

Liminal Spaces: When the European “Intellectual” Meets the American “Savage” in Two Argentine Plays

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In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt analyzes a series of documents that describe the encounter of the European intellectual with the supposedly “primitive” other people he (and it is typically a “he”) finds in the New World. Both *Criaturas de aire* (2004) by Lucía Laragione and *El informe del Dr. Krupp* (2003) by Pedro Sedlinsky stage similar encounters between the European “scientist/intellectual” and the American “primitive/savage,” but unlike the narrators whom Pratt analyzes, all of whom affirm the cultural superiority of the representative of the European metropolis, these two dramatists refuse to validate the cultural superiority of that European intellectual.¹ Basing my analysis on postcolonial theory with an emphasis on the utilization of the scenic space in both productions, I propose to analyze the manner in which the European not only invades the American space in both plays but also recreates the European space within that American setting.² In each play, the European space is associated with the interior, while the American space is relegated to the exterior in a visual trope that evokes the European traveler’s imagined or desired difference(s) along a spectrum of binary divisions: civilization/nature, mind/body, man/woman, etc., where in each case the first term is privileged over the second.³ Nevertheless, and in what I view as fundamental to the construction of meaning in both plays, although the civilized space of the European intellectual occupies the foreground of the stage, the American space is never out of sight, always visible toward the back of the stage just beyond a clearly defined border that has been constructed both physically and psychologically.⁴ As a result, the “savage” elements associated with the more primitive, rural American space continually threaten to overflow their boundaries and implicitly contaminate the civilized, European space, which in both plays proves to be the setting

for actions that are equally, if not more, savage than those of the alleged zone of barbarity.⁵ I will also argue that both dramatists add a very original touch that challenges the perceived binarism of the border itself by depicting and focusing on triangular, if not multifarious borders, beyond which there always seems to be yet another.

First, a brief synopsis of each of the plays. *El informe del Dr. Krupp* begins with a summary, on the part of the scientist/protagonist, of what we are about to witness: “Informe del doctor Teodoro Krupp sobre la muerte de la joven Aurelia. Investigación, justicia, y castigo. Dedicado al Dr. Krupp, padre” (Sedlinsky 7). It is worth noting here that even Krupp’s report is the product of triangulation—investigation, justice, and punishment.⁶ Krupp, an entomologist, informs us that he crossed the ocean and travelled up the river to arrive at the wharf, a wharf that figuratively marks a threshold, a liminal space, in his words, “el lugar donde empezó todo” (7). His description of the journey underscores the remoteness of his own roots as well as his alleged difference from and implicit superiority over the people he encounters in this “new” territory, which, of course, is anything but “new.” At the same time, this description, as we shall come to realize, marks a certain blindness on his part as well as a need to impose telos, with its clear-cut beginning and end, patently ignoring the fact that this is only one beginning among many possibilities and that in fact, “it” all started long before his arrival to the New World. Although he went to the jungle theoretically to study its insects, the play is effectively a dramatization of his scientific *informe*: the report of his discovery of the cadaver of Aurelia, a member of Eck’s traveling troupe of circus actors, who already lived in the area, and his pseudoscientific investigation into her death. In the final analysis, he studies the troupe of circus actors as much as the insects and, in fact, even employs the same instruments in the process. As he insists, referring to the actors, “Los estudié. Sé lo que llevan dentro. [. . .] Disequé sus almas, como disequé cada especie de insecto de este lugar infernal” (61). At the end, Krupp determines, incorrectly as we shall discover, that the older brother (Rolando) is guilty of the crime and summarily executes him, thus casting himself as a god figure, creator of the world, “el universo Krupp” in his terms (61), who investigates and punishes, if indeed in a blatantly arbitrary manner. His narrative and the play end as he abandons the jungle, but only after he has baptized the river with his name and burned all the papers and other objects linked to his investigation, a gesture that immediately calls into question his credibility and purported objectivity and reminds us that, as Beatriz Trastoy has noted, contemporary

theatrical works often challenge “la relación del investigador con su objeto de estudio, [...] el análisis y la valoración de los datos obtenidos a lo largo del proceso de una indagación científica” (35).⁷ The final image of the drama is that of the deceased Aurelia, whose body has been thoroughly probed and violated in the name of Krupp’s investigation. At this point, she is lying on a gurney and croons a song that speaks of her double betrayal by the man she loved (Miguel) as well as the man whom she entrusted with her revenge for that betrayal (presumably Krupp). She promises she will return, and both the song and the play conclude with the words, “No hay ley / ni hay juez / ni hay clemencia. / Nunca los hombres serán clementes” (63).

