

Moving On? Memory and History in Griselda Gambaro's Recent Theater

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Former Argentine president Carlos Menem's 1990 pardon of the military leaders of the Dirty War (1976-1983) initiated a period of forced national forgetting.¹ Not only were citizens supposed to forgive the violators for their crimes, but they were also asked to forget the atrocities of those years of terror. In *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* Diana Taylor confirms that among the concerns and emotions that ran through Argentina in 1990 as a result of the pardon were "the preoccupation with national memory and forgetting, feelings of complicity and resistance, the desire to see the forbidden and the need to reimagine community" (11). Forgetting such acts of atrocity, however, would take more than a government mandate. In fact, is it possible to forget at all? How do individuals and a nation forget about 30,000 brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and children who were abducted, tortured, and permanently disappeared between 1976 and 1983?

Much of Argentina's literature during the past twenty-five years has centered on the "problem" of the Dirty War. The works of novelist and playwright Griselda Gambaro are no exception. As the foremost woman writer of Argentina's stage for nearly half a century, Gambaro is a master at artistically representing the social and political climate of her homeland.² Diana Taylor has documented the various stages of Gambaro's theater from the 1960s to the 1980s and described the progression from a theater

of crisis to a drama of disappearance to a theater in which the characters finally speak out against their oppressors (Feitlowitz 163-74).³

Three plays, written during what might be called Gambaro's fourth decade of theater, will be the subject of this article. These works not only document the range of emotions in the post Dirty War period, but also suggest ways of coping with the memories. *Efectos personales* (1988), *Desafiar al destino* (1990) and *Atando cabos* (1991) fit within what Jeanette Malkin calls memory-theater, in that they use monologue and retrospection to remember the memories.⁴ Beyond traditional memory-theater, however, these works also demonstrate the trauma involved in remembering. They document different phases in the memory process and suggest stages of grief in a traumatized nation.

There is a significant difference between these works and Gambaro's earlier works. First, while earlier plays had either predicted and foreshadowed the events of the Dirty War or documented those horrific events during the period, these plays demonstrate the aftermath of the trauma—dealing with the memories of such atrocities. Second, there is a structural difference between these and earlier works. In her theater of the sixties through the early eighties, spatial construction had scripted intense movement into the plot. For example, *Información para extranjeros*, Gambaro's most structurally unique play, sets the stage in a labyrinth-like building where spectators are forced to view and participate in the play by walking through the space. Other early plays, such as *Los siameses*, *El campo*, and *La malasangre*, highlight the opposition between inside and outside spaces, thus creating tension between characters on each side of the divide. In these three recent plays, however, there is no movement. Ironically, Gambaro establishes a metaphor of thwarted or frustrated travel. The stage is set on a train platform or in a ship, but travel is disrupted from the outset. The only voyage that Gambaro's characters embark on is an "odyssey of memory" or an "odyssey through memory," where, like James Joyce's characters in *Ulysses*, they work through their memories in order to come to terms with the past (Rickard 13).

Gambaro's metaphor of thwarted or frustrated travel allows the reader to focus on the talking. As her protagonists literally try

to move on, be it by train or by boat, they work through their memories. In this way, Gambaro remembers the events of the Dirty War years, projects the national climate in Argentina after that War, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and demonstrates the personal trauma surrounding the remembering or forgetting of the events. These plays become testimonies of those years of terror, they document the trauma resulting from those events on both the personal and national levels, and they propose coping strategies for the Argentine citizen, possible ways to move on after such trauma.

In the introduction to their 1998 study, *The Ends of Performance*, Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane affirm that the dramatization of the past in the present is a Freudian act. "The retrospective account," they state, "reinterprets the past in such a way that what has been repressed by the unconscious can be joined with consciousness" (6). They also propose:

Freud understood that curing the traumatic symptom required a lot of talking afterward. The talking after often means "talking over" and in that performance one might be able to discern what consciousness overlooked during the event's unfolding. This talking after and talking over is where the curative interpretation occurs. (7)

Efectos personales 'Personal Belongings, Personal Impressions, Personal Effects' (1988) presents a type of talking through and, at the same time, illustrates the Freudian theory of repression.⁵ It refers not only to the climate of national forgetting soon to be mandated by Menem, but also to the ways in which individuals themselves repress difficult memories. The sole protagonist, simply called "el hombre," is waiting for a train that never comes. While waiting, he "remembers." At the beginning of this short play, he enters and exits the stage three times, each time to retrieve more luggage, which he then proceeds to pile up and "organize" on the platform.

