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EGON WOLFF, CHILEAN PLAYWRIGHT

By

Elena Muñoz Bravo

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

EGON WOLFF, CHILEAN PLAYWRIGHT

By

Elena Muñoz

Egon Wolff is one of the most significant contemporary Latin American playwrights. Wolff's unique style departs from conventional Chilean theatre and combines psychological themes and social criticism.

After the introduction, Chapter I provides an overview of Wolff's personal life and professional career. Chapter II centers upon his theatrical theories. Chapter III contains the detailed analysis of four major plays including Paper Flowers, Tell Me About Laura, The Invaders and Kindergarten. A conclusion follows. The thesis utilized the plays and interviews with the playwright as primary sources.

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INTRODUCTION

Last December, I wrote to Egon Wolff telling him that I would write my thesis about his life, theories, and plays. Three weeks later, I received a letter from Wolff telling me that he couldn't understand why there are still people interested in his "madness". Last January, I began my trip along Wolff's roads and met some of his characters, who left in my soul a kind of tender unhappiness.

This thesis is a description and study of Wolff's background and plays. Chapter I contains an overview of his life and professional career. The beginnings of Wolff as a playwright, and his success in Chilean theatre are covered in this survey. Chapter I also provides some of Wolff's responses in different interviews, and a brief summary of each of Wolff's plays.

Chapter II centers upon Wolff's theatrical theories about the dramatic structure of antirealistic theatre. An overview of the different dramatic tendencies and playwrights of the 20th century introduces this chapter. Wolff's distinction between "vertical and horizontal theatre" is compared with Martin Esslin's description of the theatre of the absurd.

Chapter III contains the analysis of four major plays including Paper Flowers, Tell Me About Laura, The Invaders and Kindergarten. The four plays are very different in theme, form, and style. The analysis of these plays contains a detailed summary of the plot, a description and psychological interpretation of the characters, and a study of the dramatic structure.

The thesis concludes by discussing the importance of American audiences knowing the plays of Chilean dramatist Egon Wolff.

Last May, I finished traveling Wolff's road, and it was a wonderful journey.

CHAPTER I

EGON WOLFF'S LIFE AND CAREER

The Secret Playwright

For more than three decades, Egon Wolff's unique style, unusual themes and vivid language broke free of the conventions of Chilean theatre. Along the way, he became one of Latin America's most important playwrights. Wolff, son of German parents, was born in 1926 in Santiago's German community. He grew up between the two world wars.

Two aspects of his life seem to have had an important influence: numerous tuberculosis attacks during his adolescence, Wolff's illnesses gave him time, during his youth, to read authors such as Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Thomas Wolff, William Faulkner and others. And the anti-Nazism of his father, which contributed to the family's economic problems after the war. These problems turned Wolff to studying chemical engineering instead of only developing his dramatic abilities.

"I have the ability to write theatre. I master the dialogue and know how to concentrate the attention. I wrote theatre in 1957 for the first time; the play was Fear's Disciples, which was performed in 1958.

However, I remember that I had had a literary inclination since I was nine years old. For my parents, literature was a perversion and they never let me follow my vocation. Therefore, I wrote secretly and sometimes I used a pseudonym. At the Instituto Nacional (National Institute, a very well known men's high school.), I founded Atenea, a literary magazine at the Universidad Católica, and wrote essays and stories for it.

It was my wife who helped me to fulfill my vocation. Nevertheless, I still work as a chemical engineer, which is my professional degree and which has never satisfied me."¹

¹E.Wolff, personal interview, 5 May 1994

Wolff's present prosperity is the product of many years of hard work. In the beginning, Wolff was a make-up salesman; then he sold chemical products, and later he became co-owner of a paint factory.

Only since 1979 has he concentrated on writing, because he got a job as a professor at the Theatre Department of the Universidad Católica de Chile (Catholic University of Chile). There, Wolff taught courses in Dramatic Perception, Dramatic Theory, Dramatic Technique, and Dramatic Construction.

In 1992, Wolff retired and dedicated his life to writing. His last play, Scars, will be performed this year at the Teatro de la Universidad Católica de Chile. He is also writing television programs and translating some of Michael Weller's plays from English to Spanish.

Wolff is currently married and has two sons. He lives near Santiago (Chile's capital) in a beautiful country house. He also has another house by the Chilean sea.

"I need silence, and that is all" he said in an interview. "No window, no landscape in front of me. The motivation is to believe in what I'm writing. As soon as I lose that, I lose all inspiration and the project flops. My most fertile writing time is any hour during the morning. In the afternoon I doze."²

The Chilean Playwright

Wolff, in his career of more than thirty years, has experimented with various styles in order to achieve an authentic Chilean expression. However, all of his plays transcend a national theme by describing the universal human condition. Therefore they have been translated into many languages and have been produced in several countries, including USA, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, England, France, Greece, Cuba, Hungary and others. Wolff has a unique ability

² E. Wolff, personal interview.

of choosing particular situations and making them accessible to all kinds of audiences.

"Sometimes I follow an idea which haunts me for days and months, trying to find its theatrical expression, as these days, for instance, the fallacy that democracy works in underdeveloped, and therefore vulnerable human societies. Or I find a simple character who embodies the theatrical aura, or an emotion such as perplexity or stupor or moral commitment.

When it is an idea which impels me to write a play, the next step is to find the appropriate characters to embody it. When it is an emotion, I try to focus on my submerged feelings about it, and that process results regularly in a metaphor, with all its expressiveness." ³

The Chilean sociologist María de la Luz Hurtado has described his work:

"Egon Wolff is a playwright of the Sixties who has had the ability to present the social processes and to describe them by symbols. He has gotten insights of society before the sociologists and historians."⁴

Wolff has mostly used the realistic style; however, the author has also experimented with some avant-garde forms. For that reason, his style is usually classified as "magic realism".⁵

His literary work describes an inner vision of Chilean society. In this vision, the author exposes a forsaken and marginal people, and the dichotomy between different social classes with their relative advantages and disadvantages.

"The strongest influence of all comes from the observation of life, which is for me an open book. As is also the theatre. So, I could say that I have read from the Greeks to the most modern American playwrights. But my strongest influence stems from knowing the mechanic who lives in front of my house, or his wife who washes his clothes, or the gardener who tends my garden."⁶

³E. Wolff, personal interview.

⁴M. Hurtado, Sujeto Social y Proyecto Histórico en la Dramaturgia Chilena Actual (Santiago: Céneca, 1983) 12.

⁵Hurtado, 44.

⁶Wolff, personal interview.

In his early work, Wolff was mostly concerned about describing social problems:

"There was an evident intention of social critique in my first plays. This aspect originated the conflict and influenced the story; and sometimes it was incoherent with my characters. Today, I let my characters originate their own conflict and resolve it."⁷

For that reason, other kinds of themes, more psychological, are continuously presented by the playwright in his last plays. These themes include the obsessive and dominant mother, the use and abuse of power, the frustrated and frustrating sexuality, and the anguish produced by forlornness.

In all of these subjects, the Chilean dramatist defends the importance and necessity of true love, in which a human being is appreciated by his defects and values and not by his professional or material success. For Wolff, a true-love relationship represents a place where people can grow together and individually.

⁷Rafael Otano, Egon Wolff: Un Dramaturgo Entre el Nacimiento y el Suicidio. (Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1976) 37.

The Successful Playwright

Egon Wolff began writing in 1957 at the age of 32. His first plays were Fear's Disciples and Owls' Mansion. The same year, those plays won the two awards of the Concurso de Obras Teatrales de la Universidad de Chile. (Theatrical Plays Awards of the University of Chile). In 1958, Wolff won the Premio Municipal de Santiago (Municipal Award of Santiago), for his play Fear's Disciples. During this same year, the play was first performed in Santiago at the Teatro Experimental de la Universidad de Chile .

Fear's Disciples is a realistic psychological drama, in which a mother has a dominant role in her three sons' lives. Because of the mother's permanent intervention, neither the father nor the sons can choose their own lifestyles. The mother was very poor in her childhood, therefore she is very obsessive with money. She decides to buy a factory in order to assure the family's future, but instead of being a solution, the factory gives them serious financial problems. Fear's Disciples shows Wolff's attraction for exploring family problems and human deformities. When the individual feels himself imprisoned or traumatized, he begins to show the ugly side of his human nature. In this case, makes the family members live as victims of an unhealthy emotional environment. They live as fear's disciples.

Also in 1958, Owls' Mansion was first performed in Chile, by the Sociedad Chilena de Autores Teatrales at the Talía Theatre. The two-act play, written in realistic form, tells the story of an overprotective mother who lives in the country with her two adolescent sons. Marta, the mother, protects her sons excessively and suffocates them in an isolated and artificial home. In this space, the sons do not have any contact with the external world. The family lives with memories and games, and they make money from selling cultivated

flowers. The mother's obsessive nature is expressed from the beginning but the origin of her obsession is not explained. The triangular relationships within the family -- the mother's domination, the oldest son's agony, the youngest son's confusion -- are developed slowly and deliberately. The mysterious signs related to the missing father increase the tension and the conflict development. The play presents the problems of a family which tries to survive alienated from normal society but achieves disastrous consequences. The melodramatic and quick ending of the play shows the playwright's lack of dramatic experience. However, Owls' Mansion as a second play marks a route for the author's later development and his permanent interest in protecting his characters. Owls' Mansion is a realistic drama similar to Fear's Disciples: both plays have obsessive and destructive mothers.

