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SPANISH THEATER ON THE APPROPRIATION OF MINORS: THE STAGE AS A SPACE OF IDENTITY AND MEMORY

Luz C. Souto

Universidad de Valencia

luz.souto@uv.es

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Abstract || More than ten years after Ricard Vinyes' research on lost children during Francoism, it is possible to set up a picture of the impact of this subject in Spanish narrative and theater. While the presence of the historiographical discourse persists in the treatment of both genres, drama overcomes the factual basis by introducing more dreamlike and spectral characters. Such is the case of Raúl Hernández Garrido's *Si un día me olvidaras* and *Los niños perdidos* by Laila Ripoll. The Argentinian precedent will frame this discussion, since it has been used as a reference not only for historical research but also for the literary representation of the issue of stolen children during Franco's dictatorship in Spain.

Keywords || Appropriation of Children | Francoism | Theatre | Memory.

Si consideraban positivo el resultado, seguramente llevarían la idea a sus propios sitios, para que otros estados, otros niños, otras sociedades, otros opresores, otros oprimidos, copiaran la fórmula.

Cristina Peri Rossi

0. Introduction

Among all the atrocities committed during the last Argentine dictatorship, the appropriation of minors was that which had the most consequences in the construction of the new generation's identity. In addition to the already painful number of missing persons, this new generation witnessed the ideological transformation of their children through their reeducation, which supported the same ideas that brought about the coup d'état. In the words of Leonor Arfuch, "el arrebatado de la identidad, del derecho a ese relato que me constituye como sujeto, es un doble delito: el escándalo del arrebatado de las genealogías y el de su perversión" (*Abuelas*, 2004: 70).

Although the case in Latin America serves as an immediate model for forming similar conclusions about the Franco dictatorship, the destiny of the children of Republicans was not investigated until 2002. The approximate number of appropriation victims in Argentina is some 500 children, while in Spain there were as many as 43,000 minors appropriated in the first half of the fifties alone.¹ In both countries—keeping in mind the individuality of each one— theatrical works have accompanied narratives from the start, though the two genres have differed greatly in their treatment of characters and their desired effects. The direct contact with the public that theater allows has promoted two direct instances of memory: the first is the denial of facts and information transmitted to the viewers—something which it shares with the novel, though in dramas the result is immediate. The second instance, which is more applicable on Argentine stages than on Spanish ones, is the opening towards a framework of militance that makes the stolen children's return possible. In this way, through the public exposition of the appropriations, theater has occupied a place that is as endangered by memory as by the recuperation of identity (in the cases where this is chronologically possible). With this stage set, a new dimension of collective memory enters the game because, "la existencia de ese recuerdo social ayuda a ordenar los recuerdos individuales, y también da un sentido de permanencia y cierta lógica dentro de la colectividad" (Luengo, 2004: 24).

In Argentina, the pioneer work on the theme of appropriation is *Potestad*² by Eduardo Pavlovsky, debuted in 1985, the same year as the film *La historia oficial*³. After this enormous advancement, it took

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1 | The facts of the Spanish case can be found in Ricard Vinyes's study *Irredentas. Las presas políticas y sus hijos en las cárceles de Franco* and in *Los niños perdidos del franquismo*, both of which are cited in the bibliography. In Spain, there were laws that indicated these robberies legal, which was the case of Orden del 30, in March 1940, which awarded the State custody of those children whose parents had been executed or were in prison. Ley del 4 in December 1941 sanctioned that the state could change their names. The entities that managed the destiny of the minors were *El Patronato de la Merced* and later *El Patronato de San Pablo*. The number of children separated from their mothers rose when, on the September 1 1945, the centers began to take charge of the children of prisoners (they could remain in the prison with their mothers until age 3, though many times they were separated at birth).

2 | For space reasons, this study will focus on the Argentine works only referentially.

3 | This debuted on April 3, 1985. It includes various characters identified as forming part of the Argentine appropriations—the military, their wives—both those who were accomplices and those who denounced them—, the mothers who searched, the civilians who joined the army to obtain benefits (both economic and 'familial'), the exiles who returned, and the stolen children.

until the end of the nineties for new stories to appear, and until the turn of the century for the theme to be consolidated and approached from different perspectives.⁴ Among the reasons for this thematic oscillation we find the political context and the methods of the first democratic governments, beginning with Law 23.492 of Punto Final (1986), until ten years later during the *menemista* era. In 1998, a new approach was attempted with *A veinte años, Luz*, by Elsa Osoria, a novel which was not well-received by the Argentine public, but which managed to restart the conflict over the appropriations. In 2000, the theme was revived in the world of theater with the project *Teatro por la Identidad*, promoted among the activities of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. First edition works from that season alone include 36 works from authors as new as they are renowned,⁵ all of them searching for the identities that they have yet to reinstate. After a decade, the project continues to grow, both nationally and internationally.