The old and heavy suitcases are difficult to carry. The initial stage directions inform us that "Colgado del hombro, un gran bolso; bajo el brazo y en una mano lleva dificultosamente maletas de distinto tamaño; con la otra mano arrastra de una sogá una

enorme maleta muy pesada." 'Hanging from his shoulder, a big bag; under his arm and in one hand he carries suitcases of different sizes with difficulty; with the other hand he pulls a very heavy, enormous suitcase with a rope' (7).⁶ Since he soon realizes that he is two hours early for the train, he decides to impose order on this mountain of suitcases, but he cannot remember what is inside them. He states,

¿Qué hago en este desierto? Pongo orden. . . . ¿Qué traje acá? (*La observa, la da vuelta. Pega el oído a la valija, la sacude*) No voy a abrirla. Soy curioso, pero no tanto. . . . No pesa mucho. Es vieja. ¿Qué puse? No me acuerdo.

What do I do in this desert? I'll impose order. . . . What did I bring here? (*He looks at it, turns it over. He holds his ear to the suitcase, shakes it.*) I'm not going to open it. I'm curious but not that much. . . . It doesn't weigh very much. It's old. What did I put in it? I don't remember. (8)

At first he does not remember and is not going to open the suitcases to find out.

Soon, however, he admits that he does know what each suitcase contains, and he begins talking to the suitcases, talking over his memories, talking through them. He says, "Sé lo que guardan todas. También vos. . . . Sólo un idiota no sabe lo que lleva en su propio equipaje." 'I know what they all contain. You too. . . . Only an idiot doesn't know what he carries in his own luggage' (9). Still he does not dare open them all. He doubts and questions everything. He thinks he knows what some of them contain, but he denies this knowledge. The man's words and actions in *Efectos personales* highlight, as Freud has, that, after a traumatic event, there are usually two psychologically opposing forces at play: on the one hand, the conscious striving to bring into consciousness the forgotten experience, on the other hand, resistance to the idea and the repression of it.⁷ In *Efectos*, the opposition between remembering and forgetting, between conscious and unconscious, is further manifested when he does open three of the suitcases and finds that he is partially correct about their contents. He pulls out assorted items and, when they are not exactly what he had

hoped, he stuffs them back into the suitcases in a disorganized fashion.

There is one suitcase, however, that continues to haunt him. It is extremely important to him, yet he cannot bring himself to open it. He has totally repressed its contents, the memories it contains. As Freud suggests, though, "the forgotten memories were not lost. They were in the patient's possession and were ready to emerge in association to what was still known by him; but there was some force that prevented them from becoming conscious and compelled them to remain unconscious" (21). The repression of a subject's memories is directly related to the painfulness of the experience that caused the memory. Repression occurs when the event of the past is, in Freud's words, "in sharp contrast to the subject's other wishes" and is "incompatible with the ethical and aesthetic standards of his personality" (22). The presence of the memory causes a high degree of mental pain, thus the ethical and aesthetic standards of the subject repress the memories to avoid the pain.

The pain the protagonist is trying to avoid becomes apparent in his monologue. Fragments of the repressed memories emerge in this talking through, where the "personal belongings" in his suitcases are transformed into his "personal impressions" of the trauma that he and his fellow citizens suffered during the Dirty War. His broken violin string reminds him of the moment of trauma, when, during his concert, some men entered, disrupted the concert, followed him and destroyed his hope of meeting the pretty little girl in the first row. He reflects:

Yo tocaba y ellos conversaban, tosían, se removían en las sillas, y algunos entraban tarde, pum, pum, pum, como si tuvieran botas, paso de ganso, ¡eso hacían! (*Ríe*) ¡A quién se le ocurre? ¿Venir a parar a este pueblo de mala muerte? Pero en la primera fila alguien me escuchaba, una piba tan hermosa. . . . La perdí de vista, los perros me siguieron. ¿Qué tenés adentro? Decime.