In 1959, Egon Wolff wrote Rag Couples, which won the literary award of the University of Chile again. Then, in 1960, the play was first performed in Santiago at the ITUCH (Instituto de Teatro de la Universidad de Chile). In this realistic drama, the script tells the story of an unhappy couple married six years. Both are materialistic and competitive people: the wife grew up in a rich family where she learned that money could solve any problem and became very cold and calculating; and the husband has a factory where he exploits his workers for his own benefit. Even though the conflict develops because of the permanent economic crisis of this family, the commercial problems also disclose the couple's sexual troubles. The play is a critique of contemporary society which places extreme importance on money, sacrificing the individual's integrity. At the end of the story, the married couple tries to recover their own values.

In 1960, Wolff got a Fulbright scholarship to the U.S.A. to take a course in playwriting at Yale University. There, Wolff wrote the play A Touch of Blue,

which was first performed the same year in New Haven, by The Yale University Theatre . In 1962, A Touch of Blue was performed in Chile at the Teatro de la Universidad de Concepción. In 1983, the play was shown in Caracas, Venezuela. This realistic drama unfolds in the yard of a very run-down house where a group of eight poor people live together. The interaction shows how these people depend on and utilize each other. Loneliness and fear dominate the characters' minds because all of them had previous desperate situations. One of the characters says: "Solitude is not exclusive to anybody; we are all in it together".⁸ Because in this particular group there are some couples who achieve better insights of their condition, the chaos resolves itself in a certain justice and moral balance. At the end of the play, the characters understand they cannot use other people to fill their own solitudes.⁸

In 1963, Wolff wrote The Invaders. This play received major critical attention and made the author an internationally known figure. American theatre professor Frank Dauster says that:

" Simultaneously this fantasy of the terror of the haves when the poor silently but tenaciously invade and conquer the wealthy neighborhoods was to give him a reputation as a social playwright; his earlier work had tended strongly toward psychological examination of social attitudes, particularly those of the middle classes. "⁹

The Invaders was first performed in Chile in 1963 at the ITUCH and for about 30 years as follows. 1965-Lima, Perú. 1966-Mexico City, Mexico; Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala; and La Havana, Cuba. 1968-Caracas, Venezuela. 1970-New York. 1971-Buenos Aires, Argentina; Madrid, Spain; and Barranquillas, Colombia. 1972-Tegucigalpa, Honduras. 1974-Guatemala City, Guatemala. 1975-Barcelona, Spain. 1977-Ohio, U.S.A.; Seville, Spain;

⁸E. Wolff, Teatro Completo. (Colorado: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1990) 4.

⁹ Frank Dauster, The Theatre of Egon Wolff: After The Invaders. (Austin: U. Texas P, 1976) 1.

Lisbon, Portugal; and Caracas, Venezuela. 1978-Madrid, Spain; Monterrey, Mexico. 1979-Linkeping, Sweden. 1986-Hannover, West Germany. 1988-Miami, U.S.A.; Dallas, U.S.A. 1992-Odense, Denmark.

In The Invaders, Wolff evolved toward a dramatic style in which apparent realism serves to underline the unreal element. With only eight characters, four on each side, the play presents two distinct segments of society: the rich and the poor. The play depends on a dream which disguises the reality, and when the dream begins or ends is not clear. A more complete description of the play is given in Chapter III of this thesis.

In 1964, Wolff was invited to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, to participate in an international playwrights' convention. This same year, the author attended the Congreso de Teatro Latinoamericano (Latin American Theatre Congress), in La Havana, Cuba.

In 1968, Egon Wolff wrote Cain's Sign. In 1969, the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro Mozart, obtaining the award of the Chilean Theatrical Critics. In 1975, the play was shown in Barcelona, Spain. In 1978, Cain's Sign was presented in New York.

In this realistic four-character drama, the conflict is about problems of conscience. A rich couple invades the house of a poor man who lives happily with his lover. The balance of this man's pleasant life is broken when the old friends come to rescue him from his poverty. The relationship between the four characters becomes complicated after the rich couple accuses the poor friend of having had some homosexual activity in the past. At the end of the play the main character recognizes his past, saying :

"There are men who carry on their forehead Caín's sign. Others fear and interpret this sign as an evil mark. But the truth is that this is a sign of a clear and analytical mind, of a restless spirit, of men without fear."¹⁰

In 1970, Wolff wrote Paper Flowers, which is considered by critics as his masterpiece. The same year, the play won the Casa de las Américas Theatre Award in Cuba. In 1972, Paper Flowers won the Best International Play Award given by the Critics Association of Argentina and was first performed in Chile at the Teatro Mozart. The play has been performed in many languages around the world: In 1972-Buenos Aires, Argentina. 1973-Montevideo, Uruguay; and Mexico City, Mexico. 1974-London, England. 1975- Sofia, Bulgaria; and Prague, Czech Republic. In 1976-Stockholm, Sweden; and Athens, Greece. 1977-Copenhagen, Denmark; Amberes, Belgium; and Oslo, Norway. 1978-Paris, France; Managua, Nicaragua; Guatemala City, Guatemala; and Caracas, Venezuela. 1980-Washington.; Vancouver, Canada; Goteborg, Sweden; and Budapest, Hungary. 1981-Alberta, Canada. 1982-Luneburg, West Germany; and Veracruz, Mexico. 1983-Santiago, Chile. 1984- Tasalónica, Greece; New Jersey, U.S.A.. 1986-California, U.S.A. 1987-Paris, France. 1989-Toronto, Canada; Miami, U.S.A. 1990-Caracas, Venezuela; Budapest, Hungary; Tokio, Osaka and Kyoto, Japan. 1993-Richmond, England.

Paper Flowers is an absurd drama divided into six scenes, and it has only two characters: Eva and The Hake. It is about an ordinary woman who invites a man who helped her with some packages to stay a moment in her house and have a cup of tea.

Eva is a solitary widow and painter and The Hake is an enigmatic beggar who has extraordinary talents. Slowly this man begins to invade Eva's space, things, and finally herself. He establishes himself in Eva's apartment as if he had a premeditated plan. From the beginning, the conflict between The Hake

¹⁰Wolff, Teatro Completo 28.

and Eva's little bird reflects the inevitable violence which will characterize the relationship between the two characters. The Hake lies, confounds, deceives; and when he kills the bird, he foreshadows Eva's destruction. The language of the script is very attractive because it expresses these two different characters' realities. Therefore, the dialogue moves from the softest tenderness to the harshest rudeness. A more complete study of this play is offered in Chapter III .

Despite the international success of Wolff's Paper Flowers, the play was not understood in Chile. The Chilean audience of the 1970s found the play inaccessible and intellectual. Not until later, in 1983 after the second production of the play, people really understood and liked Paper Flowers.

After writing Paper Flowers, Wolff spent seven years without creating any play. The author described this period as a necessary respite.

"Paper Flowers was a too violent catharsis for myself ... Since this drama I haven't been able to write any other play ... I usually cannot tolerate watching one of my plays. When some director invites me to a rehearsal, I invent any excuse to leave the theatre, after a little while ... Now I need a recess, therefore I'm writing a novel ..." ¹¹

In 1977, Wolff wrote Kindergarten obtaining the award of the Chilean Theatrical Critics. This play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro El Galpón de Los Leones. Kindergarten was also performed in Vancouver, Canada in 1982, and in Kaiserslautern, West Germany in 1984.

Kindergarten is a realistic dark comedy about three characters -- two old brothers and their old sister -- who suffer different sexual problems. The sister's visit, after ten years of absence, produces an examination of the past, present and future. These three people live in a childhood psychological state which is visually presented in a scene where they dance wearing costumes from their

¹¹Otano, 19.

youth. Kindergarten is the pathetic story of a proud family's downfall. This play will be reviewed in Chapter III.

This same year, Wolff wrote Mirages, winning the award of the Chilean Theatrical Critics. The play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro de la Universidad Católica.

This realistic drama deals with the relationship between love and sex. The script tells the story of a 17-year-old girl who comes to live with a married couple. The couple has been happily married for 25 years and they do not have any children. When the husband's attention to the girl becomes very evident, the wife sends the girl away. The play presents the necessity of establishing love ties instead of creating false illusions. The wife, more emotionally developed, says to the girl:

"No, Inés. . . you do not like people. . . What you like is the image of people, it is what you imagine of them. Men for you are images to fulfill your fantasies".¹²

The author shows how easy it is to create mirages -- little fantasies -- which break the tedium of a monotonous life. This play is perhaps Wolff's most moralist piece in which the writer promotes the advantages of creating stable and true relationships.

In 1978, Wolff created The Blue Envelope. This same year, the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro Camilo Henríquez. The Blue Envelope is an absurd farce in which two identical functionaries -- Sebastián Cereceda and Sebastián Recereceda -- are threatened with being fired from their jobs. The Blue Envelope is a particular description of Chile, when unemployment was one of the most significant problems.

¹²Wolff, Teatro Completo 88.

In 1980, Wolff wrote José. The same year the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro de Cámara del Teatro Municipal. In 1986, José was represented in Montevideo, Uruguay.

This realistic drama also deals with the values of the contemporary society. Foreign influences have invaded and corrupted the old Chilean system, threatening the family entity. The script tells the story of José, one of the sons, who comes home from the United States. After an absence of seven years, José realizes that his family has changed dramatically. The family has the worst characteristics of a cold and calculating society where there is no emotion, tenderness or love. The crisis occurs with the prodigal son arriving who strongly criticizes the new family's values. José says:

"The present-day Chilean individual is becoming practical and materialistic too. He opened a window to the United States. He is receiving all the American stink but it smells to him like perfume. Today the Chilean is learning to be similar to the American and that gladdens his heart".¹³

Although José was the one who lived in the United States, the people who stayed in Chile are the most contaminated by foreign influence.