Criaturas de aire also begins with the arrival of the European scientist/intellectual to the Americas, this time to a country estate in the scrublands near Argentina’s northeast border.⁸ Here the focus is on Rüdín, a specialist in genetics.⁹ His task will be to perfect a breed of horses so that the Creole Osorio can win an important race that will bring him fame and fortune (13). After careful research, Rüdín selects the sire that will provide the desired genes, and the stallion impregnates Osorio’s mares. At approximately the same time, the fifteen-year-old Delia, a mute gypsy and concubine of Osorio, who purchased her from her mother, also becomes pregnant, but the father of her unborn child is not her “owner” but rather a gypsy lover. Osorio’s peons kill the gypsy male, and Rüdín performs an abortion on the girl at the Creole’s insistence, but only after extracting the promise that Osorio will help Rüdín return home when the time is right. Just before Rüdín is forced to flee to avoid his pursuers, Delia retaliates by cutting the fetuses from the mares’ wombs, thus destroying his work. The play ends after Rüdín has been escorted out the door, almost forcibly. The last image we see is Osorio seated on Rüdín’s bed, implicitly occupying the Europeanized space, and Delia in the patio beyond the wall that marks the border between inside and outside, playing a stanza of a Bach sonata on a real violin that seems to have replaced the ramshackle tin violin she has used up to this point.

The similarities between the goals of the two scientists/intellectuals here are noteworthy insofar as, like Pratt’s European travelers, neither intends to remain in the New World. From the beginning each expects to return to the metropolis and his scientific studies in Europe. Meanwhile, to the extent that each man endeavors to discover or create something new, both of their projects necessarily involve the act of naming. Krupp collects insects and classifies them with the intention of establishing a new order that will carry his name, as do all the instruments he devises in the process, an undertaking that

will presumably earn him acclaim upon his return to Europe.¹⁰ Revealingly, Krupp's investigation into the crime parallels his research on the insects and is also dependent on naming, as he determines, or "names," the guilty party, if indeed in an arbitrary manner. In the case of Rüdín, the new breed of horses will be named after Osorio rather than him, but in both cases the scientist/intellectual assigns names and thus, linguistically at least, appropriates the new space and its inhabitants, a gesture that recalls that of Adam in the Garden of Eden.¹¹ As Pratt has indicated in reference to the scientific travelers she studies, "natural history conceived of the world as a chaos out of which the scientist *produced* an order" (30, emphasis in the original). Unquestionably, the act of naming is the first step in the production of that order insofar as it establishes similarities and differences between as well as among objects, differences that will allow, even encourage, comparisons that ultimately lead to designations of superiority and inferiority.

In each of the works, the arrangement and utilization of the scenic space is fundamental. In the Laragione play, that space is divided into two distinct sections: one interior, the room in which Rüdín lives and does his research, as well as one exterior, where the animals, the young gypsy girl, and the mestizo peon circulate.¹² Rüdín's combination laboratory/living space occupies the front of the stage, closest to the audience, and thus generates a certain identification on the part of the spectator with this familiar, "civilized" space that is so close at hand. In it we find a record player, requested specifically by Rüdín so he can listen to classical music, an activity that carries him back to earlier times in a cultured, metropolitan Europe and thus allows him to distract himself, psychologically at least, from the repulsion he feels for all that surrounds him in his new world. Further back on the very narrow stage, beyond a wall with windows and a door, we glimpse the exterior zone with the animals and the rest of the characters. Thus, we are allowed to view the area beyond the border that marks the end of the civilized/scientific milieu and the beginning of the savage one. Initially, that liminal wall/border seems to promise protection from the exterior, untamed world that lurks beyond it. Nevertheless, the frequency with which the door opens and sounds drift through the windows, as do the insects that torment Rüdín, underscores the permeability of and movement between the two sectors as well as the possibility that the implicitly "barbaric" and uncontrollable exterior might somehow invade that interior space, well demarcated though it is, including perhaps the space of the spectator on the other side of yet another implicit border, that of the fourth wall.¹³

