore.

Suki goes beyond turning a blind eye to Obán’s beauty and authority; she also tries to undo the blindness and forgetting that military rule has forced upon the public. She starts with the ama. In Scene III, the ama wants Suki to forget about the tubercular beggar that Obán has killed, since he would have died soon anyway. Her attitude is reminiscent of ordinary Argentineans’ initial denial of Dirty War “disappearances.” They would say that the victim must have done something to deserve his or her fate – s/he must
have had it coming, rather like the beggar who was bound to die soon in one way or another. People were fearful for their own lives, and self interest motivated their attempts to ignore or “forget” that the authorities were committing atrocities in their very midst. Suki is angry at the ama’s suggestion and stabs her hand with a comb, telling her to forget the pain. (137-38). Though this response seems cruel, Suki is trying to teach the ama that this sort of forgetting grants impunity to the perpetrators of violence, and only makes the problem worse.

It is Suki’s fight against percepticide and forgetting that motivates her to abandon her position in society. In the final scene, she removes her kimono, wig, and makeup in a moment of anagnorisis, or recognition, of what the dead soldiers need and of what her virtue demands of her. By removing her costume, she divests herself of the trappings that had defined her role and made her acceptable in society, and so symbolically rejects that society along with its disguises and pretenses. This is the final step in her resistance against the social ethos; one that she hesitated to do at first, but now accepts wholeheartedly. The distraught ama begs Suki to redisciue herself, insisting that the costume is Suki’s real self, but Suki has realized that she must go in search of the forgotten dead souls “with this that I am” (161). She shows that social roles are just as arbitrary and invented as one’s choice of dress, and in no way reflect people’s true identities. In desperation, the ama tries to convince Suki that Oscar is dead and buried, and that the living-dead never existed at all. “I never saw them,” she says, in a last attempt to impose her own defensive blindness on Suki. Suki responds simply, “You saw them,” once again affirming their reality in the face of the ama’s efforts to not see and forget (161).

Suki finds Oscar and tells him that she will abandon her profession and go with him to find the other dead soldiers: “I will prepare food. I will seat them at my table. I will eat with them. I will talk with them. I will know what they suffered” (162). Oscar finally seems content and is able to voice what he wants, something he had tried to do without success in the previous scene. He wants only to be dead in peace, and Suki agrees that she will join him:

Like this, with me! Dead without glory or lies. Supported in the street, walking with me, putting words into my mouth. Revealed. I will not deny
Suki has concluded that to be dead in peace, Oscar and the other dead need to be given a voice, to be heard not just by her but by all of society, and to be acknowledged for what they were and are, without heroic myths of false glory obscuring them. She takes the responsibility upon herself to provide them that voice and that recognition. By doing so, however, she makes herself an outcast of the corrupt society. This could be seen as her catastrophe – the ama certainly sees it that way. However, it is not the typical tragic catastrophe in that Suki chooses and embraces it as preferable to remaining within the corrupt society. By taking a more active stand against the negative social ethos, Suki purges herself of any remaining hypocrisy or corruption, and the spectators are encouraged to follow suit.

_Del sol naciente_ works to deconstruct official myth by a variety of means, without resorting to farce. The tragic structure works to purge the audience of its violent, hierarchical, and selfish ethos. Suki’s example provides an alternative ethos of compassion and solidarity. That she does not need to use the sword to deconstruct Obán’s authority shows that his trust in that element of his power is misplaced. Her quiet rebellion uses elements of social structuring such as costume, the look, and the voice, to challenge and overturn official hierarchies that place sovereignty, territory, and military strength over human welfare.

**Conclusions**

Many of the demythologizing texts in this chapter use tragedy as a mode for emplotting the Malvinas War in order to discredit some of the romantic myths surrounding it. Kohan and his colleagues suggest that this emplotment cannot work because it does not sufficiently invert the romantic drama of official myths. According to White, however, even though tragedy does not reverse the worldview presented in romance, it does reveal and “take[e] seriously the forces which oppose the effort at human redemption naively held up as a possibility for mankind in Romance” (10, original emphasis). Tragedy emphasizes these opposing forces in order to suggest a way to live
within the limitations that they impose (9-10). Both Del sol naciente and Sink the Belgrano! indicate that the forces that oppose progress and success are not embodied in an enemy other, but rather within their home societies. They expose the romantic view of the heroic conflict as ingenuous and harmful by dwelling on the casualties and eliminating the element of victory. The same can be said of Lerner’s and Costello’s songs, and many of the films, as well: Tumbledown, Resurrected, and Veronico Cruz all show the negative effects of military myths and of the war on specific young men. The forces that bring their protagonists to a tragic end are not the enemy but rather people and ideas on their own side. Machismo and heroism myths are particularly singled out in nearly all of these works as misleading and damaging; some works, like Del sol naciente, La flor azteca, and Resurrected, connect these ideals with unjust domination and cruelty toward others, while others, like Tumbledown and Sink the Belgrano!, point out that they are just as harmful to the person who believes in them as they are to anyone he might try to dominate. The solution that is implied in many of these tragic views of the war is the elimination of the values and myths that made war appealing, that stood in the way of veterans’ recoveries, and that impaired society’s ability or willingness to help their wounded, or acknowledge their dead.

Other works in this chapter use an ironic approach to the war to question or deconstruct official myths. “No bombardeen Buenos Aires,” “Sheep Farming in the Falklands,” Fuckland, and much of the Argentinean fiction discussed earlier falls into this category. These works are removed from the action of the war itself in time, place, or both, and usually question different myths than the more direct and at times more individualized focus of the tragic works. Though Charly García sings in first person, he speaks as a sort of porteño everyman on behalf of his whole city, attacking military incompetence in running both the country and the war. “Sheep Farming,” and “La causa justa” reduce the justice and importance of the war to vulgar toilet humor, and question generalized myths like the just cause and the “Great Britain” myths. Fuckland looks mostly at national identity myths. Most of these works take a broad, distanced view of the war. We do not see wounded or dead bodies; we are not asked to experience the fear, or the loneliness, or the horror of war. The myths dealt with tend to be likewise more broad and overarching, such as national identity and/or abstract justifications for war,
rather than the nature of heroism in the individual soldier, or the absence of renewal in individual citizens at home. An exception to this is Eckhardt’s *El desertor*: this work manages to mock the romance quest and its attendant heroism myths because its focus is narrowed onto one anti-heroic individual, who attains his own version of transcendence by escaping from war rather than facing it.

Gustavo Nielsen’s *La Flor Azteca* is one work in this chapter which combines farcical humor on the one hand with tragedy on the other – it multiplies the focus to show that there is more than one way to view the war, and that one is not necessarily more valid than the other. Carlos’s tragic story focuses on the war’s combatants, and questions the military’s sadistic machismo and heroism myths. Fabio’s farcical story focuses on those that hide from the war in Buenos Aires, and undermines military myths from another direction by showing its incompetence and hypocrisies. At the same time, it exposes some of Fabio’s and Argentine civil society’s own hypocrisies as well. Multiplying the focus and emphasizing that historical events are remembered and described subjectively are techniques that contribute the heightened demythologizing power of many of the countermythologizing works that appear in the following chapter.
Notes to Chapter Three

1 Lópe...
reacted to their activities so negatively. Many of their albums have been remastered and are now available on CD from Southern Records.

11 Gieco is generally known as a folk singer, but he has also played with rock bands, and is considered part of the Rock Nacional movement in Argentina. He has performed and made records together with prominent Argentine rock and pop performers, including Charly García, Raúl Porchetto, Alejandro Lerner, Nito Mestre, and María Rosa Yorio.

12 Gieco’s song is cited in a number of texts about the dictatorship and the Malvinas war, indicating the breadth of its influence. It is mentioned in Daniel Kon’s collection of interviews Los chicos de la guerra (1982), Edgardo Esteban’s memoir Malvinas: Diario del regreso, and Fogwill’s novel Los Pichucyegos. Diana Taylor discusses Mercedes Sosa’s remake of this song in her study on the Dirty War, Disappearing Acts. Gieco was also invited to sing it for Amnesty International’s concert at the River Plate Stadium in 1988, where he appeared with Charly García, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Bruce Springsteen, and other well-known popular musicians.

13 “¿No hay mal que no venga al hombre, / no hay un Dios a quien orar?”

14 “Solo hay una guerra más.”

15 “Estamos ganando. Seguimos ganando”

16 “No bombardeen Buenos Aires / no nos podemos defender”

17 The term canas has a few possible meanings, and García is likely playing upon them all: in more polite usage, it refers to grey hairs – the physical effects of cumulative stress and fear. Cana is also a pejorative slang term for the police, and for prison. I translate it as “cops” to emphasize García’s indictment of those in power and his identification with those who distrust the police and call them by that disparaging name. García’s use of the word rancias in describing the “seats of power” (line 12) also carries a double meaning. On one level it means “traditional and ancient,” and on another it means “rotten.” I chose the latter translation, to clarify García’s critical stance.

18 “Sólo le pido a Dios / que la guerra no me sea indiferente / es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte / toda la pobre inocencia de la gente” (9-12)

19 I categorize An Ungentlemanly Act as a myth-perpetuator, while Monaghan presents it as an unintentional demythologizer. I will discuss this film and its various interpretations in Chapter Five. I was unable to view For Queen and Country, Arrivederci Millwall, or The Ploughman’s Lunch, so I will not discuss them in this dissertation. For a study of For Queen and Country, see Jeffrey Walsh’s article in Aulich 33 - 49. This film presents the hopeless struggle of a poor, black Falklands War veteran to live a decent life in the London ghettos. Arrivederci Millwall and The Ploughman’s Lunch are both discussed in Monaghan 84 -116. Arrivederci Millwall is about xenophobic football hooligans who reenact their own version of the Falklands War when they travel to Spain to watch the 1982 World Cup. The Ploughman’s Lunch focuses mainly on Thatcher’s neo-conservative ideology, referring briefly to the Falklands War as only one of many self-interested Conservative pursuits at others’ expense.

20 Kevin Foster discusses the soldier’s memoir that inspired this film in Fighting Fictions 117-21.

21 The title refers to the debt that the military government owes towards the people it was supposed to have served. Much attention had been paid to the external debt owed by Argentina to its international creditors. Pereira illustrates with his film the internal debt which, unlike its external counterpart, cannot be quantified in pesos or dollars. Pereira took risks in demonstrating anti-military sentiment in this film: the government at the time was still threatened by military rebellion and discontent. In a much-criticized effort at reconciliation, President Carlos Menem would pardon the Junta leaders later on this same year.
Jeffrey Walsh discusses another Argentine film about the war: *Argie* (1985), directed by Jorge Blanco. He dismisses this film about an Argentine living in London during the war as a garbled failure (48). I have been unable either view or locate further information about this film.

The character’s name is the same as the main actor’s. The footage in the final film consists of footage taken by Stratas himself, as well as footage taken by other cameramen but made to appear as if it had been taken by Stratas. This film was made roughly according to the tenets of the Dogma 95 film movement, headed by Danish director Lars Von Trier. The main actor and other cameramen used hand-held cameras in natural settings (as opposed to a studio) without lights or special effects. Director José Luis Marqués wanted to make the film a blend of fiction and reality, so he did not have a set script before filming, and the actors never rehearsed together. Beside the two actors contracted for the film, all of the people who appear are actual islanders who were not aware that they were being filmed at the time (Marqués 39).

According to Fabiana Scherer of *La Nación*, 25,000 people had visited the website and left comments after less than two months of the site’s posting. Several of these comments were reprinted in an anonymous article in *Clarín* for Monday August 28, 2000. The following is an unaltered quote of one of these messages: “Leonardo: Excelente página... excelente anécdota... excelente venganza... No hay mejor guerra que la "guerra del sexo" y en este caso la ganaste (como buen argentino que sos)... por eso te felicito... apoyo tu causa y "las Malvinas son argentinas carajo!!!!!!!" Fuera piratas de nuestro territorio!!!!!” [Leonardo: Excellent page... excellent anecdote... excellent vengeance... There is no better war than “the sexual war” and in this case you won it (like the good Argentine man that you are)... that is why I congratulate you... I support your cause and “The Malvinas are Argentine dammit!!!!!!!” Pirates get out of our territory!!!!!” (qtd. in “Cómo es el site de Fuckland,” *Clarín digital*).

There are other British plays that may demythologize, but I have been unable to either read or view them. These include Tony Marchant’s *Welcome Home* (1983), which deals with the difficulties of returning war veterans, and Jeff Noon’s *Woundings* (1986), of which I know little beyond the title.

*Teatro Abierto* [Open Theater] was an important theater movement that, in its beginning in 1981, functioned in defiance of the dictatorship and its policies of censorship and intimidation, which had stifled the arts for many years. Placing fears of governmental retaliation aside, playwrights, actors, directors, and other theater professionals essentially donated their time in a collective effort to assert Argentine theater’s vitality and relevance to sociopolitical life. The festival occurred again in 1982, 1983, and 1985, but interest waned as its role had to be redefined after Argentina’s return to democracy (Graham-Jones 99). In 1983, when Bortnik’s play was premiered, the country was still making its transition to democracy: in fact, the *Teatro Abierto* festival was held during the elections, and ended the night before the new President, Raúl Alfonsín, began his term in office (Graham-Jones 216). That year, the festival’s plays were written on the theme of Argentina’s years under the dictatorship (Graham-Jones 97). *De a Uno* was published in the journal *Hispanamérica* in 1986.

After the opening night the production was transferred to the Mermaid Theatre. Several reviewers saw the play as parodic of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* in its “chauvinism and swagger” (de Jongh, in *London Theatre Record* 977). Some thought it successful, some did not. Reviewers do not indicate how the audience reacted to the production.

Thatcher emphasizes the islanders’ wishes in her opening statement in the April 3 emergency debate (Morgan 5). Labour leader Michael Foot says shortly afterward that the islanders are in peril and suffering, and that they must be defended (Morgan 8-9). MP George Cunningham also emphasizes that the British claim and defense of the islands is for the people rather than the territory (46). These are only a few examples. Anthony Barnett contends that, in spite of lip service paid to the rights and defense of the islanders, Parliamentary minds were centered on rescuing not people, but territory and international credibility (24-45).
In quoting Berkoff, for the sake of clarity, I will put my own ellipsis in brackets to show where I have omitted some of his text. His own ellipsis will appear without brackets and do not indicate omitted text.

Boal notes that his conclusions about Aristotle’s politically motivated poetics are in direct contradiction to Aristotle’s own statements that politics and art are separate and independent entities (xiv). However, Boal says that Aristotle’s own writings the *Poetics* and other sources belie his assertion of art’s independence from politics. Indeed, concludes Boal, “all of man’s activities – including, of course, all the arts, especially theater – are political” (39).

This hypothesis, as Monaghan points out, is built on two major deviations from historical evidence: first, that the *Belgrano* incident was the first aggression of the war (it was not), and second, that both sides were on the verge of accepting the Peruvian peace plan when the Belgrano was attacked (they were not) (Monaghan 64). Monaghan defends these blatant fictions as necessary to Berkoff’s inversion strategy: Berkoff sees Thatcher as oversimplifying and even altering history for her aims, so he does the same but in the opposite direction (63-64).

This speech is somewhat reminiscent of the St. Crispin’s Day speech in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*.

That the sailors avoid saying “we threw the first stone” may indicate that they do not understand or wish to acknowledge their own complicity and guilt in the *Belgrano*’s sinking. Their anagnorisis is admittedly only partial. This play, like many other works, stops short of assigning any blame to soldiers for questionable acts committed in wartime. British artists and the British public are reluctant to criticize their military, but choose rather to lay all the blame on the government that sent them.

“una pieza de travestismo japonés”

“*Suki*: Buenos días. ¿Siempre traés tanta luz?
*Obán*: ‘Soy’ la luz.”

The Christian God would not have been worshiped in medieval Japan, but he was and is in Argentina. In spite of the exotic setting, this play is written for an Argentine audience about Argentine reality. Gambaro used a similar device in her mid-1990s play *Es necesario entender un poco* [It is necessary to understand a little], which is set in China and France. The play, with its criticism of xenophobic attitudes, however, is aimed at her Argentine compatriots.

The concept of divine grace refers to Christ’s power to redeem from sin. God’s mercy and kindness are also often referred to as grace. Paul writes frequently of Christ’s grace as the only thing that can save people from sin. He also writes that he was called, or chosen for the ministry, through grace. Some key references are Galatians 1.15, Ephesians 2.1-10, and 1 Timothy 1.14. “Being called” means being chosen by God to a position of authority. Matthew 4.21 describes how the apostles James and John were called by Jesus. In Hebrews 5.4, Paul writes that to have authority in the ministry one must be “called of God.” The Argentine military often referred to themselves as being “called,” or “chosen” of God (Graziano 120).

“*Obán*: Vengo de cerca. Nunca me alejo de quien me necesita.
*Suki* (intrigada): ¿Y quién te necesita?
*Obán*: Sin vanidad, creo que todos.
*Suki* (suavemente): Sin vanidad, creo que nadie.”

Thinkers and artists whose writings attest to this view include journalist Horacio Verbitsky (*La última batalla de la tercera guerra mundial*), political commentators Alejandro Dabat and Luis Lorenzano (*Argentina: Malvinas and the End of Military Rule*), playwright Aída Bortnik (*De a uno*), and novelist Carlos Gamerro (*Las Islas*).
“Oban: . . . Si no me hundí en la nieve y en el barro fue para poder mandar. ¡Para que me vieran claramente en medio de la batalla! ¡Esa recua de inexpertos que tuve!

Suki: ¿Quién los llevó a la guerra?
Obán: ¡Yo los llevé! ¡Para que lucharan contra hombres aguerridos, armados hasta los dientes!
Suki: ¿Oponiéndoles con picos y azadas?
Obán: ¡Porque el espíritu lo puede todo y el valor es la mejor armadura!
Suki: ¿En esas guerras? ¿Ganaron?
Obán: No. Podrías abrazarme.”

“Acá hay héroes o tarados. Si no sos un héro, ¿qué sos?”

“¿Qué pretende esta carroña? ¿Qué voz quiere tener que no tuvo de vivo? La leva los mandó detrás de mí como manada, delante de mí como pasto para hollar. Y ahora, de muertos, quieren tener voz.”

“Ninguna mano de mujer borrará nada!”

“Con un solo acto puedo enseñarles a los dos, como cuando atravieso a alguien con la espada, yo aprendo el poder y el otro la muerte”

“Lo que yo digo es que los guerreros tienen un lugar conquistado por la espada en un país también conquistado por la corrupción y la represión, pero no sabemos cuál es el lugar de nuestros muertos. Uno tiene que saber en qué lugar de la memoria colocarlos para no avergonzarse de esas muertes.”

“Cercaremos un cementerio –bonito– y la tierra les caerá encima, con honor y olvido. Amén.”

“Y si se van todos juntos, juiciosamente, nadie los atacará. Al contrario. Les regalarán. . . flores y cintas. . . Y hasta. . . mi señor los honrará.”

“¿Qué es la. . . ¡honra!, de-tu-señor?”

“Es lo que ocurre en las guerras. Algunos. . . mueren.”

“Suki: Es bueno defender lo que es nuestro. ¿Estás contento?
Oscar: ¿Contento? (Ríe con una risa áspera e insoportable) ¡Está! ¡Está! ¡En la-fosa! ¿Qué mentira-nos llevaron a defender-si la que ya-teníamos-la-vendieron-en-cada- ¡hambriento! (Ríe)”

“Perdimos la batalla. Pero una batalla no es la guerra.” Galtieri says something similar to this in an interview, refusing to accept that he or his country had been defeated: “We suffered a partial, military setback; but we achieved a high-class international victory, for our rights that we have been fighting for these last 149 years. . . . Argentina is not defeated and of course I will not surrender” (Sufrimos un revés parcial, militar; pero logramos una victoria internacional de campanillas, por nuestros derechos por los cuales estamos luchando desde hace 149 años. . . . La Argentina no está derrotada y por supuesto yo no me rindo” (Montenegro and Aliverti 95).

“¡Basta con ellos! La tierra es nuestra y seguirá siendo nuestra. Eso es lo que vale.”

“La tierra no es más que lo que somos, mi señor. Si vive por su cuenta no sabemos lo que vive. Podemos sospechar que quizás a la tierra le guste más tener árboles y flores que cráteres y muertos.”

“Hubiera sido bueno ganarlos de otra manera, por esto que somos. Atraerlos con esto que somos.”

“Soltándome, señor. Esperando que alguna vez tenga deseos de besarte.”

“Suki: [. . .] ¿Para qué viniste?
Obán: Para mis homenajes.”
Suki: Los acepto.”

57 “Tu único vestido debe ser de tierra. ¡Esa es tu gloria! Llamate contento.”

58 “Obán: ¡Maldita seas! ¿Es que no te deslumbro?
Suki: Sí. Por eso no te veo. (Rie)”

59 “¡No merezco una mirada?”

60 “con esto que soy.”

Suki: Los viste.”


63 “¡Así, conmigo! Muerto sin gloria y sin mentiras. Sostenido en la calle, caminando conmigo, poniéndome palabras en la boca. Revelado. No te negaré. Ni la tierra ni el fuego los negarán. Ni el futuro los negará.” Suki’s desire to give the dead due recognition and not deny them is somewhat reminiscent of Gambaro’s later play Antígona Furiosa (1986). A reworking of the Greek tragedy Antigone, this play again takes up the issue of granting the dead proper acknowledgment. Like Suki, Antígona advocates the rights of the dead against the decrees of the power élite (a Creon-like “character” who is represented by a hollow breastplate). Her fight to obtain proper burial for her dead brother symbolizes the ongoing efforts of many Argentines to secure governmental acknowledgment and restitution for the deaths of their disappeared loved ones during the Dirty War.
CHAPTER FOUR
COUNTERMYTHOLOGIZERS

In London’s oldest restaurant hangs an allegorical painting of Margaret Thatcher, dressed in knightly armor and standing triumphantly before the distant hills of the Falkland Islands, sword in one hand and flag in the other. It is actually a small mural, painted directly onto a slanting wall in one of the main-floor dining rooms. Once I sat directly beneath Thatcher’s severe gaze to have a meal there. She loomed diagonally over my head as I ate, just as she has over countless other visitors to this busy restaurant, frequented by locals, luminaries, and tourists alike. Mrs. Thatcher’s imposing image has a sizable audience at Rules Restaurant. One can even buy a postcard of the painting at the front desk, to take home as a souvenir. Called *The Thatcher Years*, it makes a statement about the personality and the war that she oversaw as Prime Minister. At first it may seem that the statement is a positive one. Thatcher looks grand and imposing, and surely the image of the knight is a heroic one, connoting honor and other chivalrous values. On closer examination, however, the painting reveals quite a different message.

The postcard carries a brief (and circumspectly non-ideological) explication of the painting, which was commissioned by Rules Restaurant from artist John Springs. According to this explication, the small figure on the lower right “represents Britannia as a female warrior carrying the Union Jack and personifying Great Britain.” It does not comment on the fact that poor Britannia is naked except for a green mantle which she clutches ineffectually along with the national flag, in an attitude of shivering and uncertainty. She does not look particularly warrior-like. In fact, she looks rather bewildered and defenseless. She stands in the middle-ground, partially obscured by the figure of Thatcher, which looms over her at several times her size. To Thatcher’s lower left stands another allegorical female figure, this time “a footsoldier holding the flag of St. George.” She at least has clothes on, but she is also much smaller than Thatcher and
glances with furrowed brow over her shoulder, averting her gaze from Thatcher and the viewer alike. It seems that Springs (like many of the authors I discuss in this chapter), having noticed the romance-quest/crusade narrative emplotment of official war myths, has utilized this same theme as a means of poking fun at the myths and at their main creator. The heroic rescue is here portrayed as an anachronistic crusade in which Thatcher aggrandizes herself as the noble hero, while Great Britain itself and the footsoldier, who bear the burden of war and pay its price, are overshadowed and obscured. Thatcher is shown to be out of touch with the rest of her nation in that the flags and Britannia’s hair all blow to the viewer’s right (their own left), while Thatcher’s exaggerated mane blows in the opposite direction. The painting creates a new myth of its own in which Thatcher, rather than sending Britain on a quest for its own redemption, has
embarked on a personal quest for her own exaltation. In other words, this mural
countermythologizes.

In this chapter I will discuss countermythologizing texts, some of which are also
the most effective demythologizers. I define countermythologizers as texts that not only
question or deconstruct official myths, but deploy myths of their own that work to
subvert, and thus replace selected myths. There have not been as many
countermythologizers to choose from as there have been works in other categories. For
this reason I will include a brief analysis of each of the countermythologizing texts that I
have found, though I will limit in-depth analysis to one work from each side of the
conflict. I will discuss three Argentinean works first, beginning with the minor analyses
and ending with a detailed look at Carlos Gamerro’s satirical novel *Las Islas* (1998).
Afterword I will discuss the four British works, ending with a study of Richard Francis’s
*Swansong* (1986), also a satirical novel. Though the genres of these works vary (besides
the satirical novels there are travel books, a thriller, a war picaresque, and an illustrated
“fairy tale”), many of them draw on common themes and techniques to question standing
myths and to deploy their new ones. They emphasize how individual subjectivity affects
perception, and they question our access to verifiable, universally accurate history. They
look at motivating factors behind official myths, and they construct their own myths
about national identity, the war, and the future.

**Argentinean Countermythologizers**

The three Argentinean countermythologizers that I examine in this chapter are all
novels, and all share a postmodernist suspicion of history and memory. They encourage
a similar suspicion in the reader as a demythologizing strategy, preparing the way for
their own countermyths. Two of these novels cite aggression and nostalgia as motivating
forces behind identity-making and other war-related mythologizing efforts. All of them
address identity in the countermyths they produce. *Las Islas* generates many other
countermyths which I will look at after brief discussions of Raúl Vieytes’ thriller *Kelper*
(1999), and Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill’s novel *Los pichy-cyegos* (1983).¹
Kelper

Vieytes’s dark novel is unusual in that it attempts to tell a story from the islanders’ point of view, and they present themselves as worthy of being called the Enemy. In doing so, however, Vieytes is not merely trying to make the islanders (Often nick-named “Kelpers”) incriminate themselves with their unpleasant views and behavior. He is actually questioning Argentina’s myth that recovery of the islands is the key to reinvigorating the nation. Vieytes tears away the significations that official myth had attached to the islanders before the war (oppressed colony in need of liberation) and during the war (innocent bystanders in need of protection), even beyond what the experience of the war itself had accomplished. By pointing out the atavistic motivations behind Kelper mythmaking, he questions similar drives behind Argentina’s own nationalistic myths. His demythologizing strategy involves questioning history and memory’s access to absolute or verifiable truth, and then proposing a counter-identity myth for the islanders that suggests that their very deepest drives make recovering the Malvinas both impossible and undesirable.

Vieytes’s novel questions the veracity of history as it is written and remembered. The protagonist, Falkland Islander Len Bresley, promotes a version of Falklands history denying that Argentina ever had legitimate possession of the islands. He does not contest that there were Argentineans on the islands in 1833, but he disallows the legitimacy of the government that backed those colonists. In Bresley’s opinion, Rosas’s status as a violent dictator is sufficient to render illegal his [Rosas’s] claim on the islands (189-90). Bresley accepts his own version of the truth as absolute and infallible, yet when a football commentator declares his favorite team’s goal illegitimate, he insists that “such a subjective opinion also deserved a counter-argument” to be printed alongside it (206). Bresley’s entire narrative points to the gross distortions that can end up as accepted truth in memory or history. He is a murderer several times over, in some cases killing out of sheer anger or spite. Yet he succeeds not only in escaping from blame, but also in receiving a medal of honor from Prince Charles for his “service to the community of the Falkland Islands” (229). Meanwhile one of his dead co-conspirators, a treacherous black marketeer, extorsionist, and pimp, is remembered as a martyr-hero. The murdered village idiot, on the other hand, takes the blame as the psychotic killer of his father, an Argentine
stranger, and a beggar woman. He is remembered for generations with fear – some rumors even go so far as to suggest that the disappeared killer-idiot has escaped to Argentina where he continues plotting death and destruction for the islanders (224-25). The Kelpers in Vieytes’s novel base their hero myths on a spurious, misremembered history. Argentina’s own identity myths are based upon a nostalgia for a lost identity and unity somewhere in the past. Vieytes suggests that history and memory are unreliable; it follows then that Argentina’s own identity and renewal myths may also be founded upon an invented history. Vieytes never suggests this parallel openly in the novel, but the slipperiness of identity is implied, particularly when Bresley discovers too late that his first victim, an unidentified Argentine man, was actually of Welsh ancestry, spoke flawless Welsh, and had come from one of the Welsh communities in Argentina. Suddenly he questions the dead man’s identity, and his own actions (120-21). In an interview for Al Margen (an on-line Argentine magazine covering a variety of topics), Vieytes comments that national identity is not as simple as we would believe: not many people realize, he says, citing the sizeable English, Welsh, and Irish communities in Argentina, that the hated British are actually part of our own nation and have been from the beginning (1).

This done, Vieytes puts forward his own myth of Kelper identity, which opposes the official stance of protectiveness toward the islanders as innocent citizens of the patria oppressed by British colonialism. His myth also works to question how recovering the islands could ever be successful or positive for Argentina’s future. The countermyth is acknowledged as fictional, but all the same it provokes thought about the similarly fabricated nature of official myths. The islanders that Vieytes depicts are xenophobic and reactionary: their nostalgia for their own lost past fuels their hatred and aggression toward all things Argentine. They enliven their dull existence with heavy drinking, whoring, brawling, black-marketeering, and backstabbing. Bresley and his cronies express their determination to keep outside influences out by murdering an Argentinean man who arrives by night in a boat, without trying to ascertain why he was there. They are also responsible for the murders of a beggar woman, an islander with pro-Argentine sympathies, and his idiot son. Bresley ends up killing his partners in crime as well, when he realizes their willingness to use and betray him. Vieytes’s characters form their own
identities based on the negation of the outside Other. To maintain and protect their own sense of community and self, they repudiate the Argentinean Other through nostalgia and violence. The appearance of the Prince of Wales at the novel’s close draws further attention to that nostalgia, as an emblem of continued British attachment to outdated institutions such as royalty and colonialism.

Vieytes’s countermyth of Kelper identity actually coincides with Jonathan Raban’s observations in one of the travel books I will examine later in this chapter. As Raban writes, “You had only to look at the atlas to see that the identity of the Falklanders, like that of the British, was bound up in endless aggressive assertions of their differences from the continental giant across the water” (105). In a certain sense, Kelper perpetuates enemy myths by association: the islanders are culturally and politically British, so their nastiness reflects a generalized British nastiness. In some ways, the novel returns to the image of the islanders that was presented in the myth-promoting poetry from before and during the war, depicting them as the Enemy, evil pirates who castigate and profane the Argentinean islands with their very presence. The difference is that the novel acknowledges this image as mythologized. In an interview for Clarín, Vieytes says that his despicable anti-hero criticizes the Argentinean “fascists” but fails to see the authoritarian monster in his mirror: “In this aspect Bresley is a very Argentinean character, because I don’t believe that there are Kelpers like that, but I do believe that there are Argentineans like that” (4). Here Vieytes says explicitly what is only barely implied in the novel: that Argentina and its people are not much different in their flaws from his fictional islanders in theirs. This is not to say that he does not find attitudes in real islanders worthy of criticism, because he criticizes their real isolationist and xenophobic attitudes in his interviews and his novel alike. Through his novel, Vieytes indirectly questions why Argentina ever indulged in its own violent expressions of nostalgia, and why it should want to bother discussing sovereignty with the still-intractable British government and the still-anti-Argentine islanders.

Los pichy-cyegos

Fogwill’s novel Los pichy-cyegos [The blynd armadyllos] does not deal with nostalgia or with pent-up aggression as myth-motivators, like Kelper does. It completely bypasses the issue of motives, and demythologizes national identity and patriotism by
suggesting that, besides being fluid and evasive, these mythologized concepts are ultimately meaningless in the face of a struggle for survival. The novel perpetuates the two-fronted war countermyth, which is common to much Malvinas literature, particularly the war testimonials. Its main countermyth, however, is that Argentine history and identity are particularly inaccessible, having been debated, distorted, partially suppressed, and never brought to a consensus. As Beatriz Sarlo and Julio Schvartzman have noted, the novel also posits nationalist identities and justifications for war as meaningless during combat. *Los Pichy-cyegos* centers on a group of deserters who hide underground to wait out the war. To obtain supplies that they cannot get by thievery, they trade commodities and secrets with certain contacts in both the Argentine and British armies. The deserters call themselves “pichis,” after the burrowing armadillo whose habits they imitate to survive. Only one pichi survives the war, and the reader is given to suppose that the text was written by the nameless interlocutor to whom the pichi Quiquito tells his story.

Beatriz Sarlo discusses the novel as placing basic values of individual survival over issues of national identity, or of the war’s legitimacy. In fact, she writes that when the men in the story are placed in a life-threatening situation, national identity is one of the first things to disappear (2). It is not necessarily a pacifist novel, she says, because it does not postulate war as an undesirable or ineffective solution to national problems (2). Instead, its characters concentrate on immediate physical needs, which quickly and effectively overshadow and erase philosophical questions of the war’s legitimacy and national identity as irrelevant to their current situation. Julio Schvartzman also discusses the novel’s concentration on individual survival, which undermines the divisions between the two combatant nations, as well as the values each invokes. For this reason, he calls the novel a “war picaresque” (3). The characters in *Los Pichy-cyegos* frequently demonstrate that their desire to survive outweighs and nearly erases their allegiance to the country of their birth. The pichis do not particularly care who wins the war; they hope that the officers on both sides kill each other off so there will no longer be any warmongers left to cause problems for the ordinary people (Fogwill 57-58). They take particular pleasure in helping to destroy an Argentine marine camp, since some marines had killed two of their founding pichis. Being Argentine is not important to them; one pichi wishes he could be Brazilian; and all them wish for sex and clean beds, but victory
for Argentina is not on their lists (59). It could be argued that this privileging of the here-and-now and its concrete commodities over identity and patriotism is part of the novel’s main countermyth: the pichis concentrate on physical survival in the present because the past – particularly Argentina’s past – cannot be known or understood, and the mythologized identities and justifications formulated by those in power are irrelevant.

Many things happen in life that simply cannot be explained, as Fogwill emphasizes in the frequent improbable and even absurd occurrences in the novel, such as the inexplicable sounds of digging on a certain deserted hillside; the nuns dressed only in their habits, who wander the frigid wasteland speaking in French accents to their sheep; the numberless Pucará aircraft that congregate at a certain point in the sky under a rainbow, only to mass self-destruct; or the Harrier that manages to float poised a few feet over Quiquito’s head, even when its engines are turned off. Fogwill builds his countermyth through a series of demythologizing strategies, including this preponderance of inexplicable events, in addition to the blurring of identities, the dismantling of heroic myths, and the questioning of human access to history.

Besides having no use for ideological justifications, the pichis have little access to information about the progress of the war, as well as to knowledge about their own history. As Schvartzman points out, in their underground world, the “knowledge” of national events and figures, as well as of the progress of the war, is reduced only to “beliefs, myths, appearances” (3). Their discussion of historical events is based on claims and hearsay, and they cannot believe one another’s conflicting stories about what has happened or what is happening above the ground in the islands or on the mainland. They are essentially blind, as the novel’s title suggests. The pichis’ political conversations reveal the complexity of Argentine politics and the vast differences between different ideological groups’ “remembrance” of political events, particularly of those surrounding the guerrilla movements and the dictatorship’s repressive campaigns. Scott Alan Link has also commented that the pichis’ ignorance about certain figures, notably Hipólito Yrigoyen (president of Argentina from 1916 to 1922, and from 1928 to 1930, and an icon of democratic government), demonstrates how effectively the dictatorship had suppressed certain aspects of national history to its own advantage (324). Even after the war is over, the protagonist’s interactions with his interlocutor point to the impossibility of accurately
re-creating past events or of verifying their truthfulness or lack thereof. When the writer (Quiquito’s interlocutor) affirms that he understands what the Quiquito has told him, Quiquito angrily responds that he knows nothing at all (81; 114). Quiquito affirms that one cannot really know anything. He has forgotten the stories they told and the films he and the pichis discussed. He has forgotten dates, faces and voices. The only thing that the pichis really knew, he says, was what they were expected to do at any given moment, and the only reason they knew it was because they were told (80). His interlocutor asks, “Do you mean that the memory depends on those in command, or on what the commanders tell you to do?” and Quiquito agrees (80). The writer asks if things might be similar in Argentina, but Quiquito does not get the connection (80-81). He concentrates on the physical differences and fails to see what the writer implies: that those in power on the mainland have also determined what Argentines should “know” and what they should “remember” about their history and about current events in their country.

Although Fogwill’s novel is highly critical of Argentina’s military and its myths, it is even more vehement in its demonization of the British. At first it may seem that Argentine officers and the British are given equal status as potential enemies to the pichis, but the British are portrayed as more depraved, more “sons of bitches” than the worst Argentine military men (57). The Argentine military is shown to be incompetent: the soldiers are told to lay mines behind them as they advance, thus cutting off their retreat (100), and overzealous lieutenants kill off scores of surrendering conscripts by forcing them to form ranks and fire on British patrols with their rusty broken guns (130-31). The officers are vainglorious but cowardly, stealing horses and riding about the fields trying to look important until the British arrive (111). Once the fighting begins in earnest, those same officers are in the hospitals with head colds or sprains, or disguising themselves as conscripts to join the surrender lines (106; 111). Argentine leadership is incompetent enough to constitute a threat to its own men, and this, together with one episode describing an officer who sexually abuses a conscript, contribute to the two-fronted war myth, which states that conscripts were faced with a double enemy: the British and their own leadership. The pichi’s situation mirrors that of the regular
conscripts: Argentinean line units present as much of a threat to their survival as do the British.

If the Argentines are incompetent and at times malicious, the British are highly skilled at destruction, and much more evil and treacherous than the Argentines. Quiquito portrays the British as highly organized, technologized to the point of absurdity, and frighteningly efficient at killing. The description of British equipment as compared to Argentine baldly promotes the David-and-Goliath myth of the undertrained, underarmed child-army facing the evil over-armed British giant (100). Fogwill may not try to depict the whole Argentine armed forces as a pure and righteous David figure, but he does present the conscripts as blameless and more or less defenseless, and he certainly depicts the British as a monolithic giant. They are as arrogant as Goliath: the British soldiers who work with the pichis look down at them with disdain and pity, and the paratroopers stomp on and spit on any Argentine soldiers they see (92-93;103). They are as callous and depraved as Goliath as well: they rape and torture prisoners for fun, and they fire their experimental weapons on the lines of surrendering soldiers (56; 108; 129). They are callous even toward their own, discarding equipment and soldiers alike after their “useful lives” have expired (129). They are backstabbers, and the pichi leaders treat them with appropriate suspicion and distance, knowing that they could and would betray them if it served their interests (57). Quiquito goes so far as to suggest that the British are in league with the devil: the Harrier that pursues him on various occasions is numbered 666, the number of the Beast in the Biblical *Revelation* (116).

As was discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Martín Kohan has written that the most effective demythologizing fiction in Argentina depicts the war as a farce or a joke. In most of the works he discusses, the action is significantly removed from the war itself. I suggest that their ironic humor could not function if set directly in the middle of a realistic combat situation. As Kohan notes, the demythologizing laughter in a farcical work of fiction would be “impossible” and indeed “intolerable” in a testimonial work, which places the reader in much closer contact with those who suffer and with the actual experience of war (7). Kohan mentions *Los Pichy-cyegos* as a farcical view of the Malvinas War, but it also has much in common with war testimonials: for one thing it includes the use of an intermediary who records a witness’s
oral story, organizing and transcribing it into written form. This is one of testimonial literature’s main conventions (Link 332). Fogwill’s novel also details conscript abuse, insanity, and suffering from cold and hunger, as do most Malvinas War testimonials. In Kohan’s defense, the novel does feature a few sardonically humorous images, but most of it is tragically ironic or nightmarishly strange, rather than farcical. Though some distancing is achieved by isolating the protagonists from most of the fighting and suffering in their cave, Los Pichy-cyegos features a close focus on individuals involved in a war, which makes derisive humor a bit uncomfortable. These characteristics do not necessarily weaken the novel’s effectiveness as a demythologizer. Its real weakness lies in its tenacious demonization of the British enemy, even beyond the parameters of evil set by the Argentine military. Fogwill’s insistence on perpetuating enemy myths essentially rebuilds the divisions of “us” versus “them” on which so much of national identity is based – divisions that Kohan argues are blurred and questioned by effective demythologizers. Los Pichy-cyegos reconstructs these mythologized divisions in spite of its demythologizing strategies that dismantle military myths and identity myths. It affirms the inferiority of the Other, thus negating its own subversive countermyth that patriotism and identity are meaningless in the face of a struggle to survive.

Vieytes and Fogwill both perpetuate enemy myths. For Vieytes, however, this perpetuation serves a purpose in his own demythologizing strategy. There is no explicit suggestion in Kelper that Argentineans are any better than the islanders, and the islanders’ myths are shown to be similar to Argentina’s in terms of their motivations in nostalgia and a desire to aggressively assert their own identity and importance. These similarities are implied rather than explicit, however, and could be overlooked by a reader with a nationalist agenda. Fogwill’s enemy myth undermines his own assertions that national identities and divisions between “us” and “them” are meaningless and counterproductive. Los Pichy-cyegos is more self-deconstructing and more problematic than Kelper, but both are ambiguous in terms of how they deal with national identity and its insistence on building the self-image at the expense of a repudiated Other. Gamerro’s novel goes beyond these two in many respects. It does not perpetuate enemy myths, but rather engages in pointed criticism of both Argentina and Britain. Though Gamerro concentrates his efforts on Argentinean failings, he suggests in various ways that neither
Britons nor Argentines are any better or worse than the other. In its exploration of Argentinean identity and reality, *Las Islas* does not limit itself to one focus or even one mode or one emplotment, but creates a complex layering of narratives, modes, and foci to give a multifaceted view of the war and of Argentinean society in general. It also presents multiple countermyths to go along with its multiple deconstructions of official myths, both Argentinean and British.