In this play, Wolff expresses that love, fidelity, human decency, compassion and dignity must not be sacrificed in order to achieve economic prosperity

In 1981, Wolff wrote Poplars on the Flat Roof. The same year, the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro de Cámara del Teatro Municipal.

The play is a realistic comedy about a poor family with divorced parents, and the efforts of their children to reunite them again. Their poverty is presented as a dramatic and determining element in the couple's separation. Even though the situation is sad, the play has a lot of humor and tenderness.

¹³ Wolff, Teatro Completo 135.

In 1983, Wolff created The Medusa's Raft. In 1984, the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro de la Universidad Católica. A 19th century painting by Gericault, placed in the Louvre Museum, inspired the playwright.

The play is a complex realistic drama and occurs in an elegant mansion isolated from society. Three groups of people participate in the story: the miserable, tattered people who try to invade the house, the mysterious mansion's owner with his devoted steward, and the guests who come to visit the mansion. The play shows how these people, in a confined situation, become more and more inhuman.

In 1985, Wolff wrote Tell Me about Laura. In 1986 the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro de la Universidad Católica. In 1988, the play was shown in Vancouver, Canada. The play is a cyclical realistic drama which tells the story of a widowed mother and her widower son. They have a very symbiotic relationship and live very miserably. Mother and son play games, make jokes, and watch television during the entire play. A more complete explanation of Tell Me About Laura is given in Chapter III of this thesis.

In 1987, Wolff participated in the Modern Language Congress in San Francisco, U.S.A.

In 1991, Wolff wrote Dinner Invitation. In 1993, the play was first performed in Chile at the Teatro Apoquindo. This realistic comedy was directed by the playwright and won the award of the Chilean Theatrical Critics. The story is about three middle-aged couples who share their daily problems during a dinner.

In 1991, Wolff was invited to the Congreso Sobre Teatro No-Aristotélico (Non Aristotelic Theatre) in Barcelona, Spain. To the congress, he gave a speech about his definition of Vertical Theatre. This same year, Wolff was invited to give a speech about the present Chilean Theatre in Miami, U.S.A.

In 1992, Wolff attended the Latin American Theatrical Assembly in Kansas, U.S.A.

In 1993, Wolff participated in a world dramatists' meeting in New York. On that occasion it was determined that Michael Weller would translate into English four of Wolff's plays, and the Chilean writer would translate into Spanish some of Weller's pieces.

In 1993, Wolff created Scars. This play will be performed this year in Chile at the Teatro de la Universidad Católica. This realistic drama describes the generational conflicts of a Chilean family.

In his more than 30 years of dramatic activity, Egon Wolff has dealt with psychological themes as well as social criticism. His unique style springs free of the typical, traditional Chilean realistic and naturalistic theatre.

In addition, Wolff is recognized as one of the most important Latin American playwrights for his style, themes and language. His ability to balance games and cruelty accurately and sensibly describes modern man's alienated condition.

"I look for the nucleus of the things, their essence. It is like the attitude of children who break their toys or destroy their dolls in order to see what they have inside. This intimate penetration to the core of life could represent death. I clearly have the Greek tension between Eros and Thanatos in myself."¹⁴

¹⁴Otano, 18.

CHAPTER II

THEATRICAL THEORIES

The Twentieth Century and the New Theatre

The conventional forms of the traditional theatre have been questioned during the present century and new artistic forms emerged to reflect major changes in society.

In theatre, the corner-stones of the twentieth century are the naturalist and realistic movements of the nineteenth century, represented by the work of Ibsen, Chekhov, Hauptmann, Becque and others. Naturalist playwrights rebelled against farce, melodrama and historical costume dramas which formed the standard theatre diet of the Victorian entertainment industry. Nevertheless, these forms "lived on to entertain the twentieth century and formed a basis on which both the naturalists and those in reaction against them could build their new and more complex forms of theatre."¹⁵

The story of theatre has always been one of rebellion and reaction, in which the new forms challenge the old and the old forms in turn provide the basis for the new. Therefore, at the time when naturalism was at its peak in Europe, the theatre was urgently seeking a justification in myth and ritual at another level for the visionary quality it had missed in realism.

Symbolism was the first reaction against naturalism. This style has since been associated with the work of Poe, Wagner and some French poets such as Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Valéry.

¹⁵ Terry Hodgson, Modern Drama (London: B.T. Batsford, 1972) 5.

These poets built their ideas "upon a latter-day romantic theory of the mystical and the occult, the irrational and the world of fantasy and dream ...

Poetry was not to obey the laws of logic, but of hallucination and the surreal, so that it should stay pure and free from social relevance."¹⁶ Of all these poets, only Mallarmé described a dramatic symbolism . He conceived symbolic theatre as a ritualistic form that would combine all the arts and return to the simple elements of drama. To Mallarmé, the theatre "was a kind of secular religious experience in which both actor and audience participate and in which the mystery of the universe is suggested and celebrated; it is concerned with humanity rather than particular people."¹⁷ The most important symbolist playwrights were Maeterlink, Claudel and Jarry.

The development of psychology, with Freud's discoveries at the end of the nineteenth century, also determined substantial changes in the arts. His contributions to the knowledge of the subconscious opened wide new spaces for interpretation. Previous views had usually idealized rationality; impulse as well as intuition were looked upon as urges that needed to be carefully controlled by reason. Freud explained that human behavior is mainly motivated by impulses we do not fully understand. In addition he gave an essential significance to human dreams. He thought dreams have important messages to be interpreted.

August Strindberg, one of the most influential playwrights of the twentieth century, used Freud's ideas associated with dreams. Although he wrote many plays in the historical-romantic, and realistic-naturalistic styles; his last period corresponds to what Brockett calls "visionary-expressionism." For Brockett, Strindberg was a visionary artist.

¹⁶Hodgson, 2.

¹⁷Oscar Brockett, Century of Innovation (Boston:Allyn and Bacon,1991) 17.

"As the twentieth century progressed and the vision of humanity as alienated increased, Strindberg's work came to seem prophetic. His technical devices also served as lessons about how psychological states, intuitions, and the unconscious could be externalized."¹⁸

By the early twentieth century, the antirealistic theatre had emerged in many countries. By the Fifties, after the World Wars, another group of important playwrights including Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter and others, reacted against the realistic theatre and created the new theatre.

"Realism is placed out of the reality. Realism constrains, attenuates, and falsifies reality. Realism does not care about our fundamental obsessions: love, death, astonishment...Revolutionary is the dreamer, the thinker, the savant; this is who wants to change the world."¹⁹

In this new theatre different tendencies emerged each with its own characteristics and evolving with its own playwrights. The existentialist theatre, represented by Camus and Sartre, was the most compelling force in immediate postwar thought.

They represented a postwar generation whose faith in a logical universe had been destroyed. Existentialists saw existence as antecedent to essence, and they strongly defended the idea that "people must define their own values and find within themselves the bases for choice and action."²⁰

Existentialist playwrights rejected rationalistic interpretations of the universe, however, they used traditional dramatic structures. Their influence was more ideological than artistic and they still retained their trust in human ability to discover a way out of the chaos.

The theatre of the absurd was mainly represented by Ionesco, Beckett, Jarry, Genet, and Adamov. They agreed with the existentialist themes, but these playwrights avoided conventional theatrical forms. Absurdists used "a

¹⁸Oscar Brockett, Century of Innovation 86.

¹⁹G. Serrau, Historia del Nuevo Teatro, (Mexico: Siglo 21, 1967) 8.

²⁰Brockett, Century of Innovation 310.

succession of episodes unified merely by theme or mood instead of a cause-to-effect arrangement, they arrive at a structure paralleling the chaos which is their usual dramatic subject."²¹

Harold Pinter in England and Edward Albee in United States were other two playwrights who do not represent a particular movement within their countries, but they introduced new styles which are connected to the theatre of the absurd.

Significant changes occurred in the post-war drama: playwrights questioned the traditional theatre and proposed new dramatic styles which rebelled against realism. These new styles were characterized by the abandoning of cause-to-effect relationships among incidents.

"Rather than developing linearly, action tended to be circular or spiral, exploring a condition rather than telling a story. Characters tended toward the typical or archetypal rather than the individual. Time and place were generalized. Most of the plays occurred in some symbolic location or in a void cut off from the concrete world. Time was flexible. Language was for the most part downgraded. Although characters sometimes talked volubly, they usually recognized that they were playing with speech. Spectacle was used symbolically or metaphorically to compensate for the devaluation of language. Distinction between dramatic forms disappeared"²²

Egon Wolff calls this new theatre "vertical theatre" as opposed to traditional "horizontal" theatre. He describes the new dramatic structure as follows.

²¹Brockett, History of the Theatre, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987) 646

²²Brockett, Century of Innovation 313.

Vertical and Horizontal Theatre

The most important ideas in Egon Wolff's theatrical theory are his classification of vertical and horizontal theatre. This theory has been published in the book El Teatro desde una Perspectiva Psicológica: Lo Psicoanalítico y el Texto Dramático (The Theatre from a Psychological Perspective: Psychoanalysis and Dramatic Text) by Egon Wolff and Consuelo Morel, and articulated in a speech Wolff gave in Barcelona/ Spain in October 1991. The speech was called Conceptos Sobre Teatro Vertical. (Concepts About Vertical Theatre).