In this sense, the physical border, like the imagined one, attempts to mark—indeed, impose—essential differences that would establish and confirm the superiority of the European as well as his distance from the “barbaric” locals. Nonetheless, this supremacy is valid only from the perspective of the European. Although the locals do perceive the differences between themselves and the scientists/intellectuals, from their viewpoints the latter merit scorn more than respect. Osorio and his peon, Gregorio, ridicule Rüdín and his “strange” customs, which they deem effeminate, i.e. inferior to their implicitly superior masculinity. The disparity of their perspectives is underscored when Osorio classifies the geneticist’s music as “música de hembras,” while Rüdín labels it “la música de mi pueblo” (Laragione 18) and becomes vexed when Delia, the gypsy girl, attempts to imitate it on her improvised, “precarious” tin violin—“precarious,” or unstable, perhaps because it partakes of both “cultured” and “primitive” attributes.¹⁴ Rüdín’s irritation is surely related to the fact that the similarity of their musical tastes suggests a connection between them and their peoples, which he is loath to acknowledge, and one that he seems to find threatening. Indeed, as Angelika Bammer has proposed, “When an other is perceived as threatening, it is precisely [...] for the degree to which this other seems not just ‘different’ but—uncannily—strangely familiar, even, one might say ‘same’” (47). In fact, he finds Delia’s musical impulses so disconcerting that at a later point in the play, he steps on and crushes her tin violin (24), thus eliminating the instrument that evokes a potential link between them.¹⁵ Similarly, in *El informe del Dr. Krupp*, the scientist/intellectual fails to gain the respect of the troupe of actors, although they do allow him to participate in one of their circus acts, mostly as a way of mocking him and reducing him to the level of the native children, whom Eck has captivated with the trick of the talking dummy, a figure that leads us to the question basic to colonial studies—whose voice are we hearing? As a result, in both works we are left with the uncomfortable suspicion that the world of the “savage” might be capable of dismantling the carefully demarcated but necessarily precarious, if not illusory, space and veneer of “civilization.”

The question of “voice” resurfaces in the production of the Sedlinsky work as the scientist/intellectual quite literally interposes himself between the spectators and the other characters since his report not only relates what happened but also functions as a script that prompts and controls the actions of the troupe of actors as they stage segments of his report and enact what he is telling us. In this respect, Krupp functions as something of a playwright and director. As a result, at the beginning we see everything from his point

of view and according to his interpretation. During the course of the play, however, we gradually begin to distance ourselves from his perspective, seeing (through) the cracks and inconsistencies, to arrive at a less unilateral comprehension of events, one that differs radically from Krupp's. The key moment of the play is when the audience realizes that his scientific objectivity is merely theatre and his judgments subjective at best.

Although the utilization of the scenic space is different in the production of the Sedlinsky work than Laragione's piece, it once again is associated with the European scientist/intellectual and is located closer to the audience, thus encouraging us to identify more with him and his space. Here, too, as in *Criaturas de aire*, nature, in this case the American jungle, is visible throughout the production, but now it is located specifically within the confines of the Europeanized space of Krupp's laboratory, a recreation of the local space, a miniature model that has not only been constructed by the European "invader" but also reduced in magnitude and emptied of its power, converted as it has been into an innocuous reproduction that allows our scientist/intellectual to portray himself as a god figure who not only creates the world and imposes his name on everything but also determines guilt and innocence and administers the punishment.¹⁶

In the production, the arrangement of the scenic space not only serves to highlight the theatricality of the pseudo-scientific report, but again underscores the multiplication of the border. First, Krupp occupies the foreground of the stage and presents his scientific report as if before a congress of specialists. The real audience is seated in precisely the space where those specialists would be seated, positing perhaps our collusion in the colonial endeavor. In many ways, the work underscores the performative character of the sciences in general while promising and setting the stage for what, in another context, Michael Vanden Heuvel has labeled "a perspectival, lecture-demonstration that suggests objectivity, impressive professorial interpretation, and textual closure" (110). As we shall see, however, this promise is not fulfilled, a fact that ultimately highlights the fragility of the veneer of scientific objectivity. I would argue too that, like Pratt's European traveler and perhaps like the theatre spectator, Krupp sees what his prior experience has prepared him to see and what flatters and sustains his self-perception. Second, and perhaps even more important, as the performance begins, beyond the doctor and farthest from the audience, we find a curtained proscenium that frames yet another audience, one composed specifically of Ecks' troupe of circus actors.¹⁷ As a result, in the opening moments of the production we look at Krupp and at