1. The first Spanish dramatists on stolen children

In Spain, there were two works that headed the movement; the first was *Si un día me olvidarás* (2000) by Raúl Hernández Garrido, which debuted in the dawn of the memorial *boom*. This representation, if taken as a point of departure from the Argentine testimonials, lacks chronological and topographical markers. In this way, with his timeless characters and allegorical setting, Hernández anticipates the study published by Ricard Vinyes in 2002, in which Vinyes exposed the history of stolen children. The theatrical works of Hernández Garrido, and his chosen theme of identity within in a still-forming panorama of the Spanish memory, serve as an indicative history of the brewing changes, which in 2007 would result in the *Ley de Memoria Histórica de España*. An anticipative work similar to Hernández's own produces *Quinteto de Buenos Aires*⁶ (1998) by Vázquez Montalbán. In this installment of the Carvalho story, the detective focuses on an investigation that ends with an appropriated young woman's restitution. In *Los narradores de Auschwitz*, Ester Cohen analyzes the lucidity of those authors who think ahead of their time and tells us that, "la literatura nada tiene que ver con la profecía, sino más bien con la capacidad de 'leer' su época de manera tal que sus 'conclusiones' puedan, con el paso del tiempo, ser interpretadas, en más de un sentido cercanas a lo que realmente sucede a posteriori" (2006: 34).

The second Spanish theatrical work on appropriation, *Los niños perdidos* (2005), by Laila Ripoll, also came before Ricard Vinyes's investigations. This work directly addresses the case of republican children sent to government centers. It calls attention to the violence they were submitted to by functionaries of the *de facto* state and by

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4 | Among the most important Argentine narratives of this second period include: *A veinte años*, Luz (Osorio, 1998), *Dos veces junio* (Kohan, 2002), *Los topos* (Bruzonne, 2008), *La casa de los conejos* (Alcoba, 2008), *Cuentas pendientes* (Kohan, 2010), *Una mancha más* (Plante, 2011), *Diario de una Princesa Montonera. 110% Verdad* (Pérez, 2012), *¿Quién te crees que sos?* (Urondo, 2012), *El pájaro de hueso* (Carman, 2013). Some of these novels are purely fictional, others were produced by the children of missing persons and are auto-fictional.

5 | This article will not discuss the works mentioned. For more information, visit the official page: <http://www.teatroxlaidentidad.net>

6 | It is interesting to see how both authors are concerned with the problem of lost identity as a result of appropriation in the final Argentine dictatorship, and how few years later this would become a problem in the Franco dictatorship.

members of the church. One year after Ripoll's work was brought to stage, Benjamín Prado published *Mala gente que camina* (2006), the first and most important novel to address the stolen children of the Franco period, and one which created space for itself among the texts that today are considered part of the Spanish memorial narrative.⁷

2. From the historical discourse to the stage

The works by Ripoll and Hernández both give accounts of the loss of identity attributed to the pattern of war and the physical and psychological torture that marks the development of the characters along with the text itself. In spite of the difference between their methods, they reach analogous conclusions concerning the theme of memory. What prevails in both is that the story is told by the ones who disappeared, or by their ghosts. Both are plagued by the dead, by children detained in time, by minors without real names, by characters paralyzed after a childhood that consisted only of tragedy. The continuous repetition of these scenes, almost to the point of exhaustion, can only signify a captivity without exit, a torture that endlessly expands and never ceases to cause suffering. These works anchor a historical narrative in the present, and the tales' goal is to provide a historical interpretation. A political compromise forms when the works are set to stage because, in the words of Mayorga, "el teatro histórico es siempre un teatro político. Abriendo la escena a un pasado y no a otro, observándolo desde una perspectiva y no desde otra, el teatro interviene en la actualidad" (1999: 9).

In *Si un día me olvidaras*, the testimonies of the victims of the final Argentine dictatorship are incorporated as "true" echoes of the theatrical work; this converts it into an intentionally memorial work that is a warning against the loss of identity. This message is reinforced by the inclusion of an extra section—entitled "acotación" in the print edition—which specifies the sources and insists that we must keep fighting for memory in order to prevent the repetition of the narrative's events. On the stage, there is also an attempt to affect the audience with the taped testimonies excerpted from *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, *Nunca Más*, and, *Amnistía Internacional*.