In this classification the author discusses the different dramatic structure of the traditional theatre, which he calls horizontal theatre, versus the new theatre after World War II, which Wolff calls vertical theatre.

Many of the characteristics Wolff gives to vertical theatre are the same that Martin Esslin discusses in his book The Theatre of the Absurd. These include the rejection of traditional concepts of conflict, action, characters, space, and suspense. However, Wolff adds the idea that those characteristics can be placed within a new plane: the vertical plane.

The theatre of the Absurd has been mainly regarded, by Esslin, as a new dramatic form with non-conventional categories. "The plays we are concerned with here pursue ends quite different from those of the conventional play and therefore use quite different methods. They can be judged only by the standards of the Theatre of the Absurd..."²³

Instead of using the terms conventional and absurd, Wolff prefers to talk about Horizontal versus Vertical theatre. Therefore in explaining the conventional (or realistic) theatre he says: "We understand that the concepts of

²³Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd. (London: Penguin Books, 1968) 22.

action and reaction, argumentation and re argumentation are linear and horizontal. They move consecutively and go to an end, which is indefinite during the action but it is definite when the climax is reached. This is easy to demonstrate analyzing any play of the long tradition of horizontal theatre, which has been popular since men have written theatre for imitating life. From the Greek dithyram, which confronted the gods' will against human will, until the beginning of our century."²⁴

While Esslin indicates that at the 20th century, the Theatre of the Absurd "...strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought."²⁵ Egon Wolff says that : "In the mid-20th century, theatre becomes more vertical, in which the facts do not have a logical order.. The tendency of this new theatre is more penetrative than explicative, and it deals with unconscious dimensions more than conscious levels."²⁶

The Dramatic Space: Action, Conflict and Development.

Egon Wolff explains that theatre is always a confrontation, where opposite forces collide. In horizontal theatre, the confrontation occurs on a plane in which each of the actions is the consequence of an earlier action and that continuity is defined within a horizontal space.

Esslin states that conventional plays have a cleverly constructed story and a fully explained theme. Wolff thinks that horizontal theatre is mainly based in a story. It is a story in which the protagonist takes a course of action and the

²⁴Egon Wolff and Consuelo Morel, El Teatro Desde una Perspectiva Psicológica. (Santiago: Universidad Católica, 1991) 86.

²⁵Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 24.

²⁶Wolff, El Teatro Desde una Perspectiva Psicológica, 86.

antagonist takes an opposing course. The theme of the play is expressed through these actions.

Esslin says that "The action in a play of the Theatre of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images."²⁷ "The total action of the play, instead of proceeding from point A to point B, as in other dramatic conventions, gradually builds up the complex pattern of the poetic image that the play expresses."²⁸

Wolff agrees, saying that "In vertical theatre the actions do not need justification and causality ... In the vertical dramatic structure the facts happen by themselves without roots in the past or in formal organization. The facts emerge from the instant necessity of the characters to express their anguish or to explore the other characters' souls".²⁹

Therefore, Wolff emphasizes the idea that incoherent action's development in Vertical Theatre, expresses the characters' nature and reality. On the other hand, Esslin thinks that incongruity in the Theatre of the Absurd mainly reveals the poetic image of the play.

In searching for the origins of these new dramatic forms Wolff explains that vertical theatre is the expression of an over-informed "man" who has lost his ability to create fables and who has begun to give relative meanings to the consequences of the facts . This modern man does not believe in poetic justice, where evil is redeemed or punished.

Esslin says that the Theatre of the Absurd is the reflection of a time in which "the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions. The decline of

²⁷Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 393.

²⁸Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 406

²⁹Wolff, El Teatro Desde una Perspectiva Psicológica, 86

religious faith was masked until the end of the Second War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies³⁰.

The Dramatic Structure and Characters.

Esslin says that many of the Absurd plays have a circular structure, ending exactly as they began, and others progress only by a growing intensification of the initial situation. Wolff thinks that Vertical theatre is circular and centrifugal because it rotates and accelerates to the interior. In this circular movement the past acquires an important presence.

Vertical plays circulate around man as the nucleus and his antagonisms where the present is a fixed fact. Only the return to the past seems to have enough dramatic charge for developing the conflict and keeping the audience's attention. "The wealth of vertical theatre emerges from the diverse roads characters trace and go over to the past in order to extract from it, the rich fantasy which makes the present interesting to watch"³¹. Here Wolff is mainly referring to plays by such authors as Albee and Pinter.

Another difference is that in horizontal structure the characters have coherent psychological behaviors and their reactions are logical. They relate to previous actions and those actions proceed to create the climax of the play. But in vertical plays, characters have a more irrational conduct.

Esslin says that absurd characters are in constant flux and they do not have motivation for their actions. On this point Esslin is more complete than Wolff because he refers to the audience's identification with characters. "With such characters it is almost impossible to identify: the more mysterious their

³⁰Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 23.

³¹Wolff, El Teatro Desde una Perspectiva Psicológica, 88.

action and their nature, the less human the characters become, the more difficult it is to be carried away into seeing the world from their point of view."³²

The Story, the Time, and some Examples

In vertical theatre the plot can be very simple: a meeting in a bedroom, a bar, or a public park. And the time passing can be very short: an evening to dive into the past and enough time for characters to blame each other with charges, complaints and aggressiveness.

In Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, for example, the story is minimalistic and occurs in a simple place: a married couple entertains another young couple at their home, and during a short time -- an evening -- both couples attack each other until they all confess the intimate secrets of their lives. Through this simple story, each of the characters blames the others and discovers a past full of pain and solitude.

In Beckett's Waiting for Godot the story is about two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait for somebody who never comes. Through their static waiting, the spectator experiences "the flow of time in its purest, most evident form."³³ Therefore, the time passing is short and it emphasizes the static situation.

³²Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 401.

³³Esslin, 49.

Suspense

The idea of suspense also changes in vertical theatre. In horizontal theatre suspense is achieved by the anticipation of the future events. If the author is coherent in the structure of his characters, the public will anticipate what will happen later. That speculation will catch the public's attention, being one of the keys of many horizontal classical plays. The same idea is given by Esslin when he says that suspense, in the conventional plays, is based in the question "What is going to happen next?"³⁴

In the vertical structure, however, the suspense is achieved by the inner exploration of the characters. The author needs to create situations in which the characters sincerely discover their anguish, pain and aggressiveness in order to catch the audience's attention.

Vertical theatre has a "confessional nature"³⁵, which makes it very successful today when human introspection has been developed and popularized by modern psychology. Confession keeps the attention of the spectator who watches and expects the next revelation.

For Esslin the suspense in the Theatre of the Absurd is mainly based on the question: What does the action of the play represent? In addition he states that, "Instead of being provided with a solution, the spectator is challenged to formulate the questions that he will have to ask if he wants to approach the meaning of the play."³⁶

Therefore, Wolff agrees with Esslin by discussing suspense within horizontal -- conventional -- plays, but their description of suspense within vertical -- absurd -- plays is different. For Wolff, suspense is achieved through

³⁴Esslin, 406.

³⁵Wolff, El Teatro Desde una Perspectiva Psicológica, 92.

³⁶Esslin, 406.

the characters' inner exploration, for Esslin, suspense is achieved through discovering the play's meaning.

Duality and Progression.

Duality is one of the basics of horizontal theatre where the conflict is originated by two opposite forces. By necessity it involves two forces, the protagonist and the antagonist, for developing the dramatic action. Duality is not a condition for vertical theatre, in which the conflict generally is generated and developed inside the characters. Tension is the product of the conflict between their defenses and their revelations. The spectator enjoys watching this process where the characters' souls are dissected.

Horizontal plays have a direction in which the events are normally ruled by a resolution which addresses all the previous conflict. The resolution is achieved at the end of the play and represents the author's ethical goal. For that reason horizontal theatre is more epic in nature, where each of the events needs exposition and resolution to reach a coherent end.

For Esslin in conventional theatre "The pattern of exposition, conflict, and final solution mirrors a view based on a recognizable and generally accepted pattern of an objective reality that can be apprehended so that the purpose of man's existence and the rules of conduct it entails can be deduced from it "³⁷

In vertical plays, events are not explained by an order or project in the future, but the actions occur vertically, unearthing hidden, ignored, and feared inner truths. The dramatic forces have a more metaphysical progression where the facts are the description of the characters but not the motive.

³⁷Esslin, 405.

For Esslin the Theatre of the Absurd "...is a theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence ... And since it is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve problems of conduct or morals."³⁸

Meaning of Vertical Theatre

In the vertical theatre the theme of sense and nonsense is a very recurrent topic for its playwrights. The breakdown of language and its inability to communicate are shown as the main sources of this problem. There is no hope in the future, there is no solution in the past, and there is no perspective in the present which "can only circulate around it self."³⁹ People cannot progress and cannot communicate with each other.

This is the same aspect that Esslin discusses in the significance of the Absurd when he states that "communication between human beings is so often shown in a state of breakdown in the Theatre of the Absurd. It is merely a satirical magnification of the existing state of affairs. Language has run riot in an age of mass communication."⁴⁰

In vertical theatre, playwrights often show the hopelessness of a post-war European society. In addition, they frequently do not believe in theatrical mechanisms. Some authors thought there was nothing to be expressed, nothing that deserves to be expressed; however they were obligated to express something. "The link between the person and the thing does not exist any more...There are too many things. The eye is unable to captivate them, and the

³⁸Esslin, 393.