*Las Islas*

Carlos Gamerro’s satirical novel *Las Islas* [The Islands] (1998) is a calculated and complex attack on many of Argentina’s (and some of Britain’s) Malvinas/Falklands myths. Gamerro deconstructs identity and war myths by exaggerating them until their flaws become obvious, or by providing a concrete but preposterous history or explanation for them to show their inherent absurdities. Many of Argentina’s exposed myths reveal elements of nostalgia, machismo, and aggression as their motivations. Gamerro does not limit himself to strict demythologizing, however, for he has his characters offer up various countermyths in place of the standard ones. He even presents a “re-mythologizer” character in the process of recasting an official myth in a different form, and exposes the calculation, distortion, and manipulation behind the process. Since he has done this, of course he makes no effort to privilege his new Malvinas myths as any more “true” than the ones he has destroyed. Instead, he offers the new myths with full acknowledgment of their non-naturalness and un-reliability, as though to emphasize that the issues can be seen and understood from a multitude of perspectives, and given several different interpretations and significances, none of which is necessarily any closer to the “truth” than the other.

Martín Kohan writes that *Las Islas* is one book that has managed to overcome the sharp division in Argentine war literature between the tragic view of the war given in testimonial works and the “farcical” one that appears in most short stories and novels (8). According to Kohan, by superimposing the “farcical” (actually ironic or grotesque) and the tragic, Gamerro reveals “the signification that is found only at that crossing point: a truth that did not exist separately in either in the literary inventions or in the testimonial truths about Malvinas” (8). Gamerro portrays the war as a simulacrum of a war, and also shows that through the simulacrum, – the farce, if you will – a certain truth is revealed.
that could not otherwise be understood. Kohan is not clear on precisely what that elusive “truth” states, but he does say that Gamerro presents the drama of the entire dictatorship as it is contained in and revealed through the farce of the Malvinas (10).

Kohan discusses narrative modes being superimposed: the “farcical” or satiric mode is overlayed upon the tragic to reveal some unnamed truth. However, I would say that the layered effect of this novel goes beyond mode into its very structure. *Las Islas* contains two parallel narratives superimposed and interwoven together: the narrative of the protagonist’s experience in the Malvinas, and the narrative of his postwar involvement with the multimillionaire Fausto Tamerlán. The story of the war itself is mostly tragic, though it contains some humorous and absurd elements. The narrative of the Tamerlán conspiracy is more comedic, though its comedy is black, ironic, and grotesque. Gamerro reveals his double narrative device openly, in that toward the end of the novel, the protagonist and narrator, Felipe Félix, sees a vision of a hand from the sky peeling up the city of Buenos Aires (the setting of the Tamerlán narrative) as though it were an old adhesive bandage, to reveal the desolate landscape of Malvinas underneath (541). He then realizes that he has lived the same story over again twice (583-84): his is a “sad story lived two times, . . . two worlds made one like two mirrors facing each other” (585).

What is Gamerro trying to accomplish with the superimposed narratives, the dual modes of comic satire and tragedy, the simulacra and disguises? It is at least evident why Gamerro chooses satire as the main mode of one of his narratives. White writes in his introduction to *Metahistory* that satire is the complete reverse or opposite of romance (9). Since the Argentine nationalist myths are cast primarily in romance form, it follows that a satire would be most effective at tearing those romantic myths down. Gamerro even includes a mini-parody of an Argentine officer’s romance-quest in the Malvinas as a subplot. Kohan’s observation that humor is out of place in a testimonial work that deals directly and closely with individual war experience is perhaps a clue as to why Gamerro also uses a tragic narrative as a component of his novel. Frye notes that satire “breaks down when its content is too oppressively real to permit the maintaining of the fantastic or hypothetical tone.” (224). To describe the horror of the war in close-up and sharp focus has its own demythologizing power, and this sort of narrative requires realism and
solemnity. Kohan writes that the dual usage of both these modes reveals a truth that can only be found at their intersection, but what is that truth? What is Gamerro trying to say?

I propose that the Tamerlán narrative, a darkly humorous “thriller” story, is meant to elucidate the tragedy of the Malvinas (and indeed, as Kohan says, the entire dictatorship). By displacing elements of the war story to a different setting and circumstance, Gamerro can comment on them ironically, at a “safe” distance from the painful realities of the war itself. In both the Malvinas and Tamerlán narratives, Felipe is used against his will in order to achieve the ends of a powerful entity. In both cases, he is at least partially ignorant of the role he is expected to play, and the immediately obvious threat is only one of two or more hostile entities that he must face. In both cases, innocent people are killed in spite of Felipe’s attempts to help them. Finally, Felipe manages to survive both of the dangerous scenarios that he is caught up in, only to end up face to face with the gloomy reality of his country and his life in their state of decadence and disrepair. The close relationship between these two narratives works to discredit a number of official myths and to offer different ones in their places, particularly the just cause, national identity, and military myths. Other myths that are not directly dealt with by the dual structure itself are inserted and addressed during the course of one narrative or the other. These include “Gran Argentina,” national renewal, scapegoat, enemy, machismo, and heroism myths. The following examination of the double narrative’s demythologizing and countermythologizing functions blends into a discussion of each of these myths and how Gamerro dismantles them through a variety of interrelated strategies.

The novel opens with Felipe being coerced into stealing information from the national intelligence agency (Secretaría de Inteligencia Del Estado, or SIDE) for the entrepreneur Fausto Tamerlán. Felipe compares his situation to that of a fly caught in a spider’s web, waiting for the spider to get hungry (11). Later on, he considers that his summons to Tamerlán’s office was in essence no different from the orders he received to reincorporate in the army for the Malvinas war (583). In both cases, Felipe is an unwilling pawn in a dangerous game. Tamerlán becomes the equivalent of the military government, forcing an unwitting young man into doing his bidding for a cynical cause. Tamerlán’s obviously nefarious purpose sheds an unflattering light on the parallel “just
cause” of the Malvinas: Tamerlán wishes to obtain the data on 25 witnesses to a murder committed by his son César. He says he wants to bribe them into silence, not so much to save his son as to protect his own reputation and his business, including his plans to take over and reconfigure the entire city of Buenos Aires. He longs for the absolute power over others that was once available to men such as his father in the days of Nazi Germany. This is the counterpart of the “just cause” to recover the stolen territory of the Malvinas. The “cause” is not so much an effort to rescue the suffering captive territory as it is to restore the lost identity and honor of the Argentine nation. The conscript soldiers who must endanger their lives for the cause, though many appear to do so willingly, in reality have no choice in the matter; those who did not wish to go to war had to do so anyway. After Felipe has done Tamerlán’s bidding, he discovers that the businessman is not bribing, but killing the witnesses one by one, and the “just cause” looks more and more dubious. Through the parallel between Tamerlán and the Argentine military, Gamerro suggests that the atrocities of the Dirty War and Malvinas War alike were founded upon a simple love for violence and cruelty. While the military constructs elaborate myths about protecting Western values and Christian morals to justify its violent activities, Tamerlán openly admits to taking pleasure in the simple expression of aggression and sexual domination of an Other.

As many have pointed out, Argentina’s military government had a number of ulterior motives in the retaking of the Malvinas. The invasion of the islands was a means of distracting the public from their increasingly vocal demands for human rights accountability and economic reform, as well as a final desperate attempt to reassert myths of military righteousness, power, and heroism. Just as Argentina’s military government had even deeper, more selfish motivations than the unification and renewal of Argentina, so the Tamerlán conspiracy is revealed to have even more obscure and twisted instigators than Tamerlán and his desire to redesign Buenos Aires. Tamerlán’s son César and an infamous military officer have planned the murder in hopes of first distracting and then destroying Tamerlán Sr., in order to take over the multi-million dollar business. The military conspirator, Major Cuervo, plans to divert funds from the business toward a clandestine re-invasion of the Malvinas. This strange twist brings the Tamerlán narrative back to the initial “just cause” of the Malvinas narrative, to create a circular relationship
between the two stories: From Major Cuervo’s perspective, Malvinas is the justification, not only for the war, but also for the murders he helps to commit ten years later. This circular relationship works to discredit the “just cause” as well as the military that promoted it, and it shows how a supposedly pure and good thing can be twisted for achieving evil ends.

The superimposed narratives in *Las Islas* work to deconstruct myths of Argentina’s *ser nacional*, and to deploy a different identity myth in their place. The Tamerlán narrative presents postwar Argentina as a strange and sinister place – as horrifying as the novel’s basically realistic account of the Malvinas War. Many of its characters, places and events are grotesque and exaggerated beyond strict realism in order to achieve the nightmarish image of “the city of pain,” as Felipe calls Buenos Aires. A brief example is Tamerlán’s “pet” *diputado*, or representative in the national legislature. Tamerlán has “bought” this abject creature to get certain laws passed and to block others. The reader finds the *diputado* crawling under Tamerlán’s desk and licking his boots like a dog, as Tamerlán kicks and abuses him (156-57). At one point he orders the *diputado* to urinate on a statue of Eva Perón, which he does obediently, lifting his leg in canine fashion before Felipe’s only slightly surprised gaze (166). Throughout the Tamerlán narrative, the reader is confronted with evidence that Argentina’s true identity mirrors the behavior exhibited by its military on the battlefield as described in the Malvinas narrative. In both cases, Argentina is portrayed as a corrupt and violent country full of xenophobes, fascist sympathizers, torturers, opportunists, and parasites. First I will look at the model created in the Malvinas narrative, and then show how it is mirrored in the Tamerlán narrative.

Gamerro shows the reader a Malvinas war narrative reminiscent of many others, in that the conscripts starve, freeze, are abused by their officers, endure blood-chilling situations, see people mutilated, and witness callous bloodthirstiness on the part of the British. His story is different, however, in that the Argentinean military figures are openly represented as torturers who try to use their Dirty War techniques in a war against an external enemy. Kohan writes that Gamerro’s depiction of the torturer on the battlefield shows that, in spite of the military rhetoric about two separate wars, the Malvinas war and the Dirty War are really just two aspects of the same thing: “The farce
of the lost war in Malvinas contains and reveals the drama of the victorious war in the 1970s” (10). Not only does the military use various forms of torture in both wars, but they also seem to have difficulty determining who their enemy is, and end up attacking anyone and everyone at random. In the novel, Felipe’s commanding officer, Verraco, decides to vent his hostility against his own men rather than the British, and ends up torturing Felipe’s friend Carlitos to death. The randomness of Dirty War violence is replicated in the Malvinas War, to be directed against people on the same side of the ostensible conflict. In this brief tragedy, the military’s corrupt social ethos cannot tolerate Carlitos’s generosity and integrity, and so it destroys him. While Verraco electrocutes the naked Carlitos with generator wires (mirroring the electric cattle prod, a favorite instrument of Dirty War torturers), he brags about his military prowess and how well his “fighting” techniques will work against the British (357-59). Of course he never manages to actually fight (or torture either, for that matter) any British soldiers, because his torture session has shorted out the radar apparatus that was to have warned them of a British approach, allowing the enemy to sneak behind their lines and catch them unprepared. That some officers were abusive of conscripts is well-known, but Gamerro makes it clear that this abuse is nothing other than torture, and a repeat performance of the Dirty War in a different theater. The horrifyingly detailed description of Carlitos’ slow death, Verraco’s gloating, and the resultant surprise attack from the British, show that the Argentine military, far from being capable of fighting a real war, is equipped only for the craven abuse of helpless victims amid a lot of empty bluster about manliness and bravery.

Other characters in the Malvinas narrative play the roles of cowardly opportunists and parasites. Sergeant Morsa, the parasite, confiscates and eats all the conscripts’ rations and packages that arrive from home – he actually gets fat during the war (354).6 Lieutenant Hugo Carcasa, the cowardly opportunist, watches as two soldiers standing guard at a warehouse full of food allow three starving conscripts to go in and get something to eat. He then asserts his manliness and superiority by tying the guards up in chairs so they cannot defend themselves, and then beating them senseless (338-39). Again, the corrupt social ethos attacks kindness wherever it can be found. Carcasa and Verraco both reappear in the Tamerlán narrative, which takes place ten years after the
war in Buenos Aires. Carcasa, true to his name, (*carcasa* means a military incendiary device, and also an empty casing or framework, fitting for a hollow person obsessed with the trappings of war and false glory), lives with his mother in an apartment filled with weapons and war memorabilia. He celebrates the day of his wounding in the war as though it were his birthday, dwelling endlessly on the “glory” he earned for himself there. Verraco works for the SIDE after the war, which turns out to be a most appropriate place for a torturer to work.

Gamerro continues his parallel between Dirty War, Malvinas War, and postwar Argentina through his description of the SIDE in the Tamerlán narrative. The workings of Argentina’s intelligence organization also serve to illustrate the bizarre and twisted reality that prevails in *Las Islas*. The SIDE’s new headquarters are hidden underneath a shopping mall, and the old headquarters remain as a decoy. All of the real agents, along with records from the Dirty War and the Malvinas War, were moved underground just before the return to democracy (116). With this comic-bookish scenario, Gamerro creates more than a strange reality; he also implies that the Argentine intelligence service is still the same entity that was involved in the atrocities of the Dirty War/Malvinas War, and that the extent of its involvement has gone undiscovered and unpunished. The reader learns that Felipe had actually once worked for the SIDE, where his former commanding officer Verraco works on various hare-brained plans to recover the Malvinas. When described in detail, these laughable plans cast doubt on the competence and sanity of the people working at the SIDE. More sinister things are afoot, however: Felipe’s replacement, a nameless computer nerd, informs him that the SIDE now only investigates itself. They decided that they can only really resolve the crimes that they themselves have committed. He explains that the kidnapping of a man named Lipmann was all planned and orchestrated by the SIDE: they kidnapped him, collected the ransom, and caught the perpetrators, who were their own agents. The car chase, along with everything else, was staged.7 When Felipe protests that Lipmann was killed, the nerd merely shrugs his shoulders dismissively (134). Kidnapping and murder seem to still be the SIDE’s specialties, even now that democracy has been restored. The nerd’s lack of concern for Lipmann’s death confirms that the same callous attitude toward human life as before prevails in Argentina’s secret service.
Nazi fascism, anti-semitism, other forms of racism, and misogyny are also shown to be prevalent in Argentine society. In highlighting these unsavory Argentinean characteristics, Gamerro is merely expanding upon accepted identity myths, showing where they lead when followed through to their logical conclusions. Among these are the “La Gran Argentina” myth, in which Argentina is thought to be destined for regional leadership, and its attendant racial and religious identity myths, which posit Argentina as “White,” European, Christian, and Western (Femenia 58-59). The racism and fascism which lurk inside these myths are revealed in several of Gamerro’s characters. Tamerlán, for example, is the son of a Nazi death-camp commandant, and still retains Nazi-esque attitudes and cruelty. His father had once worked with the Argentine military, training them. He himself had helped to fund the 1976 military coup and had participated in torture with military personnel during the Dirty War (148). Some of Felipe’s ex-combatant friends attend classes given by a nationalist professor named Citatorio, who teaches, among other things, the “history” of the Jews – or “the serpent,” as he calls them – in their efforts to infiltrate and control the world (51). According to Citatorio, the Jews were responsible for instituting democracy in ancient Greece, which would “undermine the strength of the cradle of our civilization” (51). He rants that the Jews fomented the Spanish Empire’s collapse, the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, and almost succeeded in controlling Europe before Hitler saved the world (52). He extends his distrust to Koreans, theorizing that they are one of the lost tribes of Israel (63).

Citatorio’s outrageous version of history and hatred of the Jews are not unique to him; various characters in the book share his views, including some of Felipe’s ex-combatant friends, Major Cuervo, and, of course, Tamerlán. Even a scientific researcher at the Facultad de Agronomía y Veterinaria longs for the days of Nazi Germany when they could do “medical” experiments on people. In addition, this researcher, like many other characters including Cuervo and Tamerlán, exhibits a disdain and fear of women as not only inferior, but also filthy and inherently evil (277).

Another example of Argentine (and British) racism is a propaganda video to seduce the Falklands/Malvinas Islanders, called “Tú eliges” [You Choose], which Felipe sees during his visit to the SIDE headquarters. Images of natural beauty and happy “exaggeratedly blonde Argentine families” on recreational outings are contrasted with
images from Britain: abandoned mines in Newcastle, the Liverpool docks, “a multiracial mass of squatters shooting themselves up amid piles of garbage, teeming Pakistani, Arab or Caribbean slums” (122). The images that the intelligence community thinks will appeal to the islanders’ racism also reveals a racism of its own. When they want to make the islanders dislike Britain, they choose to depict ethnic peoples with olive or dark skin, living in the squalor to which their adoptive country condemns them. The Argentines depicted, however, are all blonde – Argentina is more European than England, the myth tries to say, and they measure their European-ness by race. Dark-haired (and skinned) people are conspicuous by their absence from the film’s version of Argentina – the filmmakers do not wish to acknowledge their existence. While the film tries to convince the islanders of Argentina’s superiority, it reveals the filmmakers’ own inferiority complex about the appearance of a large portion of their country’s citizens. Felipe comments on this inferiority complex when he wonders why the military officers, who were so fond of committing atrocities against their own people, never did anything to the islanders. Fear of international censure is “too rational” to explain their behavior. So he concludes that “in order to commit atrocities it is indispensable to judge the other as inferior, and the Kelpers were too white, Aryan and Anglo-Saxon for the Argentine military to rough them up” (118). Felipe also participates in the racism even as he comments on it.

Racism and Nazi sympathies are only the beginning of the despicable traits that Felipe finds in nearly everyone around him as he tries to unfold the mystery of the murder that Tamerlán wants hidden. All of his witnesses were attending a pyramid marketing meeting when they saw the murder. Accordingly, they are nearly all selfish opportunists, willing at a moment’s notice to betray a friend if they think it would help them to get ahead – the pyramid scheme demands that they recruit people into the system in order to suck them dry. One of the higher members of the pyramid is a doctor who only cheats marketing underlings on the side; his main income comes from soliciting desperate people in unemployment lines offering to buy their blood, bone marrow, or organs, which he re-sells for a profit (264-65). All of the murder witnesses are also afraid to speak to Felipe about what they saw. One witness swears that César killed his victim in self-defense (he pushed him out of a window on the 30th floor of a high-rise building),
and another insists that the victim fell accidentally while trying to prevent César from committing suicide (229, 236). This fear, selfish individualism, and selective blindness demonstrate not just a fear of Tamerlán but also the results of Dirty War terror tactics on the general population. The random violence against citizens promoted an atomization of the public through fear, making people distrust everyone around them. Frank Graziano writes that Argentina during the *Proceso* fit Foucault’s description of a society modeled after the *Panopticon*, a prison in which the cells are arranged in a ring around a central guard tower. The guard in the tower sees into every cell, but the inmates cannot see the guard. Still, they see the tower and know that he could be watching them at any moment, but are never sure exactly when that is. The guard, or the military in the case of Argentina, holds a power that is “at once visible and unverifiable” (Graziano 83).

Gamerro also uses a panopticon to symbolize Argentina’s broken society: In the novel, the panopticon is Tamerlán’s tower of one-way mirrors, which is merely a model of Argentina itself under military rule. Tamerlán, like the military during the Dirty War, enjoys the advantage of being able to see every single person in his building while none can see him. All of Tamerlán’s employees, like all of Argentina’s populace, live and work under the fear of being watched and potentially denounced by a superior that they cannot see. Having survived the Dirty War, the characters in Gamerro’s novel understand their position as watched prisoners. Thus they are experts in pretending not to see, or in justifying atrocities that they happen to notice. They are particularly frightened because they understand that Tamerlán has the power to see them and to hurt them in much the same way the military could.

The few people in Gamerro’s nightmare society who are not predatory or callously egotistical end up as victims of those who are. In the Malvinas narrative, Felipe’s foxhole mates are victims of the British and of their own officers. Carlitos, who is the strongest and most caring of them all, is also the most victimized. Gloria, Felipe’s one genuine friend in the Tamerlán narrative, is another victim. She had been tortured by Major Cuervo during the Dirty War and then forced to become his “wife.” She is again victimized by being duped into investing in the pyramid marketing scheme, and is nearly killed by Tamerlán’s thugs for having witnessed the murder. Felipe is also a victim, though he takes a turn in victimizing others as he tries to fulfill Tamerlán’s wishes and
thus avoid being killed himself. Gamerro uses a “parable,” as Felipe calls it, to illustrate a representative picture of what living in this society is like: Felipe sees an old man tending a young and feeble rosebush. In an effort to comfort himself, Felipe formulates a romantic parable about the man and his devotion to his bush:

What did the powerful and their fears matter, the never-ending pursuit of riches, the demented inability to accept life’s limitations and death’s omnipotence? Behold someone who has found peace, I thought, the truth of the simple things, I thought, his place in the world, I thought. Money is not necessary, I thought, strength is not necessary, it is only necessary to have a rosebush to take care of. (392)

His musings are interrupted by the gardener’s superior who arrives to beat the gardener, scream insults and threats at him, and warn him that if the rosebush doesn’t look better by tomorrow and continue to grow every day, that he will put the gardener in an institution, to be paid for with his own retirement money. Felipe comments that he does not need to “elucidate the teachings of the parable,” and hurries off to begin his work (393). Here Gamerro gleefully trashes all illusions about anyone’s being able to find peace and fulfillment in his society. Even the lowly gardener, who asks so little from life and seems on the surface to be happy tending a rosebush, has his tormentor who prevents him from enjoying even life’s most simple and mundane pleasures. This wretched society of self-seeking opportunists and victimizers is Gamerro’s identity countermyth: this is what he portrays as Argentina’s true identity. It is the same identity that was demonstrated by the military’s performance in the Malvinas and in the Dirty War. If there remains any doubt in the reader’s mind, however, he overtly links these victimizers with the mythic figures of Argentina’s great and glorious past in a subplot that I call “The Romance-Quest of Major X.”

Major X’s subplot deals with several Argentine myths. Some of these include military myths and the scapegoat myth, which I will discuss briefly later. The main target of this subplot, however, is the myth that associates the loss of the Malvinas with the loss of Argentina’s sense of identity. Major X is a pseudonym for Major Cuervo, the torturer who betrays Tamerlán. His romance-quest is his diary, an account of his alleged experiences while serving as the leader of a legendary “ghost platoon” on the island of
Gran Malvina (West Falkland) during the war. His diary becomes a sort of mystic codebook or guide to some of Felipe’s ex-combatant associates who still dream of retaking the islands. They have managed to obtain fragments of it, and they search for the rest in the belief that it will lead them to ultimate victory in the Malvinas. One of them insists that “Whoever obtains that diary . . . will know the secret of the war. All the answers are in it. It contains the key of the future of the Islands, which is the future of the Fatherland” (70). Major Cuervo, too, tries desperately to recover his lost diary in its entirety, having also assigned some supernatural power to its exact words, as though it is a cipher text or rosetta stone through which the divine mysteries of the Malvinas and their destiny can be unfolded. That the characters link the Malvinas’ secrets and destiny with that of their nation is consistent with the Malvinas national identity myth, which states that Argentina’s sense of identity (ser nacional) was lost with the Malvinas in 1833, and will be recovered when the islands are (Femenia 87; Guber 102). In Major X’s diary, Gamerro will exaggerate this myth to the point of absurdity and beyond, point out its deeply nostalgic underpinnings, parody the romance-quest emplotment of the war, and further clinch his counter-identity myth, all in one tangential subplot.

Major X is of course the questing hero, guided by the divine voices of the great forefathers through the fog to the hallowed secret citadel of the “Gran Estancia Nacional,” and the lost treasure of the former Spanish Viceroyalty of the River Plate. His inspiration is his “wife,” whom he sets up as his imaginary guiding Virgin-figure, following the convention of medieval courtly love (466). He sets up a “Trinity” of patria, army, and wife (conveniently named Gloria, which is Spanish for glory), where the fatherland is God, the army is Christ, and his wife is the Virgin. He “prays” to her in a missive which is really just a page in his diary, to guide him in his quest. He invokes her name to help him defeat the enemy, just as the questing knight goes forth to vanquish evil for the honor of his lady’s name, bearing a token of her love for him as his inspiration and strength (466). And so, inspired by thoughts of glory (Gloria), Major X bravely embarks on his quest to reclaim the Malvinas and with them, Argentina’s identity and honor. As part of his quest, he must endure a “test” of his faith and strength by wandering without food or guide through a dense fog for many days. He finally understands that the impenetrable fog is “the hand of God that covers our eyes, the better
to guide us” (465). He throws away his compass, intoning that “Only by renouncing all but our unbreakable faith will we pass the test” (465). He wanders blindly through the fog, led only by the mysterious voices in his head, toward the center of the island. One by one his men are lost until only he remains as the divinely chosen victor.

After passing the great test, Major X is admitted into the secret citadel of the great Argentines of the past, who serve him a grand asado (Argentine barbecue). Asado is a symbol of Argentine-ness, as is traditional gaucho garb, in which everyone in the citadel is clothed. This scene out of Argentina’s imaginary past includes famous people such as the poet Leopoldo Lugones and the anthropologist Florentino Ameghino. Other iconic images of Argentine-ness include silver and the cattle industry, symbolized by the goblets made of bull horns adorned in silver from which everyone drinks their wine. At the asado, the “forefathers” explain that the citadel was founded in 1830 by Argentine colonists:

... understanding that the great fatherland would forever be threatened by the corrupt currents of history and the outside world, they had decided to found this impregnable citadel in the heart of the Islands, to maintain the purity of the national essence and to manage from there the national destiny with their invisible hand. (468)

Here Gamerro takes the somewhat nebulous idea of the Argentine identity myth and shows its inherent absurdity by granting it a concrete reality. In this reactionary nationalistic fantasy, Argentina’s pure essence or ser nacional really is preserved in the Malvinas by the men of the citadel. They have made sure that their “essence” is pure by cloning themselves in order to last through the years unchanged. They tell Major X that they have guided the great men of Argentina (including San Martín, Rosas, military dictators Uriburu and Aramburu, the leaders of the 1976 coup against Isabel de Perón, and Major X himself), with their voices. They proclaim that the battle for the Malvinas was the first battle of the Third World War, which will end with Argentina conquering the rest of the world. They had been awaiting the leader to guide them in the war, who is none other than Major X himself (469). Here Major X has designated himself “the new San Martín” and the chosen one to lead his nation to supreme glory. This is the
exaltation of the hero at the end of the romance quest, and the projected attainment of “La Gran Argentina.”

Up to this point, the association between hallowed figures of the past and images of the “ser nacional” has been shown to inherently contain some sinister realities, for example the inclusion of the 1976 military Junta and Major Cuervo in the list of “great men” guided by the spirits in the citadel. This inclusion goes only slightly beyond the efforts of many revisionist historians to designate the dictator Rosas, for example, as a national hero. In other words, these authoritarian and antidemocratic impulses have long been part of the Argentine “ser nacional” whether Argentines want to admit it or not. Gamerro also calls attention to misogynist currents in nationalist myths by having the Argentine icons in the citadel explain how they use Kelper women to incubate clones of themselves, in order to maintain the purity of the race without female corruption (469). In this little tidbit Gamerro goes only slightly beyond the already obvious fact that authoritarian nationalists have allowed no women on their list of Argentine notables, to offer a fictitious explanation of that omission that is nevertheless consonant with nationalist thought, particularly that of the military.17

From this point onwards in the diary, nationalistic myths and their inherent flaws will be linked to other images that are more broadly accepted as symbols of evil: Major X continues writing in his imaginary romance that Argentine forces under his command, with the aid of the citadel’s denizens, defeat the British Task Force and decapitate the Royal Family in Buckingham Palace. They then conquer Europe and Africa, and reinstate African slavery, with the added twist that the slaves will be sterilized (471). Soon thereafter they re-light the Auschwitz ovens and eliminate the Jews (472). Major X fantasizes that by October of 1982, Argentina rules the entire world and has imposed Catholicism and the speaking of the Spanish language on everyone. At that point they “formally institute the Process of World Reorganization,” as a direct continuance of the “Process of National Reorganization,” declared in 1970s Argentina (472). Here Gamerro explicitly links Argentine nationalism, particularly military nationalism, with Nazism, slavery, state terrorism, and genocide. Together with the other fantasies that Major X has produced to promote himself, the military, and the Great Patria, this account works to discredit military mythmaking of all sorts because of its delusionary nature. It should
also be noted that the parodic Romance-Quest of Major X occupies a marginal position in the novel. Instead of countering official myths and their romance emplotment of the war element by element in the main narrative, and thus granting the romantic view of the war a certain amount of importance, Gamerro relegates the romance to the unimportant position of a digression. Ultimately this device makes the “just cause” of the Malvinas seem unimportant – a freakish sideshow diversion. Felipe, who reads the diary, regards it as such. Gamerro may be trying to say, as does Felipe when he changes the words to the “Malvinas March,” “we should forget them” [nos las hemos de olvidar] (340).  

Although Major X’s quest takes place in the Malvinas, it is revealed as part of the Tamerlán narrative. Accordingly, it is primarily comic in its irony. The Malvinas narrative provides its own countermyths of the relationship between Argentineans’ sense of identity and the Malvinas. In accordance with the mainly tragic mode of this narrative, these countermyths are serious in their tone. They present the Malvinas as a jealous bride, and as a terminal disease. Felipe thinks that the Malvinas smell just like a woman’s genitals, to the extent that having sex two years after the war gives him flashbacks, triggered by the smell of his partner (320-21). His friend Tomás agrees, and shows Felipe how the tattoo of the Malvinas on his arm can be transformed into a perfect image of a woman’s genitalia by pinching the skin a certain way: “What else would they smell like?” he asks. “And people ask why we want to go back” (322). Felipe imagines that soldiers who returned home and married their girlfriends would still dream of making love to the Malvinas, because a flesh-and-blood woman could not compete with them. Besides, every soldier had left his “heart and dick” behind, buried on the islands (323). While the soldiers are fighting, the “jealous and pitiless land” makes them forget the faces and bodies of their girlfriends, and “we gradually realized that we were trading them [girlfriends] in for a greater love” (323). When it snows one night and the soldiers emerge from their foxholes to see the islands covered in a white veil, they realize that the islands have been trying to tell them something: “that it was more serious than we had thought, more definitive and final: that we were married to them” (324).  

The Malvinas narrative is given in bits and pieces, usually as mental flashbacks, but sometimes as verbal flashbacks, in which Felipe describes war events to a character
in the Tamerlán narrative. The myth of Malvinas as a terminal disease is described in one of these verbal flashbacks, while Felipe discusses the psychological trauma of the Malvinas war with a psychiatrist:

I wouldn’t go back for anything. But I dream about going back . . . . We left a precise space behind when we went, but over there we changed form, and upon returning, no matter how they turned us about, we no longer fit into the puzzle; . . . something valuable and indefinable of ours was left buried over there. In dreams, at least, we all go back to look for it. . . . Hell marked us so that we believe that by returning we can make it paradise, . . . We are infected, understand, and we carry it in our blood and die a little at a time, like chagásicos. 23 Haven’t you seen how they look exactly like polyps? Every year that passes, they grow a little more, . . . It isn’t true that there were survivors. In the heart of every one there are two chunks torn out, and each hole has the exact shape of the Islands. (404-05) 24

After presenting several different Malvinas myths from various viewpoints, Gamerro presents us with these ones, from the point of view of the ex-combatant: Malvinas as jealous bride and Malvinas as terminal disease. Both these interpretations of the meaning of Malvinas frame the islands as a torment: both the bride left behind and the diseased tumors leave the ex-combatant less than whole, irretrievably damaged. Both myths present Malvinas as responsible for inevitable disappointment: the ex-soldier, once married to the islands, can never be satisfied with a flesh-and-blood woman or with anything else he occupies himself with on the mainland. And yet a return to the islands cannot help him either; he may just as well hope to turn hell into heaven merely by going there. Felipe knows that it is only the nostalgic myth of national rejuvenation and unity that deceives the conscript into thinking he can go back to the islands and find the part of him that is missing. Returning soldiers are infected with terminal Malvinas; they are transformed by it and cannot fit into society. They feel trapped, and many wish to escape their mental torment so badly that they end up killing themselves (405-06). These myths, like official myths of the Malvinas, are based in a sort of nostalgia for something lost in the past. Felipe’s myths, however, show that the nostalgia is fallacious, that the past
cannot be retrieved. The Malvinas are also like the past in that, despite their powerful
draw on their captives, they have nothing good to offer them. Even if the past could be
recovered, it was not ever as sweet as we want to remember it. Even if the ex-combatant
could regain Malvinas as his bride, she would only continue to torture him with her
coldness and cruelty.

The national renewal myth is a continuation and expansion of the Malvinas
identity myth. It states that Argentina will experience a rebirth of unity, prosperity, and
international respect after regaining the Malvinas. Within the Tamerlán narrative,
Gamerro mocks this myth by exaggerating it and by merging it with other favorite
mythologized themes in Argentinean culture, such as machismo or Perón. The revisionist
history professor Citatorio preaches his sexist version of the national renewal myth,
swaggering around the classroom with his legs apart and his hand cupping an imaginary
member at his groin:

Argentina is a hard dick ready to procreate, and the Malvinas are its balls.
When we recover them, fertility will return to our lands, and we will be
the great nation our predecessors dreamed of! A powerful country! The
wheat will flourish once again, and the livestock will furrow the oceans of
grass, and the trains will run filled with the earth’s produce for every
corner of the country. . . . A new Athens, capital of the arts and culture,
will raise its temples on the shores of the River Plate. . . . From the
recovered Islands, the fatherland’s sun of unimaginable greatness will
mark the birth of the day when the ex-colony is transformed into the
Argentine power that we all long for! (56)\textsuperscript{25}

Gone are the somewhat logical steps listed by Femenia of achieving a feeling of national
unity, which would allow exploitation of the region’s natural resources, thus increasing
national production and international respect. In this version of the myth, the Malvinas
are reduced (or elevated?) to the status of fertility amulet. Their retrieval would result in
a supernatural transformation of Argentina from an infertile phallus to a fertile one;
Argentina would have its virility restored after the symbolic castration of the British
takeover in 1833. International respect would come automatically on demonstrating the
sexual power of the Argentina-phallus. After all, points out Felipe’s friend, the Malvinas
do look like a pair of smashed eggs (*huevos* [eggs] is slang for testicles). Here Gamerro is poking fun not only at the myth of the Malvinas as the key to achieving “La Gran Argentina,” but at his countrymen’s enduring attachment to ideals of machismo. It should be noted that Felipe’s ex-combatant peers in the Tamerlán narrative still accept these myths because they spent the war in stationed in Puerto Argentino (Stanley), isolated from most of the privation and violence. Felipe’s friends who endured the battlefront hell with him are all dead. Having lived the war as a tragedy, Felipe is better equipped than his surviving ex-combatant acquaintances to discern the ironic contradictions in nationalistic myths.

In another strange version of the national renewal myth, an elderly Peronist named Don Benito writes an article about a connection between the loss of the Malvinas and a bizarre attack on Perón’s corpse in 1987, in which the body’s hands were cut off and stolen. Benito is actually a re-mythologizer, casting the national renewal myth of the Malvinas into yet another narrative to reinforce it with an extra layer of signification. He writes metaphorically, stating that Perón could hold the entire nation in his arms, but the pressure was so great that his hands blew off, and settled in the South Atlantic to become the Malvinas. According to his myth, a clown (referring to Galtieri) tried to take them for himself, and “mimic the mythic embrace by holding one [of Perón’s hands] in each of his own, with the sleeves of the uniform lengthened so that the fraud would go unnoticed” (124). The people at first are so excited to have recovered what was lost, they try to see Perón in the impostor and fling themselves happily into his arms, which sends the hands/islands flying and they are lost again (124). This allegory has reference to Galtieri’s deliberate imitation of Perón’s gestures when greeting the throngs from the balcony of the Casa Rosada, just after the reoccupation of the Malvinas. Benito is angry when Felipe points out the time discrepancy in his story: the Malvinas war was in 1982, and Perón’s hands were cut off in 1987. It is a fable, says Benito, and fables are atemporal: “The events of the fatherland already exist, eternally, in an Ideal realm from which we can only gradually remove them and make them real, at times in an inadequate succession” (125). Here Gamerro acknowledges that our understanding of history is subjective, and shows the reader a mythmaker in action, explaining and justifying his project. He pulls events out of the “Ideal Realm” (in other words, his imagination), and
makes them seem real and natural by writing about them as if they were, and by portraying them as eternal.

Benito continues, intoning that the day the hands are found, which will be the day the Malvinas are recovered, the suffering and divided fatherland will once again be united, echoing the familiar myth that links national unity and prosperity with the recovery of the islands (125). When Felipe mocks him again, Benito responds coolly, “The fatherland exists on a symbolic plane. Basically, it is a metaphor. If one tries to make it real all at once, it will evaporate out of his hands. You are one of the ten thousand who should know that better than anyone else” (125). The ten thousand that Benito refers to are the soldiers who fought in Malvinas. Felipe cannot respond; by bringing up the war, Benito has won the argument. The Junta tried to make its mythic version of the Fatherland real all at once with a war, and failed. Benito’s explanation points out the flaw inherent in the nationalist myth that makes it deconstruct itself: when followed through to its logical conclusion and thoroughly applied to concrete reality all at once, it falls apart.

The national renewal myth is conspicuously absent from the Malvinas narrative. Felipe goes into great detail describing the landscape, the color of the sky, the sound of the bombs, the madness that emerges in some of his companions, and the horrible things they scrape up to eat from the town dump. But he never mentions a word about the “just cause,” patriotism, personal or national honor, or Argentina’s future, not even to ridicule them. The only patriotic voice in the Malvinas narrative belongs to an anonymous Argentine matriarch: her maudlin “letter to a soldier” describes how she and her family pray for the suffering soldiers who defend “Our Fatherland” (345). The abstract concept of defending the fatherland is so completely foreign to what Felipe and his friends are actually experiencing, that they cannot possibly see it as anything but absurd and laughable. They while away the long cold hours composing sarcastic and insulting replies to all the “letters to a soldier” that they receive. Their mockery contains a protest: they want letters from their loved-ones, not the generic ramblings of strangers. During the Malvinas conflict, thousands of people sent these nonspecific letters as an expression of patriotic support, not realizing that the sheer quantity of them would bog down the mail so much that the soldiers would not receive letters from their families or friends.
In the novel, these well-intentioned efforts to demonstrate the solidarity required for a national rebirth are shown to be ultimately harmful to the *patria* and its soldiers.

As seen with the national renewal myth, the starkly realistic Malvinas narrative avoids or discounts the fanciful nationalist myths as incongruous. That these myths fit easily into the fantastic and grotesque atmosphere of the Tamerlán narrative only serves to deconstruct them further. Military myths, which have been deconstructed throughout both narratives, follow this pattern as well: The myths of the Argentine military as divinely chosen guardians of public morality and national dignity are elaborately endorsed by the hypocritical Major X in the Tamerlán narrative, deconstructed by the somewhat allegorical figure of Tamerlán himself, and finally contrasted with the behavior of the torturers, cowards and parasites in uniform that appear in the Malvinas narrative. Along similar lines, The scapegoat myth appears mainly in the Tamerlán narrative, especially in Citatorio’s ridiculous history lecture, which blames all of Argentina’s woes, past and present, on Jewish scheming and interference. Gamerro emphasizes the myth’s absurdity by placing it in the mouth of a ranting fool, and reducing all possible scapegoats to one (Jews). He also exaggerates the threat posed by the scapegoat beyond that postulated in the standard myth, and then he throws in the Malvinas for good measure. Citatorio relates how the Jews had tried to invade Argentina via Chile, but upon being repelled they decided to take over the Malvinas instead, and financed the British takeover of 1833 (54). He describes the war of 1982 as a joint British-Chilean-Jewish plan to invade Argentina from two fronts. According to his myth, the war was actually a victory, because the Armed Forces managed to prevent the Jewish/Chilean colonization of the *patria* from occurring (55).

The Malvinas narrative deals with the scapegoat myth only symbolically, in that Felipe’s best friend Carlitos is Jewish, and that he is sacrificed in a ritualistic way by Colonel Verraco. That Carlitos’s naked body is staked spread-eagled to the ground in the same attitude as a sheep (sacrificial lamb) that Verraco cooks and eats while watching his victim die is not coincidental. This incident symbolically identifies the military’s scapegoat myth as an excuse to “purge” the nation of innocent people through ritualistic torture and murder. Ten years later, Felipe grimly recalls that if the war had only been
against the British, Carlitos would have survived: he was the strongest of all his conscript friends, the one who looked after the rest. But Carlitos did not survive because there were two enemies: the British, and the Argentinean officers (352). This is the countermyth of the two-fronted war, which was probably originated by Daniel Kon’s interviews with conscripts and then expanded upon by other memoirists such as Edgardo Esteban, and various fiction writers, including Fogwill. To counter the myth of the brave and virtuous David losing against the unbeatable Goliath of the British, this double-fronted war countermyth suggests that the war was lost due to internal division and the immoral violence of the career military against their own soldiers. It also suggests that the real responsible party (or scapegoat) for Argentina’s failures is not the Jews, the British, or the CIA, but the Argentine military itself.

Unlike many demythologizers and countermythologizers on both sides of the Falklands/Malvinas dispute, Gamerro avoids the pitfall of promoting standard enemy myths. He does, however, acknowledge their existence. For example, the myth of the British as bullies with an overinflated sense of self-importance appears in the form of a weekly wrestling match watched religiously by Felipe’s ex-combatant associates. Every week the match is the same: an enormous British paratrooper breaks all the accepted wrestling rules by using a gun to beat up a skinny little Argentinean soldier, while the North-American arbitrator looks the other way (71-72). Felipe’s delusional companions and the studio crowd love this reenactment of the David-versus-Goliath scenario, especially when the underdog Argentinean defeats the paratrooper and beats up the arbitrator as well. That this match is repeated weekly with the same fervor and enthusiasm reveals a pathetic aspect of the Argentine obsession with their loss and the injustices they have suffered. The propaganda film in the SIDE headquarters also demonstrates a belief in the myth of the British as morally bankrupt, particularly the scenes of skinheads and punk parties, with their characteristically scandalous (un)dress and lewd behavior (122). Felipe neither rejects nor endorses these views, or those expressed in the wrestling match; he merely describes and recognizes them as feelings and opinions that some Argentinians entertain toward the British. Other characters offer a different view, such as Gloria’s speculation that the British would be “too gentlemanly” to consider torturing their prisoners (308). The Malvinas narrative contrasts her
conjecture with a chilling image of two British soldiers towing a prisoner along like a dog on a rope, forcing him to lure Argentines out of their foxholes by speaking Spanish, only to kill them when they emerge to surrender. These British soldiers may not torture with an electric cattle prod, but they do inflict a psychological torture on their captive, and their wartime ethics are decidedly lacking. Given what Gamerro has shown thus far of Argentinean character, the British do not appear any worse or any better than their opponents.