In *Los niños perdidos*, though it does not use textual fragments from historical documents, the title and its description make an obvious reference to the documentary *Los niños perdidos del franquismo*, presented on Catalan television in 2002, directed by Armengou and Belis and based on the study by Ricard Vinyes. This title inspired numerous later works across different genres, one of which—and

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7 | In an attempt to prioritize the analysis of theatrical works, I did not linger on narratives about appropriation. For more information on the characteristics of the cited novels, consult Souto, L. (2011a, 2011b, 2013).

perhaps the most important because of its concrete proposition of reparation and assistance to the victims—is *El caso de los niños perdidos del Franquismo* (2008) by Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Arias.

During the staging of Ripoll's work, the resource of the testimonial recordings is substituted with voices that superimpose historical plots, after-death sounds spoken by "las voces," which turn the fictional desperation real. In the attic where the action occurs, all movement stops at the sound of projectiles, and for moments we only hear the sound waves that remain suspended by death, and the sobs of the children:

LAS VOCES El aire. No me des más golpes. ¡No, al agua no! Tiene fiebre. A la enfermería. ¿Dónde está mi niño? Tengo hambre. Me duele. Destacamento hospicio. Todos al tren. Al desván por meón. Este niño está muerto. Mi hijo, quiero ver a mi hijo. Tu hijo está muerto. A este niño lo han matado a palos. No sé nadar. Tengo hambre. ¡Mamá! ¿Dónde está mi mamá? [...] A tu padre lo han fusilado. ¡No me pegues más! Aceite de ricino. Tiene gusanos [...] ¡Mi niño, no me quitéis a mi niño! Verdugos. Quiero salir. (Ripoll, 2010: 74)

These fictional voices recall the characters' pleas before they arrived at the orphanage. They set a scene marked by the footprints of trauma, but also emulate the words gathered by Vinyes, described by Rafael Torres in *Desaparecidos* (2002), selected by Eduardo Pons in *Los niños republicanos en la guerra de España* (1997), or remembered by Juana Doña and Tomasa Cuevas in their testimonies⁸. These are the historical figures that act surreptitiously in the work, and although their form is fictional, they are not significantly different from the real voices in the work of Hernández, but rather compliment them with their similar desperation for survival.

3. Identities in play

Ripoll's work has only one onstage setting: the attic of an orphanage where two exits can be seen; both are prohibited to the orphans by their fear of the only adult in the work, la Sor. The window in the sloped ceiling gives them a connection to the outside world: Lázaro tries to urinate on girls who pass, doves and bats come in, but the children cannot leave. They are afraid to get close to the door, because behind it lies the truth, and to open the door would be to stop existing, to know that they are dead. So they stay inside playing, remembering and interacting among a jumble of broken furniture: a wardrobe in three segments, a folding screen, a dentist's chair, broken images of saints. Some scarves and costumes inside the wardrobe help the children to act out the tragedy of their lives. In this attic, the light is scarce and their vision is limited, but they do not stop mimicking the speech and actions of the adults close to them, the

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8 | Though the case of appropriation of children during the Spanish dictatorship went public in 2002, its revelation was already implicit in the direct testimonies of those who had endured the repression, especially in the testimonies of women who passed through Francoist jails, as in the case of Juana Doña, Tomasa Cuevas or Carlota O'Neill.

victors. The characters are Cucachita, Marqués, Lázaro, Tuso, Sor, and Las voces. The plot of the work is a succession of games and sinister ludic movements that open up the stories of the children's lives and their histories for the audience.

In *Las aventuras de Pinocho* (Collodi, 1883), which enters into the world of toys, Agamben reflects on the history of playtime, and illustrates how playfulness invades life and causes time to accelerate. If we consider that there is a relation between rituals and playing, in which “el rito fija y estructura el calendario, el juego en cambio, aun cuando todavía no sepamos cómo ni por qué, lo altera y lo destruye” (2007: 98-99), the children in the attic spend their years in captivity without being conscious of the time that has passed in the world outside of that perverse place; day after day they dedicate themselves to making do with the objects that formerly pertained to the high-class sphere (scarves, mirrors, chairs) and the sacred (the figures of saints), by turning them into toys they can use to pass the time. “La esencia del juguete [...] es entonces algo inminentemente histórico: e incluso podría decirse que es lo histórico en estado puro” (Agamben, 2007: 102). Human temporality lives on in the object in the attic and, as they are metamorphosed into toys, the historicity contained in them is materialized. The children have manipulated and miniaturized them, and now the fragments of that which is “no more” remain fixed in the narration of their uprooting.