³⁹Wolff, El Teatro Desde una Perspectica Psicológica, 75.

⁴⁰Esslin, 399.

intelligence is incapable to comprehend them...For that we create our own world, an apart universe, for moving away...for escaping to the chaos..."⁴¹

Although most of these absurdist playwrights do not believe in the possibility of effective communication, their plays and characters surpass this problem and achieve an important communication with the audience.

For Wolff, vertical theatre lets us think from another angle and in another level about irrational phenomenas which are in our world and in part of our lives. For Esslin, "The theatre of the Absurd expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose, and that no one will provide him with ready-made rules of conduct."⁴²

Egon Wolff as well as Martin Esslin offers interesting descriptions of the dramatic structure of the non-realistic drama which can be called both Vertical Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd. The distinction is not really important, but the significance is. This theatre produces an insight into the actual human drama: the lack of ties between people in a world full of people, the lack of communication in a world full of communication mediums, the lack of hope in the future in a world full of statistical projections, and the lack of sense in a world full of rationality.

"Horizontalty is a product of my need to see the order in the shaping of my materials. Verticality, on the other hand, is the result of my need to escape it. I would like to be more chaotic. Sometimes I succeded, but it is at the price of my internal balance, since my more profound structure is an orderly one"⁴³.

⁴¹S. Beckett, El Innombrable, (Santiago:Alianza, 1968) 83.

⁴²Esslin, 416.

⁴³Wolff, personal interview.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF FOUR PLAYS

Tell Me About Laura

Tell Me About Laura is a three-scene realistic drama which tells the story of Alberto, a middle-aged widower and shoe salesman, and Cata, his widowed mother and housekeeper. They live very poorly and are very dependent on each other. Television and old stories told by the mother are their only forms of entertainment. Their life is miserable. Trapped within the four walls of a squalid apartment and menial work, mother and son kill time conversing, playing verbal games, carrying out ridiculous jokes, and performing empty rituals such as watching television and sipping hot cocoa.

The action occurs in a cramped and untidy living room filled with useless and incongruous objects. The physical appearance of the two characters also seems neglected and careless. The mother, in her sixties, appears in each scene in a "shabby bathrobe and bedroom slippers, with an extinguished cigarette dangling from her lips."⁴⁴ The son is described most unattractively as "a little fat, smooth, and disheveled."⁴⁵ The setting and the characters' appearance both reflect a lack of accomplishment, pride, and motivation that is subsequently communicated in the dialogue.

The conflict does not develop through shifts in the plot or changes in the characters. The three scenes are parallel: each begins with the son's coming from his job to his home, where his mother awaits him. In the three scenes they

⁴⁴ Wolff, Teatro Completo, 264.

⁴⁵ Wolff, Teatro Completo, 264.

joke with each other and watch television together. One of the topics of conversation is Alberto's plan to marry somebody called Laura. In fact, this subject is just an example of his inventiveness, as is Cata's story about Alberto's father. The truth is that mother and son have a very symbiotic relationship in which there has never been and will never be room for anybody else.

The plot is written in a cyclical structure in which the conflict does not produce any change in the status quo. The repetitive games give the play a ritual atmosphere. These games are the only source, within a very static situation, of dramatic tension, in which bizarre tricks provide refuge from a tedious existence. Wolff explains that this play reflects his "own hopelessness toward human beings and in their capacity of changing"⁴⁶

Tell Me About Laura, as the title suggests, contains dialogue which produces important activity for the characters. In a recent study of Wolff's theatre, Jacqueline Eyring observes that in this play "... the dialogue is virtually the only activity performed by the characters, and as such, the primary source of dramatic tension and interest ... Nothing happens, that is, except language, a slippery and equivocal language that at once constitutes and undermines the reality of the play. Words fill the void of the characters' dreary lives while at the same time underscoring that very same existential emptiness.

Language functions not only as sole activity, but also as a substitute for tangible, significant action and as the means of conveying the characters' unfulfilled wish for a concrete change in their situation."⁴⁷

The paradox in Tell Me About Laura is that instead of using the language to communicate with each other, mother and son use it to kill time or to attack

⁴⁶Wolff, personal interview.

⁴⁷Jacqueline Eyring, Language in/as Action in Egon Wolff's Håblame de Laura (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1989) 50.

each other. They do not achieve through their dialogue any real or permanent change in their situation or in their unorthodox relationship. Rather than successful communication, their talking consists mainly of what Eyring calls "talking at cross-purposes", whereupon the intended communication fails because the characters "reciprocally defeat each other's attempts at conversational progress"⁴⁸ Instead of attending to Cata's annoying comments or answering her foolish questions, Alberto prefers to sleep in front of his mother or to turn up the television volume to drown out her voice. In a similar way, Cata leaves the room when she can no longer tolerate Alberto's verbal aggressiveness.

Structurally, the play's three scenes are parallel: each starts with Alberto's return from his job as a shoe salesman, on three consecutive days. In the first scene he is tired, removes his shoes, turns on the television, and falls into a chair. Cata greets her son with a fresh cup of hot cocoa liberally laced with salt. After the joke, the mother asks Alberto to demand a substantial pay raise. In the second scene, Alberto enters filthy and rumpled, with blood spots on his shirt and his knee. He has been mugged -- or so it seems. However, it is another of their usual games.

In the third scene, Cata screams upon realizing that the room is full of smoke. Suddenly Alberto melodramatically enters and describes a huge fire outside the apartment. After a period of panic and hysteria, Alberto shows the fire: a smoking grill just outside the door.

For Eyring, in Tell Me About Laura, the jokes as well as the language operate at a complex level of interpretation.

"While extremely childish, these pranks acquire a ritualistic character through their repetition in each scene and the characters' obvious reliance on

⁴⁸Eyring, 51.

them as not only a source of entertainment but also an integral part of their existence. Rather than contradict what occurs on the linguistic level, the jokes complement the discourse, for they at once depend on language for their success and serve as a visual manifestation of the same search for amusement that is evident throughout the play in the discourse."⁴⁹

Another important part of this play revolves around the stories the characters tell. When Cata and Alberto are not performing any of their games, they take part in dull dialogue and in an exchange of episodes in an effort to kill time and to enjoy themselves. Because the jokes offer only a short moment of relief, the storytelling is needed to tolerate their solitude. The spectator is also caught up by trying to distinguish truth from fantasy because some of the stories are obviously false, but others seem very credible.

The very title of the play, Tell Me About Laura, stresses the importance of this particular story in the play. It represents the possibility of a rupture in the characters' symbiotic relationship. Like all of Alberto's tales, Laura's story seems very probable at the beginning, but at the end of the tale it becomes morbid and unbelievable.

CATA: (With anger) You could have been successful in what you had wanted, and you know that! The problem with you is that you have always been a coward, that's it! (Pause) You already know how I think.

(Pause. They stay silent. Then. . .)

ALBERTO: Laura thinks the same.

CATA: And who is Laura?

ALBERTO: Didn't I ever tell you about the new young woman who entered the store?

CATA: No, you never told me.

ALBERTO: I sleep with her.

CATA: Oh! here you go again!

ALBERTO: It is true, true...She is a very beautiful young woman; a true beauty. She is so ugly that Lozada does not know whether he should put her

⁴⁹Eyring, 51.

inside the store to make packages, far away from the customers, or just fire her and get it over with. ⁵⁰

CATA: (Screaming) Don't kid around about something so serious. Tell me very seriously, like a man...you are going to leave me. Aren't you?

ALBERTO: Mother you see spiders... Do you know what we found the other day, in one of our necrophiliac excursions, Laura and me?

CATA: I don't want to know anything! I only want you to confess the truth, if you are man enough! You are going to leave me. Aren't' you?...I'm asking you, damn it! What does that bitch have that I cannot give you?

ALBERTO: A navel the shape of a carnation, that's what she has...and this is something that you could never show off to anybody, mother, even in one hundred years.

CATA: Don't evade the issue, coward! I ask you for the last time: what does that harlot have that I cannot give you?

ALBERTO: Funereal fantasies in mournful tombstones. That's what she gives me...Isn't it enough? ⁵¹

Tell Me About Laura has a cyclical structure and an open ending. In the closing scene Alberto and Cata are embracing while watching television. Their life, as Alberto says, is and will be the same as it always has been: "...this room...one door...one window...a long waiting."⁵²

The two characters of the play have a failed relationship in which the mother cannot let her son grow up, and the son cannot live independently from his mother. Both have always lived together in the same apartment without anybody else. Alberto has a job in the outside world, but Cata stays at home all the time. Nevertheless, the mother had, at least, another earlier relationship with

⁵⁰Wolff, Teatro Completo, 284.

⁵¹Wolff, Teatro Completo, 290.

⁵²Wolff, Teatro Completo, 328.

Alberto's father. She seldom talks about this experience and when she does, she idealizes the situation, which probably was painful for her.

CATA: ...after those two hours, we reached a very green harbor, with many colorful little houses on the hills around the bay. The sky was full of masts and sails. People walked on the dike ... I climbed up the sunny path. The lieutenant followed me. I climbed merry and light, while my heart throbbed in my breast and my blood thumped in my eardrums ... I was so excited that I could have died. All inside my body was an ardent bubble ... Suddenly I fainted!, a sweet happiness invaded me ... Everything penetrated me: the harbor, the breeze, the birds, the water ...!⁵³

Despite the fact that Alberto is the product of Cata's experience with another person, they have developed a symbiotic relationship in which there is no real space for anybody else. Both have a frustrated sexuality: Alberto is not interested in any real woman but in the fictional Laura, and Cata lives with the idealized memory of the lieutenant.