Since they are equally fallible and equally prone to mythmaking, the British deserve at least one little jab at one of their pet Falklands myths. Gamerro obliges with the story of an exiled islander named George Turner, who was deported to Argentina for his pro-Argentine sympathies and activities. While in the throes of an alcohol-induced fit of nostalgia, George recounts to Felipe a form of the myth which presents the Falklands as a preserved slice of the old idealized England: pastoral, simple, and racially pure:

In the days before the war everything was peace and friendship: life was sometimes boring, but simple. . . . Our community was safe from the moral corruption that afflicts the planet. Neither homosexuals, nor drug addicts, nor communists . . . not even, as you will have noticed during your hopefully gratifying stay, colonial races. Some English tourists would come to visit, not to get to know the exoticism of the south seas, but to recover the taste and smell of the England of their grandparents, now irretrievably lost. (127, 129)

Turner belies his own generalizations with stories of men getting their teeth knocked out for failure to respect dance cards (there was an acknowledged shortage of women), and jokes about having to “screw” [coger] the sheep for recreation (128). In addition to his contradicting itself, George’s description of the ideal British community demonstrates an intolerance and suspicion of difference similar to that in the Argentine military’s discourse. Gamerro seems to be saying that the British and the Argentineans are not so different from one another, that neither one is blameless, and neither one is free of sentimental and xenophobic nationalistic myths.

Gamerro utilizes layered narratives and modes as part of his myth-deconstruction strategy. The main narrative of the Tamerlán conspiracy distances the reader just enough
from the war experience to make a humorous satire of war myths acceptable. The myths
themselves are shown to function best in this distanced and distorted atmosphere, though
even there they are exaggerated enough to demonstrate their follies and elicit laughter. In
the midst of the mainly realistic and serious war narrative, most official myths cannot
appear as anything but absurd and even offensive. Hence, they are not generally
mentioned in their original form, though the action depicted tends to belie their accuracy.
The incongruity of the myths with the war experience is thrown into higher relief with the
juxtaposition of the myth-resistant war narrative and the exaggerated, parodied myths of
the Tamerlán narrative. Through the double lens of tragedy and comic satire, Gamerro
reveals that nationalist myths have humorous faults, and sinister ones as well.

Like the different narratives of his novel, Gamerro’s countermyths also present a
layered vision of Argentine reality and possibility. The countermyths of the Argentine
association with the Malvinas suggest a tragic relationship that can bring nothing but
suffering and loss. The countermyth of Argentine identity portrays a grotesque nation of
victims and victimizers, a hell on earth. The countermyth of the two-fronted war places
those victims and victimizers on the battlefield where they continue to attack each other
even in the face of an outside enemy. Layered in with these bleak and hopeless
countermyths, Gamerro offers an alternative guiding fiction that allows in one tiny ray of
hope. It is not a nationalist myth or even a national one, but an individual code of
conduct for survival in a hostile universe, where the Malvinas War is only one symptom
out of many. This myth is summed up by the epigraph at the beginning of the novel:

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is
what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by
being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is
easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you
can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance
and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst
of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.
(Calvino, qtd. in Gamerro 9)\(^{31}\)

Most of the characters in Gamerro’s novel have taken the first option: they have become
part of the hell with such gusto that they have made the people and moments that are not
hell difficult to find. Gamerro makes a plea for the second option as a way to “give space” to those things that are not hell. For Gamerro, the Malvinas are hell and are best forgotten in favor of attainable heavens such as honest friendship.

The tragedy and hell of the Malvinas narrative involves the physical destruction of Felipe’s friends, and the resulting emotional destruction of Felipe himself. Though he is troubled by his inability to save his friends from the British attack that kills them all, it is guilt for the death of Carlitos that haunts and torments him the most. He hates himself for being too afraid to prevent Verraco from killing Carlitos, and for having allowed Verraco to continue living afterward. Felipe’s situation is parallel to that of many Argentineans, who suffer guilt for having remained passive or paralyzed by fear while Dirty War atrocities were committed. In the parallel Tamerlán narrative, Felipe redeems himself by facing Tamerlán and forcing him at gunpoint to end the killings. On his second trip through the same nightmarish story, he does not allow himself to remain a passive witness of murder, in spite of his fear. He also reaches a reconciliation with his dead friends, especially Carlitos, and gains a new friend in Gloria. These redeeming and reconciling moments are what ultimately make the Tamerlán narrative a comedic satire as opposed to a tragic or merely grotesque one.

Felipe’s dead friends appear to him toward the novel’s end and reassure him that he does not owe them anything: revenge, as with other warlike causes, is not important on the other side (577). Carlitos says, “All these years we’ve been waiting to tell you . . . Don’t feel guilty. . . . You did what you could.” (578-79).32 His friend Rubén adds, “We are content that you have survived. That is good enough for us. You owe us nothing more” (579).33 In the mouths of soldiers returned from the dead, Gamerro counters those myths that urge a continuation of the fight for the sake of the dead, or for avenging lost honor in the cause of the Malvinas, or any other cause involving earthly glory. In this countermyth, these things do not matter, and the dead do not care about nationalities or blood debts. They only want to see their surviving loved-ones enjoy a life without such suffering, and to be allowed to visit them once in awhile, in dreams. Gamerro’s countermyth is one that places ties of friendship above loyalties to nations, or to causes that others have died for.
After the demise of Tamerlán, Felipe calls his experience a comedy, in what may be a reference to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Speaking of his life since the war, he says, “Ten years I had slept beneath the dubious shelter of the city of pain, and now I was awakening naked beneath the unique glow of the stars. It was the end of the comedy” (541). Each of the three parts of the *Divine Comedy* ends with a reference to the stars. *Inferno* in particular ends with the narrator emerging from the pit to gaze once more upon the stars. At the end of his journeys through hell in the Malvinas and purgatory in Tamerlán’s “service,” Felipe contemplates heaven, which will be his life with Gloria afterward. However, their life does not look like the heaven one might wish for: the country remains as full of selfish and corrupt people as it was before, and though Tamerlán is dead, his petty and thoroughly evil son runs the business in his place. The thought of continuing to live makes Felipe weep with fear and despair, but Gloria and the ghosts of his dead friends provide him the support he needs to face it. That “Heaven” is so modest in its joys is just another way of discounting utopian myths of national renewal and *La Gran Argentina* as unrealistic and unattainable. This idea is reinforced by Gloria’s retelling of the “Frog King” fairy tale, in which the princess ends up married to a frog who remains a frog, instead of turning into a prince. Significantly, her version of the fairy tale is also the end of the novel.

There are elements of comedy, tragedy, and satire in *Las Islas*. Each performs its own function in the novel. White writes in *Metahistory* that satire discounts human redemption as impossible (10). Accordingly, Gamerro uses irony to deconstruct the romantic official myths and their promise of national redemption through the heroism of the military and the recovery of the Malvinas. The satire has a broad focus, aimed at the military as an organization, and at Argentina as a nation, in the Tamerlán narrative. The characters who bear the brunt of Gamerro’s criticism are types rather than individuals. The distancing and broadening of the focus allows ironic humor to do its deconstructive magic without seeming offensive. The tragedy of the Malvinas narrative is more personal: it involves a limited number of characters that are depicted as three-dimensional individuals before their violent destruction. The closer focus allows the horror of war and the loss of individual human lives to work its own deconstruction of national myths, making them seem incongruous and unimportant compared to the human
beings that are sacrificed in their names. White writes that “Comedy and Tragedy represent qualifications of the Romantic apprehension of the world, considered as a process, in the interest of taking seriously the forces which oppose the effort at human redemption naively held up as a possibility for mankind in Romance” (10, original emphasis). Tragedy reveals those opposing forces in order to suggest a way to live within the limitations they impose (9-10). The Malvinas tragedy in the novel reveals the military and its myths as forces that oppose not only national, but individual redemption as well. The tragedy leaves open the possibility of an individual redemption, however, even though national redemption has been shown to be beyond hope in the satire of the Tamerlán narrative. Comedy, according to White, manages to reconcile the protagonist with the forces that oppose his attainment of happiness, at least temporarily (9). The comedic elements of Las Islas, however, are small and represent only a minor reprieve from the general atmosphere of confusion. They are presented in the tightest and closest focus of all, affecting only Felipe and Gloria, and to a certain extent, Felipe’s dead friends. They offer the hope of a partial redemption, a temporary escape from hell into a somewhat less hellish existence.

All three Argentinean countermythologizers are concerned with identity. Kelper creates a new mythologized identity for the enemy that indirectly calls Argentina’s own identity myths into question. The Kelpers desperately try to assert their own identity through aggression against an Other who has failed to grant them the recognition they crave, just as the Argentine military has done with so-called subversives, and as the Argentine government did with Britain. Los Pichy-cyegos questions the validity and relevance of national identity of any kind, particularly in the life-threatening situations created by war. Las Islas constructs a self-critical identity for Argentineans – of a xenophobic, violent, hell-society full of victimizers, parasites, opportunists, and victims. The novel also presents countermyths of the islands themselves which portray them as an incurable disease of hollowness and disappointment. These myths themselves posit the impossibility and undesirability of recovering the past. Through this and other means, Las Islas, as do the other novels in this section, questions human access to a verifiable and absolute representation of the past through history or memory. All three novels
argue for a plurality of viewpoints and perspectives in trying to construct meaning out of life: when only one viewpoint or voice is accepted as truth, and others are silenced, the result is violence and destruction.

**British Countermythologizers**

British countermythologizers represent a wider range of genres than their Argentinean counterparts, but their strategies and findings share much in common with them. Most British countermythologizers, like the Argentinean ones we have discussed, espouse a postmodernist view of history and identity as formed by diverse subjective interpretations. The exception is Raymond Briggs’s *The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman*, which adopts a tone of oversimplified truthfulness as a sort of commentary on the fairy-tale-like qualities of official myths. The countermyths of these works are self-critical myths of Britain’s leadership and future, and of its attachment to its imaginary past. The travel books, Briggs’s illustrated storybook, and Francis’s *Swansong* all deploy countermyths predicting a grim future for Britain based upon the country’s current violent and nostalgic inclinations.

**Travelogues**

Two travel writers undertook journeys around the British Isles during the Falklands War, in an effort to understand the country they call home and its people. Paul Theroux traveled by rail, bus, and foot around the coast of Great Britain and the borders of Northern Ireland. He describes his trek and his ideas about what he encounters in *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1984). Jonathan Raban took a similar circular coastal voyage, but in the opposite direction and by yacht, visiting certain ports along the way. His experiences are recounted in the book *Coasting* (1986). Both authors comment about the war, Thatcher and her economic policies, and the current and future states of their home nation. David Monaghan gives a thorough study of these works in his volume *The Falklands War: Myth and Countermyth*. He describes how both writers emphasize the subjective and inventive qualities of their texts in order to show that their interpretation of Britain is just that: an interpretation among many possible others. Both authors foreground the circular journey or mythic “quest” emplotment of their narratives as a
deliberate and conscious choice, as a narrative strategy rather than as a natural transmitter of “absolute truth” (Monaghan 121). Each takes care to portray himself, as the ostensible questing hero, as decidedly ordinary and un-heroic (126). Each author also provides evidence that his perceptions may be skewed or simply mistaken, thus questioning his own narrative authority (Monaghan 128-29). Even though the two authors share an afternoon meal together in Brighton, Raban comments on how puzzlingly unrecognizable Theroux’s description of the meeting is compared to his own memory of it: “But then, memory, as Paul had demonstrated . . . , is a great maker of fictions,” he concludes (Raban 202). According to Monaghan, these textual strategies serve to undermine the “monolithic” governmental myths of Britain and the Falklands War that present themselves as natural, apparent, and absolute truths (122).

Both authors criticize the negative aspects of British character, how they relate to the Falklands War, and what sort of future these tendencies will lead to. Theroux sees Britain as a divided nation sliding into chaos and despair. In his travels he observes people responding to modern problems in various ways, but Monaghan notes that these can be grouped into two basic categories: escapism through nostalgia, or releasing frustration through violence (143). Theroux’s view of the Falklands War is primarily presented by his disdainful comments on the jingoistic headlines of the “gutter press,” and on the “snorting and vengeful” reactions of some who read them (Theroux 201). Monaghan argues that Theroux presents the war as simply another outlet among many for “expressing nostalgic and violent tendencies” (143).

Raban discusses British personality in terms of its insular xenophobia, and its desire to assert its own difference from and superiority over the mainland:

Standing alone in the world was what the British like to believe that they did best. It brought out the Dunkirk Spirit, which was now being busily rebottled as the Falklands Spirit. . . . It brought out, in the British Isles at large, all the crabiness, the xenophobia, the determination to take the rest of the world down a peg . . . . (221)

Of course the desire to assert superiority over the Other and punish those who have overstepped their position really results from a fear of being treated as inferior. Raban
has noticed this as well, in the violent reaction of Kelpers and Britons alike to humiliation at Argentine hands:

The Falklands held a mirror up to our own islands, and it reflected, in brilliantly sharp focus, all our injured belittlement, our sense of being beleaguered, neglected and misunderstood. As for the Argentinians, . . . They’d got monstrously above themselves, and . . . they were going to be given their Come Uppance. (106)\(^36\)

These two passages show a connection between the nostalgia and the violence that Theroux discusses as separate phenomena in his book. Nostalgia for past glories and status is also behind the aggressive attempts to “bring the rest of the world down a peg” and give the Argentineans their “Come Uppance” for getting “above themselves.” Monaghan notes this connection in his study, and by doing so has helped me to see how the two drives are linked not only in Raban’s book, but also in many of the other countermythologizing texts I discuss in this chapter (Monaghan 138). Like Theroux, Raban criticizes the war as an expression of these atavistic urges: after listening to the nostalgic and violent “verbal bloodletting” in the emergency Falklands debate, he says “I felt that I’d been eavesdropping on the nastier workings of the national subconscious” (111). He also labels that debate as a concerted effort to make the blank and meaningless Falklands “signify . . . Tradition, Honor, Loyalty, Community, Principle – . . . the whole web and texture of being British” (117, emphasis in original). Here Raban points to the authors of the Falklands myths and explicitly describes their activities as mythologizing. By doing so he reveals the contrived and motivated nature of the supposedly “natural” and “eternal” truths behind official Falklands myths and their justification for violence and wallowing in the past.

In addition to these demythologizing efforts, Raban and Theroux deploy their own countermyths of Britain’s future.\(^37\) Both travelers undertake a journeys of mythic circular structure, and on the way they see and learn things that lead them to prophesy what the future holds for Britain. Their careful deconstruction of their own narrative authority makes it clear, however, that their prophetic myths are as subjective and motivated by personal agendas as are Thatcher’s. In this way Theroux and Raban create what Barthes has called “Myth[s] on the Left,” which “label themselves as myths and point to their
masks” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 71). Both countermyths predict Britain’s destiny or future, and are put forward in opposition to the “capitalist nirvana” offered by Thatcher’s national renewal myth (Monaghan 142). Theroux’s vision of the future is based primarily on the economic and military conditions that he observes. He returns to this vision again and again through the course of his narrative. He imagines that Thatcherite materialism and emphasis on market capitalism will lead to a future in which the poor are poorer and the rich are unimaginably rich. He predicts that the rich will have to devote most of their money and technology to preserving themselves and their wealth from the poor, whose misery will make them ever more “dangerous” and “predatory” (44; 211). He also refers frequently to militarism as evidenced by the many bases, gunnery ranges, and military exercise grounds that he encounters on his travels (85; 118; 159). His descriptions of these military lands, nuclear weapons, and nuclear power plants seem to portend destruction and desolation in Britain’s future (34; 176; 206; 342). At the very least, Theroux foretells that they will result in the spread of the militarized city, on the model of an Enniskillen or a Belfast, where all people entering the “Control Zone” are monitored and inspected for weapons or bombs (235; 250). He also describes Butlin’s holiday camps (a sort of combination motel/ amusement park – a popular vacation destination for low-to-middle-income families) in military or police terms, as looking like army camps or prisons, and imagines that these, too, are models of the future coastal town (86; 132). Theroux’s myth of Britain’s future is influenced by his observations of economic trends and social violence, in addition to the Government’s emphasis on military buildups both conventional and nuclear. In this myth, the Falklands War is just one manifestation among many of the British obsession with militarization and violence.

Raban’s countermyth of Britain’s future describes a country turned into a giant “theme park” for tourists, with cutesy “shoppes” selling inauthentic handicrafts and cheap souvenirs to imitate an idealized past that never existed (210-11). As government economic policies cause the gradual death of Britain’s traditional industries (coal, fishing, shipping), they leave nothing for Britons to make a living with except their own decay, through the prostitution of their imaginary past (Monaghan 147). Raban calls this process “The merrying of England” (214), a prettifying falseness that replaces butchers with curio “shoppes” and coal mines with “living museums” (213; 217). He imagines that
any of Britain’s formerly vital institutions could be co-opted by the tourist industry, from coal mines and fish docks to universities (214; 258). The war also plays a part in Raban’s myth of the future, since it indulges in the same sort of nostalgia for an imaginary past as does the “merrying” of British towns for the benefit of tourism. Of the war’s nostalgic nature, Raban comments:

I reckoned that anything to do with the Falklands more probably belonged to Britain’s past than to its future, so the naval fleet would be sailing backward, into last year’s autumn, or maybe some other autumn belonging to the Duke of Wellington and another monarch. (110)

Monaghan affirms that Raban sees the war as part of “the merrying process,” and is thus “less able to claim any function more dignified than that of encouraging the people of Britain to give credence to a falsified version of the past as national heritage” (148). In other words, the war is only significant for Raban as “just one more stage in the nation’s decline” (Monaghan 148)

In many demythologing and countermythologizing texts, the persistent enemy myth escapes questioning and is transmitted more or less according to official lines. To Theroux and Raban’s credit, they largely avoid this error, which can undermine the deconstructive effort of a text. Theroux is saddened by the war’s outbreak and at first hopes that an agreement can be reached (24), giving no credence to the mythologized argument that Galtieri cannot be negotiated with and understands nothing but force. He aligns himself with Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges in his opinion of the war: “It is like two bald men fighting over a comb” (Theroux 39). Raban opines that the Argentine takeover of the islands “was a transparent violation of international law,” and that Argentina’s government was unsavory and fascist (221). At the same time, however, he sympathizes with Argentinean frustration over mishandled negotiations, recalcitrant islanders, and the British over-reaction to the South Georgia crisis (99; 116). He takes a moment to pick apart some aspects of the British enemy myth, particularly the demonizing of Galtieri as fascist dictator and torturer. He guesses that much of the British dislike for the “odiously pretty” Argentine president comes from a fearful aversion to male beauty:
His soft and petulant Valentino lips betrayed the distorted sensualism of power. It was uncannily easy to imagine that face creased with pleasure in the exercise of the rack and screw. Those misplaced feminine features, that braided stewardess’ uniform . . . The cruel, sexually ambiguous cast of his face seemed enough in itself to justify our unbridled distaste.

(117)³⁸

Raban writes that Galtieri is “a gift” for the British because hating him is easy, even pleasurable, “for reasons safest left in the closet for the moment” (117). His reputation as torturer and as fascist, with the added implication of sexual ambiguity, makes him the perfect target for British abhorrence. By repudiating Galtieri and everything they have made him stand for, Britons can strengthen and reaffirm their pride in their own identity as everything that Galtieri is not. This is accomplished, Raban says, in much of the news coverage of the Task Force, which he describes as a form of psychological warfare aimed at frightening Argentina’s leadership. He describes scenes of half-naked men lifting weights, charging sacks with bayonets, exhibiting their “impressive genital equipment” on television, as it bulges threateningly behind their Union Jack shorts (139). “The theme of sexual prowess and conquest was rudely explicit: the Argentine forces and their effete supremo were going to be raped by the greater potency of the British” (140).

Raban’s analysis of British insecurity both sexual and political finds echoes in Argentine society as well. Associating the enemy with homosexuality and aberrant pleasures such as torture is a way for official myth-promoters to exorcise their fears of similar traits lurking in their own ranks. Argentine myth-makers and perpetuators do the same to the British, as can be seen in Rotondo’s photo book, Aranda Duranona’s adventure novel, official sermons and communiques, and officers’ memoirs. Even some countermythologizers indulge in this practice, such as Fogwill’s Los Pichy-cyegos. Argentinean resentment toward British insults and arrogance can also be seen mirrored in Raban’s description of British and Falkland Islanders as feeling “beleaguered, neglected and misunderstood” (106) and as wanting to aggressively assert their identity and importance. Theroux’s and Raban’s portrayals of a nation in decline, resorting to nostalgia and violence in the face of a dismal future, could easily apply to Argentina. There, economic decline and political disorder drove military leaders to even more
extreme measures of violence, in hopes of regaining values, unity, and a great destiny that they felt had been lost sometime in the past.

**The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman**

This unusual “children’s book” by Raymond Briggs presents the war as a simplistic tale. Briggs is actually an award-winning children’s author and illustrator, with endearing storybooks such as *The Snowman* (1978) and *Father Christmas* (1973), among many others, to his credit. His book on the Falklands War, however, features grotesque illustrations and situations that are quite inappropriate for children, and obviously intended for adults. While official myths are set in a simplistic romance-quest emplotment, with its epic associations of gallantry, heroism, and good versus evil, this countermythic text uses a more world-weary and pessimistic emplotment, but one that is equally embedded in Western culture and thought: that of the Greek myth, where hapless mortals suffer as the playthings of the petty and capricious gods. Briggs’s retelling of the war is reminiscent of a fairy tale in its “Once upon a time” beginning and its simplistic reduction of motives and events. However, the scenario of people sent to destruction on the whims of giant, powerful monsters who fight amongst themselves for preeminence actually resembles certain tales from Greek mythology: Briggs’s main characters are monstrous metallic caricatures of Galtieri and Thatcher, who spread death and destruction in the wake of their petty quarrel. The large color illustrations and simple (but loaded) sentences enhance the myth-generating effect. Concepts such as national honor and international deterrence are meaningless to a child, but a desire to be noticed and to keep one’s own toys are powerful motivators in childhood value systems. When the diplomatic complexities and the abstract principles are removed, the simplified recounting of events seems to lay bare “natural” moral truths about the conduct of the war and its aftermath: it appears to be a clear-cut presentation of dual evils attacking the innocent. Briggs probably used the children’s book format for this very reason. It is a way of countering the simplistic and fairy-tale-like official myths by turning their own strategies against them.

To counter the pastoral idyll myth, Briggs presents the Falklands as “a sad little island” where “poor shepherds” have nothing to do but tend their sheep and eat them: “They had mutton for breakfast, mutton for dinner and mutton for tea” (4-5). Though
indeed pastoral, the scene is less than idyllic, where monk-like men with crooks stand glumly on an island just large enough for them and their sheep, under a lowering grey sky and pelting rain. The one building on the island is labeled “Coalite Co. Ltd.” to show that the islanders did not own their land or resources (4-5). They become the victims not only of the Galtieri monster, but also of the Thatcher monster (the Old Iron Woman). The soldiers who fight (at least the British ones) are also portrayed as victims. The war is not fought to defend the shepherds or their pastoral way of life, but to gain back what the Iron Woman perceives as her personal property. In the end, the “sad little island” is even more sad. Three of the shepherds have been killed, and the remaining ones stand glumly as before, but surrounded by soldiers with guns and bayonets, barbed wire, unexploded bombs, grave-markers, war trash, and dead sheep (38-39). Their half-destroyed building now reads “Fortress HQ,” a reference to the new “Fortress Falklands” policy, which increased the islands’ defenses to the point that the marines there outnumbered the inhabitants (38).

To counter heroic myths of Britain as the dictator-slaying warrior, and as the rescuer of the islands-in-distress, British soldiers are presented as tiny figures in toy boats, controlled and burdened by the enormous figure of the Old Iron Woman, who sits upon one of them and points the way toward the conflict (20-21). Her motives for recovering the island are based on the ethos of the selfish child: “‘It’s MINE!’ she screeched. ‘MINE! MINE! MINE! I bagsied it AGES ago! I bagsied it FIRST! DID! DID! DID!’” Here the impetus for war is portrayed as little more than a childish temper tantrum, based upon the desire to retain an admittedly stolen plaything. Thatcher herself is reduced to the expression of an urge to thievery and violence – and questionable sexual drives, as is implied by the illustrations of her dressed in nothing but garter belt, stockings, and high-heeled shoes, facing the viewer with legs spread open and pink explosions shooting from her cannon breasts (16-17). She looks rather like a metallic whore, and the implications of that resemblance are surely intentional. Galtieri, as the Tin-Pot General, is also first shown in a similarly sexual pose, with a sea of blood just covering the genital region. At the end of the conflict, the victorious Iron Woman is shown pregnant, shooting “I won” cartoon balloons out of her cannon breasts, having dominated the enemy and obtained sexual gratification at the same time (36-37).
Thus the urge toward war is connected with equally atavistic urges toward asserting sexual primacy. Looking at the swollen metallic belly in Briggs’s illustration, one cannot help but think of the national renewal (or rebirth) myth, and wonder what monstrous progeny will burst forth upon Britain as a result of this war.

While the Thatcher and Galtieri figures are shown as “not real”39 and Other, the men who die and are maimed in the war are shown as similar to “us.” Briggs draws them in somber black-and-white, with soft sketchy outlines and sympathetic faces, to contrast
with the bright colors and hard metallic outlines of the figurehead monsters. He devotes several pages to their suffering and destruction, as a counter to the pseudo-heroic tale of the monsters’ war (24-33). Briggs concludes this section reiterating the “us” status of the soldiers: “Hundreds of brave men were killed. And they were real men, made of flesh and blood. They were not made of Tin or of Iron” (34-35). These are the innocent mortals who are sacrificed to the petty metal titans and their quarrel. Briggs chooses to end the tale, not with the Iron Woman’s triumph, but with an ironic look at the hypocritical Victory parade, from which the maimed are excluded for fear that the sight of their destroyed bodies would spoil the festivities (44-47). The final image that Briggs chooses to sum up the whole experience is a scene of a woman and two young boys planting flowers on a fresh grave (44-48). Notably, however, all of the suffering soldiers and bereaved families depicted are British. Argentinean soldiers are also presented as pawns, but do not get any sympathy or follow-up. They remain a part of “them,” the Other.

Like many demythologizers and countermythologizers, Briggs’s book accepts and transmits standard enemy myths. The Galtieri monster is a “Wicked Foreign General” but he is also worthy of derision: he has “wicked foreign moustachios” and his gold braid and tin pots imply that in addition to being violent and horrible, he is cheap and tawdry (6-7). Briggs emphasizes again and again that he is “Foreign:” he does not belong on the island or anywhere else – he is Other. As the Tinpot General sits spread-legged brandishing his bloodstained sword and chomping his Exocet cigar, one wonders if he has not ejaculated the blood that he sits in. He wears a golden “G” on his spurs, hat and belt buckle, to show that his personal fame is more important to him than much else. His only motivation in taking over the island is that he wishes to have his name in “all the big History Books” (8). He speaks a false and childish mockery of Italian – “Mea baggazza el islandio! (I bags the island!)” (10-11) – and he “bosses” the islanders about with his windy spittle-laden blast of robot breath (12-13). After his defeat he is greatly reduced in size like a recently-emptied penis, and suitably roughed up by the whore who has dominated him with breast-cannons and animalistic sexuality (36). This combination of brutality and hollow show to cover weakness is essentially the official enemy myth of Argentinean military government, and it is calculated to inspire pride in Britain’s
contrasting democratic propriety and military valor. Even though Briggs’s Thatcher monster represents a great evil, she is not as horrible as the Galtieri monster, and the British soldiers themselves are presented as “brave,” and “real,” and ultimately, as “us.” A demythologizing or countermythologizing text cannot endorse this view of the enemy without implicitly accepting the self-congratulating British superiority myth it carries with it.

Nevertheless, Briggs’s countermyths make island life a drab and pathetic affair doomed to further deterioration at the hands of both Argentinean and British forces. They posit the war as a petty squabble between reckless Titans, with victimized people of all sides caught in the middle, and they link war with atavistic sexual urges and childish possessiveness. The nation’s promised rebirth is changed to the threat of yet another metallic monster that will use its people as playthings in destructive games. Lurking beneath these is the implication that if the monsters are “not real,” but made respectively of tin and of iron, then it follows that they are the creation of the people they now control. These human beings have allowed themselves to create military machines and leaders, and then to grant them enough power to control their creators instead of vice-versa. Some of the blame, then, must lie with the victims themselves. In this bit of self-incrimination, Briggs joins Theroux and Raban as a critic of his own culture, if perhaps a less powerful one, since his text falls into enemy mythologizing and its concomitant privileging of “us” over “them.”

Raban, Theroux, and Briggs point to some common urges motivating official myths. The travel writers see nostalgia and pent-up aggression, not only being expressed by the population at large in response to the war, but also lurking behind the government’s lofty talk of defending democracy and the rule of law. Raban sees a connection between those two urges and adds sexuality into the mix. Briggs also links violent and sexual urges in his presentation of the war. In the novel Swansong’s main countermyth, all three motivations – nostalgia, violence, and sexuality – are linked together as potent forces that converge over the Falkland Islands and entrap all who go there in their destructive power.

Swansong
Richard Francis’s satirical novel *Swansong* (1986), like Gamerro’s *Las Islas*, questions the possibility of national redemption. It does this not with two superimposed narratives but with several interwoven ones, each one from the point of view of a different character. The novel presents the stories of thirteen different characters, told by a narrator that can describe their thoughts and feelings. The narrator limits its observations to those made by the characters into whose minds it sees. It refrains from inserting any overarching, narratorial observations or opinions. This becomes evident when the same character or situation is described in vastly different terms, depending on whose chapter contains the description. In many of these narratives, the character’s past becomes an inescapable type of his or her future, and he or she is doomed to repeat past disappointments or traumas again and again. The nation in general, like the characters in the novel, appears condemned to repeat the past, not at the same level, but in a downward spiral toward entropy and deterioration. So while *Las Islas* grants its protagonist a chance to redeem himself and at least partially escape from the repeating story, *Swansong* offers no such hope. At the same time, *Swansong*’s reality is less nightmarish than that of *Las Islas*. It is, instead, tragicomic, silly, and a bit pathetic. Its main target myths are national renewal and the British identity myth, fueled as they are by a national obsession with the past. The novel also deals with pastoral idyll, military, and enemy myths. Its countermyths offer a fatalistic and entropic view of life and history: the Thatcher character (Mrs. Cheeseman) cynically steers the country into war in order to achieve what she hopes will be the economic and moral recovery of the nation, only to accelerate its decline. In like manner, the recurring and yet deteriorating fates of the other characters lead one to believe that if Cheeseman had not brought the country to ruin with monetarism and war, someone else would have accomplished the same end with different means. The mythologized significance of the Falkland Islands as a repository of the British past identity is countered by a myth of Farquhar Island (their fictional counterpart) as a sort of destructive magnet that indeed causes a return of the past, but in a corrupted or deteriorated state which ultimately destroys most of the people who are drawn there. The islands and the war surrounding them are also associated with a sexual or violent urge that survives from humanity’s most primitive past. One could also argue that the alternative identity of Mrs. Thatcher presented by the Cheeseman character
constitutes a sort of countermyth to replace the standard myth of Thatcher as Winston Churchill’s spiritual successor.

_Swansong_ does not directly address Thatcher’s comparison of herself with Churchill. It is as though this aspect of the identity myth were not even worthy of notice. Francis does, however, construct a different identity for Thatcher through his Mrs. Cheeseman character, without directly attacking the official myth about her. In doing so, Francis makes use of some of Thatcher’s traits as described by both her admirers and her detractors, such as her refusal to change course when the immediate results of her policies were unfavorable, and her sharp combativeness on issues she felt strongly about. She was a “conviction politician,” doggedly pursuing policies based on principles that she believed in (Cole 11), and she tended to sack those who questioned or impeded her (Cole 101-102). Francis takes these well-known personal traits and provides them with some rather unusual causes and explanations in his Cheeseman character, thus creating a new myth of Thatcher’s significance for Britain. For example, Cheeseman will not acquiesce to the advice of certain Cabinet members or advisers because, quite simply, she is hard of hearing. Her ears had been so clogged with wax that they have sustained some permanent damage. She has them cleaned out and gets tiny hearing aids, but she somehow intuits the deeper implications of deafness on her public image, so she makes sure the medical reports say that she underwent eye surgery, and she makes the hospital staff sign the Official Secrets Act to keep her true ailment confidential (103). When she does hear her colleagues’ suggestions, Cheeseman becomes angry and vindictive if they contradict her in any way, however trivial. At one point she is in the windowless Cabinet Room and opens a discussion with a comment about the bad weather, which, of course, she cannot see. Defense Secretary Raymond Durrant, freshly arrived from outside, remarks that the weather is actually clearing up and the sun is shining. This news might make a normal person happy, but it obviously irritates Cheeseman intensely (151). For this and other infractions, Cheeseman repeatedly manipulates and humiliates the unfortunate Durrant in front of the other Cabinet members.

Thatcher’s policies involved a good deal of belt-tightening and budget cuts in an attempt to reduce bureaucracy and waste. Accordingly, Francis makes Cheeseman so tight-fisted that she will not even hire properly trained kitchen staff for her Downing
Street household. Terry, one of Francis’ thirteen protagonists, is one of these unqualified staff. His purchasing budget is so small that he resorts to buying expired meat from a crooked waste disposal firm. Cheeseman is proud of her frugality and wishes to impose it upon the rest of the nation, as she demonstrates in a televised speech:

Some of you, . . . who are perhaps unemployed, or on old age pensions, will nevertheless be watching me on up-to-date, colour television sets. Derek and I, meanwhile, are perfectly content with our excellent, but elderly, monochrome receiver. If a product is well made it will give sterling service. It is always worth paying for quality and the bonus is that it costs less in the long run. In the same way, an economic policy that takes a certain human toll will eventually produce a human reward. (203)

Durrant, having been rudely ejected from the Cabinet Room, actually tries to watch the news on this famous television set. He remembers Mrs. Cheeseman’s speech while noting that the set takes forever to warm up, showing only “a blank humming screen” (203). If the television set works this badly, what does that imply for the economy? Durrant ponders the unemployed while he waits, thinking of their “empty faces,” like the blank screen (203). He wonders if they will eventually be “switched on” again, and “if so, what flickering monochrome features would be revealed, what weaknesses in the horizontal hold” (204). Durrant’s ruminations demonstrate the flaws in Cheeseman’s metaphor: while she shows her personal frugality by tolerating a slow television with a fuzzy image, the people affected by her governmental frugality lose their livelihoods and even their reasons for being, not just their picture quality. Durrant fears that they may not ever recover to enjoy the “human reward” she promises in the future. Francis finally adds just a touch of the absurd to the moment to poke fun at Thatcher/Cheeseman’s emphasis on old-fashioned values: when the television finally warms up, Durrant sees a woman in a 1950’s-style ballgown reading the news, not at a news-desk but at an old-style wooden table adorned with a vase of flowers. Francis exaggerates Cheeseman’s traits beyond believability not only for humorous effect, but also to show that he makes no truth claims for his own myth, while the only slightly less exaggerated Churchillian myths do claim truthfulness for themselves. The strategy calls these myths into question indirectly.
Cheeseman wishes she could impose old-fashioned morals on the rest of society, as well – a reference to Thatcher’s famous endorsement of Victorian values. She tells Durrant that he got the position of Defense Secretary because he was “happily married,” and goes on to lament that most of her colleagues are philanderers, and some of them might be something worse – homosexual. “Why people can’t be satisfied with straightforward family values is beyond me,” she says (149). Durrant notices, nevertheless, that Mrs. Cheeseman’s own career as a powerful political figure contradicts the “vision of cosy domesticity” that she espouses. He notices too, that “she always undervalued women, seeing them as helpmates, housewives, loyal props” (149-50). Durrant observes that she oversimplifies more than just gender roles; she seems to see everything in simplistic terms: “It was as though things actually became more simple than they were because she looked at them in that light, . . . The explanation, of course, was that she only saw one surface, one facet, of whatever she looked at” (151-52).

Francis emphasizes Cheeseman’s tendency toward reductive thinking and retro-style values to hint that her supposed forging ahead in “The Right Direction,” as her slogan states, is actually moving the country backward.\footnote{41} This suggestion is strengthened when Cheeseman’s financial adviser has a sudden revelation that their monetarist economic theory is actually a form of good-old-fashioned Keynesianism, harking back to Roosevelt’s New Deal. The main difference between the two is that now they are throwing government money down the unemployment-benefits hole, instead of putting it into jobs to build dams and the like. At first Cheeseman is horrified at this revelation, but then she realizes that the real Keynesian catalyst for economic recovery after the Great Depression was a war -- it was a bigger and deeper hole for money than even New Deal work projects were. So she decides to embrace the Keynesian aspects of her policy, and start a war. She hires a contract terrorist known only as “The Fat Man” to take care of the dirty work in starting the conflict. Thinking on her ability to take unexpected developments in stride, Cheeseman reflects that

Mistakes were made from time to time but she usually managed to work them invisibly into the fabric of her career. Not by trying to cover them up . . . but by making use of them, building on them, coping with the changing perspectives of life in a practical and productive manner. Thus
she managed to remain consistent. . . . Making the best of things was exactly what she was best at: indeed for her, producing a silk purse from a sow’s ear wasn’t just a proverb, it was a mystical principle. (79-80)

With this rationalization Francis casts Thatcher’s famous consistency in a completely different light: she does not merely hold on to her own pet ideas, but she co-opts and twists the ideas of others, and even the accidental errors that occur, to make them seem like they fit her original course. In other words, she is a mythmaker. As she reflects to herself, “Politics, history itself, was simply a matter of words. . . . To change everything all you had to do was word it differently” (82). Having demonstrated the emptiness behind Cheeseman’s word-manipulation games, Francis provokes thought about many different myths promoted by the Thatcher government and what motivations might lie hidden beneath the glossy surface of the words and their co-opted significations.

Cheeseman’s myth of projected national recovery depends not on moving forward, but backward toward the past in terms of moral and economic values. She rationalizes this contradiction, “confident of her ability to sell a curve as a straight line” (147). Of course, the national renewal envisioned by Thatcher and by many other Britons involved a return to Britain’s past glories of empire and military might, rather than a progression toward new and different ones. This discrepancy alone calls the possibility of renewal into question, but Francis does more than merely point out the contradictory nostalgia that fuels the national identity and renewal myths. Monaghan and others have noted that Thatcher linked the success of the Falklands Campaign to the possibility of success with her economic reforms. Francis mocks this faulty linkage by having Cheeseman’s war planned purely as an economic measure, but he also attacks each facet of the plan separately, economic and military. Early in the novel, before Cheeseman’s plans for war have been revealed, Francis has a minor character question the future promised by Cheeseman’s economic policies by glossing the public speech he has to make with what he thinks Cheeseman really intends: “unhappily we (i.e. five million, ultimately, of you) will have to endure some years (i.e. permanent) austerity, in order to ensure a brighter future for all (i.e. of the rest of us)” (96). This character, worried by the fact that Cheeseman’s economic adviser is actually hoping for more unemployment to
make his plans work, realizes that the promised economic revival is only for the benefit of the few at the top of the socioeconomic scale.

Not only is Cheeseman willing to sell out the working class for this revival, but she is also willing to sacrifice lives in a war. Even her economic adviser is repulsed by this idea, and tries to dissuade her, suggesting that she promote service industry instead, which would have the Keynesian effect of giving the masses more spending power but without the undesirable (at least for Cheeseman) tangible end products created by manufacturing or such efforts as the New Deal. When she ignores his pleas, he sends Cabinet Minister Horace Bentley to try to persuade her to accept this “more civilized alternative” (248). Much to Bentley’s horror, Cheeseman accepts the idea of service industry, but twisted to her own already firm goals of war:

I’m as interested in civilization as you are, Horace, . . . In my own way. That’s why I believe the values of civilization must be defended. . . . even so, the cost would be huge. Nevertheless, Horace, I think it would be a cost this country would happily bear. It would be the noblest form of service. That’s how I for one would regard it. . . In fact, between ourselves, this is a new principle I intend to formulate, a key to the recovery of this country, both in economic and moral terms. Service industry. It’s a phrase to conjure with, don’t you think? (248-49)

Horace thinks to himself: “War as the ultimate service industry. Was there any idea this woman couldn’t convert to her own ends?” (249). And so, Cheeseman’s advisers unwittingly provide her with the myth of the noble rescue – a great service – to justify the war they were trying to talk her out of.

Francis further detracts from the heroic rescue myth by spending very little time on military exploits and by ending his narrative just after the initial British landings. This way there is no victory in the novel, just as there is no redemption or renewal. In addition, Cheeseman’s narrative and those of her colleagues in Government occupy less than half of the novel. Other characters and their narratives fill in the picture with images of ordinary Britons and the negative effects of Cheeseman’s political and economic machinations on their daily lives. The few military characters and events depicted are comical and rather haphazard: the war’s first hero shoots down an enemy plane by
accident, and is flung overboard through his own incompetence. Tom the SAS man is a despicable person and ultimately a coward; he runs in terror from a woman, and later from a vicar. He dies a humiliating death while engaged in sexual intercourse with a sheep in a minefield. Other soldiers go to investigate the bodies only to realize too late that they have also walked into the minefield. Their only solution is to stand in place all night long, waiting for help to arrive. When one soldier wishes they had some good “songs for yomping,” the other angrily responds with a statement that ends the novel and could well sum up Francis’s main countermyth: “We’re not fucking yomping, . . . We’re standing still” (304).