I was playing and they were conversing, coughing, moving around in their chairs, and some were entering late, pum, pum, pum, as if they were wearing boots, the goose step, that's what they were doing. (*He laughs*) Who would have thought? To end up stop-

ping in this dead end town? But in the first row someone was listening to me, such a pretty little girl. . . . I lost sight of her. Those dogs followed me. What do you have in there? Tell me! (12)

The juxtaposition of these memories, that of the concert when soldiers entered and then followed him, and the question "What do you have in there? Tell me!" highlights the ambiguity of the question. Why are these men pursuing him? Do they want to know what is in his case or is he asking himself to remember the contents? What is the reason for his amnesia? He soon admits that he has not forgotten at all. "Toco de memoria, así que conmigo no podés contar para que olvide algo." 'I play from memory, so you can't count on me to forget anything' (13). He suffers from a momentary memory lapse, or is it a memory erasure? He states, "Sé lo que hay adentro. Sólo tengo un rapto o rato de amnesia." 'I know what's inside. I'm just having an abduction of memory or a momentary memory lapse' (11). The play on the words "rapto" and "rato" indicates that this repressed memory is both personal and political. Personally, it reflects the individual pain of the memories—he cannot confront them yet, they are too painful, hence his amnesia or repression—while politically, it refers to the institutionalized attempt to erase the past through the pardoning of the military leaders, the national amnesia soon to be called for by Menem. The government's attempt to abduct and erase national memory in the late eighties and early nineties is parallel to the military's abduction and erasure of thousands of compatriots during the Dirty War.

But for this man, the train will not come until memory is confronted. He cannot move on until he remembers. As Freud affirms, for recovery to be possible

the symptom must be led back along the same paths and once more turned into the repressed idea. If what was repressed is brought back again into conscious mental activity, the resulting psychical conflict, which the patient had tried to avoid, can reach a better outcome than was offered by repression. (26)

While the better outcome Freud postulates does not translate into a happy ending in *Efectos personales*, the play is a talking through of the past. The man partially remembers, but still represses some of the memories. Moreover, he is conscious of the process of remembering, and he struggles through it. He tries to determine how much he can cope with. How much should he remember? His final words express, "Tanta historia para. . . . Está bien. No hay por qué tener vergüenza. . . . Hiciste lo que pudiste. No, no. Fue mucho. . . . Una nadita. . . . Fue mucho. . . ." 'So much history for. . . . It's okay. No need to be ashamed. . . . You did what you could. No, no. It was a lot. . . . Nothing at all. . . . It was a lot. . . .' (15). The personal memories of the past overwhelm him and he tries to come to terms with his involvement in history. Did he do enough? What should/could he have done and how should he proceed? Will the train ever come that will move him forward, beyond the past?

In the end, he clings to the one suitcase that continues to haunt him, that one memory he cannot yet confront. Still unable to open it, he does take it with him as he exits the stage. He leaves the pile of memories he has confronted behind him, but in some ways, he is making progress by working through the denial and beyond repression and acknowledging the importance of that one suitcase. He is advancing one step at a time. Perhaps soon, he will be able to open it and confront all the painful memories. Until then, however, the personal and political repression of those memories makes it impossible for him to construct a future or, in Taylor's words, "to reimagine community."

In *Desafiar al destino* 'Challenging Destiny' (1990), Gambaro posits a more optimistic ending.⁸ The scene is quite similar to that of *Efectos personales* in that the man, Bobby, is also on a train platform. He has no luggage or money. Throughout the course of this once again short piece, he reflects on his own poverty and hunger and relates them to the national and global settings.

Reflections on his personal condition lead him to think about the sad state of the world and also the lamentable condition of his world, Argentina. In order to distract himself from his hunger, he spends his last dollar on a newspaper. He says, "Me distraigo del

hambre. Me preocupo por el mundo . . . en vez de . . . ser egoísta, preocuparme por mi estómago, órgano ¡enteramente personal!” ‘I’ll distract myself from my hunger. I’ll worry about the world . . . instead of . . . being selfish, worrying about my stomach, a totally personal organ’ (23)!

When the protagonist reads the newspaper, however, he becomes disgusted, because he realizes it is all fabrication.