In the beginning, Sor's interventions reveal the physical and psychiatric mistreatment of the children. However, after the first few pages, Sor ceases to exist as a character, but Tuso dresses up as her, imitating the nun they so fear. The meta-representation ends when,

se escuchan pasos terroríficos que resuenan en toda la habitación. La Sor abre un ojo y corre a esconderse en el armario, sin tantear; los niños, aterrorizados tras el biombo, contienen la respiración. [...] Se abre la puerta del armario y aparece el Tuso. Es un deficiente de unos cincuenta años. Aún conserva parte del hábito del disfraz de Sor, pero se ha quitado el rostrillo y la toca. (Ripoll, 2010: 56-57)

In this montage carried out by the children, they imitate the world of their captors, because that has been their experience of the last several years, and it is all that will survive their physical deaths. Sor (Tuso) enters the scene with a pitcher of milk in her hand and treats everyone like cats; when they do not come to drink the insults begin, from the usual “condenados chiquitines” to “salvajes, que estáis sin civilizar” until they arrive at the theme of the children's ancestry. Their contempt for la Sor gives Ripoll a chance to introduce the ideological motive of the appropriations.

The doctrine of these orphanages was based on the theories of psychologist Antonio Vallejo Nágera, who considered Marxism to be

a contagious and hereditary mental disease. This concept was the basis of the expropriations: the children were taken away from their families, which were opposed to the regime, and given to new families who would reeducate them and “save” their lost souls, in order to create a society based on “pure” values. This theory of transmission of a supposedly red generation was partially responsible for the segregation and discrimination that were practiced in Francoist jails, in the Social Auxiliary headquarters, and in religious centers:

¡Cómo se nota la sangre que lleváis! [...] ¡Hijos del demonio! ¡Anticristos! [...] Sois la manzana podrida y licenciosa que, si la dejamos, emponzoñará a nuestra esperanzadora juventud. Sois la hez de este mundo y del otro. Piojosos. ¡Judíos! Habéis heredado de vuestros progenitores los siete pecados capitales [...] No habéis sabido vencer la sangre que os corrompe [...] mejor hubiera sido haber acabado con vosotros igual que con vuestros padres. (Ripoll, 2010: 42, 45, 52-53)

Vallejo Nágera, whose theory is echoed in the voice of Tuso as he imitates the nun, also insisted on the necessity of segregation among children, as a means of conserving the true Spanish race:

La raza es espíritu, España es espíritu, la Hispanidad es espíritu. Perecerán las razas, las naciones y los pueblos que por extranjerizarse no sepan conservar su espíritu. El espíritu racista siempre ha estado latente en España, como lo pregonan los expedientes de limpieza de sangre necesarios en pasados siglos para habilitarse para los cargos públicos y pertenecer a las corporaciones gremiales. (Vallejo Nágera, 1987: 515)

Although Vallejo Nágera was directly linked with Nazi Germany, the idea of race that he propagated was not bound to the same canons, only to the values that were considered fundamental to Spanishness. In *Irredentas*, Ricard Vinyes specifies the psychiatrist’s idea of race according to the criteria of “society” (in the era of knighthood), “social group” (aristocracy), and “government” (in the militaristic discipline, supported by patriotic virtues that appeared threatened by the lower classes).

The nun is not the only adult represented in the children’s game: there are also other performers from the regimen, such as the famous señorita Veneno who, according to Juana Doña, was feared by prisoners and her compatriots alike, because of her antique methods, old age, and ferocity; this woman felt proud of not being one of the functionaries who had succeeded through the influence of their Falangist spouses. “El mundo de la ‘Veneno’ se limitaba a las cuatro paredes de la cárcel, donde vivía tan presa como las mismas reclusas; no podía ni sabía desenvolverse fuera de aquellos muros donde tenía poder para hacer y deshacer a su antojo” (Doña, 2012: 197). Lázaro, in the attic, recuperates his voice and imitates her, asking:

LÁZARO ¿Quién sois?
 TODOS ¡La organización juvenil!
 LÁZARO ¿Qué queréis?
 TODOS ¡La España una, grande y libre!
 LÁZARO ¿Qué os sostiene?
 TODOS ¡La sangre de nuestros caídos!
 LÁZARO ¿Quién os guía?
 TODOS El caudillo
 LÁZARO ¿Qué os mueve?
 TODOS ¡El recuerdo de José Antonio!
 LÁZARO ¿cuál es vuestra disciplina?
 TODOS ¡La Falange!
 LÁZARO ¿Cuál es vuestra consigna?
 TODOS Por el Imperio hacia Dios
 LÁZARO ¿Cuál es vuestro grito?
 TODOS ¡Arriba España! ¡Viva Franco! ¡Bien! ¡Bien!
 (Ripoll, 2010: 67-68)