Each of these characters’ narratives work to question the idea that a renewal of any kind, national or personal, is possible. They also gradually develop a countermyth of the Falklands and the war surrounding it as a destructive time-warp that brings a distorted past into the present to eliminate hopes of a better future. Each character has a difficulty in his or her past that s/he needs to come to terms with, and each of them ends up having to confront that difficulty as it recurs sometimes once, sometimes more often. They each face their pasts as they are touched by the Farquhar War and its repercussions in varying degrees – many of them end up on the island itself, or in the waters surrounding it when the past catches up to them. Most of the characters try to run away from the past and make a new start, but they are denied the possibility of escaping their situations. Other characters, David in particular, try to achieve redemption by searching out the past, in much the same way that Cheeseman tries to renew the nation by relying on ideas from the past. These characters are also ultimately failures in their quests, showing the futility of seeking redemption and renewal, either national or personal, either by running away from the past or by embracing it. A brief discussion of these characters’ experiences will clarify how Francis unfolds this countermyth.

The characters in this section attempt personal renewals by rejecting or escaping their pasts. The following brief descriptions of their experiences show that their attempts are futile. Terry, a sex-starved divorcee, tries to escape from his past sexual and workplace failures. He is determined to get a girlfriend and keep a job, but he cannot seem to manage either. Each of his sexual misadventures is marked by a fall into water, each time a larger body – as though the past can only get worse each time it recurs. After
losing his kitchen job at Downing Street, Terry moves to a country village and loses his job there as an insurance agent. He falls in a mud puddle while being courted, unbeknownst to him, by his homosexual landlord. When he realizes what his landlord wants, he tries to escape by taking a vacation, only to run into a girl he had pursued unsuccessfully: in shock, he slips off his rented boat and falls into a canal. Next he waits tables on a ferry, and falls into the English Channel when he makes an overzealous pass at a reluctant woman. Finally, he ends up as a cook for the soldiers aboard the requisitioned ferry on the way to Farquhar Island, where a homosexual soldier has his way with him. At this point, Terry resigns himself to his fate, which has followed him relentlessly despite his efforts to escape. Only moments after his homosexual encounter he is thrown into the South Atlantic by the recoil of an anti-aircraft gun. The narrator does not reveal whether he survives or not -- Terry has been trounced by his past, and that is all the reader is given to know.

Jack and his wife Queen try to escape their dull grey childhoods by marrying each other, but then they both lose their shops and their jobs. They try to make a fresh start in Battersea, but they succumb again to boredom and dull grey routine. Soon Mrs. Cheeseman and the Fat Man’s activities indirectly result in Jack’s being fired. They try to make another new start in Southampton, and just when Jack decides that he is happy and will not succumb to any dull routine, he chokes on some peas, his habitual vegetable of the evening. Though the narrator is stingy with definite information, the implication is that he dies, a victim of the very habits he had been trying to avoid.

Nicola is a shy and listless girl who is obsessed with her twin sister, who had been stillborn. She feels as though her sister mediates all her experiences and interactions, stifling and obscuring her. She decides to escape the smothering sister by doing something outrageous – she goes to a grunge rock concert and has sex with the lead singer, Premo Bulge. At the time she “had thought she was exorcizing a ghost,” but she gets pregnant and imagines her sister is growing inside of her womb (176). Premo, for his part, is trying to escape his past as an illegitimate child. He does so by living a sordid and grungy life “singing pig,” as he calls it, only to father an illegitimate child of his own. When he finds out that Nicola is pregnant, he quits the singing tour, cleans himself up, and marries her, determined to redeem himself by being there for his wife and child.
Nicola and Premo once again try to escape their pasts by moving to a new home near London where Premo joins the Army to support them financially. Shortly thereafter he is sent to war. Nicola dies in childbirth, having finally succumbed to the overbearing sister: the sister-child survives but there is something wrong with it that is not revealed. Premo is killed soon afterward in a surprise attack on his ship, leaving his child fatherless like himself, and motherless as well.

Laurette, a North-American student, is trying to come to terms with having been sexually assaulted in a swimming hole when she was a young girl. She has tried to escape that experience by staying away from pools, and by attaching herself to Joseph Harper, Mrs. Cheeseman’s economic adviser. Joseph is non-threatening, with his “cute itsy-bitsy timid withdrawn little prick full of charming English reserve” (88). As a young adult, Laurette is again coaxed into a swimming pool against her better judgment, and receives unwanted sexual attention in the water (93). At this point she realizes, as have many of the other characters, that her past and her fears cannot be escaped by running away (93). Unlike most of the other characters, however, she then chooses to seek fulfillment in reconnecting with that past and embracing it as a form of her future destiny. She does so by leaving Joseph to date her groper, and later by going to Farquhar Island to observe penguins and “shake hands with the animal inside” herself in a celebration of “what was primal, tumescent, salt, in all experience” (300; 224; original emphases). In this endeavor, however, she is again disappointed, as will be discussed later.

Thus far all of the characters discussed have been forced to reckon with the destructive forces of their own pasts, in spite of their efforts to avoid their fates. Laurette is one of three characters who try without success to reconnect with their pasts in order to overcome them and achieve some sort of redemption. Another one of these is Tom Rutherford, a disturbed part-time SAS man who is a modern re-incarnation of one of his noble ancestors, the 18th-century Thomas Hartley. It is as though the Hartley family must do penance for Thomas’s sordid life by repeating his path and his sufferings. Both Toms are debauchers, have participated in the gang rape of a Welsh girl, and are involved in organized criminal activity of other sorts. Both are pursued by a mysterious Fat Man who eventually drives them to leave Britain. Finally, both men go on military missions to Farquhar Island, never to return. Tom ignorantly follows in his forebear’s footsteps, in
spite of the mental torment it causes him. He is particularly bothered by his participation in the rape, and runs away from all the things that remind him of his crime. On Farquhar Island he meets Laurette, who tells him that he, like herself, must reconcile himself with “the animal inside” and all of the nastiness and “gunk” that goes with it. Later, in an effort to do as she suggests and face his animalistic past, he gets drunk and has intercourse with a sheep, upon which he and the sheep are blown to bits by a land mine. He is spectacularly destroyed by the island and the mysterious forces that converge there: the past, sexual domination, and violent aggression. His trajectory is like a romance-quest in reverse, where a wicked and impure anti-hero goes on a quest, not to reclaim sacred ground or rescue a damsel in distress, but to escape from the repercussions of his own nefarious deeds. On his quest he meets a “princess” (Laurette), but instead of rescuing her he flees from her in terror. Besides himself, the only enemy he faces is a hidden minefield, and he is ultimately destroyed by the latter when he chooses an unproductive way of facing up to the former.

David is the third character who tries to reconnect with his past by going to Farquhar Island. Unlike Laurette and Tom, he is not forced into this plan of action by previous unsuccessful attempts to escape the past. David has been searching out the past for a good portion of his adult life. He is the chairman of the village preservation society, and busy writing a history of his parish (10, 15). He is emblematic of the British obsession with historical preservation, as though his very identity is bound up in the buildings, stories, and institutions of the past. His wife has died eighteen months earlier, and he is haunted by his inability to recall her face (10). Despite his realization that he has spent too much of his life trying to save the past (27), he cannot stop dwelling on his dead wife, or on Thomas Hartley, the 18th-century rogue he has read about in his village history research. He reads of Thomas’s misdeeds with his gang called “The Terrors,” and his eventual flight to Farquhar Island due to the persecutions of a mysterious Fat Man. David becomes more and more obsessed with Tom Hartley, especially when elements from Hartley’s life story start cropping up in the present: the Fat Man shows up in David’s office one night to read the village history, and he learns that Tom Rutherford, the last of the Hartley clan, has joined “The Terrors,” as his division of the SAS calls
itself. David imagines that the Fat Man has been pursuing Tom Hartley through the centuries and into the present (187).

David decides he needs to make a “new” start himself, but he does so by taking a vicarage in Farquhar Island, a place emblematic to him of his village’s past and his personal past as well. He, like Mrs. Cheeseman, seeks for a renewal in a mystic past of ideas that do not fit well with current realities. He sees the islands as a blank slate upon which his imagination will be able to work freely to recover the image and presence of his wife Lorna (207-8). He imagines that when he arrives, “Lorna would, in effect, be sitting upon a stark rock, like some being who had surfaced from the sea, real beyond the literal detail of daily life.” (208). When David finally sees the island, he is disappointed at how ordinary the place looks – the super-reality he had envisioned is not there (253). Eventually, however, David is rewarded with what he thinks is a vision of Tom Hartley:

He understood now that he’d been Tom’s pursuer all along, galloping over half of the world like some picaresque hero in search of what he’d lost, intuiting that Tom would lead him to Lorna. Tom and Lorna were two of a kind, after all, fellow-denizens of the past. . . . at last David was not alone, having achieved whatever strange adulterous alchemy converted the present into the past which underlay it. The living past. For he hadn’t merely seen Tom Hartley: he’d seen what Tom’s dead eyes had seen. (288)

In actuality, David has envisioned the terrified and somewhat delusional Tom Rutherford, only hours before he gets himself blown up by a landmine. Through Tom Rutherford, the reincarnation of Tom Hartley, David has come into contact with “the living past,” but it is not as he had imagined it to be. David’s vision of “what Tom’s dead eyes had seen” is infused with his own romantic ideas about the distant past as informed by literature. He attempts to recount the tale in antiquated language as though written by an eighteenth-century chronicler. The result is incongruous and parodic: he refers to Tom as “our hero” and imagines that when he sees a woman sitting on a rock, he mistakes her first for a mermaid and then for an angel. In remorse for his past behavior he tells to her his “woe” and listens “agog” to hear hers in return, as though this mutual confession can cleanse him of his sins and effect the redemption at the end of the quest (290). David
fancies that the woman on the rock is Lorna, his wife. In the following chapter, she tells him her story in the form of a distorted fairy tale: “The Narrative of the Lady on Farquhar Island, or, the Princess and the Frog” (291). Lorna is the princess who has lost her golden ball in the bottomless pool, and the frog, instead of fetching it for her, says he will help her swim to find it. As the princess enters the pool, the tale’s diction shifts from David’s fairy-tale language to Laurette’s vulgar slang. It becomes evident from her description that the frog is a penis, and just as she is in its embrace, it explodes, leaving her to “[splash] shorewards through all the gunk” (294). This is not a fairy tale told by an angelic vision of David’s dead wife, but an allegory of Laurette’s first traumatic sexual experience.

This chapter unites the three characters who seek a reconciliation with, rather than merely an escape from, their respective pasts. In subsequent chapters the encounter between Tom and Laurette is told directly from Laurette’s point of view, and again from Tom Rutherford’s, both of whom give very different impressions of the event than that provided by David. Instead of the spiritual communion and healing imagined by David, Laurette, who has been studying penguins in an effort to understand her own animal side, hopes for “a bit of rough,” a celebration of the primal urges with Tom. She considers her “gunk” tale as a bit of good advice and a fitting prelude to the anticipated experience. After all, she says, “gunk was what the amniotic, seminal, saline fluid was, when all was said and done, gunk was the constructive medium, in which we flopped, half in half out, like the seals or penguins or frogs that we were” (297). Tom is also hoping for a sexual encounter, or “a short hard struggle on the grass,” as he calls it (298). He, however, finds her story a put-off and perhaps even frightening, because he runs off, justifying his “not very SAS” behavior with a comment that he had a lot of work to do and she had “held him up” (297). Laurette sees him as a cowardly “little jerk,” and she sadly reflects that “Nobody, frog or penguin, economist or soldier boy, is ever going to produce the golden ball a Princess like me requires” (297).

With the three different versions of one event presented in rapid succession, Francis calls attention to the difficulty in trying to establish a definitive recreation of a past occurrence. Laurette interprets the event in terms of animal nature, since her interest lies in wildlife and ecology. Tom sees it in military terms. There are as many different
interpretations as there were participants, and the clairvoyant vision of David the “historian” appears to be the most distorted of all, emplotted as it is in the form of a romance/fairy tale. David’s vision of Tom has not led him any closer to Lorna after all, though he thinks for a while that it has. David is like many Britons who felt that the Falklands War had reunited them with each other and with their past glorious identity, and had in a sense redeemed them. David’s imagined redemption of Tom (and himself) is revealed through Tom’s and Laurette’s narratives to be nothing but an exchange of rape stories. The implication is that the people who felt redeemed by the Falklands War experience are equally deluded, and that the war itself was essentially a rape rather than a redemption. Even Tom and Laurette are disillusioned with their respective communions with the past on Farquhar Island, since all they get to do is tell stories. They are both unable to satisfy their desires for a physical exorcism of their emotional and sexual demons. Through his non-government characters, Francis emphasizes again and again that neither national nor personal renewal is possible, and that at the same time, a return to the past as we remember it is not possible either. The past’s nature is shown to be highly subjective, a product of interpretation and imagination. All attempts to return to the imaginary past in or near Farquhar Island result only in distortion, deterioration, and disappointment. In the guise of Farquhar Island, the Falklands gain their own counter-mythical significance as the place where the past works with destructive force upon the present, where hopes for a better future are destroyed.

Francis forms a definite link through the course of the novel between the war, the past, and primal sexual urges. This can be seen as yet another minor countermyth – one that shows war to originate in savage drives that can never lead its participants toward progress or renewal. Violent sexuality appears frequently, symbolized variously by a strange white triangular creature, and by explosions of various degrees. Early in the novel, Thomas Hartley describes the Fat Man that pursues him as a “sooterkin,” a mythical creature born of Dutch women who effectively have sex with the potbelly stoves they use to warm themselves. According to Hartley, the sooterkin is “neither man nor beast, but a little like a Rat” (31). The entire first part of the novel, which sets up the characters and describes the build-up toward war, is titled The Sooterkin, after this nasty monster born of misdirected sexuality. The epigraph under the title is a famous line from
Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, “Was this the face that launched / a thousand ships . . . ?” Faustus refers of course to Helen, a woman whose beauty incited men’s uncontrolled sexual desire, resulting in violence – and one of literature’s most famous wars. In Marlowe’s play, Helen’s conjured presence is also indicative of evil’s allure, and of the power that people’s animal passions can exert over them. The sexuality that motivates violence and war is not motivated by love, but rather by a desire to humiliate, to express dominance. It is not uncommon to hear soldiers speak of victory in terms of “screwing,” “fucking,” or otherwise sexually humiliating the enemy.

The sooterkin, in the guise of the Fat Man, is responsible for the Farquhar War in more senses than one. He is the impetus behind Hartley’s expedition to Farquhar Island in the 1700s, in which “any Spanish or French settlers were to be persuaded to leave” (30). That expedition was the beginning of the dispute which the Fat Man again takes up in 1982 when at Mrs. Cheeseman’s behest he convinces the Costanaguans to invade Farquhar Island. The Fat Man always wears white, and is shaped rather like a triangle, tapering toward the top. The sooterkin can also take other forms, but it generally appears in a white triangular shape like the Fat Man, or a rat. This white triangular form recurs frequently throughout the novel, and is always associated with sex and violence – the animalistic drives inside everyone that are also responsible for the Farquhar/Falklands War.

The first part of the novel also relates Tom’s basest moment when he rapes a young girl in a barn; he is surprised and repulsed mid-crime by the triangular face of a white rat – an animal reminiscent of the sooterkin – that observes his actions. Everywhere Tom goes he sees the white triangular shape, reminding him of his guilt. When the Fat Man appears on the scene, stealing Tom’s clients and threatening to expose the nature of his crooked “business,” his white tapering shape also reminds Tom of the rat. Tom plays with a stolen arcade game in which the player operates a little white triangle that shoots cockroaches. The arcade game is another manifestation of the human propensity for violence: the sooterkin is at work even in people’s favorite games. The sexual aspect of the game enters when Tom discovers that the white triangle can “mate” with a cockroach and create white rats – more sooterkins. The sooterkin images in the game remind Tom of all the people he has “screwed” in the past – literally and
figuratively – and make him feel ashamed. He imagines that the game’s electronic innards have been colonized by rats and abandons it in a dumpster.

Even David, the mild-mannered vicar, has run-ins with the sooterkin, implying that even seemingly benign manifestations of nostalgia have their sinister underside. His voyeuristic study of Thomas Hartley’s violent sexuality is immediately followed by a drunken hallucination of a terrifying white tapering form in his kitchen. On another night David sees the Fat Man, who is sitting in his study reading about Thomas in the village history. On his journey to Farquhar Island, David continues to catch glimpses of the Fat Man, as his journey into the past brings him into closer contact with some of its more unsavory denizens (210; 231). On Farquhar Island, David watches Costanaguan troops lay mines around a cairn that he imagines was built by Tom Hartley to signal British ships long ago: it is triangular and built of white stones. David ends up as a sort of sooterkin himself, when he goes out to his church on Farquhar Island in the night wearing his white surplice over fat layers of sweaters and parka. While there he meets a married female parishioner and indulges in adulterous kissing and groping, only to be surprised by Tom Rutherford, who sees David’s white triangular shape and flees in a panic. Tom rebuilds the old Tom’s cairn to mark a landing site for the attacking fleet, perfecting its triangular form and preparing the way for yet another brutal struggle for dominance. While at work he sees another white triangle: the face of the sheep he sexually violates and explodes with.

The exploding sheep culminates another series of repeating sexual-violent images: bursting animals. Laurette uses the repulsive image of an exploding frog to describe her first experience with sex. Nicola’s first sexual encounter also involves a forceful ejaculation, but she sees the boy’s penis as a fetus – her dead sister, savagely spewing out her own innards. Later, the first shots of the Farquhar land war interrupt Laurette’s wildlife study with the unexpected sight of an exploding penguin. Not realizing that it had been blown up by gunfire, Laurette at first thinks that the penguin exploded because it was “getting the hots,” rather like the frog in her story (295). Despite Laurette’s efforts to embrace sexuality as a constructive and positive part of herself, she still sees it as primarily violent and destructive, since her first experience with it was from the perspective of the dominated victim. Together, these explosion and sooterkin images
work to reinforce a myth not just of the Falklands War, but of war in general, as yet another degenerate manifestation of the past – this time of humanity in general. The ancient animal drives toward dominance and destruction of the “other” constitute a past that, like other pasts in the novel, returns again and again, deteriorating each time into something worse than it was before.

While *Swansong* works to deconstruct or at least call into question most official Falklands War myths, it transmits standard enemy myths, with some minor changes. In the novel’s world, Argentina is “Costanagua,” ostensibly a name blending Costa Rica and Nicaragua, which in and of itself testifies to an indiscriminate opinion of Latin American countries as being all the same. Using his front business (World Wide Waste) as a pretext, the Fat Man visits Costanagua’s military procurator start a war. First he proposes a scrap metal reclamation expedition to “South Hanover,” (i.e., South Georgia, where the antics of the historical scrapmen provoked a diplomatic crisis and ultimately led to the Argentine invasion of the islands) (241). Then, he reminds the procurator of Cheeseman’s recent decision to scrap the South Atlantic Survey vessel and to cut the Royal Navy’s budget by twenty-five percent. He suggests that these measures demonstrate a waning interest in Britain’s South Atlantic possessions, and hints at the possibility of reclaiming Farquhar Island with impunity during this opportune moment. This is a significant plot twist because it deprives the Costanaguans (Argentineans) even of the intelligence to have realized on their own what the British actions implied concerning the islands. Francis makes the idea a British one, cynical and sadistic, but at least clever. The Costanaguans are given no chance to be clever. They are merely pawns, led along to do in their ignorance precisely what Cheeseman wants them to do.

A condescending attitude toward Argentina is further demonstrated by the visual description of the plaza where the military government has its offices: the litter bins are overflowing, smelly, and fly-ridden; the buildings are “a fabric of fascist concrete and glass;” and a “slovenly glum guard” lounges outside the government house (237-38). The guard lazily refuses to admit the Fat Man to the building until he realizes that the Fat Man speaks Spanish. The procurator is also surprised that the Fat Man speaks Spanish, as though admitting that most international businessmen do not generally bother with such an obscure and unimportant tongue. The procurator is dressed in “the full military
regalia of a banana republic, his epaulettes, medals, gold braid, splodged about a tailcoat of the exact maroon worn by ushers in English cinemas” (239). This description points to a childish obsession with the visual trappings of military achievement, empty of real meaning or importance. Indeed, the Costanaguan uniform shows this country’s leadership to have about as much military prowess and international importance as a British cinema usher. This depiction of the sloppy and clownish enemy mirrors the mocking enemy image given in the British mythologizing texts, particularly Curteis’s *Falklands Play*.

This standard enemy myth is not complete, however, without its sinister side. Like his mythologizing counterparts, Francis makes Argentina’s military appear evil and dangerous, as though even his satirized version of the British military would be lowering itself to fight against anyone who was not deadly. He describes the military procurator’s face as revealing “a certain sensualism and grossness – not sexual exactly; possibly sadistic. The face of a man who had watched a large number of people disappear,” and who, implicitly, had enjoyed it (239). The enemy is not only a violator of human rights, he is sick enough to gain a sensual pleasure out of doing so. In contrast, the Fat Man has also watched people disappear, but without emotion. His stoicism in the face of atrocity apparently makes him feel superior to his interlocutor (239). Although Francis includes the evil and fascist aspects of the standard enemy myth, he refrains from directly equating the Argentinean Junta with Hitler, as the official myth did. Though Francis’s enemy is depraved and powerful enough to inflict suffering and death on his own people, and perhaps on the islanders as well, he does not appear to pose a world threat as does the Hitleresque enemy in the standard enemy myth. In fact, the Costanaguan military would not have even threatened the islanders if it had not been for Cheeseman and the Fat Man’s encouragement. It seems that Francis wishes to avoid making his enemy appear too dangerous or too Nazi-esque, lest the great power of the British dictator-slaying warrior identity override his own countermyths and weaken his attack on Thatcher’s policies. This may also be another reason why he avoids dealing with the Churchillian leader myth directly, because World War Two myths have such a powerful resonance with the British consciousness.
Francis uses interwoven narratives to show many different perspectives on some of the issues facing Great Britain in the early 1980s, including the Falklands War and Mrs. Thatcher’s economic policies. The different accounts show how much one person’s perception or interpretation can differ from another’s, depending upon circumstances and values. In this way he questions the authority of a Thatcher or of anyone else to decide the significance of an historical event and to impose that interpretation on others. The remarkable coincidences linking the different characters and events, both major and minor, are a humorous (and admittedly exaggerated) way of suggesting the complexities involved in governmental policies and their repercussions, and even the unimagined complexities and domino effects that seemingly personal decisions can have on others. Again, this complexity works indirectly to criticize the Cheeseman character, who tries to force several different perspectives into one pre-determined mold of her choosing, so as to maintain the illusion of simplicity and consistency. Francis dismantles the national renewal myth through Cheeseman’s and other characters’ futile attempts to make new starts for themselves or to redeem themselves from their past failures. Nostalgic myths of British identity being bound up in the past, as well as the national renewal myth, are questioned by the novel’s countermyth about the past’s relationship with the present: the past is shown to be simultaneously unavoidable and unattainable; it is impossible to recreate and yet it is impossible to ignore or escape. Cheeseman’s proposed renewal is exposed as an impossible attempt to return to the past, since the novel’s version of history is entropic whether one tries to move through it in a forward or backward direction. Though the British government may try to move “in the Right Direction,” it may as well be standing still, as do the soldiers in the Farquhar Island minefield. The countermyth of Farquhar Island as a destructive time warp is an extension and twisting of the Falklands identity myth and pastoral idyll myth. These myths posit the islands as a repository for Great Britain’s lost pastoral identity and lifestyle, which must be preserved. The identity myth also suggests that the quest to defend the islands would win back Britain’s lost confidence in itself as defender of the weak and slayer of dictators. In Francis’s countermyth, the islands are indeed a repository of Britain’s past, but not in the sense that the official myths suggest. Going to the islands brings about an almost magical recurrence of the past in a degraded form. This degraded past, together with the atavistic
urges toward sexual domination and aggressive violence that it awakens, converge over the islands to bring all who touch them disappointment at best, and annihilation at worst.

Looking at both travelogues, the picture book, and the satire, some common self-critical themes begin to emerge in British countermythologizing texts. Theroux and Raban both use a technique of questioning the accessibility of Britain’s national past and identity, since these are both so subjective, prone to interpretation and mythologizing. Although this device is absent from Briggs’s book, it appears in *Swansong* as well as in Argentinean countermythologizers. It questions any claim to absolute truth for any interpretation of history, and since the official myths claim natural and eternal truth status for themselves, they become suspect in the light of this technique. In addition, these texts point to some common motivating factors behind identity and Falklands War mythologizing: nostalgia, aggression, and negative sexuality. The British texts also share a consciousness of the literature-ization of Britain’s identity. As Monaghan has noted, Raban and Theroux frequently talk about the distortions that literature has made to the British landscape. It is nearly impossible to see it as it is without literary overtones: expectations created by reading Wordsworth or Orwell have forever altered how certain regions are viewed (Monaghan 124). Briggs, too, by choosing a myth/-fairy tale format for his book, acknowledges the emplotment of official myths as romance quests and fairy tales, and chooses to fight the myths on the same literary ground. Francis parodies the literary emplotment of identity myths with David’s romance-quest vision of Tom Hartley’s redemption, complete with archaic language; with Tom Rutherford’s anti-quest; and with Laurette’s overtly sexual retelling of the Frog Prince fairy tale. From examining these works, Britain emerges as a land that imagines itself in literary terms – but not just any kind of literature. The identity myths and the countermyths that oppose them are cast in terms of some of the oldest types of literature: the ancient myth, the medieval fairy tale, and the romance-quest. This choice coincides with the Conservative emphasis on Britain as an ancient land peopled by an ancient race, as well as with its urge toward preservationism – not of only old sites, but also of old ways and customs. Rather than come to terms with Britain’s present non-central and multicultural reality, they continue
to mythologize Britain’s present in terms of the oldest literary forms, to lend it the illusory image of the imagined past.

**Conclusions**

Although these Argentinean and British works are indeed vastly different, there are some common currents which emerge after some examination. These include perspectives on history, the suggested motives behind identity and war myths, and the use of old literary forms such as the fairy tale and the romance-quest to counter official myths. Most countermythologizers on both sides take a postmodern perspective in which history and memory are acknowledged as subjective and even fictionalized or invented interpretations of experience. They use this device to question nationalistic myths’ claims to Truth, and also to acknowledge the constructed and imaginary nature of their own countermyths. *Swansong* and *Las Islas* in particular show the same event through a variety of perspectives, emphasizing the vast difference between one person’s perception and another’s. This device adds ambiguity to the event in question but it also enriches its possible meanings, and it reveals something about the person retelling or remembering the event. They call attention to the difference in perspectives even among people who are supposedly on the same side of the conflict. By acknowledging that while each interpretation reveals a certain truth of its own, none has absolute claim on reality, these works open the way for beginning to understand and appreciate even the Enemy’s perspective.

Most of the works on both sides identify three basic unflattering urges behind many of the official myths. Nostalgia for an imagined past fuels identity myths, particularly those that identify the islands as a repository for the lost ancient national identity of both sides. Xenophobic aggression hides in both sides’ identity myths as well as their scapegoat myths. (Though only Gamerro deals with the scapegoat myth, no one else touches it). Nostalgia for a lost unity and greatness also lurks behind myths of each nation’s promised renewal, and achieving dominance over the enemy Other is perceived as the route to that renewal. The enemy is depicted as feminized or sexually aberrant, and the home nation’s masculine prowess promises to destroy him both sexually and
militarily. Pointing out these motivations not only questions how myths based on such urges can move their nations forward into renewal, but also emphasizes their status as constructions made with intent rather than natural truths.

Most of the countermythologizing works consciously use literary emploaments that imitate official myths. Fairy tales and romance-quest narratives figure prominently, particularly in the British works, as has been discussed earlier. These forms are also parodied in Gamerro, through the Romance-quest of Major X, and Gloria’s retelling of the Frog Prince fairy tale. It is noteworthy that both Las Islas and Swansong parody the same fairy tale in connection with the war and/or life in general. For both Laurette and Gloria, the new fairy tale is ostensibly about sexual violation, and symbolizes grand hopes that end in disillusionment. Fairy tales often have happy endings achieved by unlikely means, usually magic. The countermythologizers point out that the fairy tale official myths promise improbably happy endings, and use the same literary format to predict a different future: one of disappointment, where no one gives the Princess back her golden ball, and she ends up paired with a frog for the rest of her life.

Finally, the countermyths themselves tend to be about the future, which they predict to be much less bright than that foretold by national renewal myths. Demythologizers, on the other hand, tend to re-evaluate the past rather than predict the future. Even the victorious British have little to hope for in their future, according to Raban’s and Theroux’s bleak countermyths of a divided and stagnant country, prostituting its imaginary past to the tourist industry while making the rich richer and the poor poorer. Briggs’s countermyth also predicts a grim future for the helpless toy-figure people of Britain under the hands of their monstrous leader. Francis, too, gives an entropic vision of Britain’s future based on an eternal return to its degraded past. Argentinean countermyths, on the other hand, are surprisingly less bleak than those of the British, for while Gamerro predicts the eternal return of the same hellish story, he also provides an escape route for the individual, of creating space for whatever un-hellish things can be found, in spite of the danger that this entails.
Notes to Chapter Four

1 Though published in December 1983, the text is dated 11-17 June 1982. This date, however, may not be when Fogwill wrote the novel. It may actually be a fictional date and thus part of the text itself; that is, a date placed by the fictional transcriber of the narrative on his manuscript. The dates 11-17 June would have been too early for an actual soldier in the conflict to have been home, and perhaps this has led to the idea that the dates refer to Fogwill’s writing timeframe rather than to the fictional transcriber’s. For the sake of verisimilitude, Fogwill might have chosen different dates had he been writing after the war was over. In the articles I have read on this novel I have found no evidence to support either theory, though both Beatriz Sarlo and Martín Kohan seem to agree that Fogwill actually wrote the novel during the listed dates. One would have to ask Fogwill himself, though he might not be willing to give a straight answer. It is apparent that verisimilitude is not his main concern: other details in the novel beside the dates are contradictory to actual war conditions and make the story seem less “realistic,” though this effect is consistent with Fogwill’s destabilizing project. The incongruity of dates is just one odd detail among many in the novel, which work together to question the reliability of this, or any other account of past events.

2 Argentina’s first official claim to the Malvinas in 1820 and their subsequent colonization under Vernet in June of 1829 actually occurred before Rosas took power as governor of Buenos Aires, toward the end of 1829.

3 “En ese aspecto Bresley es un personaje muy argentino, porque yo no creo que haya kelpers así, pero sí creo que hay argentinos así.”

4 Farce is Kohan’s word choice to describe the literary works which present the war as absurd or as a joke. He also probably uses that term because many of these works rely on the typically farcical device of mistaken identity to make their points. According to The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1993), farce is a dramatic genre aimed at provoking laughter using such devices as physical and often sexual humor, mistaken identity, surprise, and exaggeration. The entry specifies also that farce does not make social commentary or elicit “reflective” laughter as does “higher comedy” (402). In this sense, the works Kohan discusses do not fit a strict definition of the literary term farce, since all of them do comment on the war and/or its attendant myths, in a way intended to provoke reflection. I prefer to speak of the works he discusses as ironic or satirical, rather than farcical.

5 Like many of the names in this novel, this one has meaningful connotations. Fausto is Spanish for Faust, or Dr. Faustus, a historic-literary character who sells his soul to the devil in order to satisfy his lusts for hidden knowledge, voluptuous indulgence, and power. Christopher Marlowe’s Play Dr. Faustus (c. 1592-93), is one of many literary and musical incarnations of this character. Swansong, the other primary text of this chapter, also cites Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus.

Tamerlán refers to Tamerlane, or Timur Lang (1336-1405), the Tartar conqueror of Medieval Asia. He amassed an empire covering parts of southern Russia, Mongolia, Persia, Mesopotamia, and parts of India. He is said to have been highly intelligent, ruthless, and bloodthirsty, slaughtering thousands of civilians, looting, and levelling cities. Interestingly enough, Marlowe also wrote a play about Tamerlane, called Tamburlaine the Great, sometime between 1587 and 1593.

6 Morsa means walrus. The frequency of meaningful names increases the allegorical and mythic effect of Gamerro’s tale, further implying that it is emblematic of Argentinean society as a whole, rather than just an isolated series of incidents. Other significant names include Major Cuervo’s – Cuervo means crow or raven, and Felipe’s commanding officer Verraco, which means boar. The protagonist’s last name is significant as well as ironic: Félix, meaning happy.

7 As absurd as it may sound, the staged kidnapping described by the nerd is not far from Dirty War reality. Frank Graziano writes that “Pseudoterrorist acts were staged by the military and then duly neutralized as
though they were real in order to perpetuate the illusion of revolutionary threat (and of competent action eliminating it) that generated whatever legitimacy the Junta could claim” (65).

8 Citatorio’s ideas, absurd as they sound, are only slightly exaggerated beyond real ideologies put forward by various nationalist thinkers and writers in Argentina, as David Rock demonstrates in his book *Authoritarian Argentina*, which traces a persistent current of anti-democratic, xenophobic, militarist, and chauvinist Argentine thought from the early 1900s to the military Junta that fell from power in the wake of the Malvinas War.

9 “¿Qué importaban los poderosos y sus miedos, el infinito afán de riquezas, la demencial incapacidad de aceptar las limitaciones de la vida y la omnipotencia de la muerte? He aquí alguien que ha encontrado la paz, pensó, la verdad de las cosas simples, pensó, su lugar en el mundo, pensó. No es necesario el dinero, pensó, no es necesaria la fuerza, sólo es necesario tener un rosal para cuidar.”

10 “Sin necesidad de detenerme a elucubrar las enseñanzas de la parábola, con un último esfuerzo alcancé la cima del barranco y me puse a caminar por Libertador buscando un teléfono.”

11 “Quien obtenga ese diario . . . conocerá el secreto de la guerra. Contiene la clave del futuro de las Islas, que es el futuro de la patria.”

12 “la mano de Dios que nos cubre los ojos para mejor guiaros.”

13 “Sólo renunciando a todo lo que sea nuestra inquebrantable fe pasaremos la prueba.”

14 Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) was a poet and early Nationalist thinker. He praised the gaucho as the representative of authentic Argentinean identity (Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina* 51). He considered democracy the equivalent of mob rule, and favored government by oligarchy or military autocracy (Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina* 50, 56). Like his contemporary Florentino Ameghino (1854-1911), Lugones was known for his endorsement of a racist version of Darwinism. Ameghino was a paleontologist and anthropologist. He wrote, among other books, *La antiguedad del hombre en el Plata* (published sometime between 1878 and 1884), in which he asserts that the human species originated on the shores of the River Plate. According to the National University of Quilmes’s Proyecto Ameghino website, this book was among the first in Argentina to openly support Darwin’s evolutionary theories, and played a role in developing local trends of social darwinist thought. Referring to Ameghino’s book, Tamerlán declares that Argentina is an imagined reality rather than a natural one:

> Do you realize the genius of this man? He wanted the human race to have its origin here, right here, . . . An audacious gesture, almost inconceivable: it could only have occurred to an Argentine. This man is the true father of the patria . . . Do you understand? Our true fatherland is the imagination. (Gamorro 492)

Ameghino’s fallacious theory of man’s origin contains its own truth: that the national identity, the genuine archetypal Argentine man, is an imaginary construct subject to manipulation, distortion, and reinvention. This is why Tamerlán can declare himself “the first Argentine,” even though he is German (492). By presenting himself as *Homo Argentinus*, Tamerlán reinforces Gamorro’s identity countermyth, which posits Nazi fascism as part of Argentine identity. At the same time, however, Tamerlán’s observations acknowledge that Gamorro’s countermyth has no more claim to natural and eternal truth than does Ameghino’s identity myth, or anyone else’s.

15 “. . . comprendiendo que la patria grande se vería siempre acosada por las corruptas corrientes de la historia y el mundo exterior, habían decidido fundar esta ciudadela inexpugnable en el corazón de las Islas, para mantener pura la esencia patria y desde allí manejar los destinos nacionales con su mano invisible.”

16 General José de San Martín (1778-1850) helped lead the independence movement in Buenos Aires and led local forces against Spanish troops to liberate much of the Southern Cone of South America, including Argentina, Chile, Perú, and Bolivia. It should also be noted that his military exploits occurred
roughly between 1813 and 1821, well before the alleged founding of the secret citadel, though its denizens claim to have guided him with their voices. This is only one flaw more that Gamerro knowingly adds to his absurd exaggeration of this identity myth. Juan Manuel de Rosas was dictator from 1829 to 1852. His rule became increasingly despotic and repressive as time passed. José Uriburu was a nationalist with fascist sympathies who helped overthrow democratic president Yrigoyen in 1930 (Rock 215-16). Pedro Aramburu was dictator from 1955 to 1958, during which time he tried unsuccessfully to destroy Peronism and all of its manifestations (Rock 334-36). Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974) and his wife Evita (1919-1952), though they were adored by the masses, are conspicuous in their absence from the Citadel’s list of “great Argentines.” Their absence goes to further reinforce Gamerro’s project of linking the identity myth with authoritarian and anti-populist currents in Argentina.

17 Diana Taylor deals with misogyny in militarist/nationalist mythmaking in her study Disappearing Acts. According to Taylor, “The struggle for national identity was waged between two kinds of men (conqueror/indígena; liberal/federalists; military/antimilitary), who fought to define and occupy the ‘masculine’ position while emasculating and feminizing the ‘other.’ Women have no space in this contest, except perhaps as the contested space itself.” (16). She discusses a liberal view, espoused by thinkers such as Sarmiento and Ezequiel Martinez Estrada, which condemns violent machismo as barbarism, but maintains patriarchal authority by “honor[ing] women (in their place)” (33). The militarist view, on the other hand, “sees male identity (if not biological existence) as produced through a hierarchical, quasi-generational, all-male system. The soldier-male trains and produces other soldiers. This version explicitly distances itself from the family in that it considers the soldier-male (and not the family) the nucleus of the state…. Thus male authenticity in both models rests on the careful positioning and control of women – whether under one’s boot or under one’s wing” (34). Her description of the militarist view of the role of women in the national identity is remarkably similar to Major X’s description of the nationalist utopia hidden on Gran Malvina. Tamerlán also endorses this view, as evidenced by his discourses on the evil of the female and how he tried to overcome its influence in producing his first son with horrific “medical” procedures on his wife (379-82).

18 The original words to the song are “no las hemos de olvidar” [we must must not forget them], referring to the Malvinas.

19 “¿A qué querés que huelan? Y después preguntan por qué queremos volver.”

20 “… no habían vuelto, el corazón y la pija enterrados miles de kilómetros en dirección al sur.”

21 “… esa tierra celosa y despiadada ya no compensaba el esfuerzo, nos íbamos dando cuenta de que estábamos entregándolas a cambio de un amor mayor.”

22 “… que era más serio de lo que pensábamos, más definitivo y final: que estábamos casados con ellas.”

23 chagásicos: There is no English term for this word, which refers to people suffering from Chagas’s disease, a deadly blood disease caused by bites from a parasitic beetle.

24 “Yo no volvería ni loco. Pero sueño con volver. … Dejamos un espacio preciso cuando nos fuimos, pero allá cambiamos de forma, y al volver ya no encajábamos, por más vueltas que nos dieran, en el rompecabezas; … algo nuestro valioso e indefinible quedó enterrado allá. En sueños, al menos, todos volvemos a buscarlo… . El infierno nos marcó de tal manera que creemos que volviendo lo haremos paraíso, … Estamos infectados, entendés, las llevamos en la sangre y nos morimos de a poco, como los chagásicos. ¿No las viste, que son iguales a pólipos? Cada año que pasa, se extienden un poco más, … No es verdad que hubo sobrevivientes. En el corazón de cada uno hay dos pedazos arrancados, y cada mordisco tiene la forma exacta de las Islas.”

25 “La Argentina es una pija parada lista para procrear, y las Malvinas son sus pelotas. ¿Cuando las recuperemos volverá la fertilidad a nuestras tierras, y seremos una gran nación como soñaron nuestros próceres! ¡Un país potente! Volverá a florecer el trigo, y el ganado surcará los océanos de hierba, y
correrán los trenes cargados del producto de la tierra por todos los rincones del país. . . . Una nueva Atenas, capital de la cultura y de las artes, levantará sus templos a orillas del Plata. . . . ¡Desde las Islas recuperadas, un sol patrio de grandeza inimaginable marcará el nacimiento del día en que la ex colonia se convierta en la Argentina potencia que todos anhelamos!"

26 “. . . remedar el mítico abrazo sosteniendo una [mano] en cada una de las suyas, las mangas del uniforme alargadas para que no se notara el fraude.”

27 This passage serves to reinforce Rosana Guber’s theory that in the popular imagination, the cause of Malvinas was linked with the desire to free the oppressed and vindicate outlawed popular movements, particularly Peronism (Guber 99, 103).

28 “Los hechos patrios ya existen todos, eternamente, en una Idealidad de la cual sólo gradualmente podemos desprenderlos y hacerlos reales, y a veces en una sucesión inadecuada”

29 “La patria existe a nivel simbólico. Básicamente, es una metáfora. Si uno trata de hacerla real toda (sic) de golpe, se le evaporará de las manos. Usted es uno de los diez mil que deberían saberlo mejor que nadie”

30 “En los días antes de la guerra todo era paz y amistad: la vida era a veces aburrida, pero sencilla. . . . nuestra comunidad estaba a salvo de la corrupción moral que aqueja al planeta. Ni homosexuales, ni drogadictos, no cimunistas . . . ni, como habrá comprobado durante su espero que grata estadía, razas coloniales. Algunos turistas ingleses llegaban de visita no a conocer el exotismo de los mares del sur, sino a recuperar el sabor y el olor de la Inglatera de sus abuelos, hoy irremediable [sic] perdida.”