(Abre el diario, lee, protesta) “¿Qué es esto? ¡Increíble!” *(Da vuelta la página)* “¡Vamos! ¿Qué me quieren hacer creer? ¿Soy idiota?” *(Da la vuelta las páginas, se indigna cada vez más. Cierra el diario, furioso)* “¡Mierda! ¡Pura mierda!”

(He opens the newspaper, reads, protests.) “What is this? Incredible!” *(He turns the page.)* “Get out! What do they want to make me believe? Do they think I’m an idiot?” *(He turns the pages and becomes even more indignant. He closes the paper furiously.)* “Bullshit! Pure bullshit!” (23)

He knows the reality yet he sees how the authorities continually reinvent it.

After selling the newspaper to a man who is peeking over the wall, he sees that the man has the same reaction to the contents of the paper. They both react to the official story they are forced to confront. He asks the man,

¿Qué esperaba? Con el diario nos equivocamos siempre. Si lo compramos, nos enteramos de cómo va el mundo, si no lo compramos, no lo sabemos, y el mundo, por sorpresa, nos puede estallar encima. Dilema insoluble.

What were you expecting? With the newspaper we’re always wrong. If we buy it, we find out how things are going in the world, if we don’t buy it, we don’t know, and the world can come crashing down on us by surprise. It’s an irresolvable dilemma.’ (25)

Unlike the character in *Efectos personales*, however, Bobby pretends that he never intended to travel. He states from the outset, “Compré el boleto, segunda ventanilla, derecha, y lo tiré. No pienso viajar. Cambié de idea. Eso digo, si me preguntan. Lo diré . . . con seguridad.” ‘I bought the ticket, second window seat on the

right and I threw it out. I don't intend to travel. I changed my mind. I'll say that if they ask me. I'll say it . . . with certainty' (19). He is not going to confront history or the current state of his nation; instead, he chooses a more optimistic approach and re-invents himself and his circumstances. He follows the official model. If one can say the world is as it is not, like in the newspaper, then why can't he be someone else with a different set of circumstances?

He decides to become Doctor Hernández Frides who is waiting for a certain woman, Marta, who is young, beautiful, foreign and passionately in love with him (28). After a woman who enters rejects him, he then changes the name of the woman he is waiting for. He now waits for Mabel, who is also a doctor. To his surprise she arrives, and not only is she everything he had wished for, elegant and young, but she is also attracted to him and, furthermore, she invites him to dinner and insists on paying. She is perfect and she loves everything about him. He has succeeded in inventing a happy ending. But can one fabricate a future by pretending the past did not happen? Will this amazing mythical woman, this new Evita, really come along and repair Argentina's broken identity? Since the Mabel of Bobby's fantasies is a foreigner, perhaps Argentines are looking for an outside solution. *Desafiar al destino* suggests that ignoring the reality and fabricating a new one has been a route well traveled in Argentina's recent past and is one of the methods both the government and the citizens have used to deal with their history.

Gambaro confronts history full force in *Atando cabos* 'Loose Ends, Putting Two and Two Together,' first performed in London in 1991, when she places the only two protagonists on a ship, but immediately disrupts the possibility of travel when a shipwreck occurs.⁹ Just before the moment of the shipwreck, Elisa is annoyed because Martín is pursuing her and that he has a military look (13). When the shipwreck occurs, Martín rushes to save them, to look for the lifeboat so they might get to shore. For Elisa, however, the shipwreck reminds her of her daughter's death and provokes a deluge of memories about which Elisa cannot and will not stop talking. Elisa's daughter, it seems, had been abducted and possibly pushed from a helicopter into the sea. Diana Taylor con-

firms that during the Dirty War the military "threw the live but drugged, naked bodies of the 'disappeared' into the sea" (16).

The opening line of the play informs the astute reader that the woman, Elisa, is the mother of a disappeared person, when Martín asks her, "¿Es suyo el pañuelo?" 'Is this your kerchief?' (9). In any other context the kerchief might be insignificant, but in an Argentine play of the period following the Dirty War, the kerchief ties Elisa to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who still march every Thursday in front of the President's palace in honor of their missing children.