In staging this game of imitation, Ripoll achieves two objectives: first, to inform the public of the deeds and historical names linked to the expropriations. Secondly, a weighty effect on the spectators, since the presentation of the characters in the regime becomes more terrible when it is transmitted through the children, when their voices utter the same sentences that previously condemned them. They perpetuate the scene of their mistreatment, the violence of the world invades the space of their games and sublimates their childhood of military education. There are various literary examples in which one can observe children pretending to be part of the war,⁹ where the objects of the massacre are converted into elements of entertainment. But there is another point of view reflected in the children, which does not correspond to their age but has to do with occupying a role in the adult conflict. A work that exemplifies this point of view is *El cartógrafo-Varsovia, 1:400.000*: in which Mayorga illustrates one girl's mission to create a map of the ghetto before it disappears. She relays to her teacher the changes that occur on the site, which is continuously altered by bombs, until they finally recognize that there is nothing left to draw. Decades later, the myth of the girl and her map transcends borders and there are many possible outcomes for the heroine:

Llevo sesenta años oyendo la leyenda del mapa. En distintas versiones. [...] Una la sitúa a la niña en Treblinka. Otra la salva y la lleva a Nueva York para convertirla en una autoridad mundial en cartografía. En la tercera versión, mi favorita, la niña abandona el mapa para unirse al levantamiento: deja de observar la catástrofe para combatirla. (Mayorga: 66)¹⁰

The fact that the happy ending is not one in which the girl saves herself and escapes from the destruction of Varsovia, but unites with the resistance instead, reveals the slightness of heroism and of an adulthood forced by the war. There are various examples in which the world of violence opens an excision towards an adult childhood,

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9 | In *Los niños de la guerra*, Josefina Aldecoa compiles ten stories by writers who lived through the conflict. They all bear the mark of the conjunction between childhood and bombs, childhood and loss. The sublimation of innocence at the hand of an abrupt transition into adulthood, and also the normalization of exceptional circumstances, is a ludic vision. Juana Salabert, following Aldecoa's format, published *Hijas de la ira* in 2009, which includes ten women's testimonies of their childhoods during the Spanish Civil War.

10 | The quotes from *El Cartógrafo* have been excerpted from the online version, which can be found in the *Colección Virtual Dramaturgia Contemporánea*, (<http://www.muestrateatro.com>).

including some prominent works from Argentina, such as *La casa de los conejos* (Novel, Laura Alcoba 2008) and *Infancia Clandestina* (Film, Benjamín Ávila, 2012).

The children in the loft had neither weapons nor dolls (at least not whole ones), and played dress-up and toy trains. But their amusement with the locomotives and wagons, if in fact it started as an innocent thing, ended up being a reminder of what they had lost. The trains had stopped evoking adventures and voyages, but had become the prison itself, a parade of sacrifices that came and went from extermination camps:

CUCA ¿Y si jugamos a los trenes, que es muy emocionante? [...]
LÁZARO [...] ¡Atención, atención, el destacamento hospicio al tren!
Chaca chaca cham piiii, piiii. [...]
CUCA ¡Tengo sed!, ¡quiero agua!
LÁZARO ¡Atención, atención: No hay más agua ni más sardinas hasta llegar a Madrid! Chaca chaca chaca.
CUCA [... Y pasaban los días y las noches. Y dos sardinas con un vaso de agua. Hacía mucho frío. Olalla se murió y olía muy mal. Luego se murió Antón, entonces olía peor. Nos arrimábamos a una ventanita que había, muy alta, muy alta, para poder respirar. [...] Gritamos tanto que no se podía dormir ni nada de nada. Luego, al cabo de unos días, ya gritábamos menos. [...] Y pasaban los días y no llegábamos a ninguna parte. [...] Entonces abrió la puerta un guardia civil y dijo «¡Qué mal huele!», y dijimos: «Es que se han muerto unos niños».
(Ripoll, 2010: 80-81)

The everyday nature of their games became altered by the seriousness of an impossible situation that finally returned to being sadly normal.¹¹ What becomes clearest to the spectators is the familiar manner in which the facts are relayed, the theatricalization of the happenings that they carry in their historical baggage, that they know from testimonies of survivors. Juana Doña described the Alicante-Madrid trajectory and reconstructed every one of the stops in the improvised prison in her story, “El tren estaba largas horas parado y cuando andaba lo hacía a paso cansino, era la lentitud de la muerte, otro niño había muerto en el vagón” (2012: 80). Her testimonies, along with those from Tomasa Cuevas, naturally describe the indescribable and open a space that makes possible other words of political theater like those of Ripoll and Hernández:

Alguien con poder había ordenado desde algún despacho gubernamental que partiera una expedición infantil hacia un destino desconocido para los pasajeros y sus madres, «un tren de hierro y madera que hacía chas, chas». Un tren en marcha cargado de hijos de reclusas no es un hecho banal, accidental. Era una empresa que exigía una decisión política y un apoyo logístico suficiente. (Armengou, 2002: 58)

Then, the horror deepens through the proximity and familiarity between fiction and reality, the scant distance between the children