31 This translation from the Italian is by William Weaver, in Calvino 165. The Spanish version quoted by Gamerro reads: “El infierno de los vivos no es algo que será; hay uno, es aquél que existe ya aquí, el infierno que habitamos todos los días, que formamos estando juntos. Dos maneras hay de no sufrirlo. La primera es fácil para muchos: aceptar el infierno y volverse parte de él hasta el punto de no verlo más. La segunda es peligrosa y exige atención y aprendizaje continuos: buscar y saber reconocer quién y qué, en medio del infierno, no es infierno, y hacerlo durar, y darle espacio.” The Spanish version omits the “if” [si] after the first semicolon.

32 “Todos estos años, estuvimos esperando para decírtelo. . . . Que no sientas culpa. . . . Vos hiciste lo que pudiste.”

33 “Estamos contentos que vos te hayas salvado. Con eso nos basta. No nos debés nada más.”

34 “Diez años había dormido bajo el abrigo incierto de la ciudad del dolor, y ahora despertaba desnudo bajo el brillo único de las estrellas. Era el fin de la comedia.”

35 Theroux considers himself “an alien” American in his book, and purposely takes that perspective for his study of contemporary Britain. I admit I am taking some license in including him as a British author, but I defend my decision on the grounds that he and his family have lived much of their lives in Britain, and that his book presents not only how he views the state of the United Kingdom in 1982, but also how the people he meets in his journey view it.

36 This passage is also interesting as a mirror image of the Argentine accusation against the British: in Argentine eyes, it is the British who have gotten “above themselves,” and it is the Argentineans who feel “beleaguered, neglected and misunderstood.” It is interesting to see that the same feelings reign on both sides of the Atlantic, with each party feeling itself the victim and wanting to fight back against the arrogant aggressor.
Although Monaghan’s book is entitled *Myth and Countermyth*, most of the texts he discusses are what I would call demythologizers. These travelogues are an exception, in that they present countermyths according to my definition of that term: as new myths that work to discredit one or more official myths.

This description of Galtieri bears a marked and non-coincidental resemblance to the description of the Argentine military procurator in Richard Francis’s novel *Swansong*. Raban mentions Francis by name in *Coasting*, not specifically in relation to *Swansong*, but merely as an author that he (Raban) enjoys reading (266). Raban takes Francis’s description as a standard mental image that a Briton might have of a South American military dictator for his analysis of the mythologized enemy image.

The text describes the “Wicked Foreign General” as “not real,” but rather made of tin pots (7). The Thatcher-monster is described as “not real either. She was made of Iron” (15).

This actually occurred in the postwar victory parade. Injured or disfigured soldiers were not allowed to participate, but were asked to either watch from a grandstand or to stay at home. Robert Lawrence recalls this experience with deep bitterness in his memoir *When the Fighting is Over*.

Francis undermines this accusation, however, in his attempt to also show her as lacking in taste and sensitivity by having her remove all the antiques and chandeliers in her Downing Street office because “she felt that they provided the wrong sort of atmosphere” and she wanted to show that that “in every sense of the phrase, she meant business” (99). Attachment to tradition and relics of the past are admissible, it seems, when it comes to tasteful decorating. These measures on Cheeseman’s part are also incongruous with the rest of her extremely conservative character.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY: AMBIGUOUS TEXTS

The day after Argentina’s recovery of the Malvinas, General Galtieri greeted cheering crowds from the balcony of the Casa Rosada, arms outstretched and giving a “thumbs-up” gesture, in a deliberate imitation of Perón’s traditional welcome to his followers gathered in the Plaza de Mayo. Despite the fact that the military regime and its predecessors had repudiated and even outlawed Peronism, Galtieri took advantage of the national euphoria as an opportunity to associate himself with the popular leader and imply a newly attained national solidarity under his own leadership. The Argentine daily Clarín features a photo of Galtieri in his Perón imitation on its front page on April 3. The next day, Clarín ran a cartoon about the event by one of Argentina’s best-known and respected cartoonists, Hermenegildo Sábat.

The cartoon at first seems to depict Galtieri arm-in-arm with Perón and the famous tango singer Carlos Gardel, both celebrated figures from Argentina’s mythologized past. On closer examination, however, one notices the backward hands, and realizes that Galtieri has appropriated Perón’s sleeve to make his own hand look like Perón’s. Sábat makes Galtieri’s attempt to usurp Perón’s place in the national imagination look hypocritical through the stolen sleeve. Perón, in turn, seems to have superimposed his own right hand over Gardel’s. While Galtieri tries to make himself popular by associating himself with Perón, Perón does the same thing by co-opting Gardel’s hand. Perón’s ill-fitting uniform and grotesquely distorted face seem to contribute to the critical effect.

Despite his popularity among the masses, Perón has been controversial in some social sectors; Gardel, on the other hand, had (and still has) devotees across the socioeconomic and political spectrum. Like the Malvinas prior to the war, Gardel is a mythologized element of national identity that functions as a unifier rather than a divider. In Tango and the Political Economy of Passion (1995), dance historian Marta Savigliano
writes that Gardel’s rise from the lower class to wealth, fame, and eventual acceptance among the elite classes mirrors the gradual rise of tango music and dance through a similar process (65-68). At the same time, however, Gardel’s poor origins were well-known and remained with him in a “stubborn double presence” that “was proof that social mobility was possible and that Argentina could actually develop” (68). In other words, Gardel became a unifying symbol that not only brought the classes together in appreciation of a national art form, but also suggested that Argentina as a nation could rise and prosper among other nations. Here is a different manifestation of the “Gran Argentina” myth, in which the tango and Gardel symbolize Argentina’s potential for progress and greatness. Seen in this light, Gardel becomes an especially valuable figure for Sábat’s cartoon general(s) to co-opt in their attempts to mythologize themselves as part of Argentina’s renewal and rise to international prominence.

Perón’s symbolic thievery of Gardel’s image adds a certain ambiguity to the cartoon. While Galtieri’s entire right shoulder and arm appear to be inside Perón’s left sleeve, Perón’s right arm is in full view, and the tip of his sleeve seems to merge with Gardel’s. Is Perón usurping Gardel’s image, or is the singer’s ghost willingly associating himself with that of the populist leader? There is no immediately obvious answer to this question. Nevertheless, I suggest that Perón’s possible hypocrisy in this cartoon should not necessarily mitigate the criticism of Galtieri’s pretense. For me, this cartoon demythologizes by exposing Galtieri’s attempt to write himself into the national regeneration myth of the Malvinas. Sábat’s Galtieri has taken two already mythologized figures and tried to apply their significations of charismatic leadership, unifying power, and potential for greatness toward his own personal ambitions. Whether Perón’s leadership and greatness are pretended or authentic, they are used intentionally by Galtieri. He attempts to empty Perón and Gardel of their meanings in order to make them signify his own imagined role in unifying Argentina behind the cause of the lost islands.

Two British writers, however, see only myth-perpetuation in Sábat’s cartoon. Kevin Foster describes it as a manifestation of the Argentine national regeneration myth. He writes that the cartoon accepts and applauds Galtieri’s gesture as symbolic of “the final attainment of that elusive unity between all classes of Argentine society” (122). He describes the cartoon as depicting “past and present, military and civilian, popular hero
and politician united in mutual celebration as the dream of national wholeness, territorial, political and spiritual unification, is finally realised” (123). Nick Caistor’s brief analysis of the cartoon in Framing the Falklands War gives a similar explication, characterizing the cartoon as “fervently patriotic” and as glorifying the retaking of the islands (52-3). Neither one of these critiques takes into account that the newspapers were censored, and that to make his point Sábat had to be subtle and even ambiguous so as not to invite unwelcome governmental scrutiny. Evidently the critical aspect of this cartoon escaped the Argentine censors, and the British critics as well. Sábat allows the cartoon’s meaning to escape his control to an extent – to maintain a certain amount of ambiguity or polysemy – so that different readers can produce different meanings from it according to their desires and preconceptions. The military regime’s censors wanted the newspapers to express patriotism and support for the government and the effort in the Malvinas. In their eyes, the cartoon must have done this, because it was allowed to go to press. The British writers find a similar meaning, but motivated by different desires on their part: they seem to share a condescending view of Argentina as a third-world country plagued by dictatorship, ignorance, and demagoguery. Their analyses of the cartoon, accordingly, assign Sábat the role of the passionate Argentine, blinded by the government’s cynical manipulation of his patriotic feelings. They glean this meaning from the cartoon because on some level they seek to validate their patronizing approach to Argentina’s cultural production. By allowing the cartoon’s meaning to “get away,” Sábat was able to communicate criticism and demythologizing to those who wished to see them, while protecting himself from those who wished to see only blind acceptance of governmental policy. In the process, however, he also permitted the British critics to continue in their superior attitudes toward his own and his countrymen’s understanding.

In order to communicate meaning, a text must be created and also interpreted. In a way, the reader can be seen to produce the text s/he reads: the reader is responsible for creating meaning out of the accumulation of signifiers on the page. In his essay S/Z (1970, translated to English in 1974), Roland Barthes criticizes the “literary institution” for separating the creator and the user of the text, for positing the reader as a mere consumer of the text, limited to either “accept[ing] or reject[ing]” it (4). Barthes offers an alternative to these limitations in his theory of “the writerly,” or “what can be written
In this theory the reader is “no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text”: s/he has access to “the pleasure of writing” (4) and “writes” or (rewrites) what s/he reads in a “lexeological act – even a lexeographical act, since I write my reading” (10). Most texts – “the enormous mass of our literature” – are what Barthes calls “readerly texts,” in that they are already written (4-5). They are not infinitely plural like the ideal writerly text that he posits, but they can be “polysemous,” offering a limited amount of plurality (6).

Some texts are more polysemous or ambiguous than others: there are those such as Sábat’s cartoon that allow different readers to find or produce completely antithetical meanings. Barthes explains it thus: “The more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it” (10). A certain amount of polysemy is inherent in the text, making it less written – less “readerly” and more “writerly” – more open for the reader to produce, or write, it. Even in a classic readerly text that is more completely “written,” polysemy enters through connotation, which Barthes defines as “a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of another text),” or “an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system” (6).

When a text is read, the limited plural system emanating from it is then intermeshed with another plural system of meanings and associations, that belonging to the reader her/ or himself: “This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite” (10). The reader’s work is to “shift” and “couple” the two systems “whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the ‘I’” (10-11).

The texts I discuss in this chapter are ones that have “gotten away” from simple classification or explication; they do not necessarily function within the framework of categories I have set up for sorting and interpreting Falklands/Malvinas War cultural response, nor are they limited to a single interpretation or meaning. This is partly because the text is inherently “less written”: it is ambiguous, contradictory, or self-deconstructing. It is also partly because different readers’ backgrounds, expectations, and desires – their personal “systems” of texts and associations – have affected their reading to the point where the meanings they find in the same text can be quite diverse. The “escapee” texts I discuss come from a variety of genres – Sábat’s cartoon, memoirs and/or testimonials, films, popular songs, and a novel. The two central texts I have
chosen to analyze are both first-hand accounts that were made into films: *Los chicos de la guerra* (1982), and *Tumbledown* (1988). Even though they are from opposite sides of the conflict, the protagonists of these two stories both deal with similar issues of battle trauma, shattered illusions, and societal ingratitude. Their stories have also gotten away from them, to provoke controversy and almost take on a life of their own in the public imagination. Most first-hand accounts tend toward ambiguity in dealing with nationalist myth, and these are no exception. Before examining these main texts in depth, I will briefly discuss some of the other works that have escaped categorization in terms of how they approach official war myths: a satirical novel by Osvaldo Soriano, an ambivalent protest album by Raúl Porchetto, and a war anniversary film by Stuart Urban. To introduce the central texts, I will place them within the wider context of memoirs and testimonials from both sides of the conflict.

**Examples of Escapee Texts**

*A sus plantas rendido un león*:

Osvaldo Soriano’s *A sus plantas rendido un león* [At her feet a defeated lion] (1986) is a baffling Argentine novel that escapes categorization. Martín Kohan lists this book as a deconstructor of nationalist myths, primarily because it presents the Malvinas conflict in a farcical or parodic light. I see it as primarily a myth-perpetuator, however. Kohan himself writes that many myth-promoting Argentine works take an anti-imperialist approach, since part of Argentina’s “great national story” involves its struggle against colonization – be it Spanish, British, or North American (Kohan et al. 83). Soriano’s novel protests imperialism in various forms, including the United States’ economic imperialism over much of the world, and the UK’s imperialism in Northern Ireland, the Falklands, and Africa. Even the novel’s title, taken from the Argentine national anthem, refers to Argentina’s triumph over imperialism. Though the anthem speaks of the Spanish imperial lion defeated in Argentina’s wars of independence, Soriano uses the patriotically charged line to refer to Argentina’s modern defeat of the British imperial lion in the Malvinas and in a fictional country in Africa. *A sus plantas rendido un león* is so fervently anti-imperialist, in fact, that it endorses terrorism as an
appropriate means of opposition – whether this endorsement is intended as serious or
tongue-in-cheek is difficult to tell. The novel’s terrorist subplot adds a sinister and
disturbing edge that actually undermines its anti-imperialist message, at least from the
perspective of a North-American in 2005. Certainly its effect on an Argentinean
audience in 1986 would have been much different.

In addition to re-affirming the myth of Argentina’s anti-imperialist mission,
Soriano’s novel promotes mythic interpretations of the Malvinas as a captive woman, and
as Argentina’s lost love. He creates an allegory of the Malvinas as the neglected wife of
a British ambassador. This lonely woman secretly loves the novel’s protagonist – a
bumbling but sweet-natured Argentine Consul who genuinely loves her in return. Her
sense of propriety prevents her from leaving her husband, however, so the poor Consul is
defeated in his attempts to legitimize their love.

Soriano also reinforces enemy myths: the British Ambassador is presented as
cold and unappreciative of either Argentina’s or his wife’s merits. He is arrogant and
over-reacts to any perceived slight with overweening belligerence: after news of the
recuperation of the Malvinas reaches him at his post in Africa, he sets up a 200-meter
“exclusion zone” around the British Embassy, instructing his guards to arrest the
Argentine Consul should he so much as approach the limits of the zone. Although
Argentina and its allegorical representatives appear disorganized and weak compared to
the powers that oppose them, they are dauntless and intrepid in their defiance of
overweening dominators. Here again we see echoes of nationalist myth, this time the
David and Goliath myth. This novel may reduce the Malvinas to the scale of a wacky
love affair in an obscure African country, but it manages to promote Argentinean myths
all the same. Meanwhile, its incongruous terrorist leanings erode away at what could
have been a more sympathetic treatment of Argentine anti-imperialist thought.

Reina Madre:

Raúl Porchetto’s album Reina Madre [Queen Mother] (1983) deals with Malvinas
myths in an ambivalent and even self-contradictory manner. Supposedly a protest album
against the violence of Argentina’s most recent military regime, including the Malvinas
War, Reina Madre nevertheless perpetuates enemy myths about the British, as well as
identity and just-cause myths of the Malvinas.³ Porchetto opens his album with “Ningún
rey” [No King], a song that presents one of the central contradictions of Argentine thought on the Malvinas War. The singer asks:

What country could banish
The love of its people
From their land?

[¿Qué país pudo desterrar
el amor de su gente
de su suelo?] (5-7)

He then calls for music and dancing, because “no king / could or can ever / destroy liberty” (16-18). The use of the word “king” could refer to the monarchy of the United Kingdom as being unable to kill Argentines’ love for their Malvinas or the “liberty” they still wish to bestow upon the captive islands. Primarily, however, these lines explain why an oppressed people, even those who had been “banished” or exiled in fear for their lives, could support the dictatorship in its retaking of the Malvinas. Many (mostly non-Argentineans) have questioned and criticized how, only days after a mass protest against the government had been quelled with repressive violence from the police, the Argentinean people could turn out in such overwhelming support for their government’s actions in the islands. Argentineans have justified this reaction by qualifying it as support for the cause of Malvinas, not for the government in general. Porchetto’s message in this song uses a similar explanation: not even a despotic regime could dampen the people’s love for the Malvinas or the joy of their return to Argentine rule. The entire album maintains an anti-Junta and anti-violence position, but attitudes toward the Cause of the Malvinas, and by extension, the Malvinas War, are ambivalent and fluctuate from song to song. Vestiges of nationalism, the just cause myth, and Porchetto’s ostensible anti-military, pacifist stance tend to undermine one another.

In a number of the songs on this album, Porchetto protests all violence and claims a pacifist collective identity for himself and other artists. For example, “Mientras el mundo” [Meanwhile the world] describes a nameless “he” who dreamily watches the sparrows and “knows only how to create, create” (5;14), while the rest of the world, intent on status and recognition, “speaks of war” (1-2; 7-8). Again, in “Bailarines de la vida” [Dancers of life], he divides people and events into two reductive camps: the
creative and the destructive. He alternates peaceful and hurtful images and finally lists himself among the creative when he wishes to abandon the worldly game, write songs and make love (9-10; 15-16). In this and other songs, he uses the metaphor of the tango to signify the insane and often self-destructive ways of the world, which he seeks to abandon (17-20). In “Desde que el mundo es mundo” [Since the world began], Porchetto includes international peacemakers and artists in his circle of chosen ones, such as Gandhi and Picasso (5; 11). In doing so he approaches the supra-national pacifism of Borges in his poem “Juan López y John Ward.” Porchetto is unable to maintain this cosmopolitan stance, however, because his nationalism creeps in to undermine it. This song’s opening lines divide the world into two types of people: the creators and the destroyers; the peace-lovers and the “foolish warriors” [necios guerrerros] (3-4).

Porchetto sings that he has no doubt what side he would choose, between

    Power, conquests, money,
    stolen territories
    and the poetry, science, music
    of the other side.
    [El poder, las conquistas, dinero,
    territorios robados
    y la poesía, la ciencia, la música
    del otro lado.] (7-10)

The mention of stolen territories places the British Government in the camp of the war-making “them” along with Hernán Cortés and Napoleon, whom Porchetto mentions by name (5; 11). He does not mention Argentina’s military government directly, but it, too, is implicated in the reference to “foolish warriors.” By placing both warring governments in the “them” camp with other international figures, Porchetto attempts to abandon the standard opposed pair of Argentine “us” and British “them,” and broaden his protest against the Malvinas War to a protest of violence in general. Nevertheless, the mention of the precious stolen territory has so much emotional baggage attached, that the Argentina-versus-Britain pair implicitly interferes with his alternative of peace-promoters versus warmongers. Though he attempts to claim an international pacifist identity as his own, Porchetto holds fast to his national identity as Argentine. He may even try to align
his national identity with the pacifist one, but because he clings to the idea of Britain as an enemy and a thief of national territory, he fails. The Junta itself failed in similar attempts to portray Argentina as a peaceful country and its invasion of the Malvinas as a peaceful recuperation of national territory.  

Three of the songs on the *Reina Madre* album criticize the military government and contribute to Porchetto’s anti-military message. “Por honor y gloria” [For honor and glory] calls the military leadership “cardboard gods” who “abuse [their] powers,” in a reference to the military’s self-appointed messianic role (1-2). The speaker then urges the “decent people” to take action and heal the “tired” nation (4-12). In a similar vein, “El poder del universo” [The power of the universe] encourages people to believe that they, the citizenry, hold the real power, in spite of all the horrible things that the military, referred to only as “They,” may do to coerce and intimidate:

They can prohibit for you a thousand songs  
measure the words you say  
but they can never even approach  
the Power that the Universe keeps within you.  
They can wound you  
shatter you  
dismiss you with a breath  
of life  
and even then the power will continue within you.  
[Pueden prohibirte mil canciones  
medirte las palabras por decir  
pero nunca podrán ni acercarse  
al Poder que el Universo guarda en vos.  
Ellos pueden lastimarte  
hacerte añicos  
despedirte con un soplo  
de la vida  
y aun así el poder seguirá en vos.] (14-22)
These two songs thoroughly reject the Junta and encourage the public to resist the repression for the good of the Nation. The song “Paremos la tristeza” [Let’s stop the sadness] mourns the suffering of the years under dictatorship as “such sad years / . . . such hard years” (1-2). Porchetto sings that it is time to end the suffering, not through violence but through peace, because the lesson of those years is to strive for “Love toward others / And not redemption through blows” (27-29). Here he condemns not only the messianic project of the Dirty War to “redeem” Argentina by cleansing it of the communist threat, but also the attempt to “redeem” the Malvinas and Argentina’s national identity and prestige with them. In this song he abandons the bit of Malvinas-inspired resentment and nationalism that has broken through his pacifist veneer in “Ningún rey” and “Desde que el mundo es mundo.” The “nonaggressive aggression” of Malvinas is rejected as the wrong way to solve national problems. This moment of clarity is lost again, however, in the album’s title track, which perpetuates enemy and just-cause myths.

In the song “Reina Madre,” the speaker is a British soldier who bids his mother a confident farewell on his way to war. In accordance with standard enemy myths, the soldier speaks disdainfully of Argentineans as “a few savages” who “dared to disturb / the imperial order, and will pay” (lines 4-5). He reassures his mother by explaining “They are from the southern hemisphere, / what can they do to us? / We are different, we are better” (9-11). The experience of fighting the flesh-and-blood Argentineans, however, wakes the soldier up from his self-righteous imaginings, and he realizes that they are the same as me
they love this place so far from my home
whose name I cannot even remember.
Why am I fighting?
Why am I killing?
[son igual a mí
aman este lugar tan lejos de casa
que ni el nombre me acuerdo.
¿Por qué estoy luchando?
¿Por qué estoy matando?] (13-17)
These few lines repeat familiar arguments of Argentina’s claim to the islands: geographical proximity should place them under Argentine jurisdiction, and the British were unappreciative and in some cases even unaware of the islands’ existence and needs. The Argentineans, on the other hand, love the islands with their whole souls, so why should the British fight for them? The British soldier has been kept ignorant of the islands and of Argentina’s legitimate claim. He has been taught to scorn the South Americans, but when he sees them face to face he discovers that they are not his inferiors at all. When he understands the truth, he loses his desire to fight, because he is not an inherently bad person, he has simply been misinformed and poorly educated. In this implied scenario lies embedded the myth of the Just Cause. Argentineans thought that their troops would fight better than the British because they truly believed in the righteousness of their cause, whereas the British were merely fighting for pay and had little or no interest in the islands themselves. Some insist that their willingness to fight for the cause makes them morally better than the British and has earned them greater respect in the world (Kon 166; Büsser 362). Even though this song was written after the defeat, it perpetuates the sentiment that the British, if they had been principled at all, should have felt shame once they realized that the Argentineans were as good as they were, and how deeply the Argentineans loved the Malvinas.

The British soldier in the song continues to reflect, even after the war is over, that those in power are hypocritically complacent about the victory in the South Atlantic. Their ignorance of reality is summed up in the figure of the Queen, who walks peacefully in her rose garden while her retainers and her Parliament run the country and ensure that she is not disturbed (18-22). The soldier muses that the Queen will soon watch a movie about the war by a famous director, and she will get emotional and applaud the happy ending (23-28). Perhaps for her it seems to be a happy ending, but only because she is unaware of really happened to the men who fought, as the soldier emphasizes when he struggles with guilt, because the Argentineans were just like him, they loved those islands, and “Why was I fighting? / Why was I killing?” (30-34).

By placing the war protest and the justification of Argentina’s cause in the mouth of a disillusioned British soldier, Porchetto tries to have his cake and eat it too. He attempts to protest the violence and defend Argentina’s position at the same time, by
casting blame on the British Government. In the process he undermines his own effort, however, as the song ends up sounding like a wish-fulfilling self-congratulation for Argentina’s military actions: those arrogant British have learned that they were not superior after all, and they must regret attacking us, now that they know our cause was just and deeply felt. This song, like “Ningún rey” and “Desde que el mundo es mundo,” suffers from internal contradictions as well as discord with the rest of the songs on the album. In all cases, strong feelings of nationalism and resentment provoked by the Malvinas War have undermined this artist’s otherwise pacifist message.

**An Ungentlemanly Act**

*An Ungentlemanly Act* is a British film dramatization of the Argentine invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas, from the point of view of those islanders most involved in the resistance effort. It aired on BBC2 in June 1992, in observance of the war’s ten-year anniversary. Most of the film concentrates on the few days leading up to the Argentineans’ arrival, and the experiences of the invasion itself. It glosses over the British counterinvasion, the ensuing war, the return of the Governor and re-raising of the British flag in a brief closing sequence. The effect is to emphasize the peaceful and pastoral lifestyle of the islanders, and its subsequent destruction by the Argentinean takeover. David Monaghan describes this film as “the most significant” of the 1992 television retrospectives on the Falklands/Malvinas War. He also suggests that writer and director Stuart Urban has made political statements in his film by endorsing some official myths “while simultaneously deconstructing” them (176). He adds that Urban “vigorously denies” any political agenda or self-conscious intertextuality in his film, citing his scrupulous adherence to documented facts and first-hand accounts as the sources for his screenplay. Indeed, the film opens with a printed statement that its dramatization strictly follows documented fact and first-hand accounts. It shares this attribute with many of the texts in this chapter: despite the authority of “truth” claimed by testimonials and testimonial-based texts, these seem to also be the most vulnerable to ambiguities and multiple interpretations. This film is one that “got away” from its writer and director (Urban) in a different sense than Sábat’s intentionally ambiguous cartoon. Monaghan’s characterization of this film as an unintentional demythologizer already makes it fit into this chapter as a text whose meaning is left partially unwritten for the
viewer to complete. Yet I suggest that its meaning is still more plural: even in the light of Monaghan’s intelligent analysis, I can still see this film as a myth-perpetuator.

The printed opener to the film states by way of background that in 1833, Britain “resurrected its claim” to the Falkland Islands and evicted the Argentinean settlers, thus beginning the 150-year long British presence in the islands. This reductive history of the islands, like most background histories for Falklands War texts, selects and slants the facts to more clearly favor the legitimacy of Britain’s claim, just as most Argentine texts select and slant historical facts to favor their own claim in their Malvinas texts. From its first moments, the film shows its adherence to official versions of the islands’ history and significance. The opening shots continue in this vein, showing endearing penguins, people digging peat, and a woman walking a sheep on a leash. We see a small memorial ceremony, and a lone golfer at the unassuming little Stanley Golf Club, all accompanied by an upbeat military-style march tune. These and later depictions of Falklands life provide a concretely detailed picture of the pastoral idyll myth: contented-looking people go about their duties in an unhurried way, Governor Hunt and his staff are shown to lead with devotion and kindness toward their people, the landscape is green, unspoiled, and pleasant, illuminated by uncharacteristically sunny skies. Monaghan acknowledges these idealized and gently humorous scenes of rural life, but writes that these actually serve to deconstruct Thatcher’s myths that try to simultaneously recover Britain’s past identity and transform Britain into a monetarist economic powerhouse:

Once a clear image is created, as in *An Ungentlemanly Act*, of the gentle, unselfish people, the relaxed, eccentric way of life and the unmechanized landscape that would be essential components of any realization of Thatcher’s nostalgic vision of nation, the idea that such a society could at the same time be thoroughly competitive, single-mindedly acquisitive and technologically productive becomes very hard to sustain. (184)

For me this film does not call attention to a conflict in Thatcher’s ideology as Monaghan suggests. This is largely because in my estimation, the pastoral idyll myth did not present the islands as a model for a revitalized Britain, but rather as a preserved slice of Britain’s past that Thatcher wanted to protect, precisely because the rest of Britain can never recover that way of life. This attitude toward the islands is similar to that which
prompted Thatcher’s Government to pass the National Heritage Act in 1980: by turning old mansion homes and other buildings into historical tourism sites, the Conservative party wished to associate itself with respect for and preservation of Britain’s national past (Wright 42).

From Thatcher’s Cheltenham speech, I gather that the aspect of the Falklands that she posits as a model for Britain to follow toward economic vigor and competetiveness is not the Kelpers’ pastoral way of life, but the efficiency and dedication of the Task Force and support industries in Britain, who gave their all to courageously rescue the islanders despite the risks and discomforts involved:

We have to see that the spirit of the South Atlantic – the real spirit of Britain – is kindled not only by war but can now be fired by peace. . . . Just look at the Task Force as an object lesson. Every man had his own task to do and did it superbly. Officers and men, senior NCO and newest recruit – every one realized that his contribution was essential for the success of the whole. . . . Look at what British Aerospace workers did when their Nimrod aeroplane needed major modifications. . . . They managed those complicated changes from drawing board to airworthy planes in sixteen days – one year faster than would normally have been the case. . . . That record performance was attained not only by superb teamwork, but by brilliant leadership in our factories at home which mirrored our forces overseas. . . . If the lessons of the South Atlantic are to be learned, then they have to be learned by us all. . . . Success depends upon all of us – different in qualities, but equally valuable. (Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham Race Course, July 3, 1982. Reprinted in Barnett 150-51)

The identities that Thatcher proposes for the modern Britain are that of the dictator-slayer and the defender of the Rule of Law, and also of a nation working together for the common goal of national prosperity and international prestige, even though the road may be difficult. The model for Britain’s economic renewal is supplied by the selfless teamwork of the Armed Forces, the aerospace and shipbuilding industries, to accomplish a daunting task efficiently and successfully. The islanders in Thatcher’s mythology fulfil
the role of victims to be rescued by the chivalric actions of the Task Force. The islands themselves represent a heritage site, a holy ground to be saved by the crusading military, a time capsule in which to preserve Britain’s lost pastoral identity, an object for nostalgic reflection and warm fuzzy feelings. So in my view, *An Ungentlemanly Act* coincides very nicely with Thatcher’s mythologizing project.

The most obvious conflict with official myths that Urban presents in his film is the suggestion that the British counterinvasion worked to further destroy rather than preserve the pastoral simplicity of Falklands life. The sequence depicting the fight to regain British control of the islands is a combination of staged and actual news footage. Monaghan writes that its presentation in “eerie” black and white, its dark images reminiscent of those used to depict invading Argentine forces, and the “howling wind” sound effect, are intended to make a negative comment about the further destruction brought on by the British war machine (192). He also suggests that the “short shrift” in terms of time allotted to the sequence “calls into question any preconceptions viewers might have about the heroic role of the task force as retrievers of history” (192). Although this interpretation seems reasonable and logical, I did not have similar impressions while viewing this part of the film. Rather, the segment reminded me of the similarly brief segment used in Curteis’s *Falklands Play* to gloss over the Task Force’s effort, downplay the horrors of war, and highlight Margaret Thatcher’s individual heroism. In the case of Urban’s film, I guessed that the sequence was kept short so as not to detract from the emphasis on the Argentinean invasion’s destructiveness and absurdity, and on the gallant but ineffective efforts of the islanders and Royal Marines to defend Government House. Certainly the dark images and howling wind effect create a negative impression of the counterinvasion, but I attributed that to a realistic assessment of any armed violence as a horrible (if perhaps at times necessary) thing.

The British attack did indeed cause further damage to the environment and the islanders’ lifestyle. However, it was a sacrifice that most islanders were willing to make, as is evident from the interactions between islanders and British soldiers described in most first-hand accounts of the war. The negative effects of the war are also undeniably evident in Urban’s film. At the same time, the film makes apparent that the islanders’ way of life would have been even more thoroughly obliterated by continued Argentinean
administration, as martial law, curfews, driving on the right, mandatory Spanish instruction, and other non-British customs and norms would have been enforced and maintained. The Argentinean airline representative drunkenly remarks that it will not hurt the islanders to learn a little Spanish. Following the surrender, Governor Hunt discovers that the invading soldiers have stolen his medals, and an Argentinean officer insults Governor Hunt’s military uniform, saying it looks like he found it at the circus. Hunt severely tells the officer, “You’ll never persuade these people to follow you,” to which the Argentinean responds, “When you have someone by the balls, their hearts and minds soon follow.” The final scene before the war-footage montage reiterates that the damage to Falklands life at the hands of the invaders has only just begun: The tearful islanders sing “Auld Lang Syne,” in contrast to the jeering Argentines, who bid farewell to the Governor and his family with shouts of “Adiós, puta” [Goodbye, whore], as they are driven away on the right-hand side of the road. After this, the brief war sequence that immediately follows seems a painful, but mercifully brief, interlude before the Union Jack is once again raised at Government House and Governor Hunt returns. The image of the Falklands Governor’s Flag, with its ram on a badge at the center of the Union Jack, triumphantly fills the screen as the credits roll.

Some of Monaghan’s other points include the idea that the film highlights the smallness and fragility of the Falklands, their government, and their society. He suggests that this frailty symbolizes Britain’s “imperial decline” (185): the islands’ defense is handled in an “amateurish spirit” (188), Hunt’s old fashioned concern for propriety and saving face are irrelevant and counterproductive in modern warfare (189), and the islanders suffer from a “debilitating naiveté” (190). All of these critiques are backed up with ample evidence in the film itself. Monaghan suggests that these dying imperial values and the pastoral society they try to preserve are untenable anachronisms in the modern world (184). Again, the Falklands society does not make an adequate model for contemporary British aspirations, but I do not think that Thatcher ever suggested that they did. I agree with Monaghan’s assessment that the film makes the islanders and their contingent of Marines look woefully unprepared for the invasion, and less than professional in their attempt to defend Government house. However, it also makes the fall of the colonial Government and way of life look like a tragic loss for the islanders. It
makes the massive Argentinean invasion look absurdly out of proportion, in its heavy-handed bullying of this peaceful people who are unprepared to counter a violent takeover. Argentineans wished to see themselves as liberating the islanders from an oppressive colonial situation, bringing them the rights of full citizenship that Britain had long denied them. This film rejects that idea entirely by showing Falklanders as content with their lot in the colonial system, and by showing the Argentine “liberation” to be a destruction. It arouses anger and indignation at the Argentineans, summed up in the title that describes the invasion as “an ungentlemanly act.” The depiction of the islanders as “damsel-in-distress” figures, together with the humiliation inflicted upon Hunt and the Royal Marines, justify the British counterinvasion, even if this does wreak further destruction upon the pastoral landscape and way of life. The pastoral may be irreparably damaged, but least the the islanders will not remain under the control of the alien and undecorous Argentinean soldiers. At the same time, Britain can save face and re-assert military superiority over the forces that had dared to give their Marines’ professional image a black eye. In conclusion, Monaghan contrasts the practical and humanitarian views of Mavis Hunt in the film, with the hawkish ones of Margaret Thatcher. He writes that Urban and Mavis would probably agree that the “ungentlemanly act” of the title must refer to all war, not just the Argentinean invasion (194). This may indeed be true, but other aspects of the film work to impress upon the viewer that the British role in the Falklands War was a necessary evil to combat the greater, Argentinean, evil that had already been allowed to occur.

**Memoirs and other First-hand Accounts**

The central texts of this chapter are first-hand accounts that were made into films. Memoirs and other eye-witness accounts make up a large percentage of the total number of works that deal with the Falklands/Malvinas War. They are also among the most ambiguous works in terms of how they deal with Falklands/Malvinas myth. Very few memoirs are heavily mythologized, and those that are were written by high-level commanders in the Argentine Armed Forces, like Colonel Mohammed Alí Seineldín’s *Malvinas, un Sentimiento* [Malvinas, a sentiment] (1999), and Captain Hector E. Bonzo’s
1093 tripulantes del crucero ARA General Belgrano. Testimonio y homenaje de su comandante [1093 crewmembers of the cruiser ARA General Belgrano. Testimony and homage of their commander] (1992). Even these, however, have their self-deconstructing moments. Not all high-ranking officials are such avid myth-perpetuators. Lieutenant Colonel Italo Piaggi is less enthusiastic and more self-deconstructing in his mythologizing, as he rages against the incompetence, hypocrisy, and disloyalty of his immediate superiors and the Armed Forces High Command throughout his memoir, Ganso Verde (Goose Green) (1986), and his statements in Speranza and Cittadini’s collection of testimonials, Partes de Guerra [War reports] (1997).

Argentine military leaders are steeped in messianic military mythology from their entry into the armed forces, and even before that, since the military has long played such a prominent role in Argentine society and government. This mythology is central not only in their personal and organizational self images, but also in their efforts to legitimize and maintain their power and control. It is therefore not at all surprising that they should mythologize their war experiences so heavily. Piaggi is the exception because his superiors used him as a scapegoat, pinning blame for the loss of Goose Green entirely on him, and stripping him of his rank. It was therefore in his interest to question some myths by placing the guilt back on the shoulders of his superiors.

Memoirs and testimonials from lower-ranking Argentineans and conscripts tend to be less mythologizing and more ambiguous than those of their superiors. Daniel Terzano’s 5,000 adioses a Puerto Argentino [5,000 goodbyes to Puerto Argentino] (1985) seems to intentionally avoid dealing with official myths at all, and José Manzilla’s Malvinas: hambre y coraje [Malvinas: hunger and courage] (1987) supports some while indirectly questioning others. Edgardo Esteban’s memoir Malvinas: diario del regreso [Malvinas: diary of the return] (1999) is largely demythologizing, though it also contains some contradictions and ambiguities. Daniel Kon’s collection of interviews, Los chicos de la guerra, is similar to these memoirs in its ambivalent and at times contradictory treatment of certain myths. I will demonstrate, however, that it leans more strongly toward demythologizing than myth promoting. The film version (1983) is more firmly demythologizing, having reduced some of the ambiguity. Conscripts were used and victimized by military mythology, facing the brunt of British wrath in the islands while
the Junta took the glory. When the war was over, they were largely neglected, denied jobs, and deprived of proper medical and psychological care (Guber 120-25; Gociol, et. al. 27, 34-41). The Armed Forces even put out a short news item urging ex-combatants not to talk about any negative experiences they may have had (Gociol, et. al. 28). It was in conscripts’ interest to break down the military myth, to show how they were used and abused, in order to gain the public support they needed. At the same time, pride makes them want to be part of a heroic mythology; to feel that they did not fight for nothing. From these conflicting desires comes the ambivalence that characterizes their treatment of the war, both in writing and in their social and political activities.17

British memoirs do not follow the general pattern of their Argentine counterparts in terms of higher ranks supporting the official myths while lower ranks question them. These texts tend to be sparse in their treatment of official myths across the spectrum of rank. General Julian Thompson’s No Picnic (1985) is a good example of this tendency to write with a matter-of-fact, “we’re just doing our job” approach. The British military, particularly the Navy, has been a source of pride for Britain, but it has not played the prominent social and political role that the Argentine military has in its nation. In the UK, the military’s role is to serve its political leaders, not to be the leader itself. In the face of threatened budget cuts, the British armed forces did have an agenda during the Falklands War: to show how useful and efficient they were in the service of the government’s objectives. This may be why they leave the mythologizing about national renewal, identity, and crushing evil dictators to the politicians. Their mythic strategy may indeed be the seeming absence of mythology: “we’re just doing our job” seems to be one of the central British military myths.

Some lower-ranking British memoirists seem to mythologize more than their superiors: Lance Corporal Vincent Bramley’s Excursion to Hell (1991) describes the moment in which he becomes convinced of the righteousness of the British cause: an islander woman (damsel in distress) welcomes him into her kitchen with tea and expressions of thanks for undertaking the islanders’ rescue (58). Nevertheless, even Bramley’s forays into standard mythologized issues are few, brief, and ambiguous – even before he had become convinced of his side’s just cause, he was looking forward to the manly test of combat, ready to give it his all (10). This may be because in the lower
ranks, the emphasis is not on getting recognition and support from the government or vice-versa, but on proving one’s manhood, and loyalty to one’s mates. The chivalric rescue myth resonates somewhat with this agenda, and so it finds its way, albeit briefly, into Bramley’s and other soldiers’ writings. Consistent with his military values, Bramley is primarily concerned with taking care of his buddies and living up to his unit’s high standards of strength and professionalism (53). He is also concerned with the moral and psychological effects of combat horror on himself and other soldiers in his unit. These are issues which come up in Robert Lawrence’s memoir and the film about his experience, *Tumbledown*. Lawrence’s approach to myths, both governmental and military, is contradictory and ultimately harmful to himself. While Bramley recognizes the difficulties that military ideology can cause for a soldier, Lawrence does not. Like *Tumbledown*, the Argentine book and film *Los chicos de la guerra* deal with damaged heroes trying to find their place within a national and military mythology that they simultaneously deconstruct. These two contradictory and thus incompatible activities result in an ambiguous text and to controversy in the viewing public’s reaction.

### Argentina’s Prime Escapee Texts: *Los chicos de la guerra* on Page and Screen

Journalist Daniel Kon conducted interviews of eight conscripts just days after their return home from the war and published them in a book, *Los chicos de la guerra*, later that same year (1982). His book sold over forty thousand copies in the first six months after its publication, showing that Argentineans were very interested in the soldiers’ thoughts on what happened to them during the war (David Foster 43-44). One year later, the book was made into a film that received positive reviews and enjoyed moderate success. Because Kon’s work features the voices of several different soldiers, there are a number of contradicting views expressed toward different myths. At times, a given speaker contradicts himself in terms of his support or rejection of certain national myths. Some of Kon’s interviewees also give an alternative self-image/military myth that posits not only the military, but also Argentinean society in general, as disorganized and
lacking self-discipline. Finally, both book and film promote a countermyth of the Argentine soldiers fighting a two-fronted war, one against the British and the other against their own officers. This countermyth is one of the more compelling and oft-repeated countermyths against the Argentine military and national renewal myths, and it may well have gained its initial currency through *Los chicos de la guerra*. Because of the multitude of views expressed and the resulting ambiguity in terms of war myths, this book has been variously interpreted by different writers.

In his book *Violence in Argentine Literature* (1995), David Foster writes that even though Kon’s book relates personal stories from necessarily limited points of view, its meaning for the Argentinean public goes beyond the personal or anecdotal (45). The book’s popularity, the currency of the phrase “Los chicos de la guerra” to refer to the war’s veterans, and the prevalence of the two-fronted war myth in other texts, all tend to corroborate his assessment. For Foster, *Los chicos de la guerra* is a contestatory response not only to the Malvinas War, but also to the Dirty War: when it is read in the light of Argentina’s recent history under military rule, it becomes “less a litany of grievances about the ill-prepared Argentine war effort than a series of very telling allusions to the cynicism of a military apparatus that made the entire country an instrument of its ambitions” (46). The testimonies of these young men indicate the military’s deceit, incompetence, and disregard for the dignity and lives of its military servicemen during the Malvinas War. These accusations, in turn, cast doubt on the glory the military claimed for having won the Dirty War, and they also supported allegations of human rights violations during the *Proceso*. Kon’s book contributed to the already snowballing evidence that Argentina’s military was not the righteous guardian of national dignity and greatness that it claimed to be; rather that it willfully used and abused its own citizenry as pawns in a risky bid for power and international prestige. In sum, Foster sees Kon’s effort as a demythologizer, primarily of military myths.