Martín, on the other hand, not only refuses to hear Elisa's stories, but he also believes that whoever fell into the sea deserved it: "Quien saltó al mar, al río, fue porque se lo buscó." 'Whoever jumped into the sea, into the river, was asking for it' (18). He wants Elisa to stop talking and, when she will not, he accuses her of being hysterical.

Elisa's memories are a combination of what she actually knows (that her daughter was abducted and disappeared) and what she imagines (that her daughter, like other disappeared people, was raped and tortured and then thrown from a helicopter into the river or the sea). Elisa's memory might border on what John S. Rickard, in his study of Joyce, calls an activist model. This activist model is memory that involves the creative transformation of experience. According to Rickard:

An activist memory is a metaphor of the search, it is not a straightforward process of retrieval, but rather a creative or active search back through language and experience, guided by imagination and as dependent on the contexts of the present as on the past. Activist memory is always problematic for it doubts the availability of any final truth. It is memory as an intersection between actual experience and interpretation, imagination and repression. (11-12)¹⁰

Elisa tries to imagine the past, and her present situation helps her to do so. As she looks at the fish jump in and out of the water, she imagines her daughter as she was pushed to her death. She is sadly searching for a truth that she knows she will never fully understand, yet she continues the search by trying to combine imagi-

nation with her present knowledge in an effort to recover/uncover her memory.

On the other hand, Martín has no imagination, and, if he has a memory of the past, it is completely "passivist" (Rickard 11-12).¹¹ Elisa accuses Martín of never having imagined anything. She warns, "Usted nunca imaginó nada" 'You never imagined anything' (24). He readily admits that he has no need to imagine, because he made history as well as History and invents the stories about it. Martín states,

No necesito imaginar. Yo hice la historia, la grande y la pequeña. Todas las historias que Ud. cuenta, yo las hice. Y los que hacemos la historia somos los únicos libres y podemos ensalzarnos. No necesitamos ninguna absolución.

I don't need to imagine. I made the history/story, the big one and the little one. All the histories/stories that you tell, I made them. And those who make history/the story are the only ones who are free and can praise ourselves. We have no need for absolution.
(24)

Martín's personal, self-centered view of history and the stories about it allows him to absolve himself of all guilt over his involvement in the Dirty War.

In *Atando cabos* Elisa is talking through the past in the hope of finding a cure. As she tries to exorcise her nightmares ("Es mi manera de exorcisar las pesadillas" 'It is my way of exorcising my nightmares' [14]), she asks herself whether history demands an absurd and miserable reconciliation with the past (25). She admits that she did not want to travel because she feared that her worst nightmare might be realized; she might have to sit alongside the enemy. She states,

Yo no quería viajar. Pensaba en una casualidad trágica. . . . Que podía compartir la mesa en el comedor, sentarme en cubierta, en un bote, junto a uno de éstos que tiraban . . . los peces al río. Como compañeros inocentes.

I didn't want to travel. I kept thinking about a tragic coincidence. . . . That I might have to share a table in the dining room, to sit on

deck, in a boat, alongside one of those who were throwing . . . the fish into the river. Like innocent companions. (15-16)

Later she repeats, 'How is it that I'm sitting next to you? Was there no punishment?' (23). She cannot imagine co-existing with the murderers, as if they were innocent.¹²

There is no resolution for Elisa's memories; however, through the verbal expression of her wrath she finds catharsis. She recognizes the past and her incapacity to move beyond it and sees that her only hope of moving forward lies in her excessive talking, a speech filled with wrath about the tragedy.¹³ She says to Martín, "Algo haré para que no deje de verme. ¿Verborrágica, dijo? Hablaré tanto que lo inundaré con mi memoria, y no podrá respirar, y se ahogará en tierra, en el naufragio." 'I'll do something so that you never stop seeing me. Hysterical you say? I will speak so much that I will drown you in my memory and you won't be able to breathe and you will suffocate on earth, in the shipwreck' (26).¹⁴ Despite Martín's assertion that she and others like her will not change the world, she warns that he will never succeed in erasing her memory and that her memory will haunt him.