them, while they look at Krupp and at us, thus producing a self-conscious work that not only reflects itself and reminds us that what we have before us is theatre, but also creates a vague sensation of discomfort in spectators. Who are the subjects of the gaze here and who are its objects? Like Pratt's European traveler with his imperial eyes, spectators expect to be the subject of the gaze, not its object. In addition, the fact that the spatial disposition of the actors reflects our own converts us, on the one hand, into the intellectual spectators who form part of a scientific congress but, on the other, into part of the spectacle itself, perhaps other travelling actors, observed by those of the play, a situation that hints at unexpected links between a scientific report and a theatrical circus even as it destabilizes the actor/spectator binary.¹⁸

In this way, and in what I read as a commentary on the sciences and the scientific method, Krupp's report is not only performative, but also overtly linked to a circus, displaying its own blend of telling and showing. It is worth noting that both the circus and the scientific exposition begin by informing the audience what they are about to see and hear in the metatheatrical venue, introductory remarks that prepare us for what we will see and at the same time shape and limit not only what we see but also our interpretation of it. I have already quoted Krupp's introductory remarks, and, as reported by the scientist, Rolando's words of introduction to the circus act—words that, significantly, were bequeathed him by his father, the elder Eck—similarly announce what the spectator will see and hear. Rolando begins by inviting his potential audience to “una cita con lo inexplicable” (10), the latter a term that surely describes Krupp's report but one that he would never utter since his “scientific method” is aimed specifically at explaining the unfathomable, forced and self-serving though that explanation might be. Functioning as a narrator within Krupp's narration and as something of a master of ceremonies, like Krupp, Rolando then insists that his group has come from far away. He goes on to assure his spectators, “van a ver la magia. [...] Van a oír. [...] Van a ver. [...] Van a sentir” (11). His words, his promises, again like those of Krupp, convert spectators into something comparable to imperial travelers in a new land, but like most travelers, ones who have already been told what they will see, hear, and feel, and who, like spectators in general, may be limited to seeing and hearing only what they have been told is there as opposed to what they might discover were they able to observe their surroundings without the acquired blinders. Just as Krupp describes the depths of the murky river in which he caught insects and eventually encountered Aurelia's body, invisible beneath the water's calm surface, we are often not immediately capable of

seeing beyond surfaces to glimpse “lo que estaba pasando por debajo de la línea del agua oscura, que parecía calma” (9).

Since in the circus the combination of showing and telling serves to distract the spectators’ eyes from the tricks and sleights of hand on which the performance relies and render the prestidigitation invisible, the question arises if Krupp’s report, which also comprises showing and telling, might not have the same goal. In both the circus and the scientific report, perhaps all we see is illusion. Furthermore, the fact that the central act of the circus involves Franz, the talking dummy, encourages us to draw an analogy between the dummy and Krupp, who is also the central act of his scientific performance. First, since the dummy act depends on a trick of ventriloquism, it begs the question of the source of the voice we hear. Second, since, as reported by Krupp, it was Rolando, the elder brother, who threw his voice in the circus act, a skill he apparently learned and inherited from his father, we must wonder whose voice we are hearing as Krupp speaks: Krupp’s or that of his father, Krupp’s or that of “science,” which is also traditionally paternalistic in character.¹⁹ But the metaphoric waters become very muddied here, and again Krupp’s reliability is called into doubt, for although Krupp has told us that Rolando was the source of Franz’s voice, it turns out he has misled us. Late in the play, we learn that Krupp eventually discovered that the source was, in fact, Miguel. While Rolando interacted with and ostensibly spoke to and for Franz while seated on a trunk, it was Miguel who lent his voice to the dummy from his hidden position inside that trunk. Thus, Krupp’s initial belief that Rolando had inherited the most important elements of Eck senior’s patrimony proves erroneous, for, as we finally discover, the younger brother was, in fact, the heir, a situation that might well explain Krupp’s scientific mania to control truth and reign superior.