Martín Kohan and colleagues, however, write that the book fails to demythologize effectively, because despite its recriminations against military mismanagement, it still subscribes to “The Great National Story,” as they call nationalistic identity myths, as well as to the idea of the Malvinas recuperation as a “Just Cause” (Kohan, Blanco, and Imperatore 83). In this sense, *Los chicos de la guerra*, like other texts that “lament” the
Malvinas War, “participate[s] in the same logic” as triumphalist literary responses. Even though “lamenting” texts have changed the protagonists from victors into suffering martyrs, they still present them as heroes, in an “epic” style (Kohan 6,7). According to Kohan, these texts’ bitterest complaints about lack of preparation or abusive officers end up supporting the patriotic vision of the Malvinas gesta [heroic exploit] (7). He writes that nearly all Malvinas veterans agree that the war was justified and would willingly return to fight again, provided they had better training, equipment, and leadership (7).18 Even if this statement is accurate, their desire to return is qualified by the need for better leadership, showing that the military’s myths if their own heroism and messianic role have been sufficiently dismantled for the war’s veterans. While I can agree with Kohan’s argument that irreverent or mocking texts can be more effective demythologizers than testimonial works, I feel he dismisses the testimonials too quickly and completely. His argument places the various nationalistic myths under one heading: that of the “Great National Story.” For Kohan and colleagues, this overarching megamyth defines who is us and who is other, what Argentinean values and traditions are, and what the nation’s destiny is or should be (83). That “Story” is more complex than he allows, however, and texts like Los chicos de la guerra do question some aspects of it, even while perpetuating others. I will examine the myths that Kon’s conscripts address, and show how some voices affirm them while others attack them. This ambiguity and contradiction allow the reader to draw different conclusions from the material according to his or her own agenda.

Two voices in Los chicos de la guerra speak in favor of the national renewal myth, though it is more in terms of wishful thinking than an affirmation. Guillermo and Carlos both feel that the nation became united in the Malvinas cause during the war. While they acknowledge that the defeat damaged this unity and spirit, both hope that the experience will help Argentineans to unite again and improve their country (44; 159). Other interviewees find that the alleged unity caused by the war effort was not as real as they had hoped it would be, even before the defeat. Fabián sees “very little” evidence of a national change after the war (215). Ariel, a soldier who had to return home early because of a crippling case of rheumatoid arthritis, is particularly disillusioned by what he saw in Buenos Aires during the war. Though the medical care he received was
adequate, he feels that people were helping him only out of obligation, and that their hearts were elsewhere (56). He was saddened to see egotism, people picking fights or complaining for no good reason, or being rude to one another. He was especially insulted when a woman shoved him aside to get past him in a line for X-rays. He had hoped that people would be less selfish and more kind to one another, in honor of those who were fighting for their country (56-57). So while some soldiers maintain a hopeful faith in the possibility of a national renewal even without the Malvinas, others feel that the touted unity and national change of heart never really happened at all.

In Kon’s book there is only one voice that affirms the “Just Cause” of Malvinas without any caveats. Carlos contends that the war should have been fought sooner, that Britain was in the wrong, and that the only solution was to retake the islands by force (157). He insists that the invasion and war were just, because the Argentine Episcopate supported them. He affirms that they would never have condoned the war had it not been just (157). Carlos believes in the Great National Story, in the unity of the Argentine “Us” and its righteousness. Of course it is easier for him to maintain these beliefs because he was stationed in Puerto Argentino, where he had better shelter and food, where he did not face death or see friends killed. His naivete and unquestioning faith in Church leadership actually work to cast doubt on his affirmation of the Just Cause. Other voices in Kon’s book are not so enthusiastic about the Cause and the “Us,” but they still think them justifiable. They suggest that even though Argentina was justified in its claim and even in its invasion of the islands, it might have been preferable to negotiate rather than fight (129; 151). Others think the violence was absolutely unnecessary, and express anger toward those who were so willing to go to battle (18; 65; 176). Nevertheless, one of these contradicts himself by saying that he was and still is proud of defending his country (59), and that he would be willing to go back and fight again, with better leadership and equipment (65-66).

Regardless of whether they would return to fight or not, none of the conscripts questions the justice of the Cause itself, only the methods used in achieving it. And though none of them questions the validity of an Argentine “Us,” Ariel does reject the idea that violent repudiation of an Other is a valid way to establish or strengthen that identity:
Look, they have called me veteran, hero, and that bothers me. I think that we build the nation by working, studying, having clean fun, being united to lift up this country, which is beautiful. It seems to me that we don’t need to kill Englishmen to build the nation. That is why this hero label bothers me so much; it is useless.\(^{20}\) (64)

Ariel’s phrase *hacer patria* [literally, make fatherland] could be loosely translated into building the nation. He is speaking not of physically building the country but of improving people’s circumstances and thus strengthening a sense of national identity and patriotism. He does not need sophisticated language to make his point clear: Argentines should not need war to define their identity or improve their nation. Soon after this comment Kon asks him if he discovered his real personal self in the extremities that the war placed him in, and again Ariel rejects such an idea as impossible: he says that he never felt like himself during the war, not even for a minute, and he never “found himself” by participating in the war (66). His sense of being alienated from himself during the war reiterates and corroborates his affirmation that identities, be they national or personal, need not and can not be formed through violence. This is a concept brought out by Beatriz Sarlo’s on-line article on Fogwill’s *Los Pichy-Cyegos*: that in a combat situation, survival instinct takes over and identity is the first thing to disappear, followed quickly by any interest in a “higher” cause like national pride or sovereignty rights (1-2). Indeed, some Argentine conscripts did not have a clear idea of their cause even before being faced with life-threatening circumstances: one soldier recounts speaking with some fellow conscripts who did not understand what the Malvinas meant for Argentina or why they should want to fight for them (Kon 19).

Responses to the identity and Just Cause myths are among the most ambiguous in Kon’s book: Ariel, who is more aware and articulate in his criticism of the identity and Just Cause myths than any other of Kon’s interlocutors, is ironically also the only one of them to say that he would willingly return to fight again (65-66). In spite of their refusal to see themselves as heroes, Kon’s chicos do appear somewhat like martyrs; innocent young men who were manipulated and subjected to horrible suffering for the sake of a cause that some of them naively believe in and that others do not understand. Speaking in terms of these specific myths only, Kohan is correct in saying that *Los chicos de la*
guerra fails to demythologize. However, these are not the only myths addressed by the book. As David Foster has pointed out, the positive image that the Argentine military had constructed for itself is eroded away by the evidence that Kon’s conscripts bring forward. Once the military leadership appears in all its unprincipled, power-grasping glory, the Just Cause looks more and more like an excuse or a front to cover the military’s deeper, selfish motivations.

Military Myths are the hardest hit in Kon’s book, as nearly all of the soldiers’ testimonies destroy any illusions of righteous purity, manly courage, or glorious leadership on the part of their officers and noncommissioned leaders. Even Carlos, the fervently religious and patriotic boy who served the entire war in relative comfort at Puerto Argentino, admits he saw selfishness and cowardice in some people, though he insists that these were not all officers. He adds that most soldiers and officers were brave and good (160). Other soldiers in the book are more critical, and even when they are not complaining specifically about the leadership, the circumstances that they describe are by themselves testimony to military incompetence, disorganization, and disregard for the morale and well-being of the troops. All but Carlos speak of desperate hunger and cold, as the leadership failed to distribute adequate food and clothing. None of them were shown maps, told where they were located, or when to expect an attack. Some were not trained on how to use or clean their guns (88; 181). The combined descriptions of several conscripts give the impression that the conscripts were the most willing to fight, the noncommissioned officers were less hardy, and the officers were the most cowardly and pathetic of them all, in spite of the greater comforts and privileges that they were given (68; 116). Officers were the first to flee the battlefield and the only group to hang back when asked for volunteers to counterattack (147; 149). Fabián concludes that the military has proven it is incapable of governing a country, and now it has shown it cannot properly fight a war, either (215). He and other soldiers suggest that the military leaders need to dedicate themselves to their own business and improve their performance. They imply but do not say outright that the military should not interfere with government anymore (48; 215).

Kon’s text also puts forward two countermyths that both work to undermine military myths: one, that Argentines are culturally incapable of organization and
equitable leadership, and two, that the conscripts were fighting against their own officers in addition to the British. The “disorganized Argentina” myth suggests that poor planning, inequity, and unearned privilege are part of Argentina’s military and even civilian culture. Fabián and Guillermo both speak of the chaotic and haphazard methods of their leadership, and both consider it a sort of cultural illness inherent in Argentineans in general. Fabián calls the undelivered food and supplies an example of “organization a la Argentina,” and says that their only access to food was through his trenchmate’s lucky acquaintance with a warehouse guard in Puerto Argentino. This need for patronage and connections in order to get anywhere he characterizes as “very ‘a la Argentina’ as well” (194-95). He compares the impartiality and organization of the British in distributing food to prisoners with the chaos that erupted when the prisoners were allowed to distribute the food amongst themselves. When the Argentines were in charge, a near riot ensued and some did not get any food at all, whereas when the British distributed rations, everyone got equal portions of the same food, including the British themselves (195). Fabián suggests that the Argentinean military’s lack of order and fairness comes from an underlying selfishness and greed in the Argentine soul: “It seems to me that Argentines are almost always looking for a way to get ahead, to gain some personal advantage from every situation” (195).22 Guillermo also compares his experiences under his own superiors to those he had as a prisoner. He and Fabián are both impressed by the organization and the mutual respect among British officers and soldiers, the lack of yelling and threats, the smooth manner in which the prisoners are provided with food, sleeping, and bathroom facilities (49; 195). On seeing Guillermo he asks himself: “What is it that we Argentines are lacking? What is going on with us?” (49).23 This countermyth makes the dream of La Gran Argentina look out of reach: it suggests not only a dysfunctional military, but also a sick society plagued by egotism and corruption. It is a less exaggerated version of Las Islas’s countermyth of Argentine society being made up of oppressors, opportunists, and parasites.

The “two-fronted war myth” is related to the “disorderly Argentines myth,” and may well have originated with Kon’s book, since this was published so soon after the war ended. The image of Argentine officers abusing conscripts seems to have struck a resonant chord with Argentinean audiences, because this myth is repeated frequently in
fiction and nonfiction commentary alike. One of Kon’s interlocutors, Santiago, describes a sergeant who hoards the rations of all his men, eating them at his leisure while the conscripts starve. He eats the meat out of each ration box, and leaves the crackers for the mice rather than give them to the men (92-93). He taunts his men by hanging fresh meat outside on a spit and punishing anyone who comes near it (94). His favored punishments include beating, staking men spread-eagled to the ground for hours at a time, and making them strip and hold hands and feet in freezing puddles. (89-90). In sum, Santiago describes an officer who deliberately endangers the lives of his men as a means of assuring personal comfort while asserting his dominance. Egotism and abuse are not the only ways that officers make themselves into a second enemy: they also endanger their troops through poor decisions, lack of leadership ability, and cowardice. A few of Kon’s conscripts mention circumstances that point to incompetence and lack of fortitude in the military leadership. Some, however, say that only a small percentage of officers were cowardly or mean, and a few take pains to describe some very good commissioned and noncommissioned officers (69, 118, 187).

It is interesting to note, however, that only one soldier in Kon’s book speaks of abuse, though Kon briefly mentions two other conscripts who are hospitalized for injuries ostensibly sustained during punishment (219-20). Kon’s collection and other first-hand accounts affirm that conscript neglect and abuse did occur during the war, but how common was it? It is difficult to tell from published sources alone how widespread or how serious these problems were. To my knowledge, no one has done an in-depth study on the issue by interviewing every surviving conscript, or even by interviewing a few from each unit, to obtain a clearer idea of how many officers were abusive or cowardly. Some first-hand accounts, such as Terzano’s 5,000 Adioses a Puerto Argentino and Manzilla’s Malvinas: hambre y coraje, refrain completely from criticizing officers. Others, such as Speranza and Cittadini’s collection Partes de Guerra, contain a significant dose of praise from conscripts for their superiors. Regardless of how prevalent abuse and incompetence actually were, a countermyth arose that labelled the military leadership and all officers as enemies to the soldiers, just as they were enemies to the civilian population that they had terrorized during the Dirty War. This countermyth discredits official military myths that characterize officers as brave, pious, and selfless.
servants of the *patria*. One officer quoted in Speranza and Cittadini’s *Partes de Guerra* complains bitterly at the undeserved hatred and vilification he has faced as a veteran officer, and blames it on the media. Everyone seems to think that simply because he was an officer, he was a coward and had mistreated his men (217). Even British authors such as Kevin Foster perpetuate this countermyth: “until the battles of 11/12 June, many of the conscripts . . . suffered more at the hands of their own leaders that they did from the enemy” (*Fighting Fictions* 125). Despite the ambiguity and even the contradictory evidence given in Kon’s book, the abusive officer image has had a deep effect on the Argentine public, and has worked to countermythologize the Argentinean military as a group of selfish sadists with delusions of grandeur. This countermyth also indirectly erodes the just cause and national renewal myths, showing them to be mere facades used by the military to hide its cynical motivations. As Kevin Foster points out, the officers’ oppression and manipulation of conscripts through fear, coupled with abuse and neglect, mirror their tactics against the civilian population during the Dirty War, and indicate that the Malvinas War was “not the first act in a narrative of national renewal, but the last gasp of *la guerra sucia*” (*Fighting Fictions* 127).

While military myths are the most thoroughly attacked by Kon’s interlocutors, a certain amount of ambiguity remains. In like manner, enemy myths are questioned by some conscripts and perpetuated by others. Most of the conscripts say that they never really hated the British. The only exception is Carlos, the soldier who perpetuates most other official myths as well. Nevertheless, he feels that it was harmful for him to have felt hatred towards them (164-65). His impression of the British soldiers he met as a prisoner is strictly in line with official enemy myths. He finds them arrogant, and implies a lack of manliness on their part because of their personal cleanliness: “they were too clean, smooth-faced, they looked like they’d just left a finishing school for little ladies” (166). He disdainfully comments on their materialism as well: “when we told them that we were conscripted soldiers, they laughed. They couldn’t understand that we don’t fight for money” (166). Carlos apparently subscribes to the idea that Argentine soldiers are more spiritually pure than the British, since they fight for the *patria* instead of a paycheck. Guillermo also says that British soldiers were incredulous at the Argentineans’ lack of training and financial compensation, but he does so with a critical
attitude toward his own military, as opposed to Carlos’s smug superiority (49). None of the conscripts complain about how the British treated them, and many found it a great improvement over conditions under their Argentine superiors.

There is one aspect of the enemy, however, that draws consistent mythologizing from Kon’s interlocutors: the Gurkhas. All three soldiers who mention them tell horror stories about them, though none of them actually faced Gurkhas in combat themselves. The tales they tell Kon are all second-hand descriptions that they heard from other soldiers retreating from the front. Some of Guillermo’s buddies from B Company tell him that they had seen Gurkhas behaving like drugged lunatics on Mount Longdon (36). According to other sources, however, the Gurkhas were not involved in that offensive.30 Guillermo’s friends tell him that the Gurkhas fought while high on drugs, and that they killed each other and anyone who got in their paths, yelling all the while (37). Santiago hears other conscripts tell him similar stories, adding that the Gurkhas laugh while killing even their own men (102). Santiago and Guillermo both say that the Gurkhas did not take prisoners but that they slit the throats of anyone trying to surrender (36, 102). Guillermo adds that these robot-like killers had no survival instinct, that they had been “brainwashed” and did not care about anything, not even their own lives (37, 45). Having seen Gurkhas for the first time after the Argentine surrender, Carlos concludes that they “are little bloodthirsty things, they don’t look like men, they are totally inhuman beings. I think if someone were to say that the Gurkhas were monkeys, the poor monkeys would be scandalized” (165).31

These soldiers’ descriptions demonstrate that they had already formed a Gurkha myth, without ever having had any direct experience with the Gurkhas at all. This may be partly due to British media articles that emerged in early May stressing the Gurkhas’ fighting skill and fierceness. The Argentine press followed suit with several sensationalist articles of its own, thus exacerbating the psychological effect on the Argentine soldiers and populace (Seear 72-73). Argentine soldiers were expecting Gurkhas to be soulless killing machines on drugs – this image was also generally in keeping with the broader enemy myth. They were also expecting the Gurkhas to be “brainwashed” -- why else would third-world men fight for a colonial power?32 Before the British or Gurkhas ever set foot on the islands, the Argentineans were all too ready to
see and hear confirmation of their Gurkha myth, though much of what they “saw” was imagined rather than real. In actuality, the Gurkha battalion in the Falklands/Malvinas War did very little fighting. Their main roles were to garrison Goose Green after 2 Para’s victory there, to back up the Scots Guards for the battle of Tumbledown, and later to head the assault on Mount William (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 384). The battle for Mount William brought almost no face-to-face contact between enemy forces, as the Argentineans pinned the Gurkhas down with heavy shelling and then quickly retreated before the Gurkhas could engage them (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 399; Seear 267, 269). Even after the war, the Gurkha myth, now with a life of its own, continued to spread.33

The Gurkha myth is a new dimension of the enemy myth, that appears after the war is already underway. *Los chicos de la guerra* works to sustain and build it, while parts of the book perpetuate other official myths. At the same time, it contains many demythologizing and even countermythologizing moments. The countermyth phenomenon in *Los chicos de la guerra* illustrates that a text, particularly an ambiguous, largely “unwritten” one like Kon’s, can permit readers to generate a wide variety of meanings according to the system of other texts, associations, and desires that they bring to bear on it. *Los chicos de la guerra’s* internal contradictions leave the text even more “unwritten” than the connotations of a classic text do, leaving more entrances and connections for readers to couple with their own subjective systems of meaning. Barthes writes, “To read is to find meanings” (*S/Z* 11): just after the war, a disillusioned Argentine populace went looking for evidence with which to condemn the military government and its underlings, and it found that evidence in Kon’s book. Kohan and his colleagues read Kon’ testimonials looking for myth-perpetuating elements, and they found those there as well. These different readers found and named their various meanings, and in the process they produced their own texts – not only their own versions of *Los chicos de la guerra*, but also their own versions of the war and of the conscripts who fought in it. Because of its ambiguities and multiple strategies, this book does not fit cleanly into any of the categories I have set up to sort through Falklands/Malvinas war responses. Its different reincarnations through David Foster’s and Martin Kohan’s readings have served to increase its plurality still further. The multiplicity and plurality
of this work’s meanings is again augmented by the addition of its film version, directed by Bebe Kamin.

The movie Los chicos de la guerra differs from the book in a few important respects. It reduces the number of protagonists from eight to three: two of these, Fabián and Santiago, are loosely based on the interviewees by the same names in Kon’s book. The third, named Pablo, is inspired by a short vignette at the end of Kon’s book, about a conscript who had gone berserk after learning that his friends had been killed in the war. The reduction in characters allows the film to concentrate more in-depth attention on three of the stronger demythologizers in the group. Numerous fictional details are also provided in the film that clarify the book’s ambiguities and place the film more firmly in the demythologizing category. Notwithstanding these attempts at restricting the text’s possible interpretations, the varied response it received from different sectors of the public show that the reader (or in this case, the viewer) still produces his or her own text.

The film provides a good deal of material about the lives of the three protagonists before the war. This allows the audience to identify with the characters and feel more sympathy for their plight. It also provides a venue for exploring the negative role of the military government in the lives of these characters long before the war ever begins. The film shows Fabián as a little boy, playing football and astronaut with his friends, and bored out of his mind at a patriotic ceremony on his first day of elementary school. This scene associates patriotism with pedantry and insincerity, as the dour-faced school officials drone on in monotonous and flowery language while the children yawn and fidget. Afterward, when asked if they liked the ceremony, the children respond “yes” in dutiful unison. Later, the film depicts the military government’s intrusion into daily life, when a teen-aged Fabián witnesses a police officer threatening and then shooting at a motorcyclist who had thrown a handful of leaflets toward a group of students. We also see his first personal encounter with the police, who assault him without warning, and then threaten, question, frisk, and finally beat him up, simply because he is sitting on a curb talking to his friend after dark. As Fabián returns home, his parents are shown watching a propagandistic television show where a woman talks about how the military government has made the streets safe once again. This is particularly ironic considering that Fabián has just been attacked by the police, who were supposedly protecting society
from violence. The television announcer then addresses the screen, reminding parents that they are responsible for the actions of their children: “Do you know who your children are with? Do you know what they are doing, right now?” he asks. This segment shows a government that is particularly hostile toward youth, inspiring suspicion in the public against its own children.34

Scenes of the conscripts’ personal lives are cross-cut with shots of them as prisoners in the Malvinas, as they dig graves for their dead comrades. In this way, parallels can be drawn between the suffering of soldiers in the Malvinas and their previous suffering as civilians at the hands of the Argentine military government – the one is but a continuation of the other. British soldiers impassively guarding their prisoners look benign compared to an Argentine school official shown seconds later, who makes students stand at attention while he inspects them up and down as though they were soldiers themselves. He carps on their grooming, how they stand, how they sit, and picks out certain individuals to humiliate. He stands uncomfortably close to a girl and leers down her blouse. Another juxtaposed pair of scenes first shows Pablo before the war, out hunting with his father, immediately followed by a shot of him too weak to dig, weeping in despair while standing in an open grave.

Pablo and Fabián serve in the same unit, but Pablo is wealthy, while Fabián is from a lower-middle-class family. This contrast allows the film to explore how class affected people’s treatment by the government. Pablo’s family actually witnesses the police’s assault on Fabián, but Pablo’s father, who has connections with the military, does nothing to intervene. When the boys’ unit is called up to fight in the Malvinas, the commanding officer calls Pablo’s father to offer Pablo a position in Buenos Aires that will save him from having to serve in the islands. Pablo’s father insists that his son go and fight, even after the commanding officer tries to dissuade him several times. Even Fabián is privileged, however, compared to Santiago, who is alone in Buenos Aires trying to make a living washing dishes in a bar. Santiago is introduced just after the scene in which Fabián’s mother goes to comfort him after he has been beat up by the police. Fabián at least has his parents to look after him and worry about who he is with, but Santiago has left his family in a poor provincial town and has no one. When he is called up to go to Malvinas, the only person to say goodbye to him is his boss, who whacks him
on the back and tells him how lucky he is to go. Santiago, meanwhile, looks less than enthusiastic.

On the islands, Santiago faces starvation and abuse from his superiors. After being reprimanded for freeing a soldier who had been staked spread-eagled to the ground, Santiago gives voice to the two-fronted war countermyth in the film just as he does in Kon’s book: “How are you going to fight the English if you freeze all of our soldiers? . . . I don’t think we came here to shit on each other” (90-91). On his return from the war, Santiago finds that his boss has given his job to someone else, and that his chances of finding work are very slim. Santiago is victimized not just by the military, but also by the decidedly un-renewed society that he returns to after the war. Unable to find work, emotional support, or psychological help for his battle trauma, he ends up in jail after venting his aggressions in a disco brawl. The film also shows the effects of war on Pablo, who goes insane and starts shooting up his music room with a rifle, and Fabián, who sits dazed, skinny, and speechless in his living room as various family members and friends come to visit.

The film version of Los chicos de la guerra manages to clear out some of the ambiguities that weaken the book’s demythologizing power. By means of filmic techniques and additional fictional material, it also connects the abuses of the Malvinas War with those of the Dirty War, and shows that they are two parts of the same thing: a self-serving government manipulating and abusing its citizenry to consolidate its own power. Like the book, the film attacks military myths most strongly, though it also questions the national renewal myth. It promotes to the two-fronted war countermyth in order to further question military myths, but it omits the distracting disorganized-Argentines countermyth in order to keep its message sharp and simple. The film also refrains from perpetuating any enemy myths, as these would only work to reinforce the mythic emplotment of the war as an epic. The film could be interpreted as having taken the confused and contradictory memories of several conscripts and emplotted them as a tragedy, rather like Berkoff’s play, in which the combatants are the tragic victims of their country’s negative social ethos.

The film’s sharpened questioning of military and heroic myths, however, brought about a negative reaction in some sectors of the ex-combatant audience. These viewers
were insulted by the film’s emphasis on the protagonists as victims, on the pathos elicited by scenes of childhood contrasted with postwar despair, and by the absence of conventional heroism. Other groups of veterans insist that none of them were heroes, and parents of dead conscripts continue to affirm that they were martyrs (Gociol, et al. 31). The film and the book that inspired it have become common currency in the national imagination, and the catalyst for a debate as to the ex-combatants’ identity and place within the national mythology. Many still use the name “chicos de la guerra” to refer to veterans, while some veterans groups work actively to repudiate that name and the identity that goes with it. Some groups accuse those who promote an heroic identity for veterans of having been co-opted by the Armed Forces (Gociol, et al. 29). These groups, in turn, decry their detractors for lacking patriotism (30) and for hurting veterans and the nation alike in a “demalvinization” campaign (31). There appears to be little room in the interpretations and ideologies presented for an identity somewhere in the grey areas in between these two extremes, or perhaps outside them altogether. Much of the debate centers not so much on the film itself, but on the mythologized entities it refers to: the war, the career military, the conscripts. Even the reviewer for the popular daily paper *Clarín* concentrates much of his commentary on the war and the situation of the historical conscripts rather than on what he saw in the film itself (Couselo 9). It is as though the plural and contradictory Argentine national imagination produced its own multivalent text that includes history, memory, war myths, and countermyths, together with the film and the book, in a network of interconnected and yet incompatible meanings. This complex accumulation of identities and interpretations has given *Los chicos de la guerra* a significance far beyond its original scope, but many who have contributed to its production cling to their own individual contributions as the “truth,” rejecting the plurality and multiplicity of meanings that exist in and around these texts and the war that they refer to.

**Britain’s Prime Escapee Texts: *Tumbledown* on Page and Screen**

The British testimonial/film combination discussed here is even more ambiguous and slippery than its Argentine counterpart *Los chicos de la guerra*. The story of Scots
Guards Lieutenant Robert Lawrence is one that escapes its author and attains a life of its own in the press, on film, in Parliament, and in the pages of scholarly journals. After his leadership on Mount Tumbledown, and the near-fatal wounding that he got as a result, Robert Lawrence was remembered by many as a hero. In the last moments of the battle, Lawrence had 40% of his brain blown away by a sniper. Miraculously, he survived, but was paralyzed on one side of his body. In Max Arthur’s collection of first-hand war accounts (1985), Lawrence is mentioned by two other interviewees, as well as Arthur himself, as someone who stood out in their memories as not only heroic, but also positive and determined to go forward in spite of the injuries he faced (x, 38; 133). A more negative and inconsistent Robert Lawrence appears in the memoir he wrote in conjunction with his father, John Lawrence (When the Fighting is Over: Tumbledown, a Personal Story). Filming for the BBC production of Tumbledown began in January 1987, some two years after Lawrence first started working with Charles Wood on the script (Lawrence 164, 168). Lawrence’s memoir discusses the progress of the film and the controversy it provoked even before it was aired on May 31, 1988 – the same day as the memoir’s publication. The film takes Robert’s story even further out of his control, where it communicates many different things to different people.

Robert’s story has escaped him in many ways. First, Robert and his father contradict themselves and each other, and they deconstruct some of the myths that they cling to during the course of their narrative. Secondly, screenwriter Charles Wood and director Richard Eyre literally produce their own text of Robert’s experiences in the form a film that, in spite of Lawrence’s extensive involvement with its production, presents him and the Falklands War in a negative light that he seems to have neither intended nor acknowledged. Finally, the film seems to have escaped even Wood and Eyre, since it stirred up a significant debate in the media and even in the House of Commons, not only over the views it purportedly expresses, but also over its accuracy and validity as a political statement. Jeffrey Walsh writes that the multi-level controversy created by this film has made it into “a central ideological text” of the Falklands War (Aulich 38). Even the scholarly assessments of the film vary widely in their opinions and approaches, as I will show in this discussion.
As Kevin Foster notes, Lawrence minimizes his struggle to overcome his disabilities and concentrates on his intrepid actions in battle for the account he gives Arthur (Fighting Fictions 107). His memoir and the film version of it, however, both concentrate on his post-war struggle, and constitute a bitter indictment of the British Army, Government, and society’s treatment of its wounded veterans. In spite of this condemnation, however, Lawrence and his father both deal with military and heroic myths in an ambiguous or contradictory way, which tends to undermine the demythologizing project. In a way, the demythologizing that occurs appears to be unintentional, or to come out of the text in spite of the authors’ attempt to suppress it. Robert’s arrogance, aggression, and combativeness emerge quite plainly in the memoir, but so does an intense desire on his and his father’s part to be liked, admired, and given special treatment. In his attempts to explain and justify his behavior, Robert almost (but not quite) arrives at the conclusion that the Army values he has internalized directly thwart his efforts to deal with his disabilities and find acceptance in peacetime society. He has a conflicted understanding of these mythic military values: the heroic and chivalric view of battle, military machismo and regimental pride, the importance of appearance and performance, and loyalty to regimental brotherhood and nation.

Robert comes from a “forces family” and has been steeped in British military mythology – British military men are to cultivate values of loyalty, sacrifice, and bravery in service of Queen and Country. In these myths, Army service and even battles are seen as opportunities for adventure and growth from boyhood into manhood. Robert writes that he saw the Army as “an opportunity to have a bit of a Boy’s Own existence” (9). He is also influenced by film and television depictions of war as emplotted on the romance model. He even writes in his memoir that, as he approached the Falklands and wrote his last letter home, he imagined his own actions as seen through a camera lens in a 1940s war movie. He muses that it was a strange feeling to be interpreting his reality through the preconceptions that movies had created for him (15).

Robert continues to measure his experiences on Tumbledown against his own mythic expectations: the Adjutant with his walking-stick is “the classic sort of eccentricity you expect to see in war films” (25), and a “warrior-like” sergeant with “a piece of shrapnel up his arse” is humorous in its incongruity with the heroic model (23).
The sight of a dead Guardsman makes him angry and spurs him forward to take
vengeance (27). He decides to “go for it” so that he will not have any regrets later (28),
and describes his elation when he calls his men to follow him in a charge forward, and
they all obey (30). As he and another Guardsman move in on some snipers, he says,
“Again, I remember thinking that this was just like the movies” (31). In general, his
entire description of the battle is like a movie in its level of excitement and also in its
absence of real horror or fear.38 At the end of his book Robert writes that he feels “a
duty” to inform people that the Falklands was a bloody and horrible war (193), but with
this description he perpetuates the heroic myths of combat that he grew up with. Robert
also wants to clarify what happens to people who get injured, “to make them think twice
about getting involved in another war,” but he continues to uphold the war in its
emplotment as an heroic rescue of an invaded and oppressed people (192-93). His
persistent view of combat as a chivalric adventure also makes it difficult for him to come
to terms with his injury: maiming is not generally dealt with in chivalric or heroic
discourse (Monaghan 151, 164).

Besides this chivalric myth of combat, other military values that cause Robert
trouble in his post-war adjustment include a strong sense of machismo and an excessive
pride that induces him to respect only those who share his (military) strengths and values.
The British military is known for extreme competition among its various branches and
regiments. Marines, Paras, Guards, and others are taught that their regiment is the very
best, that they must continue to prove themselves to be superior. Vincent Bramley writes
that the sense of elitism and the rivalry that it encourages are a great source of strength
and effectiveness for the Army in terms of individual performance and discipline: “Each
member of a body of fighting men is disciplined to preserve that sense of superiority –
not, of course just to brag about it, but to demonstrate it by actions within the commonly
agreed code of conduct” (Two Sides of Hell xi). Robert’s pride and desire to show
manliness and leadership help him to perform bravely on the battlefield. He leads his
platoon from the front, and goes in after deadly accurate snipers in order to clear the way
for his lads to advance. His gallantry also gets him shot. As he lies dying, faced with an
interminable wait for a medical evacuation helicopter and a broken radio, his machismo
once again serves a useful purpose. When he starts to cry in helpless frustration, all his
Sergeant has to do to revive his fighting spirit is say, “Go on sir, you have a good cry.” Having essentially been given permission to continue showing weakness, Robert becomes furious: “I thought, you bastard, I’m not going to cry. I had been all for crying up to the minute he said that and then I just thought stuff it, I won’t” (40). His rekindled machismo helps him not only to resist tears, but also despair and the insistent desire to slip into unconsciousness. His fury keeps him alive and kicking for several hours until he is able to undergo surgery at a field hospital. His dogged determination to live surprises his doctors who, fully expecting him to die at any moment, had left him until they had saved the patients they had felt were more likely to survive treatment.

The unpleasant corollary to the British soldier’s sense of pride and elitism, however, is that the other regiments are seen not as second or third best, but as contemptible. Under this paradigm, military non-combatants and civilians can end up looking inferior as well. Bramley writes that a British soldier’s sense of pride in his training can often lead to misunderstandings with civilians (*Two Sides of Hell* x). Even during the war, when it should have been appropriate and helped the soldiers to do their best, the rivalry between regiments went too far and became destructive (*Two Sides of Hell* xi). Though Robert’s pride and aggression have brought him success in training, combat, and survival, they disrupt his efforts at rehabilitation and reinsertion into civilian life. At one point he has a fight with an ex-Para policeman that he meets. Regimental pride gets the officer upset when Robert comments on how miserable the Paras had looked last time he saw them, in the cold and wet of the Falklands. The policeman responds to the unintended insult by calling Robert “sonny,” so Robert’s own conceit requires him to demand that the policeman call him “sir” (75). It is not enough for these two to recognize a fellow military man as an equal; each feels a need to assert superiority, and so the situation escalates: the policeman offers to fight Robert, Robert calls him an obscenity, the policeman threatens to arrest him. Only after Robert threatens to “drag him through every newspaper” does the policeman back down and leave in a rage (75). Robert also lashes out at nurses, doctors, and other personnel on various occasions for not treating him with the dignity he feels he deserves. He understandably wants respect from others, but seems unable grant them respect in return. He explains his behavior in his memoir:
A lot of things I did and said then might now, five years later, seem quite unjustified. But one has to try and understand what happens to the mind of a young man who has been taught by the Army to have pride in himself, pride in being able to look after himself, and then suddenly finds himself injured and dependent on everyone else. . . . There is frustration and fear, and there is a wounded pride to go with the wounded body. (63)

The above quote is as near as Robert gets to understanding to what extent his military values of pride and manly perfectionism have ultimately done him harm.

He is not unique in this problem; it is widely acknowledged that many soldiers encounter similar difficulties with intolerance and aggression after having seen combat, and particularly after having been wounded. Judging from Robert’s memoir, the British military and medical infrastructure were poorly equipped to help veterans understand and deal with this phenomenon, often called post-traumatic stress disorder. On the other hand, Robert seems to have taken his pride and sense of superiority a little too far, even by military standards: a Guards sergeant major who is recuperating in the same hospital tells John Lawrence that Robert was very brave but too impetuous, and that is what got him into trouble, both on Mount Tumbledown and in the hospital (Lawrence 80). John, who cannot bear to hear anything negative about his son, is much happier with the response of a Guardsman from Robert’s platoon. The guardsman speaks in accordance with the heroic myth that both John and Robert still subscribe to, comparing Robert’s action in battle to that of John Wayne in True Grit, and celebrating Robert’s near-disastrous escape from the hospital as though it were an exploit of bravery (80). John is disturbed by his interaction with the sergeant major, perhaps because it challenges his mythologized view of war and particularly of his son’s performance in it. He briefly wonders if people would, as the sergeant major warns, “get tired” of Robert “if he continued to make trouble by being aggressive and difficult” (81). Rather than question his cherished myths, however, he decides that Robert’s aggressiveness was appropriate on the battlefield and it should be acceptable at home as well, because his son was a hero and a leader at heart. “After a lot of thought,” he writes, “I dismissed the sergeant major’s warning” (81).
Robert’s machismo ultimately hurts himself more than anyone else. He writes of his increasing worries about whether he will be given a pension and a discharge date, but his pride keeps him from speaking honestly of his fears to others in the regiment who might help him. He gets frequent visits from regiment personnel and from various important officials, but he always tells them he is “very well indeed” when they ask, and so instead of the reassurance and comfort he craves, he just gets “a lot of gassing” (72-3). When he criticizes the regiment for not being “friendly” or behaving like the supportive “family” that they had always claimed to be, he fails to recognize that his own refusal to be honest and ask for help is partly to blame for their shortcomings.

Another military value that causes Robert conflict and anxiety is that of maintaining appearances – to him, soldiering is very much about image and even performance. The British military expects certain standards of behavior and dress from its members, both on and off duty. The preoccupation with image is so ingrained, that as one military historian writes, a trained eye can pick out a British military man in civilian clothes and identify what branch of the service he belongs to, merely by the way he dresses (Griffith 1). In a similar vein, military honors are bestowed in the form of medals and ribbons – things that are worn on the uniform and grant special status to their wearer. Steeped in this tradition as they are, both Robert and his father exhibit a craving for, and even a dependence upon, superficial tokens of status and recognition. Robert, for example, is even more obsessed with the “cool” image of his personal kit than most other soldiers: “I put on all my best stuff to go into battle; a bit like gearing up to go to a disco on a Friday night. It was very typical of me, because most other people didn’t do that” (42). His efforts at “dressing up” for battle show that he views soldiering as a sort of performance – a chance to “see and be seen” looking brave and manly, as though he were going out on the town or starring in a movie. This notion is understandable, given the chivalric and heroic myths of war that prevail in Britain, and particularly given that Lawrence's military duty prior to the war truly was a performance: he had worn the bearskin and red dress uniform to perform the Ceremony of the Keys, at the Tower of London. However, even after the reality of battle has hit him in the form of a nearly fatal bullet to the head, he adheres to this mythic image of war as an adventure and a stage for strutting one's stuff. Though his life is slipping away, he finds the energy to fret over the
medics cutting off his best Northern Ireland boots and SAS Arctic smock when he is about to undergo surgery in the field hospital. Writing about that experience, he muses that he had always encouraged his men to indulge in sartorial individualism:

I reasoned that if a guy is being a cowboy, thinking, aren’t I cool, aren’t I great, look at the smock, he can’t then suddenly turn round and start complaining when it begins to rain and he’s stuck in a trench. Hardly very outdoor-loving and macho that, is it? No, if you’re a cowboy, then you can’t complain. (42)

And yet, complain he does – not about being in a trench in the rain, but about having his clothes ruined by the hospital staff, and later, about being asked to mind the instructions of his caregivers, or wait for the bureaucratic wheels to grind out the details of his pension. While in the hospital, he essentially refuses to perform for the Army any more: he rejects the clothing they issue him, and he wears a personal radio headset wherever he goes, to aid him in shutting out anyone who tries to tell him what to do: “I didn’t care about the system any more,” he writes. “There was nothing anybody could do to me that could compare to what had already happened, and I wasn’t going to be a good boy and do as I was told” (93).

Robert may have suddenly seen through the shallowness of military performance standards, but he still measures his own worth with the outward trappings of civilian status. After he has mostly recovered and is able to drive, Robert acquires a Land Rover. He is very pleased with it until someone outside a bar shouts at him, “Go careful with Daddy’s car, sonny” (130-31). He is so traumatized by this off-hand comment from a complete stranger, that instead of shrugging it off as good-natured ribbing from someone whose opinion is completely irrelevant, he denounces his car as a “hearse” and goes out to buy a flashy new one – a Panther Kallista, to be exact (131). He also dumps his girlfriend since she had witnessed his perceived humiliation, and had tried to “fight his battles for him” by scolding the shouter herself, thus challenging Robert’s sense of manliness (131-2). He very quickly acquires a stylish new girlfriend to go with his new car: a very wealthy and beautiful girl from Belgium named Beatrice (132). Robert’s father, rather than being concerned by his son’s slavish devotion to image, is pleased at Robert’s “statement” of a car, and that his son is “still able to attract such a cracker”
He hopes that these will bring his son the happiness that keeps eluding him, since they enable him to once again “be the dashing young officer” (132). He falls just short of recognizing that they are merely props for playing a role, rather than magic amulets to grant his suffering son the chivalric transcendence he longs for.

Perhaps John cannot be critical of his son’s shallowness and insecurity because he, too, is greatly concerned with image and gaining proper recognition from the right sort of people. He proudly writes that he is Assistant Secretary of the MCC at that icon of Englishness, Lord’s Cricket Ground. He describes sitting next to the Queen for the Test Match in June 1982, discussing his son Robert and her son Andrew, both serving in the war (19-20). Even though the Queen is “marvellous” in her ability to show interest in every one of her subjects and their affairs, he imagines that she has taken a “different,” special interest in his concern for Robert (20). Later, when Robert is receiving his medal at Buckingham Palace, John is terribly disappointed that the Duke of Edinburgh is distracted and does not even look at Robert when he pins on his Military Cross. He is quickly consoled, however, because the Duke of Kent “knew him by name immediately and spoke to him at length” (104). John meticulously lists all the dignitaries he speaks to at the occasion, and the connections he has with them (105-6). He also describes Robert’s various medals at length, showing that he places great stock in them and what they stand for (109).

By now the reader of Robert’s memoir has seen enough to question his values of machismo, military elitism, and performance. Robert, however, remains attached to them. His next cherished myth to be challenged is that of the regimental brotherhood. After the hated “system” has finally put Robert together as much as it can, and handed him a pension and a discharge, Robert goes to Chelsea to say goodbye to his platoon. The new Company Commander gives him a revealing rejection on his arrival: “I don’t think it’s very good for morale for the boys to see you limping around the barracks like this. So if I were you, Robert, I’d hurry up and get out of camp” (137). The Commander essentially says that he does not want his men seeing what might happen to them if they experience combat. He admits that military training and mythology deliberately exclude wounded soldiers; that these are not heroes but impediments to morale. Robert is shocked to learn that [l]oyalty, as far as the Army was concerned, seemed a pretty one-
way street” (137). Later this revelation is confirmed when no one from the Regiment ever calls to see how he is doing, and eventually he hears that rumors are circulating among his former peers that he has lost all his money and gotten involved in drugs (162).