Alberto cannot tolerate long separations from his mother; yet he cannot leave his mother: "I am a fool in love with you mother! ... Only you and me, mother and son, tied by a mutual huge love, and blessed by God..."⁵⁴

Alberto doesn't have the capacity for developing a romantic relationship with a woman, even more, when he creates the story about Laura, he charges the tale with destruction and death: "The girl, Laura, likes to watch the tombs, the boy, Alberto, does too. We have something in common. They walk together over the tombstones. I tell her about the movies I have seen, and she tells me about the ones she will never see..."⁵⁵

⁵³Wolff, Teatro Completo, 298.

⁵⁴Wolff, Teatro Completo, 326.

⁵⁵Wolff, Teatro Completo, 289.

Although Alberto is very dependent on his mother, he knows they have a wrong relationship, and his anguish over that situation results from the fact that he sees the destruction in which they live. He tries to change their situation, but Cata traps him, and he fails, becoming very frustrated.

The mother cannot see his son as he really is. She idealizes his abilities and demands of him more than he can achieve: "Lozada (the boss) is nothing without you, he becomes helpless without you. Don't you see you are the best salesman in his store?..."⁵⁶ Alberto suffers because of his mother's requirements and tries to show her how he is: "Alberto thinks he is a failure, mother... Please, Cata, stop dreaming! Don't you see how you crush me with your dreams? I want you to see me as I really am! Don't you realize that if you see me as I am, I could also see myself better?"⁵⁷

At the end of the play, a little change is produced in Cata, when she is able to see her son as a very damaged person. In that moment they have a painful discussion and they achieve real communication.

ALBERTO: Don't you see that in that moment life hurt us, mother? Don't you see that from that moment we were like two brothers?⁵⁸

Tell Me about Laura is an interesting play which juxtaposes the beauty and kindness of the human condition with its less attractive side. These two slovenly, crazy, and interdependent people try to survive by playing abusive games full of black humor. The play is a metaphor of any relationship in which people destroy each other, instead of growing together.

⁵⁶Wolff, Teatro Completo, 177.

⁵⁷Wolff, Teatro Completo, 287.

⁵⁸Wolff, Teatro Completo, 300.

Wolff gives us two very funny characters who live a very dramatic situation. The dialogues are consistent and the conflict is well developed.

The Invaders

The Invaders is a drama divided into three acts. The play is set in the house of a rich family in the city of Santiago, Chile. The parents are Lucas Meyer and his wife Pietá. This wealthy middle-aged couple have two young children: Marcela and Bobby. At the beginning of the first act, the parents are coming home after a party. They talk about their happiness and their fortune. However, Pietá is a little anxious about their future. She is worried about the latest news that some very poor people are descending on the affluent neighborhoods of the city. Lucas tries to calm his wife by convincing her that: "Poor people are completely innocuous"⁵⁹ The couple leaves the living room (and the scene) to go to the second floor.

Moments later, a window pane is broken and the window is opened by a dirty hand. Through the opened window enters a ragged poor man who has a carnation in his old jacket. Hearing noise of the breaking glass, Meyer comes quickly with a gun and threatens to kill the intruder if he doesn't leave the house immediately. The intruder, without any fear, says he prefers to stay. When Meyer realizes that he cannot kill the stranger, he asks his name. "People call me China" the stranger answers, "and you are Lucas Meyer, the industrialist ... and now, after this first formal introduction, you can go to bed, if you want ... I understand it is enough for you for this first meeting. God bless you and your pretty wife in your dreams ... Good night."⁶⁰

After these first two scenes, more tattered people invade the house and other rich houses of the city. Meyer is trapped by China, who knew him in the past; Meyer feels guilty because China knows some secrets about him and an

⁵⁹Wolff, Los Invasores. (Santiago: Ercilla, 1970) 10.

⁶⁰Wolff, Los Invasores, 17.

associate who mysteriously died some years ago. For that reason, Meyer cannot force China to leave the house.

As time passes, Meyer becomes more and more frightened by the invasion. In addition, the play progresses from reality to surreality in which Meyer sees all kinds of specters who annoy him: nuns asking for money, children asking for food, and fired workers asking for jobs. After all this persecution, Meyer is convinced that this situation is the revenge of the dead associate's family. The industrialist cannot tolerate his guilt and screams: "Stop! ... Stop! ...I killed him! I killed him!"⁶¹

At that moment, Pietá awakens Meyer. He seems relieved realizing everything was a bad dream. He tells his family about the story of the invaders. His wife and children listen to his tale, while a dirty hand breaks a window in the living room of their house, and the play finishes.

The Invaders is a drama in which the apparent realism serves to underline the unreal element: the play depends on a dream which disguises the reality, and it is not clear when the dream begins or ends.

As the title itself suggests, the plot tells the story about the invasion of vagrants into the province of the well-to-do. Although the play is a drama written in a conventional structure (horizontal in Wolff's classification), it has some nonrealistic elements which represent the protagonist's fantasies.

The play has a very short exposition and therefore an early point of attack. The conflict is produced between Meyer, the protagonist; and China, the antagonist. Nevertheless, this conflict represents a struggle between two separate parts of society: the rich and the poor.

The context, as well as the message of the play, are suggested by China's dialogue at the end of the play: "Wealth penetrates people's

⁶¹Wolff, Los Invasores, 85.

personalities creating deep roots ... It becomes second nature which distorts their entire reality ..."62 These lines describe the atmosphere of The Invaders, in which reality is deformed by a dream.

The characters of The Invaders can be interpreted on different levels. They can be analyzed as real people, they can be interpreted as symbols of different social classes, and they can also be described as allegorical within the protagonist's dream. Margaret Peden, in her study of the present Chilean theatre, observes that in The Invaders "the tension, the drama of the play, is expressed through the characters, not merely by them."⁶³ But Luz Hurtado, in her description of characters in The Invaders, says: "Although the characters are very convincing, they really are symbols of different social classes."⁶⁴ Peden questions this interpretation because "The two remaining characters especially are just the opposite of stereotypes. Toletole, the sad little clown, and the ambiguous China are magically real characters: China is never really defined, and the development of the play lifts both characters into the world of the unreal. It is the mystery of China and Toletole that makes The Invaders such a powerful play."⁶⁵

Lucas Meyer, the most complex character of the play, represents the two themes of the play: he feels guilty about his associate's murder and frightened of possible revenge by the dead person's family. To achieve his very good economic position, Meyer has repressed his sensitivity to injustice and poverty: "I'm Lucas Meyer ... That means that I had to take decisions which have hardened my heart."⁶⁶

⁶²Wolff, Los Invasores, 56.

⁶³Margaret Peden, Three plays of Egon Wolff. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969) 50.

⁶⁴Hurtado, 78.

⁶⁵Peden, 51.

⁶⁶Wolff, The Invaders, 59.

The conflict between Meyer and the invaders could be seen as the moral conflict inside his consciousness. The conflict is well described by China when he says to Meyer: "The people are not rebelling against you; You are very obsessed with the idea that your life is important to us ... Is it so difficult to think that what occurs outside is only a necessary crusade? A simple game for justice? Come on! I invite you to watch the reality. It is a spectacle which the spirit enjoys. Come, join us. Come, follow us."⁶⁷ The words "obsessed", "game", and "spectacle" are related to the dreamy situation.

Meyer, by keeping his identity, never understands the true nature of the invasion. He believes it is personal revenge, instead of a social movement. He doesn't comprehend that for the squatters there is not one particular guilty person but the entire upper class.

China is a very special indigent. He is cultivated and clever. His criticisms of Meyer's behavior are accurate and blunt. China is a well developed antagonist who makes Meyer recognize the truth. He has a tender relationship with Toletole, whom he takes care of. As the leader of the invaders, China doesn't want violent revenge.

He is peaceful and just: "...I don't want death ... I want life for them! I want life for us!.. A slow, long and bright life, with the absolute certainty we won't need to sack nevermore."⁶⁸ China disapproves of the other invaders when they try to steal or damage Meyer's goods. He wants a peaceful solution: "I wish that in the end everything had been done as inside white sheets ... clean, like the heart of one of our dead ones ..."⁶⁹

Pietá, Meyer's wife, is a beautiful, cold, and materialistic woman. She is very proud of their social position. She praises her husband's ability to

⁶⁷Wolff, The Invaders, 71.

⁶⁸Wolff, The Invaders, 55.

⁶⁹Wolff, The Invaders, 57.

accumulate wealth: "You have never doubted, you have never failed. You put your eyes on something and then you get it. You simply achieve it. Perhaps you got me in that way too"⁷⁰. Although Pietá is very happy at the beginning of the play, she is also afraid about something: "And why do I have this feeling of ... vertigo? ... Of a dangerous unbalance? ... I believe in divine justice ... Yes, yes, perhaps it is only a primitive superstition that the same people cannot always achieve the best."⁷¹

Toletole represents the opposite side of Pietá. She is poor, single, homeless and ugly. However, she is also happy and doesn't have any fear. Toletole admires China and respects him. She is not clever; she doesn't know why they are invading Meyer's home. She only wishes for a beautiful dress and a huge plate of food.