As a result of this labyrinth of voices and invisible agendas, the question arises if, in the case of Krupp as in the case of Franz, there might not be yet another hidden third party who will similarly prove to be the voice we are in fact hearing, which, of course, ultimately there is—the voice of the playwright, who “throws” his voice into the words of the characters. In the final analysis, although the Sedlinsky work stages a congress that suggests scientific objectivity and professionalism, all this disintegrates while the theatrical gesture per se is called into question. Theatre’s gaze, often clinical if not imperial, is anything but innocent here. At the same time, the closed ending implicitly promised by a scientific report is also withheld. While Krupp believes that his punishment of Rolando provides that closure, the

arbitrariness of the punishment makes a mockery of the notion of closure. The murderer, be it Miguel Eck or Krupp, still lives, if indeed not unscathed. Krupp tells us that Miguel contracted a mysterious disease that disfigured him, and I would argue that Krupp's "illness"—his mania for power—is merely less somatic, less visible than Miguel's. As we saw in *Criaturas de aire*, the fourth wall forms an implicit border, which perhaps encourages us to wonder to what extent we, the audience—and perhaps particularly, we, the theatre critics and scholars in the audience—occupy a position in relation to the spectacle that parallels that of the scientist/intellectual in regard to the new world he hopes to conquer and domesticate, to name and explain in his own terms and from his own blind spot, for this, of course, is precisely what we too do as theatre scholars.

As I indicated above, the two plays dramatize the multiplication and multilateralism of the border. Within the scenic space, the world of the European scientist/intellectual superimposed on the American land is clearly demarcated, as is the zone of contact and transculturation—the world of Osorio and the peons in *Criaturas de aire* and that of the troupe of itinerant actors in *El informe del Dr. Krupp*.²⁰ However, the genuinely "native" world—if such a concept is a possibility—the radically different, is relegated to the invisibility of the offstage in both works. Although both Rüdín and Krupp view the people with whom they have contact as the "other," the "native," and culturally inferior, if not "savage," the fact is that there exists yet another border and another region beyond it, a zone populated by people with whom our protagonists have no direct contact, people of whom characters speak but whom we do not see. In the case of Krupp, this would include the inhabitants of the jungle, in the case of Rüdín, the undomesticated gypsies and Indians of the hinterlands, whom Osorio would no doubt include among the "alimañas" that, in his words, can be found just beyond the line where the real country begins (Laragione 13). Surely, Osorio's classification recalls Susanne Zantop's observation that "as part of, and indistinguishable from, the land, the natives are not conceived of as humans; they are identical with [. . .] 'nature'" (271). Still, although they have no contact with these groups, our scientists/intellectuals are both conscious of their presence and perceive them as a potential threat. Revealingly, these zones are not only invisible to the imperial gaze—including the spectators', which are doubly imperial to a large degree—but are also described as even more savage and brutal than what we do see. Like the protagonists, we spectators do not see nor do we have to cope with what lies beyond the intermediary, transcultural zone populated by

Creoles and half-breeds. In this sense, both works dramatize the fact that the European traveler, scientist/intellectual, only sees that which exhibits already familiar characteristics that reflect to some degree his previous experience. Or, as Pratt has insightfully phrased it, although Europe's mastering discourses "claim to wish to see and wish to know, [they] only see what they wish to see and know what they wish to know" (105).

The influence of prior experience is underscored early in the Sedlinsky work when Krupp opens his scientific report in a most unscientific manner with an anecdote from his youth, a scene apparently repeated frequently, when his father punished him for an offense that in fact had been committed by his younger brother, who always managed to escape unscathed. As we immediately begin to suspect, the brutality of his youth influences every aspect of Krupp's life, including his research and "scientific discoveries," products of his purported objectivity. Specifically, he remembers the voice of his father "como un trueno" (7); his own flesh exposed to the cold air, awaiting the punishment; and the rod of the father, a symbol of power and an instrument of "justice," which, in this case, proves to be arbitrary punishment. In this way, from the beginning emphasis is placed on the omnipotence of the father, who named and decided whom to discipline, whom to absolve. The fact that the anecdote concludes with the words "Consagro mi informe a su memoria [that of his father], guía y sostén en el laberinto de mis investigaciones" (7), is certainly revealing on several levels. First, although Krupp calls his father his guide and support, his description of the punishment suggests that the father was anything but objective and fair in his dealings with his sons. Thus, his father's "guidance" was in the final analysis a form of misguidance, leading him away from truth and objectivity. Second, the fact that he specifically uses the term *laberinto* in reference to his research suggests that he may be trapped in a labyrinth of scientific research filled with dead ends and blind alleys, an inescapable maze of perplexity explained away only at the price of foregoing "scientific" truth and objectivity. Indeed, not only has he knowingly been as arbitrary in his administration of "justice" as was his father, but everything he has done appears to be motivated by a desire to imitate and "become" the father. Despite the injustice and the errors of his father, Krupp models himself after him and re-enacts his version of world order, thus, like Rüdín in *Criaturas de aire*, perpetuating an unjust society, bringing to the New World the perniciousness of the Old, reproducing a capricious social order while enthroning himself in a position of dominance.