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11 | With regard to the idea of ‘normalcy’ in the States of exception, Josefina Aldecoa demonstrates the experience in a story about her childhood: “A esto se reduce una dictadura, a sentir como anormal la normalidad de las democracias” (Salabert, 2009: 108).

and their games. The daily terror they are submitted to seems like another facet of the game. The theory of the sinister outlined by Freud suggests that the children's estrangement from the everyday life alters them. Through their repression, things we once trusted (such as the costumes, the toy trains) now seem strange and enemy. The sinister is not only represented in the situation lived during their time trapped in the loft but rather, in time, it is the figure of the locked-up young people, tortured by hunger and fear; they are human and yet un-human, figures of transition and perpetual folds in the moment of desperation, those whose spirits do not respond to their own consciences but to Tusó's memory, a mental sickness that has remained trapped in the violent past.

E. Jentsch destacó, como caso por excelencia de lo siniestro, la «duda de que un ser aparentemente animado, sea en efecto viviente; y a la inversa: de que un objeto sin vida esté en alguna forma animado» [...] «Uno de los procedimientos más seguros para evocar fácilmente lo siniestro mediante las narraciones [...] consiste en dejar que el lector dude de si determinada figura que se le presenta es una persona o un autómatas». (Freud, 1973: 21)

The lost children are not living characters. When the spectator discovers their deaths, these enduring games—which were terrible because of their ferocity and naturalized virulence—become doubly sinister; now they are absent bodies that have disappeared in the clamor of a war that covers everything. The children interact with Tusó until the end of the work, and though they live in his imagination, they are also seen by the spectators, and everyone is obligated to recognize the fatality: the children have been murdered. La Sor pushed Cuca out the window, Lázaro and Marqués were beaten to death, and Tusó, the only survivor, was the one who took revenge on the nun:

TUSO ¡Y yo no quería! ¡Pero cuando vi que empujaba al crío por la ventana y que se liaba a palos con vosotros con esa saña...! ¡Me entró un coraje...! ¡Así que até una cuerda de lado a lado de la escalera y esperé a que bajara! ¡Y cuando llegó a mi altura... la empujé! ¡No se cayó sola, la tiré yo! [...] Luego vi que ya no respiraba, así que escondí la cuerda y fui a quitarle las llaves para sacaros de aquí [...] No me dejaron ni acercarme [...] Y yo seguí todo el rato «Que hay dos niños, que hay dos niños» pero nadie me hacía caso. Pa mí que sabían con el pastel que se iban a encontrar y pensaron que cuanto más tarde mejor. (Ripoll, 2010: 109-111)

Los niños perdidos symbolizes the invasion of a tragic period in the theater, and actualizes facts that, except in states of emergency, were part of everyday life, but that in the present day can produce an estrangement among the spectators. When the public recognizes the fictional act as historical fact, it changes their perception of the work and constructs a political memory. In the words of Mayorga, “en

cada obra de teatro se hace o se deshace conciencia, se construye memoria o se destruye” (1996: 118).

Another Spanish production about the stolen children and their search for identity that has an analogous effect is *NN12* by Gracia Morales (SGAE award 2008). This work, in contrast to Ripoll’s, does not delay in telling the public who in the work is dead; it is revealed in the first act that Patricia Luján Alvares, a teacher, was tortured and killed. A young man who wants to know if Patricia is his mother is the one who searches for truth. The murderer is also revealed as an old man who had previously jailed Patricia. The “militante del sentido”¹² is a forensic anthropologist. The work does not give clues about the geography or time period in which the events occur. The scenography and the characters can be as easily linked to the Argentine case as to the Spanish one. Morales proposes that the NN’s process of recuperating identity is witnessed by the victim. As in the stories of Quiroga, the *más allá* invades the stage. Patricia attends to the restitution of the child she only saw at birth. Mother and child are each on a different side of the universe of the missing, but both are before the eyes of the spectators, where they may become free and recover their identities through the forensic investigation.

Under similar criteria, Raúl Hernández Garrido’s *Si un día me olvidaras* suggests a game among adults who have been detained in their traumatic childhood. The characters, as in Morales’s work, do not pertain to a specific time period. Though the testimonies inserted in the action refer to the Argentine dictatorship, the rest of the facts are less exact. The bombs that do not stop falling and the man-to-man combat seem more suited to a stage in Spain than in Buenos Aires.