In The Invaders, Wolff created a group of very magical characters who swing between reality and fantasy.

The message of the play is very clear: a warning to the rich that poor people can rebel against social injustice. However, this theme is secondary to the play's dramatic form. It is very significant how Wolff develops the plot around a dreamy and surrealistic situation; and how he introduces, in the plot, the two principal themes of the play: guilt and fear.

Egon Wolff is not the first playwright of using a dream to tell a story. This technique has a long tradition. Calderón's La Vida es Sueño and Priestley's An Inspector Calls are some significant examples.

Perhaps the universal struggle between different classes is something not very interesting today, but in the sixties it was a main concern in many Latin

⁷⁰Wolff, The Invaders, 6.

⁷¹Wolff, The Invaders, 7.

American countries. Therefore The Invaders is not a kind of play which can be fully appreciated in all times; it was an important play for a specific period.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a realistic, dark comedy written in three acts . It tells the story of two old brothers, Mico and Toño, who have lived together for a long time.. Although they come from a well known family in Santiago society, their life is miserable economically and otherwise. The two brothers live from the profits of an umbrella store administrered by Mico, and from the sale of a few jewels that still remain from the times when the family was wealthy.

At the beginning of the play the two brothers seem very worried because Meche, their sister, is coming to visit them for a few days. Meche is coming to seek her daughter whom she left as a child. The daughter, who is married, lives in the same city as Meche's brothers.

The brothers do not like the idea of having another person sharing their daily lives. Mico, who maintains both himself and his lazy brother, is very concerned about the extra money his sister will make him spend; and Toño, who has convinced his sister by letters that he is a responsible and serious man, is anxious about having the truth come out.

Toño and Mico have a complex routine of games. By means of these games, in which they play different roles and wear costumes, they disguise their anguish and fear. The two aging brothers have significant sexual psychological problems; and the games, where they behave like children, allow them to relieve their tensions. It is this reality as well that Toño and Mico do not want to show or to share. But the sister's visit is inevitable, and they have to alter their lifestyle to accomodate the guest.

With the appearance of Meche, the story develops a new twist. They change their games and new conflicts appear. The kindergarten has a new member: now three children have a common, painful past in which they can find

the origins of their neurosis. However, they do not want to confront their truths and they try to maintain the games and disguises.

Two other incidents build the story. One is that Meche is well received by her daughter, therefore she decides to stay:

MECHE: (Answering the phone) Hy! Angelita? Is this you, my little daughter? (almost crying) Yes, your mother, my honey! Oh, yes, yes. No, never more. Yes, in your uncles house. Yes, don't worry, I will live with them.

TOÑO: (Looking at Mico) Oh, Jesus, it seems it is unavoidable! Three Sánchez-Uriartes under the same roof! ... The infernal circle will be closed. Two was unbearable enough, but now three! We will suffer misfortune for ever! ⁷²

The other important incident which changes the story is related to Toño. He has become very nervous because of some phone calls he has been receiving. He tells his brother and sister that he has an old debt with a tailor. But Meche and Mico, who are curious about this, do not believe Toño's story. Then Toño confesses he has been playing cards, and the men who phoned him want him to pay back the money he owes them. A new struggle begins: Toño asks Mico for the money, Mico refuses, and Meche calls Mico "a cold and greedy person" and Toño "a stupid and irresponsible man".⁷³

Because Mico persists in refusing, Toño is forced to make a new confession: he is being blackmailed by a man who has some pornographic pictures of Toño with a teenager. In addition there is evidence in the police department of an earlier moral's charge. This extreme threat of humiliation to the Sanchez-Uriarte's family gives a kind of resolution to the play's conflict: Mico accedes to give money to Toño, and that fact quickly brings about their last

⁷²Egon.Wolff, Kindergarten. (Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1978) 54.

⁷³Wolff, Kindergarten, 40.

battle. In the final confrontation, after a long game in which Mico and Meche had been reproaching Toño for his sexual appetites, Toño decides to take revenge on Mico by telling an old secret about Mico: he had tried to castrate himself with a knife. This crude revelation makes Mico desperate enough to confess all his sexual perversions. Mico's confession represents Toño's victory: the clean, organized and supporting Mico is as corrupt as he.

After this last battle, a kind of balance is achieved. However, the spectator knows that these three aging children will play many more games inside their kindergarten in the future.

The play is structured around the conflicts caused by the brothers' differences. The contrast is significant: Mico is obsessed with money, order, and cleanliness. He tries to be refined and sophisticated, but he seems ridiculous and effeminate. Toño, the other brother, has a disreputable life style, "a sort of 1920s playboy."⁷⁴ He is a liar and a loafer by nature: he expects Mico to support him, while he mistreats his brother by creating false sexual stories about Mico and the nuns. These two brothers are rivals: each of them has quite different moral standards.

Kindergarten has a markedly ritual nature in which the characters repeat games, acts, and sentiments. For Frank Dauster these games represent an escape from their suffering: "The two brothers have a whole series of obsessive tics, but they too are acting: behind the effeminate housekeeper or the bohemian would-be gentleman, are two tortured beings. This is why they engage in mutual torment; this is why the arrival of Meche converts this ritual game into something new and infinitely more promising: alliances of two against one."⁷⁵

⁷⁴Dauster, 6.

⁷⁵Dauster, 7.

Therefore, Meche's arrival produces an important change in the conflict: where there were two sides in the conflict, there is now a triangle which is divided in two: two against one. Within this new dramatic function the roles alternate. Most of the time, Meche and Mico are against Toño for his lies and laziness, but, at times Meche and Toño attack Mico for his miserliness. The family nucleus is altered because of the games of two against one, the tension increases, and the confrontation becomes more painful. Margaret Seyers Peden in describing this alteration says : "Wolff effects his internal tension through the shifting and precariously balanced state of domination/submission, affection/repulsion games played between the two brothers and the sister."⁷⁶ But this new triangular structure also gives the characters the possibility of having a companion with whom to share the distress of this game of victimization.

Many times the characters seem almost able to lower their defense mechanisms and touch their own true emotions. However, when they begin to feel the pain, they escape by inventing another game.

In Kindergarten no one wins. In addition, there is no victory of a particular point of view. Wolff only describes these kinds of people "for whom all tomorrow will be equal to yesterday and today..."⁷⁷ Therefore, the dramatic action of the play originates in the characters' small insights and confessions. For these three adults, who live as if they were children in a kindergarten, there are neither big triumphs, nor spectacular defeats. Their affairs will always be small, but not for all that, any less dramatic.

"At last they are reunited in the house, in the holy place, under the shadow of the mother ever present in their memories, and when a threat comes,

⁷⁶Dauster, 9.

⁷⁷Dauster, 9.

they huddle together protecting each other and themselves in a relationship of mutual dependence beyond any difficulties between them. They know they are in need, and together they attempt to exorcise their manias and their terrors. They never make it to maturity; they are locked in their own infantilism, but within this infantilism they continue to clutch to life, and in this struggle we find the triumph of Wolff and his creations."⁷⁸

Kindergarten, as the title suggests, is the story of two aging brothers and an old sister, who live together and behave like children. The three characters return to their childhood by playing children's games. Wolff says about these characters: "Nobody had written before about this theme in my country. The pathetic and solitary old people have been forgotten by Chilean playwrights. Everybody is too worried about youth! Perhaps this is the expression of a country which values sensations more than wisdom." ⁷⁹

Mico is the oldest brother. He supports the household by administering an umbrella store. He is very stingy with the money and very obsessed with the house cleaning. He tries to remain an aristocrat, but he is poor and pathetic. Mico pretends he is the most chaste and pure of the three, but at the end of the play he confesses his real sexual nature:

MICO: You don't understand! I began to feel my skin burning at an age when you were just playing with toys. I couldn't see a female's leg without having fantasies. A female's breast raised my blood pressure. I was always a troubled boy ... One day, from a little window, I spied Aunt Adelaida and Uncle Abdón while they made love. (Pause) I died one hundred times that day near the window. I swore to rid myself of that obsession. I began to take baths in the cold water of the river. At night, I slept with a

⁷⁸Dauster, 9.

⁷⁹Wolff, personal interview.

crucifix over my mouth ...(Screaming). Oh, Jesus,
Toño! I still masturbate myself! I do it, Toño⁸⁰

Mico is the oldest brother who cannot overcome his infantile condition.

Toño has all the characteristics that Mico denies having. He is very proud of being a playboy. He is happy for not having to work and he thinks that money is to be spent. Toño is also a child who needs to play games to express his feelings because he has many problems in communicating his inner self.

At the end of the play, after Mico's crude confession, he cannot console his brother: "Toño watches his brother. He is perturbed and confused. He is not the kind of man for these situations. He cannot confront his own pain, therefore he cannot tolerate others' distress."⁸¹ Because Toño is not able to take seriously Mico's revelation, he answers with a kind of joking dialogue:

TOÑO: What was it? Theatre or truth? If it was theatre I think Lawrence Olivier would become green with envy looking at your Ophelia. Come on, I don't know what you want with those emotional disclosures! Who do you think I am ? Sigmund Freud?⁸²

Despite Toño's lies, he does not pretend to be a saint. He is more sincere than Mico, showing his imperfections and limitations.

Meche is a "sort of silent film vampire abandoned by the latest in a series of lovers"⁸³ Because of her many love affairs, she had been considered the black sheep of the Sánchez-Uriarte family. She is proud of being the youngest

⁸⁰Wolff, Kindergarten, 58.