As noted, Krupp's identification with his father is evident at the end of the play when he punishes not the culprit, the younger brother Miguel, but rather Rolando, the older.²¹ Moreover, after firing at Rolando, he notes "El ruido del trueno y la vara en mi mano" (62), two elements underscored in his earlier description of his own punishment as a youth. Significantly, he adds, "Quise volver a oírlo," and to confirm his new-found powers shoots two more times. In other words, the "pleasure" of his omnipotence, of assuming the power and the law of the father, and thus being able to act with impunity, leads him to exaggerate the already undeserved punishment. The fact that the punishment/justice is linked to sound takes us back to what we might classify as the two "beginnings" of the work: the beginning of the play *per se*, with Krupp's account of the punishment marked by the sound of his father's voice in contrast to the silence that preceded it, but also his depiction of his arrival to the New World, "where it all began." I have discussed the former, but in the latter he emphasizes on more than one occasion the silence he encountered in his new world, a silence broken only by the sound of the departing steam boat and the insects, until the triple "thunder" of his pistol, which breaks the silence as it imposes the "law" of the new father.²²

It is worth noting too that our Dr. Krupp not only supplants his own father but also the elder Eck. In addition, he usurps Eck's patrimony, taking with him when he departs both Franz, the "talking" dummy who provided the central number of the circus spectacle, as well as the wolf skins the family had brought from their homeland, curious objects of myth, superstition, and illusion, which, like the dummy, would seem to have no place in Krupp's purportedly objective, empirical world of scientific research.²³ It is revealing too that, before killing Rolando, Krupp assures him, "Conozco sus crímenes y sus motivos. Los celos hacia su hermano por el desprecio de su padre. Conozco su oscuridad y su veneno" (61). He presumes to know them because he believes they reflect his own experiences. Thus, the scientist/intellectual here, like the European traveler discussed by Pratt, sees only himself in his research/investigation, yet he still repeats history, the injustice of his father. But Krupp, like the spectator, cannot possibly know what Rolando felt. It is Krupp's own imperial "eye" that presumes to know but is able, or willing, to "know" only that which reflects himself. At the same time, Krupp's dealings with the brothers literalize the paternalism of the colonizer who views the indigenous people as children in need of his superior guidance and discipline, and this in spite of the fact that Ecks and company are not, in the final analysis, the "veritable" natives. They are merely the inhabitants of the contact zone,

the border area where the two groups meet, a zone which, as Pratt notes, is where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4).

Ultimately, then, both Sedlinsky and Laragione suggest that “civilization” not only contains the seeds of “barbarity”—in spite of having supposedly overcome it—but also proves to be as barbarous as the supposedly still “savage” space. In Laragione’s play, Rüdín is a devotee of classical, and implicitly classist, music as well as the refinements of European culture and as a result considers all that surrounds him in the American space far too primitive and barbaric for his sophisticated tastes. Eventually, however, it becomes apparent that he is a Nazi fugitive who conducted his previous genetic experiments on European gypsies at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, suggesting that for him, his human subjects existed at the same level as the horses on which he experiments during the course of the play. Similarly, in the Sedlinsky work, Dr. Krupp, who came to catalog the local insects—that is, conquer the New World of the “unknown” by classifying it according to the European “known”—is, as we have noted, the son of another Dr. Krupp who repeatedly abused his son physically as well as psychologically.