The aim of this work is an exercise in unfolding facts that give form to the identity issue. The first duplication is that of the names, which are direct allusions to classical tragedies (Píldes, Electra, and Orestes), and which at the same time emulate the tragedy of the twentieth century. The second duplication is of the roles, a resource that we also see in the work of Ripoll. The stigma of “appropriated” is assumed as much by Orestes as by Píldes. In the opening words of the work, one can already see the fluctuation between names:

Lo podemos llamar Píldes, aunque su nombre auténtico es insignificante
[...] El otro, nervioso, intranquilo. Sería pretencioso llamarlo Orestes
[...] La mujer, llamadla Electra, pero también Clitemnestra o Ifigenia.
O mejor, llamadla simplemente la mujer. (Hernández, 2001: 11)

This vacillation in identity, represented in the multiplicity of names, is a characteristic that theater shares with novels and stories on the theme of stolen children, as much in the Latin American sphere as

NOTES

12 | This definition is used by the sociologist Gabriel Gatti to designate the work of archivists, anthropologists, psychologists, and all those who work to recover a sense of that which was affected by the forced disappearance of people.

in the Spanish. Some examples are “La rebelión de los niños” (Peri Rossi, 1980), *A veinte años Luz* (Osorio, 1998), *Cuentas pendientes* (Kohan, 2010), *Dos veces junio* (Kohan, 2002), *Quinteto de Buenos Aires* (Vázquez, 1998), *Mala gente que camina* (Prado, 2006) y *Si a los tres años no he vuelto* (Cañil, 2011). All these texts exemplify the vestiges of the robberies with a hesitation in their very names. Hernández’s last work, *Todos los que quedan*, demonstrates the author’s persistence on the theme of identity conditioned by State violence. In the story, Ana Cerrada Lebrón undertakes a search for her father, a Republican who was supposedly freed from Mauthausen. The double identity occupies the stage: the man who claims to be Juan Cerrada turns out to be a German condemned to death for desertion, who takes on the name as a reminder of the dead civilians in the Spanish war.

In *Si un día me olvidaras*, Electra carries a suitcase. In it she guards the secret of her past and her identity. When the luggage falls to the floor and bursts open during a fight between Píldes and Electra, it is revealed to only contain a pile of bloody rags and bandages. The bandages evoke birth and death throughout the work; the trauma of the appropriation will remain inalterable in the Orestes’s subconscious, he will return to the oneiric images and the repeated vision of the stained dresses. The dialog is short, sometimes disconnected, referring continuously to the ocean, to a basement that torments Orestes and his dreams with ghosts that repeat incessantly, like the representation of Tuso in Ripoll’s text:

ORESTES No voy a bajar. Nadie vive en el sótano.
ELECTRA Nadie.
ORESTES Se lo pediré a mi hermano. Bajaré por mí.
ELECTRA ¿Estará de acuerdo?
ORESTES Le pediré que levante un muro para olvidarnos que allá abajo hay un sótano. No quiero volver a oír las voces que suenan allá abajo.
ELECTRA Sería mejor pensar que todo es un sueño, una fantasía. Que no estoy cerca de ti, que no he venido hasta ti para abrirte los ojos. No me puedes ver. Pero dentro de poco estaré a tu lado. (Hernández, 2001: 15)

Electra’s search takes her to confront Píldes in order to save Orestes, as the homonymous mythological character described by Pindar, who helped her brother to leave the country and avoid being murdered by Clitemnestra. In this case, though, salvation is not in fleeing but in truth, in descending to the basement and to memories, in staying to look for a memory, the answer to the characters’ plight. Electra reveals the content of her suitcase, “en mi maleta ni hay ropas ni objetos innecesarios. Sólo recuerdos, para ti. Quiero que me escuches”, and later, even though Píldes interposes himself: “Píldes levanta el arma y aúlla, como un lobo. La mujer se desvanece en el aire antes de rozar la piel de Orestes” (2001: 20). Píldes’ howl

joins the screams of witnesses in the back, the never-ending voices of memories of the children in the attic, the silence stemming from the lists of disappeared people that permeate the scene and the story. “Dolor de hogar”; Heimweh, as Primo Levi called it: “Sabemos de dónde venimos: los recuerdos del mundo exterior pueblan nuestros sueños y nuestra vigilia, nos damos cuenta con estupor que no hemos olvidado nada, cada recuerdo evocado surge ante nosotros dolorosamente nítido” (2011: 81).

Orestes remembers his adoptive parents, who were killed in an accident, and suspects he has been appropriated. Thus begins the fight among the brothers, a fight for a place of belonging, for family’s truth, which coincides with knowledge on collective memory:

ORETES Sé la verdad. Me la dijo ella... mamá.
PÍLADES No puede ser posible.
ORESTES La oí de sus labios. De los labios que tantas veces me besaron, a los que tantas besé. La historia de dos hermanos que no lo eran, de dos gemelos con distinto padre y distinta madre. La simulación oficial, la cruel impostura. Anoche volvía soñar. Ella venía hacia mí. Mi niño, me llamaba. Pero yo olía a sangre. Era un vestido viejo y sucio, lleno de mentiras. (2001: 25)

Orestes begins to construct himself around the memory of the smell of blood, “abro los armarios. Están llenos de abrigos y me ahoga el olor a sangre,” his nose drives him to an ancestral need for knowledge. The vision comes from his dead foster parents, but it is also a memory of his mother, opened so her child could be stolen, of the body that never ceases to be present and absent at the same time: *missing*.