⁸¹Wolff, Kindergarten, 59.

⁸²Wolff, Kindergarten, 59.

⁸³Dauster, 6.

of the three characters and she tries to keep her youth by using a lot of makeup and a blond wig.

Meche does not feel any blame for her past. She abandoned her seven-year-old daughter when she fell in love with one of her lovers. Nevertheless, she comes to seek her daughter, pretending that the girl was removed from her arms by her father. Meche never recognizes her abandonment and never explains why she spent so many years before trying to find her daughter.

The three characters of Kindergarten have the same characteristics: they attempt to disguise their inner affliction by means of lies, in large doses. As Frank Dauster observes: "These three suffer from the same itch of the flesh, each in his or her own manner. All three are victims, battered by life. Of course, their sins are another dimension of the family's decadence, but their multivalence also makes them function on a purely human level."⁸⁴

Kindergarten is a dark comedy, in which the three characters hide a tragedy behind their humor.

⁸⁴Dauster, 8.

Paper Flowers

Paper Flowers is an absurd (vertical) drama divided into six scenes. Wolff tells the story of an ordinary woman -- Eva -- who invites the man who helped her with some packages -- The Hake -- to stay a moment in her house and have a cup of tea. Eva is a solitary widow and painter and The Hake is an enigmatic beggar who has extraordinary talents. He tells Eva he has seen her many times before, at the Botanical Garden, but Eva does not believe him:

EVA: The Botanical Garden? You saw me?
 THE HAKE: You were behind the parrot's cage,
 painting some clumps of laurel ... (He stares at her.)
 You had on a light straw hat with a green ribbon.
 And a kerchief with some scenes of Venice. ⁸⁵

After Eva realizes The Hake is not lying, she decides to give him some hot soup instead of the tea. They eat the soup together, and have a nice talk. When the soup is finished, Eva asks The Hake to leave because she has to go somewhere. The Hake persuades Eva to let him stay because somebody is looking for him in order to kill him. Eva assents and leaves The Hake inside her locked apartment. After she exits, The Hake shakes the cage of Eva's canary, while he says: "Eat your little peaches! Eat, you shit! Eat, you fruity corsair!"⁸⁶

Eva returns happy in the second scene: she has bought cheese and salami for her guest. The Hake has been making a sea gull from newspaper. She likes it very much and asks The Hake if he knows how to make flowers. The Hake says he can make beautiful camellias. Then Eva realizes The Hake

⁸⁵Egon Wolff, Paper Flowers, Trans. Margaret S. Peden. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971. 13

⁸⁶Wolff, Paper Flowers, 22.

has cleaned the whole house except her room: "How could I go in there without your permission?"⁸⁷

The Hake tries to teach Eva to make flowers with the newspaper, while he speaks about different uses for a newspaper : "The paper from newspaper has a world of things to say. It takes whatever form you want to give it. It folds submissively. It allows itself to be handled without resistance. It occupies very little space in your pocket. And it is a faithful companion on winter nights. It keeps you company ... tranquilly ... silently ... always ready, there it is, for any use whatever."⁸⁸

Eva is very curious about The Hake's origin; she cannot believe he is a simple beggar. She asks his name, but The Hake says he has no name; therefore Eva decides to call him Bobby. When it is getting late, Eva invites The Hake to spend the night in her living room.

In the third scene, Eva wakes up and realizes The Hake has cleaned up the apartment. He has removed things from one place to another because he did not like where they were. Then, The Hake prepares breakfast for both, and speaks to Eva in French. Eva is curious again and asks The Hake where he learned French. The Hake instead of answering, closes the curtains, turns on a lamp, and throws the silhouette of figures on a magazine. Eva seems very interested in the figures and tries to do the same.

Then, The Hake moves close to her and holds her hands. They look in each other's eyes, and The Hake, confused, opens the curtains. After that, Eva says: "Bobby, there is no reason to be timid with me. (Laughs.) I'm not going to eat you, don't you know. (Agitated.) After all, having spent the night here together, gives us a right to ... a certain familiarity, don't you think?"⁸⁹

⁸⁷Wolff, Paper Flowers, 25.

⁸⁸Wolff, Paper Flowers, 31.

⁸⁹Wolff, Paper Flowers, 43.

After this scene the entire play progresses to Eva's total surrender to The Hake, who torments and finally destroys her. At the end of Paper Flowers, Eva collapses into silence and near autism, while The Hake becomes progressively and violently loquacious, in a stunning and ritualized reversal of roles. He has established himself in Eva's life as if he had a premeditated plan. The passing of time and the plot of the play are realistic; however, the theme as well as the two characters have obvious antecedents in Beckett, Pinter and Albee. The conflict is not linear (horizontal) because one of the two forces -- The Hake -- does not play by conventional rules. He is not the classical antagonist because he neither finds any resistance in the protagonist nor shows any change at all. The Hake abides outside the dramatic progression, and it is Eva alone who experiences the corresponding change. As Frank Dauster observes: "One half of the equation is not resolved, and the nullification of Eva does nothing to illuminate the internal process of The Hake, nor why he exercises such a powerful influence over her."⁹⁰ Therefore, the protagonist -- Eva -- offers no resistance to the stranger who humiliates and decimates her from the beginning. There is no conflict between them. Eva is seduced by The Hake and moved to her destruction without any confrontation.

Wolff says that in vertical structure it is not important "what happens", but "why it happens". In Paper Flowers the spectator is not too interested in what will happen next, but why those things are occurring. Margaret Peden observes: "What happens in Paper Flowers is extremely simple at first view. What is not simple is why ..."⁹¹ Dauster seconds her interpretation, saying that because "no credible reasons are offered for The Hake's behavior with regard to Eva ... The spectator/reader is left ultimately to decide why."⁹²

⁹⁰Dauster, 2.

⁹¹Peden, 6.

⁹²Dauster, 4.

Although Paper Flowers' characters come from two quite different social levels, their social condition is not the basis for their conflict. The key to Eva's character is her role as as a solitary female, rather than her role as a cultivated woman. Her solitude and sexual frustration make Eva the perfect target for The Hake. Perhaps Eva is single and only pretends she is a widow. In any case, Eva is a woman who has no man, and who needs one: anyone. For Dauster, Eva is "pathologically in need of subjugation; her pathetic flirting and acceptance of The Hake's increasing savagery are examples of her romanticized vision of him and her inability to realize his violence and resentment, all which leads inevitably to her final degradation."⁹³ Therefore Eva is easily seduced by The Hake from the very start. The fact that The Hake had paid attention to her before attracts her to him even more.

The Hake is a beggar who begs for company to express his destructiveness. As Diana Taylor observes: "The Hake's destruction of Eva is seen in terms of his pathological incapacity to accept anything or anyone who is more authentically creative than he."⁹⁴

The Hake is attractive, powerful, penetrating, and intelligent. He knows well how to be with Eva in order to become indispensable. At the beginning of the play, before the first scene, Wolff writes an explanation of The Hake's name: "The Hake is a fish of the Chilean seacoast. It is long and thin-bodied, its large, acute-nosed mouth set with sharp teeth. It hunts the deep waters of the Pacific to feed its voracious appetite."⁹⁵ Indeed, this explanation is an accurate description of The Hake's personality and behavior. He is a representative of violence; a victim, yet at the same time an agent, of dark forces.

⁹³Dauster, 5.

⁹⁴Dauster, 5.

⁹⁵Wolff, Paper Flowers, 10

The theme of Paper Flowers has many levels of interpretation. Some critics think that The Hake's gradual decimation of Eva's world represents the poor wreaking vengeance on the bourgeoisie. Others see the conflict as a battle between sexes, with the man unconsciously determined to deny the woman's right to her own identity. In other studies, the play is regarded as an example of a destructive couple's relationship in which nobody grows, but one destroys the other. Others interpret the play psychologically, where the two characters represent inner, unconscious aspects of only one person. In this perspective, the conflict springs from the fight between the instinct to live and the instinct to die.

Because Paper Flowers is an absurd (vertical) drama, the emphasis lies in the situation and not in the story. In addition, the dramatic action is simple: the progressive stripping away of a soul. Perhaps this simplicity is one of the reasons for its multiple interpretations.

CONCLUSION

The past two decades have produced several fine Latin American playwrights, the Chilean Egon Wolff being one of the most significant. Although he is neither the most prolific nor the most avant-garde, Wolff is one of the most serious talents of Hispanic dramatic art.

This study has described his professional career of more than thirty years, in which the playwright has dealt with psychological themes as well as social criticism. The success of some of his plays in different countries has proved his ability to choose particular situations and make them accessible to all kinds of audiences.

The study of Wolff's distinction between "vertical and horizontal theatre" has opened a new way to approach non-realistic plays. The idea of a centrifugal theatre which rotates and accelerates from the outside in gives an additional understanding of the dramatic structure of antirealistic plays.

The analysis of Wolff's four major plays showed how the author has experimented with various styles in order to achieve an authentic Chilean expression. Some of Wolff's characters portray a living example of how people can survive in undeveloped countries. Nevertheless, at the same time, others show universal characteristics which can be found in many different cultures.

The interviews with the playwright confirmed his kindness and frankness in talking about himself and his plays.

This thesis is intended to present Wolff's plays to American students of theatre. I strongly believe that they will identify themselves with Wolff's work

more than they will find important differences. As Frank Dauster observes:
“The conflicts at the heart of Wolff’s theater are not social or intellectual, but
human.” ⁹⁶

⁹⁶Dauster, 28.

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