To develop this further, I would like to return to Krupp’s words at the beginning of *El informe del Dr. Krupp*, when he refers to his investigation and the resultant justice and punishment, words that not only signal the triangulation of nearly everything we encounter in this work but also underscore the question of the “law of the father” and its role in the colonial project. Particularly pertinent is the term “justice.” Although one might understand the word in terms of impartiality and the assignment of an appropriate reward or punishment, it is important to keep in mind that the noun comes from the Latin *iūs*, originally a religious formula that had the force of a law, a law that was, let us not forget, created by powerful men, if indeed attributed to the figure of God, the Father. Later, *iūs/jūs* came to signify “the law,” as in the judicial system, the institution that decides the regulations by which society will abide, while *iustus/justus* came to mean “in keeping with that legal system.” As its etymology highlights, the notion of justice is not only relative but also linked to the “law of the father”—be it religious, familial, sociopolitical—a law that centralizes that same father and shores up, indeed assures, his authority and perhaps more importantly the unquestioning acceptance of his depiction of the world. Furthermore, the fact that in Spanish the word *justicia* signifies both the institution, the body of people that decides guilt and punishment as well as those who administer that punishment, again

underscores a critical slippage and the (erroneous) perception that *justicia* (the institution) will necessarily lead to *justicia* (justice, fairness). Finally, the Spanish term *investigación* can, of course, be understood as either “research” (as in scientific) or “investigation” (as in judicial, criminal), which leads to yet another critical slippage that would imply that Krupp’s investigation into the crime is as objective and rigorous as scientific research is presumed to be. Since the former is clearly not objective, we are by implication led to question the objectivity or lack thereof in scientific research as well as perhaps that of all our judicial systems and scientific endeavors. Ultimately, all this focus on investigation, justice, and (misdirected) punishment serves to unmask the scientist/intellectual and his supposed objectivity by underlining the tenuousness of scientific objectivity and the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of finding a “truth” not already contaminated by the optic of one’s own experiences.

In the final analysis, both works effectively stage the act of erasing the other, which, like the act of naming, forms part of the process of colonization. As I indicated earlier, the veritable natives are invisible in both works, while the inhabitants of the zone of transculturation, like Delia and the itinerant actors, are effectively silenced. Although Laragione’s work is ambiguous in regard to whether the gypsy girl is truly mute or simply chooses not to speak as a means of maintaining some power and autonomy, and although neither Osorio nor Rüdín would listen, literally or figuratively, to her if she could or would talk, Delia’s muteness certainly evokes the silence demanded of colonized peoples.²⁴ There is no question that the only word Osorio might hear would be “mischó,” a word that she supposedly vocalized to her gypsy lover and a word that would serve the Creole to solidify his dominance over her, reassure himself of his control and mastery.²⁵ In her muteness she evokes the other, the native of whom and in whose place the colonizer would speak. The same erasure and recreation (reinvention) of the other occurs in *El informe del Dr. Krupp*, insofar as all that we witness in regard to the troupe of actors has passed through Krupp’s consciousness; the words we hear “from them” are a part of his report, his personal rendition of events. Similarly, although Aurelia is already dead and thus silenced, Krupp presumes to know what she wants, to be able to “read” her and know what she says in death. In his words, “Aurelia gritaba venganza” (13), a vengeance that he is quite willing to extract, if indeed on the wrong brother, but a vengeance whose primary function is ultimately to reconfirm his newly acquired power. Underscoring his arrogance and conviction that he has right and truth on his side, he assures

his audience, “Me había elegido a mí, para eso [the vengeance]” (13). In both cases, the scientist/intellectual, the “civilized” and “civilizer,” speaks in place of the others but not from their place. As Pratt has noted, “Indigenous voices are almost never quoted, reproduced, or even invented” (52). Similarly, and like his father before him, our Dr. Krupp refuses to listen to the defense of his victim; it simply does not interest him. At the same time, the natives in each play are invisible, located beyond yet another border that marks another limit, spoken of but neither heard nor seen by the audience. Still, the fact that the only true natives we even hear of in the Sedlinsky work are depicted as children again underscores the perception of the European scientist/intellectual of the native as a child who requires paternalistic control.²⁶ In the play, Krupp reports seeing the native children, who have been captivated by Eck’s tricks with the talking dummy, as they participate in the ritual ceremony with the wolf skins each Thursday night. Notably, however, it is a ceremony in which he does not participate. He only witnesses the activities of the group from a safe distance as they pass by the closed door behind which he is concealed. His position affords only a partial view, limited to what little he can glimpse as he spies through a gap in the shutters. Throughout the play, not only is his vision partial, but it would appear that he intentionally provides his audience with incomplete information about his experiences and even withholds information from us on more than one occasion. As discussed above, he leads us to believe that Rolando was Franz’s ventriloquist rather than Miguel. In addition, although he tells us he spied on these ritualistic reunions led by a young man dressed in animal skins, it is not until almost the end of the play that he finally mentions the fact that those reunions ceased the day before he found Aurelia’s body, a fact that would seem most pertinent to his investigation. The night before he found the body, he saw only the young man in the skins pass by with a young woman; he did not see them return—all facts that point to Miguel rather than Rolando as Aurelia’s killer.