The missing people “ponen en cuestión dos soportes fuertes de la vida social: *la identidad* y el *lenguaje*. La identidad, en efecto, se tambalea, no sólo la del propio detenido-desparecido, también la de su entorno [...] el lenguaje se tuerce” (Gatti, 2001: 18). In this space of contradictions and instability, theater should turn to a rapture in order to be able to transmit the break in meaning that disappearance produces. As much as Ripoll and Morales, Hernández does not force his actors to represent in reality something that is not there, the blackout of identity. The void is also invoked by Electra in front of the sea, in the same way the myth does in front of Agamemnon’s tomb.

Mira. Es un mechón de cabello de mi hermano. Un homenaje de mi desconocido hermano a nuestros padres muertos, ante su tumba, el Océano. Fíjate, podría creerse que es de mi propio cabello [...] Apoyé mis cabeza contra su huella y oí sus pasos, a través de la distancia. Los reconocí, los he seguido, cruzando fronteras y atravesando guerras, hasta llegar aquí. (Hernández, 2001: 29)

Laila Ripoll’s children are also forced to remember their parents; they

cling to the life that came before the claustrophobic solitude of the orphanage, though this life is also marked by pain. Cucachita is the smallest in the group, the one who wets the bed and talks most about his mother, and is the character who gives voice to the martyrs, whose discourse stands out against those of the other children:

Me acuerdo de mi mamá y me hago pis, me acuerdo de la tía Mariló y también, me acuerdo de la enfermería en la cárcel y me meo del todo, me acuerdo de la celda donde estaba mi mamá con muchas más y ya ni te cuento. Y si pienso en cosas de ahora, pues mucho peor, porque ya no está mi mamá para cogerme en brazos y darme un beso, ni la tía Mariló con un boniato, ni Marina, que tenía un niño como yo y se murió de disentería, y la cárcel era muy fea y muy asquerosa, pero estaba mi mamá. (Ripoll, 2010: 83)

In both works, the characters are interrupted by violence and fear, both while Ripoll's children still remember who their parents were, Hernández's know nothing of their pasts. The concrete references are to their foster parents and Orestes recognizes his ideological transformation: "me convertí en heredero de los torturadores" (Hernández, 2001: 23). His foster brother, Píldes, is the one charged with completing the reeducation, and he will do it using the same excuse as his progenitors: "estamos en un país en guerra. Saber disparar es tan necesario como respirar" (2001: 24).

As the work advances it becomes more confused, in an intent to transmit the indeterminateness of the identities, and the characters begin to morph into one another. At moments Electra is Orestes's mother, in others his sister, in others his lover, but when they make love their moans of pleasure convert into shouts of suffering, and Orestes occupies the place of Píldes. Sometimes Píldes is the appropriated child and Orestes is the one who kicks the mother's stomach, torturing her. Any one of them can be the victim, the victimizer, the expropriated or the sacrificed.

4. Conclusions

There is a significant difference in the reconstruction of the expropriations in the theater and in novels. On one hand, the narratives about these plundered children are valuable to the historiographic discourse (*Mala gente que camina* by Benjamín Prado, *Si a los tres años no he vuelto* by Ana Cañil), to the point that this becomes the epicenter of the narration, leaving a mark that is more descriptive and more tied to empirical proofs than to facts. On the other hand, the theatrical representations, as we have seen, use the same discourses as their source but remain subject to a work about the actors who insist on being part of a more oneiric and spectral environment. With this resource, dramaturgy attempts to

bring spectators and missing persons to the present, as well as those lost in graves and orphanages. In this choice, apart from aesthetic intention, there is an intention of social intervention, a public use of the recent past, and an active construction of the memory that turns the spectators into participants. The message is summed up by an old man in Mayorga's *El cartógrafo*, "Vuelve a la calle y abre bien los ojos. Y pregúntate qué debe ser recordado. Serás tú quien salve o condene" (2010: 26).

In this way, both genres respond to the necessity of reparation and a reconstruction of the traumatic episodes, however, the visual impact which can be valued in the theater has permitted works like *Los niños perdidos*, *Si un día me olvidaras*, and *NN12* to see themselves reinforced by characters uncommon to memorial narratives (ghosts, spirits). These works have used the stage to transmit that which the novel exemplified through historical insistence, to question the spectator, and to give the memory of the lost its place in collective remembrance.

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