Elisa's wrathful conversation with Martín is necessary in order for her to come to terms with the trauma of the Dirty War. She reflects on what happened, begins to recognize her own feelings regarding the events, and expresses her rage toward the perpetrators. As Bakhtin suggests, one's thoughts cannot become clear until they find precise verbal formulation and until they have been converted into a scientific work that engages the subject.¹⁵

At the same time, Elisa and Martín are more than just individual characters in *Atando cabos*; they symbolize two significant groups in post Dirty War Argentina: those who lost loved ones and those who were the military perpetrators. Demonstrating two strongly opposing sentiments in post Dirty War Argentina, Gambaro uses Martín and Elisa to show the psychological dichotomy of her nation at the end of the twentieth century. In his critique of Freud, Bakhtin confirms that society, rather than individuals, most often dictates verbal reactions, and he asserts that social milieu determines and controls verbal reactions through-

out one's life.¹⁶ Martín copes with the past by asserting his power and the military's right to have violated human rights. His views reflect those of a certain sector of Argentine citizens. Elisa, on the other hand, can finally speak of the events and, in doing so, expresses the wrath of the majority of citizens in a grieving nation.

These plays, read together, document and remember some of the horrible events of Argentina's Dirty War and further serve as testimonies of the psychological state of individuals and nation in the War's aftermath. Each play posits a different way of coping with the memories and a unique psychological stage in the healing process. In *Efectos personales* the man begins to move beyond memory repression, coming to terms with memories little by little, organizing them, consciously holding on to the memories he cannot yet confront, in an effort to move forward and face them all some day. When he opens all the suitcases and confronts their contents—the memories—perhaps then the train will come to move him into a happier future.

Desafiar al destino exposes the national antics of creating an official story to hide the truth and then subverts that policy as a way to potentially rebuild and reimagine community. For Bobby, moving forward means recognizing the past for what it was and empowering himself by recreating himself and his future. Elisa in *Atando cabos*, on the other hand, faces the past with anger. Her screams allow her to move forward by exposing the enemy and reminding him of his role in the past.

In each of these plays, Gambaro establishes a metaphor of travel, has her characters on the verge of moving on, but then impedes them from literally doing so because they have not yet fully come to terms with their memories. Rather than travel, Gambaro's characters experience an "odyssey through memory" in "which characters and readers struggle to come to terms with the past in order to move toward the resolution of the desire for closure" (Rickard 13).

By remembering the Dirty War, by showing the impact of its memories on the individual and national psyche and by proposing different ways to cope with this painful past, Griselda Gambaro demonstrates that, despite a government mandate, forgetting is

not an option. Through the thwarted travel metaphor Gambaro dramatizes the inevitable frustrations of working through past trauma, as a nation and as individuals. Her protagonists are literally stagnant, but by talking over the memories and talking through them, they are indeed moving forward.

Notes

1 According to Diana Taylor,

By 1990, forgetting had become official policy, much against the wishes of certain groups that had vowed never to forget. Alfonsín had initiated the trend toward general amnesty and "reconciliation" in 1986 with his *punto final* policy. He set February 22, 1987, as the date for a "full stop" to new charges of human rights abuses. The Law of Due Obedience followed in June 1987, dismissing charges against all but the commanding officers who ordered the tortures and executions. . . . Menem further contributed to erasing the memory of political terrorism by forgiving even those few who had been indicted under Alfonsín. Following the third military attempt to overthrow the constitutional government on December 3, 1990, Menem granted a presidential pardon to six senior officers accused of torturing and murdering hundreds and thousands of individuals, including Jorge Rafael Videla and Emilio E. Massera, two of the junta leaders most directly responsible for the atrocities of the Dirty War. Menem justified his actions by stating that "Argentina lived through a dirty war, but the war is over. The pardons will definitely close a sad and black stage of Argentine history." (13-14)

2 Gambaro has received numerous awards for her theater over the course of her career. On June 13, 2001, the Mexican ITI Centre honored her on the occasion of World Theater Day. At that time, the President of the Argentinian Center, actor Jorge Rivera López, paid homage to her at the Cervantes National Theater in Buenos Aires.

3 Taylor provides an in-depth analysis of the stages of Gambaro's theater in *Theater of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America*.

4 According to Malkin, memory-theater focuses on both the memories and the memory-making process by both imitating "conflicted and sometimes repressed or erased memories of a shared past" and

initiating "processes of remembrance through practices of repetition, conflation, regression, recurrent scenes, involuntary voice, echoing, overlap, and simultaneity" (8). These Gambaran plays bring memory to the forefront and highlight the stagnation or repression of memories. At the same time, they show the process of trying to remember a painful past in an effort to move forward.