In spite of this treatment, Robert continues to adhere to military and heroism myths, and his nation’s role as the destroyer of dictators. He affirms at the end of his memoir that the war was necessary and worth it: “When thousands of fighting troops march into your house to tell you, with the barrel of a gun stuck up your nose, that you must no longer speak English, but Spanish, you have a right to be defended by any civilized nation” (192). He speaks of his “white-hot pride” in having fought and killed for principles that he had been taught to believe in, “like freedom of choice and of speech” (192). These affirmations undermine his ostensible project of making people “think twice about getting involved in another war” (193). He may affirm these officialist sentiments but his behavior and bitterness speak of an underlying doubt and ambivalence toward the war and the price he paid to fight in it. His feelings and actions regarding so-called traditional values are likewise contradictory: He rails against society for having “[c]onned [us] into believing in a set of priorities and principles that the rest of the world and British society in general no longer gave two hoots about. We had been ‘their boys’ fighting in the Falklands, and when the fighting was over, nobody wanted to know” (192). The values he refers to are most likely sacrifice and loyalty; he harps on these at other times in the book. Despite having been tricked into holding these values, he asserts that he maintains them anyway. Other values that his father claims as theirs are “the true values of courage, love, devotion to duty, selflessness, valour and chivalry,” (191). Yet Robert’s peacetime behavior could hardly be called chivalrous or selfless. He demands payment and honors for duty that was professed to have been a sacrifice. He does not maintain his devotion to duty; he claims he has done his part and it is now someone else’s turn. He insists he is “[n]ot bitter about the war, the injury, or even my disability,” but it appears that in reality he begrudges having sacrificed so much of himself for the sake of a disloyal society (193). His involvement with the making of the film *Tumbledown* also reveals an underlying disillusionment with the Army and the values that it purports to uphold, but he seems unwilling to admit that to himself.
This inability to admit his own disillusion results in further disappointment when Robert sees the Ministry of Defense’s and the Scots Guards’ negative responses to the film. He writes that he had hoped they would want the public to understand what returning soldiers need in terms of public support and special care, but they do not (166). The media controversy likewise leaves him incredulous: he insists that the film was not political at all, but that “it was simply about soldiers and young men; the reasons why young men join armies and want to go to war, and the reality of the possible consequences of their ambitions” (165). What he describes, however, is indeed a political subject. Young men want to join armies and go to war because it has been mythologized as a romantic adventure, an opportunity to prove one’s worth, to become a real man, to practice values of sacrifice, loyalty, and chivalry in the name of national honor and personal glory, and Robert is no exception to this. *Tumbledown* shows those myths as having motivated Robert to behave in a way that gets him shot. It emphasizes the decidedly unromantic and unheroic effects of wounding, and doubly questions those myths by showing that they prevent Robert and others from coming to terms with his disability. It condemns the British military and social culture that creates soldiers to fight wars, but will not take responsibility for their physical and psychological needs afterward. *Tumbledown* is decidedly political, even if Robert does not want it to be: it challenges cherished myths that sustain not only the armed forces but also Thatcher’s project of regaining the Falklands, proving the nation’s worth, and gaining the collective resolve necessary to push forward out of stagnation.

Robert’s refusal to recognize *Tumbledown’s* political message seems disingenuous, and yet he does not seem bothered by the film’s negative portrayal of his personal character, either. This depiction is consistent with Robert’s personality as it comes through in his memoir, but it is probably not what Robert would like people to think of him. The film replaces the more usual romance-quest emplotment of the Falklands adventure with a circular structure, which emphasizes the protagonist’s – and his society’s – lack of transcendence after having passed through the trials of the Falklands War. The film also highlights some of the contradictions in Robert’s feelings as stemming from a certain self-imposed blindness. For example, it has his character condemn the war as “not worth it,” eliminating the later qualifications and reversals of
that remark that appear in the memoir. By doing so, the film retains the shocking effect of a soldier and patriot angrily rejecting his country’s latest military exploit, while contrasting that verbal rejection to his continued dependence on nationalist and heroic myths. Even when Robert realizes that he has been deceived, he still is unable to put aside the heroic myths that have been his undoing.

The film opens with Lawrence and his friend Hugh visiting acquaintances George and Helen Stubbs some time after the war, once Lawrence is as recovered as he is going to get. The Stubbses have set out a meal for him and his friend, and Lawrence smokes at the table even though he knows his hostess objects to it. While the others eat he talks loudly and crudely of his incontinence, and shows them gory photographs of his wounded head. While Hugh is elsewhere, Lawrence brags to the Stubbs that Hugh is jealous of his medal, saying that Hugh was “never a real soldier.” Here, in addition to behaving rudely, he shows that in spite of his disillusionment with “the system,” he still prizes the superficial recognition represented by his medal. He even imagines that his physically whole companion might prefer to be in his shoes, disabilities and all, in order to appear as brave and manly as Lawrence’s wounds and medal show him to be.

The Stubbs try to maintain polite interest in their guest, but behind his back they wonder what sort of person he is (a “killer,” Helen fears), and they hide their daughter in her room because they do not want her to associate with him or his friend. It is worth noting that the Stubbs are not portrayed as totally innocent victims of Lawrence’s psychological aggression: George hypocritically collects war memorabilia, but had himself refused to fight in World War Two. His collection is symbolic of his (and British society’s) attitude toward the Falklands War: he is willing to accept the superficial glories that it bestowed upon his people and nation, but unwilling to face up to the ugly realities of its effects on the combatants. At the same time, however, the film is critical of Lawrence, who demands attention and adulation like a child throwing a tantrum. Even though the Stubbs family could use a little waking up, Lawrence’s methods are decidedly crude and he alienates them rather than win them to his cause.

The luncheon scene is repeatedly interrupted by flashbacks to various times in Lawrence’s life: before the war, during, and afterwards, as he struggles to recover from his devastating injuries. The film actually ends with a grisly flashback of Lawrence
brutally bayonetting a pleading Argentine soldier in the face, and then raising two guns in the air and shouting, “isn’t this fun?” At that very moment he is shot, as though on cue from the gods who strike down insolent mortals in their moment of greatest sin. This scene, which portrays Lawrence as a remorseless killing machine, perhaps even a monster, is the last scene of the film; this is the image that lingers in the audience’s mind as the credits begin to roll. This lasting picture of Lawrence’s character causes the viewer to realize that Lawrence is just as selfish and unlikable at the end of his journey (that is, at the beginning of the film), as he is at the beginning (placed somewhere in the middle of the film to show that it is not truly a beginning after all). This circularity shows, not only that the beginning-middle-end construction of the romance quest does not fit the reality of a human being’s life, but also that the character has not improved or grown at all due to his ordeal: the quest and battle did nothing to purify Lawrence, just as, the film implies, it did nothing to purify or renew Britain. On the contrary, it accentuated Lawrence’s – and perhaps Britain’s as well – less admirable qualities of self-absorption and aggression, and caused them both unnecessary pain and alienation. The scene immediately preceding the wounding scene has Lawrence visit his old unit. His exclusion from their world is emphasized by their uniforms and his lack of one, and by his tentative wave to them as they march past unseeing, with their gazes fixed straight ahead. The two scenes’ juxtaposition reminds the viewer that Lawrence’s very zeal in acting out his country’s military myths has isolated him from regular society, and also, ironically, from the organization that has made him what he is. The credits roll in front of a return to this penultimate scene, focusing on Lawrence’s face staring at the camera through the blur of his former comrades-in-arms as they pass by.

The film particularly highlights Lawrence’s pride and aggression as one of the values that has brought him both recognition as a hero, and alienation from society. His lack of respect toward the military and medical establishment is given more emphasis than it is in the memoir. At one point he lights up a cigarette after having been told he may not do so; there are people on oxygen in his ward and the fire hazard is too great. He shows no concern for his own safety or that of the other patients in the ward. To top it off, he yells at the nurse for scolding him – for being responsible and caring for his safety in spite of his defiance. In the film, Lawrence lashes out at perceived
condescension even from those who attempt to help him, belittling them as ignorant and assaulting them with horrific tales of what he endured. He refuses to recognize any standard for prestige other than that of battle prowess, and does not show any regard for the hospital staff’s medical training and knowledge. As a result, he makes enemies where he needs friends the most.

Lawrence feels, with some reason, that his wounds should earn him the respect and gratitude of his countrymen for whose honor he fought. Instead, he is largely shunned and ignored, even when he does not offer prior provocation: Kevin Foster points out that disfigurement of the hero is not possible in a romance quest, which was Thatcher’s and the media’s chosen emplotment for the war. Thus Lawrence, along with all other soldiers who were seriously injured, is “not only a political embarrassment” but also “a narrative impediment, and is treated accordingly” (Fighting Fictions 108).

Lawrence and other wounded soldiers are not permitted to march in the victory parade, or even to wear their uniforms to the memorial service at St. Paul’s Cathedral. In the film, Lawrence is tucked in the back row of a transept, where from his wheelchair he can neither see the service, nor be seen by anyone else. The military medical system shuffles him from hospital to hospital and repeatedly loses his records. As a result he is forced to undergo the same tests and fill out the same forms over and over. The doctors and officials he must deal with are for the most part uncooperative and unsympathetic -- when he visits a military bureaucrat to inquire about a disability pension, he is subjected to insulting questions on whether he felt sexually aroused by killing, and not given any straight answers as to his pension.

With this filmic indictment of the very institutions that should be seeing to Lawrence’s welfare, writer Charles Wood (and Lawrence too) argue for the need to acknowledge and take responsibility for the negative consequences of war, especially those who are wounded in it (Foster, Fighting Fictions 109). The film shows that war has ugly and decidedly un-heroic effects on its participants, and its emphasis on Lawrence’s physical and mental anguish tends to belie the chivalric and heroic views of war and soldiering. The circular structure highlights Lawrence’s inability to achieve the transcendence that, according to the romance-quest myth of war, should have been his reward for his bravery and leadership. It also reinforces an idea that Monaghan has
noted, that in spite of Lawrence’s exclusion from the mythic structures of the military, he is unable to abandon or escape from them. Lawrence, like his society, remains obstinately attached to the myths that have been his destruction, and refuses to alter his attitudes or behaviors to accommodate his new reality.

Governmental, media, and scholarly responses to *Tumbledown* and Lawrence’s memoir have been widely varied. Part of the controversy surrounding Wood’s film was its unhappy association with Ian Curteis’ cancelled *Falklands Play*. Curteis felt that the BBC had cancelled his play and favored the “anti-government” film *Tumbledown* because of a “left-wing” bias in the company’s leadership (Curteis 37). In his chapter for *British Television Drama in the 1980s*, critic Geoffrey Reeves chronicles the media furor over *Tumbledown* and the *Falklands Play*. He also provides a critical assessment of the two works. Reeves shows how writer Charles Wood and director Richard Eyre responded in contradictory ways to the growing controversy about their film, even before it was ready for transmission. Wood at first affirmed a political intent and later denied it when he feared his film might be cancelled (143). Eyre reiterated the film’s political message and defended it on the grounds of artistic freedom (145-56). Soon after *Tumbledown’s* initial transmission on 30 May 1988, the BBC issued a disclaimer that the film was a drama, not a documentary, and did not claim to represent actual facts (Reeves 147).

Notwithstanding this insistence on the film’s genre and intent, the public understood it to be based on a true story, and felt that it should portray events and personalities in a strictly accurate manner. Many people complained to the BBC and/or the press about factual inaccuracies, particularly those who felt they had been slandered by the film. Robert’s ex-girlfriend and the physical therapists at St. Thomas’s Hospital, for example, felt betrayed by what they saw as the film’s inaccurate and negative portrayals of them (Reeves 150-51). The Scots Guards were also upset that the film showed them in a false light. Concerned about their public image, they held a press conference to show how, contrary to Lawrence’s allegations, the regiment had taken good care of its wounded men (146). Psychiatrists were even brought out to question the film’s ideological stance on the grounds that Lawrence was obviously no longer himself, so his view of the situation was bound to be distorted (149). For these people, the film
unjustly smears members of the military and medical establishment, and cannot have made a valid political statement because it deviates from verifiable facts.

Regardless of whether the film’s ideological statement was accepted as valid or not, it did prompt reflection and debate on the treatment of returning war veterans. Even Members of Parliament commented on the film. Conservatives generally found it appalling: one said that Tumbledown was an “insult to all those who had been wounded in war and had not complained” (Reeves 147). Some more liberal MPs, however, thought it provoked some useful introspection (148). Reeves gives a summary of many different editorial and movie reviewer responses to the film, which range from indignant repudiation to enthusiastic praise, from appreciation of its technical mastery to complaints that it was “tedious” or a “failure” (148-50). On the film itself, Reeves says that the character of Lawrence is neither “attractive” nor “admirable,” and hence the film makes the viewer question “the nature of heroism” as a construct imposed upon the soldier from outside (155). He also writes that in spite of its unpleasant anti-hero, the film succeeds in criticizing society’s treatment of its veterans, but that its message was too easily lost in the emotional controversy over its factual accuracy:

By keeping the names, by appearing to deal with facts, [Wood] allowed people to discredit the work. Some of the facts were “wrong” so the whole thing could be discounted. It is ironic that one of the most political and Brechtian of modern English playwrights should reach his largest audience with a piece that while exploring his favourite territory – the dichotomy of being pro-soldier and anti-war – would be so compromised by being set in the no man’s land of faction.42 (158)

In accordance with Reeves, Paul MacKenzie’s journal article, “Artistic Truth, Historical Truth: the ‘Faction’ Film and the Falklands War,” acknowledges that the mixture of fact and fiction in Tumbledown aroused confusion and ire in some quarters (43-44; 52). Nevertheless, MacKenzie contends that the film is still a powerful indictment of the Falklands War, or of any war, as “futile” (48). He predicts that the film’s “artistic truth” will eventually be more remembered and more influential in shaping popular perceptions of the Falklands War than the “historical truth” put forward in more traditional historical accounts, because it appeals to the emotions and sends a more powerful message (56-57).
Jeffrey Walsh’s essay in Aulich’s collection *Framing the Falklands War* attributes the controversy surrounding *Tumbledown* not to its blend of fact and fiction, but to Wood’s reputation as a “left-wing . . . anti-establishment” writer (38). Walsh writes that the film “dramatizes many of the profound contradictions” surrounding the Falklands conflict (42). He affirms that it “endorses the courage of the troops and their professionalism, while satirizing Rambo-style heroism as fatuous.” In contrast to many reviewers, Walsh feels that the film refrains from either clearly promoting or denouncing the war (42). Mostly, however, he concentrates on the film’s ambiguous treatment of various icons of Englishness. Images of Lawrence’s upper-crust country lifestyle, Chelsea, Lord’s Cricket Grounds, the Cotswolds, the Ceremony of the Keys, and military parades are cross-cut with horrifying battle images or with scenes of an unsympathetic society that rejects its wounded veterans (39; 41). Walsh suggests that these juxtapositions tend to celebrate traditional images of Englishness, while simultaneously testing their “rhetoric and moral appropriateness,” and ultimately “deconstructing the dead weight of [their] tradition” (39; 42).

While both Reeves and Walsh see Lawrence as a disagreeable protagonist who causes the viewer to question received notions about war heroes, Kevin Foster sees him as a true hero, both on and off the battlefield. Foster writes that Lawrence’s determination to recover mobility and independence, as well as his struggle to make society take responsibility for its war veterans, make him a hero (*Fighting Fictions* 108; 110). Foster writes that *Tumbledown* subverts official myth because it presents the romance quest journey in reverse. However, he contradicts that assessment by saying that Lawrence ends his journey with “self-acceptance and pride,” which does not correspond to the hero’s state of uncertainty at the beginning of a standard romance quest (108). Foster even interprets Lawrence’s journey in the film as a “moral triumph,” which he contrasts to the more uncertain view that Lawrence presents himself in his memoir (112). I suggest that what Foster describes as self-acceptance and pride is only a facade to cover Lawrence’s insecurity and pain, both emotional and physical. I also see a profound absence of any triumph or transcendence in the film, and this is one of the ways that it counters the traditional romance-quest emplotment of war stories. Foster writes that Lawrence still believes in the heroic myths of the Falklands War, and that he
struggles to rewrite them so that they will include him and the other wounded as their protagonists (115).

Monaghan’s discussion of the film coincides with Foster’s assessment of Robert as “a narrative impediment” to both military and civilian society alike (Fighting Fictions 108). Monaghan develops this idea by exploring in what ways Robert’s maimed body and wounded spirit pose a challenge to chivalric conceptions of war and heroism (Monaghan 157-60). However, Monaghan does not see Robert’s solution to his dilemma as a triumph like Foster does: Monaghan writes that “reinserting himself into military mythology” will only lead Robert to “a dead end,” where he will be isolated not only from military culture, but also from any more productive options for understanding and dealing with his situation (162). For Monaghan, Robert is more victim than hero, having been physically and emotionally destroyed by trying to fulfill military culture’s mythic expectations.

Jo Henderson’s essay, “The Falklands: National Identity and the Experience of War,” also discusses Robert as a victim. According to Henderson, Lawrence’s zeal in defending Britain’s nationalistic myths renders him unable to participate in them (196). She maintains that he is harmed even more by the loss of his belief system than by the physical injuries he suffers (195). She concludes that “Tumbledown leaves the viewer with the sense that death and suffering eclipse all value systems” (197). However, in this conclusion she contradicts herself. If what she says about Lawrence being hurt most by the loss of his value system is true, then that system, in spite of its demonstrated shallowness, is what eclipses everything else for him. It would be perhaps more consistent to affirm that the film demonstrates people’s immense investment in and dependence upon their value systems, at times to their own detriment.

Through his memoir and the film Tumbledown, Robert Lawrence’s story has come to signify many different things to different people. For some it is about a hero who redefines and enriches the idea of heroism, for others it is about an anti-hero who forces people to question the validity of heroic discourse in the first place. For yet others, it is about a victim of the system. Some see it as an anti-government and anti-Falklands War statement. This is certainly not what either Robert or his father had intended. Even the film’s writer and director, acknowledged pacifists and critics of the Thatcher
Government, were taken aback by the furor their film generated, and the scrutiny and criticism that it brought upon the BBC. As for Lawrence himself, he writes that he had hoped to let people know what fighting was really like, to make them “think twice about getting involved in another war” (193). Nevertheless, the picture he gives of the battle in his memoir is very similar to the “sanitized” adventure-movie versions that people have already seen and heard. In addition, he affirms the justice of the British cause, and his pride at having served it (191-92). He does succeed in condemning the military and government’s treatment of him, but at the cost of revealing how poorly he himself fits the image of chivalrous heroism that he longs to make his own. The film goes further by questioning the value of the war through its harrowing and gory images of the battle, and by emphasizing the poor thanks its veterans receive on returning home. At the same time, however, it emphasizes Robert’s own negative qualities and personal failings. In his memoir, Robert claims to maintain his faith in values of loyalty and sacrifice, but the film clarifies that the values he truly clings to are machismo, elitism, and self-promotion. The film deconstructs military values, showing how they make men into arrogant, efficient killing machines, only to abandon them once they are no longer useful. This story, in its various manifestations, is truly “one that got away.”

Conclusions

There is no neat and tidy way to sum up the works discussed in this chapter. They do not share much in common other than provoking mixed reception. Some of them, like Porchetto’s album and Kon’s book of interviews, contain not only ambiguities and pluralities that encourage contradictory readings, but also intrinsic contradictions within their own textual systems of meaning. For many of these texts, trying to arrive at “the correct” interpretation is a useless and meaningless exercise. It is rather more revealing and interesting to look at what they mean to whom, and why. In this way, one can use the text produced by a certain reader to learn something about that reader’s agenda.

That the album Reina Madre is so dear to Argentine audiences says something about the ambivalent and painful feelings people harbor for the dictatorship and the fight to recover the Malvinas. That such a controversial government should undertake a
project so beloved of the nation is bound to generate mixed feelings, even more so since the project was a failure. Many who abhorred the government and violence in general felt, like Porchetto, that the takeover of the Malvinas was justified, representing as it did the righteous desires of the people. It is too painful and difficult for some to detach themselves from nationalist pride and anti-imperialist indignation to admit that the government’s actions might have been cynically manipulative of popular sentiments, rather than in unison with them, as journalist Horacio Verbitsky has argued. His central thesis in La última batalla de la Tercera Guerra Mundial [The last battle of the Third World War] is that the Malvinas War was merely a continuation of the military Junta’s reign of terror (10-11).

A few groups agree with Verbitsky’s assessment, like some of the veterans’ associations described by Judith Gociol and her colleagues. For those who fought, experiences of combat were widely varied, and some felt more abused and unprepared than others. Likewise, attachment to heroic war myths and macho self images provoke still more mixed feelings over whether to admit to being used or abused, or whether to insist on brave and heroic resistance against overwhelming odds, in the epic tradition. The controversy over Los chicos de la guerra among veterans and other groups further demonstrates the huge divisions that the military government’s activities have aroused. Even without the film, these differences would have existed, but the film and its title have been taken over by these groups as symbols over which they can argue about the validity of the invasion, the conduct of the Armed Forces, and the identity of the veterans themselves.

For British observers, interpretations of the war and its significance had generally followed more clear-cut lines of the political right versus the left: all of the demythologizing and countermythologizing works discussed in this dissertation come from the left side of the political spectrum. Conservative voices tended to be in favor of the war and of its mythic interpretation. Robert, too, had stood on the Conservative side of the mythic fence prior to his experience. Afterward, though he continues to profess patriotic and military values, these contrast with his behavior, and with the film that he helped to make. This inconsistence reveals that Robert harbors mixed feelings about the war’s value as compared to the price he paid to participate in it. He still believes in the
heroic emplotment of the war even as his experiences and his anger at the establishment question that emplotment. Despite his protestations, he no longer stands entirely on the Conservative side where the war is concerned, and this betrayal of formerly held values may have played a role in Conservatives’ reactions to the film. Much of the public anger over the play also centered around its factual inaccuracies. As Reeves implies, this nitpicking reveals an unwillingness on the part of the audience to honestly examine its own attitudes toward war and its wounded veterans (158). Rather than do so, people found in factual details an excuse to discount the film’s overall message as invalid. An entirely fictional film with a similar message may not have aroused such controversy, but it too may also have been dismissed as fictional ravings by an audience unwilling to question its own mythic fictions, enshrined as truths, about war and its consequences. This same audience would probably have found validation in Urban’s An Ungentlemanly Act as well, rather than the questioning and deconstruction that Monaghan found there.

Although they do not fit neatly into my system of categorization, the works in this chapter are valuable in understanding Britain’s and Argentina’s Falklands/Malvinas War myths. They are particularly important because they reveal how attached both societies are to those myths – how, even when the myths are challenged and questioned, they still maintain at least some their appeal for many individuals and groups within the society. They also reveal, though perhaps unintentionally, what many countermythologizing texts emphasize: that history and memory are subjective interpretations of experience. Controversies over the value and interpretation of works like Tumbledown and Los chicos de la guerra underline that historical events are and will continue to be presented and interpreted in disparate ways, and that divergent memories exist of the same event, even in people who were supposedly “on the same side.”
Notes to Chapter Five

1 I was unable to secure permission to reprint this cartoon. It can be viewed in the April 4, 1982 issue of Clarín, in Kevin Foster’s Fighting Fictions 123, or in Aulich (Ed.), Framing the Falklands War 53.

2 Lines five through eight of the first verse read: “On the face of the earth arises / A new and glorious Nation: / Her brow crowned with laurels / And at her feet a defeated lion.” “Se levanta a la faz de la tierra / Una nueva y gloriosa Nación: / Coronada su sien de laureles / Y a sus plantas rendido un león.” The sixth verse clarifies the identity of the defeated lion: it describes Buenos Aires leading the people in battle, “And with robust arms they tear / The haughty Iberian Lion” Y con brazos robustos desgarran / Al Ibérico altivo León] (lines 5-8). The original 9-verse version, written by Vicente López y Planes, was officially adopted as the national hymn in May 1813. In 1900, it was decided by official decree to shorten the anthem for public performance at ceremonies and in schools. The newer version includes half of the first verse, half of the last verse, and the chorus. It omits the above lines about the lion.

3 A record dealer and collector in Buenos Aires told me that this album is difficult to get because it expresses feelings about the dictatorship and the Malvinas War that are dear to many Argentines. At first he would not admit that he even had a copy of it available for sale. Only after I had demonstrated a genuine interest in Argentine rock, and only after I had persisted in visiting his store to chat and ask about the album several times over the course of a week, did he agree to sell it to me – for a hefty price.

4 “Ningún rey / pudo ni podrá / destruir la libertad.”

5 Many prominent Argentinean thinkers, including exiles and National Commission on Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) chairman Ernesto Sábato, supported the action in the Malvinas while maintaining their otherwise anti-dictatorship stance. Very few Argentineans have questioned the validity of such a distinction; one of the few who has is the prominent journalist Horacio Verbitsky (La última batalla de la tercera guerra mundial 10-11; 153). (See also Verbitsky’s article “Malvinas: 20 años después”).

6 “Mientras el mundo entero / habla de guerra / . . . / él solo sabe crear, crear” (7-8; 14).

7 Femenia writes that the Junta tried to portray its Malvinas invasion as a non-aggresssive move by emphasizing that their commandos had sacrificed themselves rather than hurt the local population or the British soldiers garrisoned there (76). They tried to portray Argentina as a pacifist country by highlighting their long-suffering and patience during the long and pointless negotiations with the British (81). Costa Méndez also made public statements that the invasion was not aggression but rather a correction of a previous aggression on the part of Britain some one hundred fifty years earlier. He also referred to the colonial situation in the islands as a “permanent aggression” (Costa Méndez, IATRA speech May 27, 1982, ctd. in Femenia 81). In spite of these efforts there was no disguising the fact that the recovery was obtained through a violent takeover, and the “curious concept of nonaggressive aggression” did not convince the international community (Femenia 76).

8 “Dioses de cartón, los valores / abuso de poderes, sus horrores”

9 “Fueron años tan tristes / fueron años tan duros”

10 “amor hacia la gente / y no redención a palos.”

11 “es que unos salvajes osaron molestar / el orden imperial, y pagarán.”

12 “Son del sur de la tierra, ¿qué nos podrán hacer? / somos distintos, somos mejores.”
Giardinelli writes that Argentine society was manipulated into believing the myths of Argentina’s righteousness and resultant importance and power: “the infantile attitude of the leadership extended to society, to the great majority of Argentine society, who believed, truly and honorably believed that the war was just and that solely because of this, as though it were a question of faith, it was possible to defeat a secular imperial power like England, principal ally of the principal power on the planet, the United States” [la actitud infantil del poder se extendió a la sociedad, a la gran mayoría de la sociedad argentina, que creía, verdadera y honradamente creía que la guerra era justa y que solamente por eso, como si fuera por una cuestión de fe, se podía vencer a una potencia imperial secular como Inglaterra, aliada principal de la principal potencia planetaria, los Estados Unidos] (194-95, original emphasis).

There is some doubt as to whether the demythologizing is unintentional or not: Monaghan speculates that Urban’s disavowal of political intent is disingenuous (176). There is no way of proving whether it is or not.

When I viewed this film in London, I regretted not having read Monaghan’s assessment first, as I felt that it would have given me an idea of details to pay special attention to in the film. Looking back, however, I am glad that I had not read it first, as Monaghan’s convincing arguments might very well have influenced my impressions of the film. As it turned out, my perceptions were quite different from Monaghan’s.

Piaggi’s memoir is odd and contradictory not just in its mix of mythologizing and demythologizing, but also in its title. The English translation “Goose Green” in parentheses is actually part of the title; yet “ganso verde” actually means “green goose.” The place name “Goose Green” is usually translated into Spanish as “Pradera de los Gansos.”

Judith Gociol, Luis Felipe Lacour, and Rodrigo Gutierrez Hermelo provide a description of five different veterans’ groups and their various ideological and policy agendas in their article “Ex combatientes de Malvinas: ocho años de posguerra,” for the magazine Todo es historia. Their discussion shows how violently opposed some groups are to others, and how differently they view the value of the war, the behavior of the officers and military leadership, and the role of the conscripts. Much of the conflict hinges on the diametrically opposed identities that have been assigned to the combatants: abused martyrs, or brave heroes (31). Gociol and colleagues say that thirty two veterans’ organizations existed at the time of writing, and that these represented various different political sectors (28). For more details on opposing groups and their views, see note 32.

Kohan does not provide a source for this claim. Looking strictly at Los chicos de la guerra, only one of the eight conscripts expresses a willingness to return and fight again. None of them were directly asked this question, however. Judging from the attitudes expressed by the conscripts in Kon’s book, I would guess that maybe two of the eight would respond positively if asked whether they would want to go back and fight again. The source for Kohan’s claim is probably Speranza and Cittadini’s testimonial collection Partes de Guerra; he cites this book in a different context in his article. This book offers a more patriotic interpretation of the war than Kon’s book, and is largely positive in its treatment of the officers and the official myths. This is probably because nearly all of its contributors either served under, or were themselves, some the most celebrated officers of the campaign. More, though not all, veterans in this book give the impression that they would willingly return to fight in the Malvinas. One, Oscar Poltronieri, says he would go back, and he believes that most of his fellow veterans would also (198). Gociol also quotes a veteran who swears that every ex-combatant he knows is glad to have served and wants to go back (31). Significantly, this veteran is also a member of the officialist veteran’s group headed by Admiral Büßer, and he also claims that everything in the film Los chicos de la guerra is a lie.

One wonders what he thinks about the kidnap and torture methods of the military regime during the Proceso, since Argentinean Catholic Church officials did not condemn this, either.

“Mirá, a mí me han tratado de ex combatiente, de héroe, y todo eso me molesta. Pienso que hacer patria es trabajar, es estudiar, es divertirse sanamente, es estar unidos para levantar a este país, que es hermoso.
Me parece que no hace falta matar a un inglés para hacer patria. Por eso me molesta mucho esa etiqueta de héroes; no sirve para nada.”

21 Argentine soldiers are not the only ones to complain of craven, incompetent, or overbearing leaders. Though he is complimentary toward most of his leaders and mates, Lance-Corporal Vincent Bramley describes his own platoon sergeant as a coward who disappeared before the battle at Mt. Longdon and reappeared only after the Argentine surrender, still giving orders and expecting to be obeyed. He also mentions another platoon sergeant who was so disliked that he hid during the battle for fear that his men would try to kill him (72; 176).

22 “Me parece que los argentinos, casi siempre, estamos buscando la forma de sacar alguna ventaja, de sacar un provecho personal de todas las situaciones.”

23 “¿Qué es lo que nos falta a nosotros, los argentinos? ¿qué es lo que nos pasa?”

24 Other accounts published later include more descriptions of cowardly, cruel, or abusive officers, including Edgardo Esteban’s memoir, Malvinas: diario del regreso, first published in 1993, and Vincent Bramley’s book of interviews, Two Sides of Hell (1994). By then, abusive and incompetent officers had already appeared in fiction works like Fogwill’s Los Pichy-cyegos (1983), and been discussed in nonfiction commentaries like Graziano’s Divine Violence (1992) and Verbitsky’s La última batalla de la tercera guerra mundial (1985). Verbitsky mentions the negative experiences of Kon’s conscripts and then adds yet another dimension to the two-fronted war myth: he suggests that the military government is mostly concerned with its own citizens as potential enemies, and seeks to control them through propaganda and misinformation. In the process, the government fails in its leadership against the external enemy and makes itself into a second enemy for its own soldiers as well (172). In most cases, however, this myth appears in the form of abusive and incompetent officers in the islands who impede their soldier’s efforts to defend the patria, as in Gamerro’s Las Islas (1998), and Nielsens’ La Flor Azteca (1997).

25 The two-fronted war myth had gained enough currency by 1990 to induce a spokesman for the veteran’s group CECTEL to comment on it to Todo es Historia journalists Judith Gociol and colleagues. While discussing his group’s pro-Armed Forces views of the war, he says, “It has been said that the enemy was the officer or the sergeant who tormented the little soldier; and that was not the case [Se ha dicho que el enemigo era el oficial o el sargento que atormentaba al soldadito; y no fue así]” (Gociol et al. 33).

26 2nd Lieutenant Juan José Gómez Centurión: “Los medios nos trataron muy mal, . . . Nos encontrábamos todos los días con la imagen de que le habías robado la comida a tus soldados, que le habías pegado a tus soldados, que habías sido un cobarde. Y era muy duro” (217).

27 This is a bit of a distortion on Foster’s part: of course the conscripts did not suffer much from the enemy before 11 or 12 June, because they had not faced the enemy yet until then. Conscript abuse was real, but Argentinean officers certainly did not pose as much of a threat to the conscripts as did the British, who killed and maimed many of them with great efficiency once they had arrived on the scene.

28 “estaban demasiado limpios, muy bien afeitados, parecían recién salidos de un colegio para señoritas.”

29 “cuando les decíamos que éramos soldados conscriptos se reían. No podían entender cómo nosotros no peleábamos por plata”

30 Britain’s 3rd Parachute Regiment headed the assault on Mt. Longdon (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse 396). Some of the Paras remark that they had wondered if the Argentineans they fought on Longdon had mistaken them for Gurkhas, since the Paras are typically small in stature (Bramley, Two Sides of Hell 149).
“Son unas cositas chiquititas y sanguinarias, no parecen hombres, son seres totalmente inhumanos. Creo que si alguien dijera que los gurkas son monos, los pobres monos se escandalizarían.”

Seear cites an article in the Argentine periodical *Flash*, which suggests that the British would use the Gurkhas as “cannon fodder,” a “human shield” for the Royal Marines, or as “suicide commandos.” The journalists conclude that Gurkha participation in the war demonstrates Britain’s profound disregard for human life, since the only possible end for the Gurkhas on the modern battlefield would be death (ctd. in Seear 168; 195; 235). [Flash no. 184, 18 May 1982, p. 3].

Marcelo Eckhardt’s youth novel *El Desertor* perpetuates the myth of the brainwashed and oppressed Gurkha used as a suicide commando: the Gurkha character, (tellingly illustrated as a robot on the cover) rejects his colonization by deserting with the Argentine protagonist (illustrated as a dog). Charly García includes Gurkhas in his song, “No bombardeen Buenos Aires,” and Fogwill’s pichis discuss them as well. Mempo Giardinelli mentions that some soldiers claimed to have been raped by Gurkhas (195). The myth has even crossed national boundaries, as Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez includes some “colourful” descriptions of Gurkhas in a retrospective article for *El Espectador de Colombia* on April 3, 1983. According to Márquez, only 70 of the original 700 Gurkhas survived the war due to their thoughtless savagery, and even after the surrender they continued killing indiscriminately, so that the British units had to contain them by force (ctd. in Seear xxi). In actuality the 7th Gurkha Rifle Battalion suffered few casualties – Seear describes each one in detail: two deaths (271, 311) and nine wounded (311, 343-344). One other Gurkha was killed and several wounded by a booby trap five months after the surrender (345). The Gurkhas were considered by many to be outstandingly professional, clean, and polite (Seear 35, 302, 330; Kitson 62; Weston 113).

Pablo Vila writes that youth as a group were specifically targeted by the military in its repression: Sixty-seven percent of the disappeared were between eighteen and thirty years of age. Youth were generally taken to be guilty unless they could demonstrate otherwise ("Tango, folklore y rock" 87).

“¿Con qué van a pelearlos a los ingleses se se les congelan los milicos? . . . Yo creo que no vinimos aca para cagarnos entre nosotros” (Kon 90-91).

*Demalvinization* [Desmalvinización] means different things to different groups. Admiral Carlos Büsser’s *Malvinas: la guerra inconclusa* defines it as viewing the war as a failure; doubting Argentina’s righteousness in invading on April 2 (12). He conflates the April 2 invasion with sovereignty, claiming that they are inseparable: according to Büsser, those who question the validity of the invasion are also questioning Argentina’s sovereignty and are therefore traitors who humiliate the Patria (9). He also condemns as delmalvinization any criticism of the Armed Forces’ behavior, either before or during the Malvinas War. He writes that such criticism discredits the military and, by association, Argentina’s right to the Malvinas (12). Büsser actually heads the “official” veterans’ group, called la Casa del Veterano de Guerra [House of the War Veteran], which supports and perpetuates the mythologized views of the war put forward by the Argentine Armed Forces. Other veterans groups like the Centro de Ex-Combatientes en las Islas Malvinas [Center for ex-combatants in the Malvinas Islands] affirm Argentine sovereignty, but condemn the Armed Forces’ actions in the war. They and other groups like them see delmalvinization as a lack of care for the veterans of the war, particularly the conscripts (Gociol et al. 36; 41). Still others interpret the reinstatement of cordial relations with the UK and the USA as delmalvinization, because they feel that it makes the deaths of those who fought meaningless (Gociol et al. 36).

*Boy’s Own* was one of Britain’s most popular boy’s publications for many years – it ran from 1879 until 1967. At first a weekly storysheet, it was later published as a monthly periodical. Along with puzzles, games, and contests, it contained adventure stories, often in a serial format and with imperial and patriotic themes. Jules Verne was among its early contributors.

The only exception is his description of being caught by surprise and having to stab an enemy to death with a broken bayonet, and even that abstains from detail in an effort to mute the nastiness of the experience (31-32).
Zachary Leader makes this observation in his review of Lawrence’s book (TLS 3-9 June, 1988. Ctd. in Foster, Fighting Fictions 110).

Mike Seear’s With the Gurkhas in the Falklands also testifies to the British military medical system’s shortcomings in terms of psychological care for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (309).

Paddy Griffith writes: “Dress habits are deeply ingrained - particularly through training. The same high standards applied to the wearing of uniforms, are applied to the wearing of civvies . . . in spite of 25 years of IRA targetting, Service people actually do want to stand out from the rest of the populace. There is an invisible but very real psychological threshold that civilians cannot cross, established by the various and demanding rites of passage Servicepeople have endured, and the discipline of the lifestyle they choose to follow. Like a masonic fraternity, military people do get on together - and enjoy recognising one another, which is probably why unofficial civvie uniform survives. Off-duty, service people themselves benefit by recognising others of the same ilk - by the cut of a blazer, the contradiction of knife-edge creases on a pair of immaculate Levi 501’s, the regimental heraldry of a tie, or the purposeful hieroglyphics of an otherwise incomprehensible squadron sweat shirt” (1).

Faction, a term combining the words fact and fiction, is used by some writers to designate films that, like Tumbledown, are based on experiences of real people but have been altered or embellished with fictional elements for the sake of making a more interesting drama. Many of the British films about the Falklands conflict are “faction” films, including The Falklands Play, Resurrected, An Ungentlemanly Act, and The Falklands Factor.
CONCLUSION

The many different cultural responses to the Falklands/Malvinas War are so varied in their approaches, techniques, and myths addressed, that it is difficult to arrive at an overarching set of conclusions about them. One general trend in the cultural responses I examined involves how texts emplot the war, and another is that some of the favorite myths among myth-perpetuating texts also tend to be the myths that demythologizers and countermythologizers avoid dealing with directly. The highly favored myths on either side are different, probably due in large part to the outcome of the war: Britain favors its military myths, while Argentina clings to regaining the Malvinas as a just and necessary national cause. Enemy myths are particularly persistent and resistant to demythologizing. Overall, Argentine writers seem more willing to take a humorous approach to criticizing national myths than British writers. I will discuss these trends in more depth and offer some hypotheses as to why they may have come about. It is also interesting to note that in spite of all the demythologizing efforts of the British and Argentinean intelligentsia, myth-perpetuating texts were still being produced in both countries after the year 2000. I look briefly at two more picture books of the war, one British and one Argentine, later on in this conclusion. The British text presents its nationalist myths in more muted and modest terms, while the Argentine text, published by the Fundación Soldados [Soldiers Foundation] under the direction of high-ranking Army officers, is just as stridently mythologizing as ever. Again, these differences are probably owing to the war’s outcome.

As White has written in Tropics of Discourse, emplotting otherwise chaotic past events into a familiar story-form helps not only to impose a sense of order on what happened, but also to assign it a certain value or importance in the larger scheme of things (87; 91). Accordingly, Falklands/Malvinas response texts emplot the war in ways that correspond to the meaning or value that they assign to it. The myth perpetuators tend to use a romance-quest emplotment. The demythologizing texts vary their approaches,
from straightforward tragedy through ironic tragedy and on into irony. Many of the
countermythologizing texts emplot the war as a satire; sometimes tragic, sometimes
comic, and sometimes a mix of the two. In other words, they use more than one mode at
once, even though the use of the ironic mode necessarily discounts the comic and tragic
as inadequate approaches to reality (White 10). The only mode that demythologizers and
countermythologizers do not use is the romantic, unless they hold it up as an object of
parody and scorn, as do Francis’s *Swansong* or the film *Fuckland*.

These different approaches accomplish various ends; the romance, as has been
discussed, tends to reinforce the status-quo. The Falklands/Malvinas myths set up by the
power elite of each nation are cast in a romantic form, particularly the just cause, national
crusade, heroism, and national renewal myths. Frye observes that ruling classes tend to
present their ideals in a romance form, with the forces that threaten their own power
appearing as the villain (186). Myth perpetuators choose the romance quest emplotment
because it coincides with the story-form of the myths themselves and reinforces the
official interpretation of the war as it stands.

Demythologizers have a number of options available to them: while romance
holds up the possibility of redemption and transcendence as attainable through acts of
bravery and heroism, both tragedy and comedy make that transcendence much more
difficult to obtain. Comedy manages to at least temporarily reconcile the forces that
oppose redemption with those that seek it, so it is not as effective a demythologizing
emplotment as tragedy, which has the opposing forces defeat the protagonist in order to
demonstrate how one may at least avoid destruction amid the forces that oppose
redemption (White 9-10). Reconciliation of hostile forces is rarely seen in
Falklands/Malvinas demythologizers or countermythologizers. The forces that oppose
“redemption” in that conflict have not been reconciled, either within each combatant
nation, or between the two. The humorous impulse in most Falklands/Malvinas texts
tends to demythologize through either mocking or pathetic irony, without implying any
reconciliation or consensus. This ironic mode used in a satirical emplotment of the war presents redemption as
impossible, presuming “the ultimate inadequacy of consciousness to live in the world
happily or to comprehend it fully. Satire presupposes the ultimate inadequacy of the
visions of the world dramatically represented in the genres of Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy alike” (White 10, original emphasis). This makes it more effective in deconstructing mythologized approaches by showing them to fall short of adequately representing the war. At the same time, however, satire questions even itself as a satisfactory approach to representing reality (White 10). This can be seen in most of the countermythologizing texts: they insist on a plurality of views without privileging any one as more truthful than the others. By doubting human access to a verifiable and absolute representation of the past through history or memory, they question all myths’ claims to Truth. Instead, they acknowledge that each interpretation reveals a certain, non-exclusive truth of its own, often revealing something about the person or group that gives it a voice.