5 There is little information on the staging of *Efectos personales* in Argentina. The play was staged in the Teatro Alfil in Madrid, Spain in 1990 under the direction of Roberto Villanueva.

6 All translations are mine.

7 In the second of five lectures on psychoanalysis that Sigmund Freud made at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1909, he explains the process of repression as a battle between the "conscious" and the "unconscious" (24).

8 *Desafiar al destino* was staged in the Salón de los Pasos Perdidos de la Legislatura Provincial of Mendoza, Argentina on September 28, 2001.

9 *Atando cabos* has been the most frequently staged of the three plays. Originally commissioned for the International Theater Festival in London in 1991, it debuted under the direction of James McDonald in the Royal Court on July 4 of that year with actor Colin McCormack playing Martín and Dinah Stabb as Elisa. It was staged again in London in 1993 with the title *Putting Two and Two Together*. On October 14, 2000, the play was performed at the Teatro de la Comedia Municipal in Quilmes, Argentina. Gambaro confirmed in a January 2002 telephone conversation that the play has been well received in both London and Argentina.

10 In explaining the difference between activist and passivist models of memory, Rickard is borrowing the terms and their definitions from Edward S. Casey.

11 Rickard defines Casey's passivist model of memory as "memory as a passive process of registering and storing incoming impressions. It has a tendency to reduce all mnemonic function to simple replication and retrieval and to deny or ignore what Casey calls the 'transcendent aspects of memory' by insisting on the 'intimate link between memory and the personal past'" (9-10).

12 Elisa repeats this fear again and she recognizes Martín as that enemy. She asks, “¿Cómo estoy sentada a su lado? ¿Es que no hubo castigo?” ‘How is it that I’m sitting by your side? Was there no punishment?’ (23). The question of whether or not there was a punishment is particularly appropriate at the time of debut of this play, immediately following Menem’s pardon of the junta leaders in December 1990.

13 According to Mikhail Bakhtin, Freud’s theory of the unconscious proposes that a strong verbal reaction is necessary to move toward a cure for trauma. Bakhtin states,

Par ailleurs, notez bien, lecteur, l’énorme importance que la méthode cathartique accorde à la REACTION VERBALE. C’est là un trait de sa théorie que Freud souligne lui-même, quand il compare sa méthode de traitement de l’hystérie à la confession catholique, dans laquelle le fidèle se trouve, effectivement, soulagé et purifié par l’aveu qu’il fait à un autre.

Besides, note well, reader, the enormous importance that the cathartic method places on VERBAL REACTION. There lies a characteristic of his theory that Freud himself underlines, when he compares his treatment method for hysteria to the Catholic confession in which the faithful person finds himself comforted and purified through the confession he makes to another. (117)

14 Interestingly enough, Elisa’s speech at the end of *Atando cabos* is reminiscent of Dolores’s screams at the end of Gambaro’s 1981, *La malasangre*, with one important difference. At the end of *La malasangre* Dolores screamed that her silence would continue to reign so that her silence would destroy the enemy. In *Atando cabos* Elisa now has a voice and speaks out angrily about the tragedy. Perhaps Gambaro’s characters are moving on?

15 Bakhtin states, “Ma pensée ne saurait être définitivement claire avant que je ne lui aie trouvé une formulation verbale précise et que je ne l’aie confrontée aux propositions scientifiques touchant le même objet, autrement dit avant que je ne l’aie convertie en une œuvre scientifique qui m’engage.” ‘My thought will not be able to become definitely clear before I have found a precise verbal formulation for it and before I have confronted it with scientific propositions touching the same object, in other words, before I have converted it into a scientific work that engages me’ (184). By verbalizing her wrath, Elisa clarifies her emotions and is able to begin to justify them. She is fi-

nally engaged with her feelings in a way that will help her move from the irrational to the rational and conscious comprehension of them.

16 Bakhtin writes, "Notre milieu social ne cesse de déterminer et de contrôler nos réactions verbales tout au long de notre vie." "Our social milieu does not cease to determine and control our verbal reactions throughout our life" (182).

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