Categorizing the texts was often difficult: a given work may seem at first to mythologize but, on deeper examination, reveal demythologizing elements. More works than those discussed in Chapter Five contained such ambiguities. I felt like another Mrs. Cheeseman at times, trying to force resistant novels, memoirs, or films into my arbitrary structure of interpretation. Rotondo’s myth-promoting photograph book *Alerta roja*, for example, undermines its own project: pointed references to abundant food and letters for the soldiers remind the reader of the starving conscripts and lost or slowed mail described in other sources. The book’s complaints against British sophistication and treachery are shrill and petulant, and its nondescript photos accompanied by melodramatic captions raise questions about the author’s credibility. Plausible or not, the repeated defensive carping on these themes without convincing photographs can make the book seem petty, thus demeaning the dignity of the Argentinean cause and its forces while trying to defend them. This book, like the British film *An Ungentlemanly Act*, could be interpreted as either promoting or deconstructing national myths, depending on how the viewer wishes to interpret it.

Other works that primarily demythologize or countermythologize end up promoting other myths. Eckhardt’s oppositional *El Desertor* promotes enemy myths, as do Fogwill’s *Los pichy-cyegos* and Francis’s *Swansong*. Fogwill’s novel is particularly difficult to categorize. This is partly because its promotion of the enemy and David/Goliath myths serves to deconstruct its own countermyth, and partly because the
line between what constitutes a countermyth and what is simply a demythologizing strategy turns out to be thin, porous, and very blurry indeed. While other texts indulge enemy myths without endangering their position as demythologizers, Los Pichy-cyegos’s enemy myths undermine one of its central demythologizing strategies. Throughout the novel, Fogwill demonstrates repeatedly that soldiers at war have no use for national identity, that Argentine forces are just as potentially dangerous to the pichis as British, that “we” is not defined by language or birthplace. Then he deconstructs his own efforts by demonizing the British as even “more sons-of-bitches” than the Argentines. He also plays up the David versus Goliath myth, having the British obliterate rows of helpless, poorly-armed Argentine conscripts with futuristic experimental weapons. By doing so he rebuilds the “them” and sets it up in opposition to the Argentine “us” that he had taken such care to deconstruct. El Desertor’s enemy mythologizing is more mild, and is limited to the British as colonial oppressors and the Gurkha myths, so its own efforts at deconstructing identity myths are not as strongly eroded as they are in Los Pichy-cyegos. Swansong promotes a typical British enemy-myth view of the Argentine regime, but blurring the lines of nationalist identity is not one of this novel’s deconstructive strategies, so no self-deconstruction occurs.

Los Pichy-cyegos also exemplifies the difficulty in defining what constitutes a countermyth as opposed to a demythologizing strategy. It could be argued that Fogwill uses a series of complex deconstructive strategies, and does not deploy a major countermyth of his own. The novel does promote the two-fronted war countermyth, but this myth is neither unique to Fogwill nor particularly prominent in his novel. I contend, however, that Fogwill builds his countermyth out of those combined deconstructive strategies: that is, by showing national identity and ideology to be irrelevant in combat and by placing the verifiability of the past in doubt, Fogwill not only questions identity, just cause, and other myths, but he also creates a countermyth that Argentina’s past and its identity are indefinable and un-knowable. Fogwill’s novel also fits in with other countermythologizers in that its post-modern view of history and questioning of us-versus-them constructions of identity are hallmarks of the other countermythologizing texts.
Countermyths in some of the other texts tend to be subtle like this, crystallized slowly through a process of accumulated demythologizing strategies. *Swansong*'s countermyth is built up through the gradual and improbable convergences of most of the characters with Farquhar Island and their degraded, disappointing pasts. *Kelper*'s countermyth also emerges slowly, as islander identity is revealed to be based on xenophobic aggression, violent urges, and spurious memories, and the reader is eventually invited to look for similar qualities in Argentina’s own identity myths. *The Tin-Pot Foreign General*’s countermyth is simply an alternate version of the war-fairy tale in which the titans destroy the islands at the expense of their own soldiers and the islanders as well. It is missing the suspicion of history and memory that characterizes most countermythologizers, but it fits the countermythologizing model, however, in its conscious usage of fairy tale and ancient mythic forms, as a means of countering official myths in their own literary terms. Raban and Theroux’s countermyths are somewhat more straightforward and easily identified, and Gamerro’s range from overt countermyths that the protagonist offers during reflective moments about the Malvinas, to the subtle, gradual materialization of his alternate Argentine identity myth that manifests itself through the nightmare world of modern Buenos Aires and its monstrous inhabitants.

If the countermyth definition is so elastic, how could I justify leaving any of the works at all in the simple demythologizing category? The answer is that most strictly demythologizing works utilize a completely different set of deconstructive strategies than those used by countermythologizers. The two main demythologizing texts that I examined, *Del sol naciente* and *Sink the Belgrano!*, use a tragic dramatic structure, calculated to encourage the spectators to question certain attitudes they may be harboring and then get rid of them as harmful. Whether or not the structure actually convinces audience members to discard their jingoistic myths, both of these works also show the negative effects of official myths on their characters. In Berkoff’s play, those affected are the sailors, who are endangered and also suffer guilt for the deaths of their mates and of the Argentine sailors. In Gambaro’s play, the combatants obviously suffer, but so do Suki and the rest of society. Suki and the countless poor in her town suffer economic woes and a sense of helpless indecision as to how to deal with the veterans and the dead, while the elite waste time and resources on a fruitless war.
Describing the negative effects of war and its mythology on people seems to be a common link for most (admittedly, not all) of the demythologizing works studied in Chapter Three. The dramas use Everyman-type figures, such as Suki’s beggar friend, the soldier Oscar, and Berkoff’s numbered sailors, to stand in for groups that the war has affected in a negative way. Bortnik’s *De a uno* shows the negative psychological effects of the Dirty War and Malvinas War on an ordinary Argentine family. Most of the demythologizing songs also protest the horrible things that befall ordinary people during war: “Let’s Start a War,” “Tramp the Dirt Down,” and “How Does it Feel” speak of the soldiers who suffer and die. “Shipbuilding” and “La isla de la buena memoria” both present more individualized characters who suffer from the war, one a civilian and the other a soldier. “No bombardeen Buenos Aires” laughs at the pathetic state of the porteño Everyman from the fear, distrust, and economic uncertainty that military rule has brought him. Films *Veronico Cruz*, *Los chicos de la guerra*, *Tumbledown*, *Resurrected*, and *For Queen and Country* all deal with men whose lives were either lost or ruined by the war and/or its attendant myths. Even *Arrivederci Millwall*, though it is about British football hooligans, shows the negative effect of jingoistic myths in terms of the aggression and xenophobic ugliness that their adherents unleash upon the world.

Argentine demythologizing fiction, with its largely humorous irony, still presents people who suffer as a result of war or war myths. In “Memorándum Almazán,” the embassy employees who fall for the Chilean swindler’s act are humiliated and one loses his job, because they allow their patriotic feelings for the mythologized figure of the veteran to cloud their judgment. The office workers in “La Causa Justa” are terrorized and one is even killed when the maniacal Tokuro acts in defense of his distorted myths of honor and just cause. In *La Flor azteca*, Carlos – and even Fabio, who gets to live the farcical version in Buenos Aires – suffer physical and psychological damage from their “participation” in the war. The identity reversals in these works do their part in questioning the value of identity myths, but the straightforward simplicity of myths causing harm to characters is also effective in demonstrating the flaws and shortcomings of nationalistic myths. This power is reiterated by Gardini’s nightmare war stories of combat accomplishing nothing but confusion, alienation, destruction, and madness.
Four demythologizing texts stand out for not conforming to this general pattern: Crass’s song “Sheep Farming,” Eckhardt’s *El desertor*, and the films *The Falklands Factor* and *Fuckland*. Crass’s song does briefly mention suffering and death for the soldiers, but its main emphasis is Thatcher’s self interest, and its tone is bitterly ironic. It could be said to posit a countermyth, albeit a common and simplistic one, of Thatcher’s entering the war for egocentric political reasons. Its genre restricts its ability to develop ideas such as the subjectivity of history, or to parodying the romance quest, as do other countermythologizing texts. *The Falklands Factor* stands out as an intellectual analysis of the Falkland Islands’ merits or lack thereof, of the waste involved in going to war over them, and of the cynical motivations behind political discourse. In this sense its approach is more like that of a polemic essay than of a fictional story or an emotional protest song. Its approach is argumentative and essay-like, based as it is on Samuel Johnson’s essay and on his negative experiences with self-seeking politicians. It brings the reasoning of an essay to an audience that might not otherwise sit down to read critical evaluations of the war’s justification. This unique film also seems uniquely British – it relies on pride in and fondness for one of Britain’s great writers to open the way for a censorious view of a popular war. Raphael Samuel calls Dr. Johnson “the best-loved character in English letters” – he is a real-life incarnation of the mythic “freeborn Englishman” character: melancholy and eccentric, oppositional, and fighting doggedly to defend what he felt was right (III: xvi; xxxi). A critical assessment of the Falklands War in the mouth of such a beloved character is bound to at least elicit reflection from its British spectators.

*El desertor* and *Fuckland* are the only two other works that do not use human suffering as a demythologizing tool, though Eckhardt’s deserter implies that suffering and death would have been his lot had he bought into nationalist myths and remained to fight. Both of these texts fall into the category of “farcical” or parodic emplotments of the war: both Eckhardt’s deserter and Marqués’s naughty tourist perform a parodic inversion of the romance quest. In this sense these texts are more like the countermythologizers than the demythologizers. The Argentine tourist’s sexual conquest points out the artificiality of nationalist identities and their reliance on excluding an Other. It does not appear to offer a countermyth of the Malvinas, but it does offer a self-critical view of Argentine arrogance. It could even be said to venture into the issue of different perspectives
altering perception and memory, in the final shots where Camilla steals Fabián’s camera and leaves him a message on it of what she really thinks of him and of their encounter. *El desertor*’s journey constitutes a rejection of nationalism and so-called heroism, and takes him back to a second childhood rather than to heroic exaltation. The futility of hating an Other is emphasized in that the protagonist’s deserting partner is a dreaded Gurkha and their rescuers are the godless Communists – Russian fishermen. They all become friends and witness the fall of Berlin’s Wall, symbolic of the artificiality of nationalist and ideological identities and the divisions they impose. Eckhardt’s novel even questions of history’s reliability and explores the possibility of different perceptions altering remembrance of the same event. Upon close re-examination this deceptively simple story for teens looks more and more like it could pass for a countermythologizer. This text once again calls attention to the inadequacies of a category system for understanding a given body of literature.

Argentina’s many humorous demythologizing texts like “No bombardeen Buenos Aires,” *El desertor*, “La causa justa,” “Memorándum Almazán,” and *Fuckland* highlight a lack of similar material on the British side. Berkoff may use some ironic humor, as does Crass, but within an overall context of choleric accusations and bitter protest. McGowan and Hands’s *Don’t Cry for Me, Sergeant Major* is a wry journalistic account that highlights some of the absurdly humorous incongruities of the war, but rather than criticize it paints a sympathetic picture of Britain’s fighting forces, their adaptability and dauntless good humor. *Swansong* emerges as the only really funny British critique of the war, but its humor it bittersweet, tinged with a bit of the pathetic and hopeless. As the title implies, it is the humor of a nation in decline. It is also a nation whose past continues to return in an ever more degraded and unpleasant form, suggesting a future that can only get worse. Argentinean artists’ willingness to laugh at themselves and their country, even though the problems they laugh at are very serious, suggests that they still maintain some hope for a better future. Britain’s critics like Raban and Theroux offer the bleakest of futures for their nation – for them, things are bad but they can and will get worse. Argentina’s artistic critics, on the other hand, seem to imply that the worst has already happened, so now things have to get better. Of all the artists discussed in this dissertation, Argentinean society’s harshest critic is probably Gamerro, and even he
offers a tiny ray of hope amidst the grotesque nightmare that for him is Argentina’s present. Others, like Eckhardt and Nielsen, end their novels with a good dose of hope for a better future in which blurry, pluralistic identities, and live-and-let-live attitudes prevail.

Other differences between the two cultures and their respective responses to war myths have emerged in this study. Britain lacks a large body of poetry about the conflict, all the more evident when compared with Argentina’s two anthologies full. The occasional poem written by a combatant appears in memoirs, such as Mike Seear’s *With the Gurkhas in the Falklands*. These attest to the emotional and life-changing nature of combat. Others, such as Lieutenant David Tinker, were inspired to quote anti-war poems from other wars, by poets like Wilfred Owen and A. E. Housman, in their letters home. The Falklands/Malvinas were not present in the minds of British people before 1982 as they were for the Argentineans, and even the war itself was not sufficient to draw poetry from British writers, unless these were directly involved in the fighting itself. The quantities of Argentinean poetry about the Malvinas and the war testify to the depth and breadth of national feeling for those islands in Argentinean society; feelings that were and still are largely absent from the British collective imagination. Argentinean poetry proves to be the main artistic vehicle for promoting the crusade narrative of the war. It is especially noteworthy and unique among artistic responses for articulating the islanders as the enemy and the islands themselves as a captive woman that longs to be reunited with the Argentinean mainland. These ideas can be expressed explicitly in poetry without seeming absurd because of poetry’s metaphorical character. British myth promoters endorsed the romance-quest emplotment of the war implicitly through the structure of their adventure tales, photo souvenir book, and Curteis’s *Falklands Play*.

Other differences as well as similarities between the two nations’ approaches to national myths emerge when one looks at responses on a myth-by-myth basis. Some myths are more favored than others by promoters, and certain myths among these favorites are avoided by demythologizers. These favored myths on each side differ and point to differing cultural biases. Myth promoters were largely similar between the two nations, and the exceptions indicate myths that are favored by being passed over in the deconstructive works.
Among both Argentine and British myth-promoting texts, the overwhelming favorites are the just cause and the enemy myths – all myth-promoting texts support these myths without exception. Trailing these are heroic myths of the conflict as a religious crusade and/or romance quest, and heroic myths of combat as promising adventure, proof of manliness, and/or individual exaltation. These are somewhat more popular with British myth perpetuators than with Argentinian ones. In connection with these myths, the enthusiastic British portrayals of their military as brave and worthy representatives of the British spirit contrast with a subtly different promotion of similar myths from Argentinian sources. Myths that sacralize the Argentinian military leadership, though prevalent in military discourse and some military memoirs, are less prominent in artistic responses to the war. Praise for the Argentine military has been largely displaced from the current leadership to nineteenth-century military heroes and the conscript soldiers, which are praised in poetry, picture book and adventure tale alike, and even granted superhuman and saintly status in some of the poetry. With the exception of the martyr-hero Captain Giachino, Argentine career military men and their leaders are only eulogized in one artistic myth-perpetuating text: the adventure novel Operación Algeciras. The growing national distrust of the military leadership seems to have had an effect even on texts that attempt to justify and glorify the war. Argentinian myth promoters also stood out for their attachment to the David-versus-Goliath myth; a myth of hopelessly outgunned but plucky underdogs for the losers to comfort themselves with.

British myth-promoters exhibited more fondness for “Great Britain” myths than Argentine writers did for their corresponding “Gran Argentina” myth. Most British myth-perpetuators portrayed their nation as the dictator-slaying enforcer of international rule of law, while certain Argentine poems are the only texts that promote their Gran Argentina myth. Neither British nor Argentinean myth perpetuators deal with scapegoat myths, unless one takes the enemy myths to be the new scapegoat myths. Thatcher’s favorite scapegoats of the period were socialism in general and striking labor unions in particular – these we see condemned in her speeches but not in myth-promoting artistic responses to the war. Argentinean military discourse from before the crisis likewise deals extensively with internal scapegoats like communist subversives, but these are completely ignored in artistic responses to the war. I would hypothesize that on both
sides of the conflict, any suspicions or hostility toward possible internal folk-devils such as communists or labor unionists were quickly transferred to the new external enemy to be confronted in the South Atlantic war.

When artists from both sides of the conflict set out to create texts that questioned official myths, they favored certain myths over others. Many of them avoid the myths that perpetuating texts had promoted most enthusiastically. Instead they choose certain indirect strategies that, because so many of the official myths are interrelated, eventually imply a questioning of some of the myths that artists could not bring themselves to address directly. British authors take on their just cause myth in moderate numbers, while most Argentine demythologizers attack theirs only indirectly. *The Falklands Factor* and Berkoff’s *Sink the Belgrano!* both question the intrinsic value of sovereignty over such a remote and inhospitable place, adding, along with the Exploited and Crass, that the price of war in lives lost and ruined is too high for such a dubious prize. The films *Tumbledown* and *Resurrected* question the war’s value as compared to the price in individual suffering. Berkoff, Francis, Raban, and Theroux question the apparently cynical and selfish reasons for the government’s decision to counterinvade, while Briggs questions whether the war has not actually made the islanders’ situation worse than it would have been under Argentine rule.

While several Argentine texts do question their just cause myth, most take an indirect approach rather than attack it explicitly. The cause of Malvinas is such a deeply felt one in Argentina that it is difficult and/or ineffective to attempt to discount it. Most artists question the just cause myth only insofar as the military’s role and the use of force are concerned. Eckhardt, Borges, and Gieco are among those that reject the just cause myth indirectly by judging all war to be wrong; hence no nationalist cause, no matter how valid, could justify war in their estimation. These texts condemn the invasion indirectly but refrain from contesting the validity or importance of Argentina’s historical claim on the islands. Similarly, Fogwill does not pass judgment on the claim itself; he only shows that its justice or lack thereof becomes unimportant when physical survival in combat is the main concern. Some otherwise demythologizing works waver when it comes to the just cause myth and end up promoting it, even when this contradicts their other efforts. This happens in the book *Los chicos de la guerra*, and Porchetto’s album *Reina Madre*. 
In a similar vein, the myth that frames Malvinas recovery as a national crusade is so interconnected with the legitimacy and perceived significance of Argentina’s claim, that deconstructors other than Gambaro, Gamerro, and Lamborghini avoid taking it on directly. These three artists question the crusade by questioning the cause. Gambaro’s play Del sol naciente condemns the war by condemning all forms of coercion and domination, whether international or interpersonal. She also questions the cause more directly and thoroughly than others, suggesting through Suki that territory in and of itself is meaningless and unimportant. Other than Gambaro, only Lamborghini and Gamerro label the territorial claim itself as inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. Lamborghini’s short story belittles the Malvinas cause by equating its significance with that of smutty workplace jests. Gamerro’s Las Islas points out the military’s cynical reasons for undertaking the cause, and then directly questions the cause itself through two of his countermyths. The countermyths of the islands as terminal disease and jealous bride point out that the Malvinas are merely a torment and have nothing to offer Argentineans but pain and disappointment. As such, they are hardly worthy of being reclaimed via a national crusade. As will be shown later on, a few demythologizing and countermythologizing texts wear away gently and indirectly at the national crusade myth by undermining the romance-quest emplotment of the war. This way, they can question the crusade theme of the war without directly addressing the legitimacy of Argentina’s claim on the islands.

The David and Goliath myth is another favored construct among Argentinean myth-perpetuators, and largely avoided by demythologizers and countermythologizers. To debunk a myth that has mitigated national humiliation over the military defeat is perhaps too much of a blow against personal and national amour propre. Gambaro and Gamerro are its only deconstructors. Gambaro questions it by suggesting that the military leadership was irresponsible and foolish to bring such unprepared troops to fight a seasoned enemy. Las Islas undoes this myth with the two-fronted war countermyth, showing an Argentine Army divided against itself rather than the virtuous David. Gamerro’s novel also parodies it through the weekly wrestling match episode. Though Los chicos de la guerra and Los pichy-cyegos both employ the two-fronted war
countermyth, they do so while portraying the conscripts as the beleaguered David (rather than the whole army) and emphasizing the greater power and greater evil of the British.

In Argentina, the most overwhelmingly popular targets for deconstruction or head-on assault are those military myths that exalt the Argentine Armed Forces – particularly those that posit the military as saviors and guardians of national morals and dignity. These are roundly attacked by nearly all of Argentina’s demythologizing and/or countermythologizing texts, in an angry response to military irresponsibility, mismanagement, corruption, violent repression, and cruelty. Some undermine pro-military myths with ironic humor to point out their hypocrisies, like García’s “No bombardeen Buenos Aires” and Sábat’s cartoon. Others attack military credibility by showing how deadly serious their incompetence and cruelty could be, like Lerner’s song, the film Veronico Cruz, Bortnik’s De a uno, Gambaro’s Del sol naciente, and Gardini’s collection of short stories. Nielsen’s La Flor azteca and Gamerro’s Las Islas employ both strategies simultaneously for a more thorough condemnation of Argentina’s military leadership. Gamerro’s military characters are the epitome of evil: torturers, selfish sadists, opportunists and parasites who kill and destroy for pleasure and power. At the same time, they are grotesquely humorous in their hypocrisy and blatant incompetence. This dual image is remarkably similar to Britain’s enemy myth of the Junta, although Gamerro’s portrayal makes them far more sinister – their incompetence for Gamerro is grotesque and horrible rather than merely buffoonish, as they are in most British texts.

In contrast, British demythologizing and countermythologizing texts refrain almost completely from criticizing the behavior of their armed forces during the war. Berkoff questions the morality of sinking the Belgrano, but blame for that lies more with those who gave the orders than with those who carried them out. The “Queen’s shilling” myth stands between the military and criticism; they did not have any say as to whether they would fight or not; they were simply doing their jobs as the government and their contracts required them to do. The British maintain a strong sense of pride in their military and its performance: they lived up to their prestigious reputation as fit, efficient, and creative fighters, earning victory in a war with great logistical difficulties and in which they were outnumbered by nearly three to one by the enemy. Even those who condemn the decision to go to war do not attack the military, whose professionalism and
effectiveness is still a source of pride for many Britons. Exceptions to this rule come only via first-hand experiences from soldiers who participated in the war, like *When the Fighting is Over* and *Tumbledown*, which detail military mishandling of wounded and psychologically damaged veterans. These are also the texts that aroused the most public ire, as Reeves describes in his article on the Parliamentary and media furor over *Tumbledown*. Many of the complaints about the film center on its status as an insult to the brave soldiers who had fought uncomplaining for Queen and Country in the past. An example that sounds very much like the others is Conservative MP John Stokes’s response: “I was wounded in the last war with countless others and we never thought of making a play about our experiences. I can only think that the underlying point is to undermine the sacrifices and heroism which enabled us to repossess the Falkland Islands. It is another example of the BBC stabbing the nation in the back” (qtd. in Reeves 147). This response and many others like it documented by Reeves demonstrate the almost hallowed status granted to British military honor, and the fury that is aroused by questioning it. The media mauling of Philip Williams, the missing Guardsman who returned after being presumed dead, is another testament to British hostility toward anyone whose words or actions might stain the illustrious history of Britain’s brave and stoic fighting forces (Williams 99-101; 103-5; 211). He had been vilified as a coward and deserter even before the film *Resurrected*, based loosely on his experience, or his memoir *Summer Soldier* came out. *Resurrected* generated an angry reaction from Parliament and the military similar to that provoked by *Tumbledown* (Williams 187; MacKenzie 43). Part of the indignation came from these films’ – particularly *Tumbledown*’s – ostensible claims to truth, and they were hotly contested on individual points of faithfulness to the record or lack thereof. The truth claim combined with Lawrence’s status as a decorated hero made his accusations against British military culture much too painful for many to bear.

Rather than attack the military, most British anti-war texts undermine the military sub-myths of individual exaltation through acts of heroism and machismo instead. These myths overlap several of the others, and by undermining one myth, demythologizing texts begin to wear away at others by association. The romance-quest plot structure underpins these personal heroism myths, along with many others, including the just cause, the
national crusade, and national renewal myths. By manipulating the emplotment of the war, a demythologizing or countermythologizing text can deconstruct some or all of the romance-dependent myths at once. British texts attack individual heroism and machismo myths by altering the romance quest emplotment, and in doing so many of them question the national crusade myth as well. Berkoff changes the romance quest to a tragedy, and Tumbledown transforms it into a circular structure; both of these alterations deny the hero and the society of any transcendence. Briggs also alters the romance quest fairy tale by making it resemble a Greek myth in which a pair of capricious titans engage in a power struggle that wreaks havoc upon the hapless human victims who just happen to be in the way. In this way the soldier’s transcendent bravery is reduced to the sacrifice of a pawn, and the nation’s heroic rescue is reduced to a further destruction of the innocent. Springs’s painting The Thatcher Years mocks the Falklands rescue as a personally self-aggrandizing adventure for Thatcher herself, as do Berkoff’s play, Swansong, and Crass’s “Sheep Farming in the Falklands.”

Argentine works also frequently question heroism myths, which induce young men to look forward to combat experience as a means of proving their manhood and attaining glory and adulation. Texts like Gardini’s stories, Lerner’s song, Gambaro’s Del sol naciente, Gamerro’s Las Islas, and Los chicos de la guerra, directly posit soldiers as victims rather than as heroes. This reversal of the protagonists’ role undermines the romance-quest structure of the war. By association, then, the myth that emplots the war as a righteous crusade also comes under question. Some texts, like Fuckland and El desertor undermine both these myths indirectly through a parody of the individual soldier’s romance-quest. Except for the texts already discussed as directly discounting the justice of the war, this is the only way that Argentine demythologizers question either the just cause or the national crusade. Beside the indirect method of altering emplotment, the national renewal myths of each nation have also been questioned by other means, such as Los chicos de la guerra’s and Tumbledown’s strategy of depicting individuals and institutions that have not been renewed or united to the cause, and who neglect their veterans once the war is over. Las Islas, Kelper, Swansong, and Raban and Theroux’s travelogues all deploy countermyths that challenge national renewal myths with bleaker predictions for their nations’ futures.
Identity myths take on an interesting new configuration in demythologizing and countermythologizing texts. The official Argentine myth proposes that Argentina’s lost identity is in the Malvinas, waiting to be recovered. The very similar British version posits a British, pastoral identity that is preserved in the islands and should be rescued from the Argentine threat in order to guarantee its continuance as part of the national heritage. Countermythologizing texts in particular have reworked these myths to show that their nostalgia is inextricably linked with aggressive and xenophobic urges. These texts, and even some demythologizing texts like *Del sol naciente* and *Sink the Belgrano!*, expose the motivating force behind these myths as a desire to establish or strengthen national identity through violent repudiation and domination of a constructed Enemy. This sort of us-versus-them nationalism is also contested in some demythologizing texts that portray these identities as imaginary, arbitrary, blurry, and porous, such as *Los pichiy-cyegos*, Borges’s poem, and much of the “farcical” Argentine fiction cited by Kohan. Fogwill’s novel, however, undermines this effort with persistent promotion of enemy myths.

The “Gran Argentina” and “Great Britain” myths can also be viewed in this light as measuring one nation’s greatness by its perceived superiority over another. These myths can then be undermined by questioning identity myths, and in some cases, the national renewal myth. Other than this indirect approach, these myths are not often addressed by demythologizers or countermythologizers on either side. The Argentinean greatness myth does not enter into the myth-perpetuating texts as much as its British counterpart, and Gamarro is its only direct detractor. The “Great Britain” myths of dictator slayer and defender of rule of law, on the other hand, are promoted enthusiastically by myth-perpetuators, but dealt with obliquely or not at all by demythologizers and countermythologizers. *Swansong* indirectly discounts these as irrelevant in Cheeseman’s cynical pursuit of war. The novel does not address Britain’s role as enshrined in World War Two myths, however, and its promotion of enemy myths undermines its demythologizing efforts for these myths. Berkoff also questions somewhat obliquely (though not as obliquely as Francis): *Sink the Belgrano!* reveals the selfish motivations behind trumpeted values like rule of law and deplored dictatorships...
who violate human rights. Some texts that largely demythologize continue to promote these myths, like Lawrence’s memoir and, to a certain extent, Briggs’s storybook.

Enemy myths are by far the most stubborn and persistent of all official myths, and few demythologizers or countermythologizers take them on with any efficacy. On the Argentine side, only Gamerro directly questions the validity of enemy myths by showing their persistence in Argentine culture and making them look a bit silly and paranoid. He also implies that British society and its armed forces were neither more nor less depraved than their Argentine counterparts. Gambaro questions enemy myths indirectly by suggesting that the islanders did not deserve to be dominated through force any more than anyone else. By blurring lines of national identity, and by placing sympathetic British and Argentine characters on equal footing, Borges also indirectly questions this myth in his poem. Sink the Belgrano! and Raban’s Coasting may be the only British de- or counter-mythologizers that question enemy myths directly. A few address them indirectly by questioning “us-versus-them” nationalism and identity, like Theroux’s Kingdom by the Sea and Swansong, but that is all.

Those texts that successfully question the validity of an us-versus-them identity should by logical continuation undermine enemy myths as well, but many of them, including Los pichy-cyegos, El desertor, the book Los chicos de la guerra, and Swansong, contradict themselves by perpetuating enemy myths. Perhaps the persistence of enemy myths indicates that people’s willingness to criticize their own society only goes so far, and they cling to the idea that things are much worse elsewhere, as a sort of mental consolation prize. The enemy is a convenient Other with which to salve injured pride through negation and repudiation: enemy myths say soothingly that, as bad we have become, we are at least better than they are in that horrible place. We may be pitiable, but we have not yet hit rock-bottom, and there are the Others that prove it. Many texts, both British and Argentine, either refrain from criticizing or directly indulge in this sort of comfort-mythologizing, even when it directly contradicts their other demythologizing projects.

Various internal contradictions appear in several cultural responses to the Falklands War. The co-existence of contradictory myths in the same work echoes and reveals a corresponding ambivalence in its author’s society. Porchetto’s nationalist
affirmations and anti-English resentment exist side by side with his abhorrence of violence, echoing general Argentine ambivalence over a failed war waged by a hated regime for an hallowed cause. In like manner, a sense of righteous vengeance mingles with a distaste for war and sadness at the destruction of tranquil Falklands life in An Ungentlemanly Act, revealing mixed British feelings regarding the war’s efficacy.

Robert Lawrence’s story and Los chicos de la guerra, in their book and film formats, revealed and unleashed national controversies over the nature of heroism, the collective identity of veterans, and the meaning of the war itself. The number and varying views of the disputing parties indicate that there were and still are more than just two sides of the Falklands/Malvinas War.

These controversies continue, as evidenced by continued publication of myth promoting and demythologizing books in both countries. The Argentine military establishment and veterans’ associations have recently published more books reasserting many official Malvinas myths. 20 años, 20 héroes [20 years, 20 heroes] (2002) catalogues Argentinean acts of heroism, but it applies that label to just about anyone who happened to die during the war, including one unfortunate fellow who was hit by a bomb while emerging from his foxhole to look for food (31). The David and Goliath myth is promoted (16), as is the enemy myth: if Argentine troops had resisted just a little bit more, that wicked Margaret Thatcher would probably have brought out the nukes, writes contributor Rosendo Fraga (17). Malvinas: álbum de la campaña [Malvinas: campaign album] (1999) pays homage to the Argentine military’s warlike performance while simultaneously acknowledging peace as “the supreme good . . . that we long for” (9).

This picture book is aimed not at the military history enthusiast, but at those who were involved in the war and their families, who might wish to commemorate it as a positive and heroic moment in Argentine history. It does not claim to be a history, but rather an homage to the various units and their men who fought (12). Although it claims to also honor the British “who were worthy adversaries on the battlefield” (9), its tone is consistently critical and even at times derisive of the British. The prologue opens with a statement that in 1997, an Argentine general presided over United Nations forces in Cyprus “including a British battalion” (15). This opening simultaneously celebrates the renewal of peaceful relations with the old adversary and a symbolic chance to exercise
authority over him. The pages that follow affirm the Armed Forces’ “professional merits” (17), pointing out repeatedly that British forces “learned to respect” them for their “effectiveness” (12, 74; 130; 134). It also promotes the David and Goliath myth (67; 103; 128; 155), the malvinization myth (12; 103-112), the just cause (12; 135-6), and military heroism myths (136). The book ends by affirming that wars are best avoided and that the Argentine Armed Forces have given up any claim of influence on Argentine politics (178). These statements, however, are immediately followed by an appeal to the debt owed to those who died, and an avowal that the once-neglected surviving veterans will be “revalorized [revalorizados]” as is their due (180). The contradicting values enshrined in this book mirror some of the mixed Argentine opinions regarding the war. Some, like these two recent books, try to celebrate the entire effort from the invasion through the defense of Puerto Argentino, officers, high command, and soldiers alike. Meanwhile, they make a few half-hearted concessions to “political correctness” by affirming the Argentine military’s commitment to peace and international respect and cooperation. Some try to champion fighting officers and criticize the high command for not supporting them adequately, while others try to valorize the conscripts while condemning the fighting officers and high command alike. Still others wish to portray the conscripts wholly as victims and the war as thoroughly wrong. In this camp is journalist Horacio Verbitsky, who warns that any attempts to validate the war as heroic or as fulfilling the will of the people will “only serve[e] the purpose of re-sacralizing the Armed Forces, imposing a false glory on the most irresponsible of their acts, and clearing the way for their eventual return to power” (La última batalla de la tercera guerra mundial 11). Verbitsky just revised and re-released this book in 2002, along with an article reiterating his main points against the military in Noticias de la semana. He still maintains that Argentina’s claim on the islands is legitimate, just that invasion was the wrong way to solve the issue, and that celebrating that war could have dangerous consequences.

British society is also divided on how it should view the war. While Guardian commentator Mark Lawson may assert that no one cares about the Falklands War anymore, the continually emerging publications about it testify to the contrary. Left-wing intellectuals continue to put forward critical analyses of unnecessary British jingoism and
bloodlust while military personnel and others continue to celebrate Britain’s victory and the bravery of the armed forces that won it. Kevin Foster’s 1999 study *Fighting Fictions* and David Reynolds’s 2002 picture-book history *Task Force* are examples of this continuing interest in and disagreement over the war’s significance. *Task Force* is more modest in its myth-promoting than the 1982 picture book, *War in the Falklands: the Campaign in Pictures*, by the *Sunday Express* team. It simply takes the just cause for granted, but does not deal with preserving the national identity, Britain’s duty to defy dictators, or the Dunkirk Spirit. Whereas the *Sunday Express* book’s photos dwell on human and emotional scenes such as captive islanders, tearful goodbyes and reunions at quayside, victory and camaraderie scenes, wounded men being attended by medics, etc., Reynolds’s photos concentrate on military preparation and action scenes: patrols, marches, loading guns, explosions, and aircraft and ships in motion. There are no shots of wounded men in Reynolds’s book. Reynolds skips from an account of the invasion to an account of the preparations for sending the Task Force, without dwelling on justifications, islander suffering, or ideas of heroic rescue. In place of the national renewal myth, Reynolds offers a military renewal myth: he proposes that the war proved the importance of always maintaining “well-trained, well-equipped military forces,” and that it prompted a renewal of the military’s sagging status in British society (vii). *Task Force*’s target audience appears to be armchair military-history enthusiasts, while *War in the Falklands* was aimed more toward the general British public. Hence Reynolds’s account concentrates on detailed descriptions of the operations and various individuals’ roles, promoting the armed forces’ performance as professional and brave. Individual heroism as an ideal is promoted also, along with muted enemy myths. Even though the target audience for this book is more narrow than similar, earlier offerings like *War in the Falklands*, Reynolds’s book reinforces the impression that many Britons’ most cherished and persistent myths about the war concern the fine performance of their military as a group and as individuals. In all of Falklands literature, these are the myths that are least questioned, and when they are questioned, as in Robert Lawrence’s memoir and the film *Tumbledown*, the general response is a vehemently indignant one.

The good thing about all of this disagreement, the persistence and proliferation of official myths along with various myth adjusters, promoters, questioners, and counterers,
is that the different opinions and views have been and are being expressed. When only one viewpoint or voice is accepted as truth and other viewpoints are forcibly silenced, violence and destruction can and has ensued. The multiple and contradictory views being expressed within both countries reiterate that attempts to create meaning out of the past are highly subjective, and that past events cannot be made to mean a single thing, or even just two or three. The next important step is for partisans of one particular meaning to try to appreciate the truths that other meanings may have to offer. Carlos Büsser, for example, insists on lumping all criticisms of the military’s conduct during the war into a single category of anti-patriotic attempts to humiliate the nation (9). In doing so he conflates criticism of the military with criticism of the nation and of Argentina’s claim on the islands. He thus fails to appreciate the nuances of views other than his own and what valuable lessons might be learned from them. On the other hand, writers like Verbitsky, who reject all praise for Argentina’s conduct of the war, conflate praise for individual soldiers’ bravery and devotion to the cause with praise for the war and for the military leadership that started it. He neglects the need for veterans and others, who gave so much of themselves to a cause they believed as just, to assert that what they sacrificed was not in vain. Countermythologizing works – such as Swansong, Coasting, The Kingdom by the Sea, Kelper, El Desertor, and Las Islas – that emphasize the presence of and need for a multitude of perspectives open the way for beginning to understand and appreciate these different perspectives. Hopefully, this pluralizing impulse will eventually open minds to appreciating even the Enemy’s perspective, and a more constructive dialogue can proceed from there.
Notes to Conclusion

1 Frye also speaks of a certain “proletarian element” in the Romance form, which co-exists paradoxically with the conservative one (186). White pairs the romantic mode of emplotment with an anarchist ideology, as opposed to a conservative one, and he presents the comic mode as the preferred format for conservative ideologists (Tropics of Discourse 70). He also qualifies the categories and pairings he sets forth by saying that a given historian may or may not choose a mode of emplotment consistent with his personal ideology (70).

2 There are a few exceptions, all of which are Argentinean: Eckhardt’s El Desertor and Nielsen’s La Flor Azteca offer hope for a partial redemption through friendship and tolerance of difference – El Desertor is the more hopeful of the two. Gamerro’s Las Islas also suggests that friendship is the one island of not-hell in the midst of hell. These possibilities for reconciliation are only partial ones, however, and are admittedly questioned as inadequate through the use of irony.

3 This hypothetical attitude of hopefulness may have arisen in part from the euphoria of returning to democracy after several years of dictatorship. Most of the good-humored demythologizers I discuss were written between 1986 and 1993. Texts after this date tend to be more self-critical and less hopeful, as though the euphoria were slowly wearing off: La Flor Azteca (1997) tempers the hope it offers with a dose of irony and tragedy, as does Las Islas (1998). Fuckland (2000) does not use tragedy, but it does not offer much in the way of possible comic reconciliations, either: it is strongly ironic and self-critical underneath its humor. Argentina’s devastating economic crash in December of 2001 may well have done away with the atmosphere of hope for a better future in Argentina, but it is difficult to tell simply from Malvinas texts. The only Malvinas text I know of that was published after 2001 is the myth-promoting collection of biographies, 20 años, 20 héroes [20 years, 20 heroes] (2002). Its romantic emplotment of Argentina’s role in the war is not necessarily representative of prevailing attitudes in Argentina, especially since it was written and published under the direction of the Army.

4 Interestingly enough, the story in this novel has been shown to be based on historical events. A July 24, 2004 article in the Guardian indicates that Admiral Anaya recently admitted to having sent a team of saboteurs to blow up a British ship at Gibraltar during the Falklands War. The operation was even named “Operación Algeciras” and one of its participant was a former anti-government guerrilla, just like the novel. See Giles Tremlett’s article at <www.guardian.co.uk/falklands/story/0,11707,1268201,00.html>. British intelligence was apparently aware of the attempted attack and notified Spanish authorities, who arrested the team and deported them to Argentina. An article that was published October 10, 1983 in the Sunday Times “Panorama” on the suspected attempt is available at www.gibnet.com/texts/falkwar.htm.

5 The only demythologizing and/or countermythologizing texts that do not directly attack Argentina’s career military are Borges’s poem, Fuckland, Forn’s “Memorándum Almazán,” and Lamborghini’s facetious “La causa justa.” These concentrate their deconstructive efforts on other mythic targets.

6 This is also a high-quality book, in contrast to the rather poor quality of Rotondo’s Alerta Roja photo book. Even though it has a soft cover, its large size, quality glossy paper, and numerous large photographs all contribute to its being a relatively expensive book – so only those in the middle and upper classes would be likely to buy it (many veterans come from poor families, and the continuing problem of unemployment, which is even greater among veterans than the rest of the population, perpetuates this poverty).

7 “Esta confusión sólo sirve al propósito de resacralizar a las Fuerzas Armadas, trocando en glorioso el más irresponsable de sus actos, y abriéndoles el camino para un eventual regreso al poder.” Socialist commentators Alejandro Dabat and Luis Lorenzano, writing in 1982 before the reinstatement of democracy, also argue that the Junta’s war was only masquerading as a legitimate war against imperialism, and that while the Argentine claim to the Malvinas is valid, it is “a non-essential point,” which should be addressed only after the reinstatement of social and political democracy and the achievement of economic stability (1-2).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laura Linford Williams was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1969. She attended Brigham Young University as a Trustees Scholar, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities with an emphasis in Art History in 1992. During her undergraduate years, she spent several months each in both Britain and Argentina, though at the time she did not imagine that she would later write a dissertation about the Falklands/Malvinas dispute. She entered the Florida State University in 1994 on a fellowship from the Program in the Humanities, and received her Master of Arts degree in April, 1997. She worked as a teaching assistant for FSU’s Program in the Humanities from August, 1995 through December, 1997. She completed her doctoral degree at FSU in April, 2005.