In conclusion, both playwrights fracture the mask of the scientist/intellectual, with his feigned objectivity and equanimity, as well as the veneer of civilization behind which all sorts of barbarity hide, a veneer that serves to silence the other, making him or her invisible and depicting him or her as an impotent being in the face of the “law” of the scientist/intellectual. By seeing and interpreting all in terms of polar oppositions, civilization/barbarity for example, and accentuating these seeming contradictions, the European scientist/intellectual in each of these works suppresses or even erases the ambiguous, the interstitial spaces between those contradictory extremes, the

transcultural, and the fact that the people he encounters, like himself, span both extremes and everything in between. In this way, the two dramatists effectively disrupt the imperial binary structure on all sides of the multifaceted frontiers/borders and provide an original touch by foregrounding what is usually overlooked or hidden in both theatre and the outside world: the place from which we see, from which we “spectate.”

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Notes

¹ *El informe del Dr. Krupp* premiered in August 2003 in the Teatro Nacional Cervantes in Buenos Aires under the direction of Francisco Javier. I saw it that same month. *Criaturas de aire* opened in June 2004 in the Espacio Cultural Anfiteatrón, also in Buenos Aires, under the direction of Luciano Cáceres. I saw it in August of that year.

² Implicitly, this space is considered “primitive” or “savage” since in the binary logic—or perhaps better expressed, binary illogic—of Western thought it is defined as “not European”. Throughout this essay I will insist on using the rather cumbersome term “scientist/intellectual” in an effort to stress that while our protagonists are indeed intellectuals, they are specifically scientists, intellectuals who are generally perceived as more objective and thus implicitly superior to other intellectuals, such as literary scholars or philosophers, for example, and this in spite of the fact that as Aaron Perkus has noted, “the humanities [...] modeled themselves after [...] positivistic, ‘scientific inquiry’” based on “intersubjectively objective grounds” (73). Yet, as we shall see, in these two plays our scientists are anything but objective, dispassionate observers.

³ Paola Hernández has similarly observed, in regard to *Criaturas de aire*, that this division of the scenic space “visualiza el sistema binario” (60).

⁴ Although I work with and cite the published texts, many of my references to the utilization of scenic space are based on elements that were found only in the productions, particularly in the case of the Sedlinsky work. Complicating my analysis a bit further is the fact that three versions of Laragione’s *Criaturas de aire* have been published. Two of them are essentially the same, with some minor variations in wording: the one that appears in Laragione’s *Teatro 1* (2006) and the one published as part of an anthology of Argentine playwrights, *Argentina / Dramaturgas* (2003). The third publication, the one on which I have relied, was published by Teatro Vivo and is described on the title page as the “versión estrenada.” This version generally follows the lines of the other two, but both the beginning and the ending are altered to reflect what was staged in the 2004 production. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from this latter publication. Hernández has noted that the play was also published even earlier, in 2001, in a collection of the Premio María Teresa de León (64). I have not consulted that version. As far as I know, Sedlinsky’s text was only published in one version, but the majority of the spatial details that I analyze are absent from that published text.

⁵ Hernández has posited that in *Criaturas de aire*, the civilized European brings the barbarism to the rural area (64). I would, of course, certainly agree but would emphasize that as it is depicted, the “New World” is not a pristine world populated by the “noble savage.” Furthermore, the European scientist/intellectual is not the first to arrive in either of the plays. Rüdín is preceded by Osorio (or his ancestors), as well as Gregorio, the mestizo, in addition to the gypsy, Delia, whose ancestors, although apparently originating in India, certainly did pass through Europe before coming to the New World. Similarly, Krupp

is preceded by the Eck family, also European if indeed a more marginalized group insofar as its members came, not from the metropolis, the European cultural centers, but rather from the rural areas of Eastern Europe (Cernogratz), an area of wolves and magic. At least this is what Rolando tells his audiences; of course, we cannot know to what degree this is an invented past to enhance their aura and their show.

⁶ It seems likely that this surname was chosen for its historical resonance. A German family living in Essen, the Krupps were known for their production of steel, arms, and munitions and apparently used prisoners of war as well as Jews from the concentration camps as forced labor during the Second World War. In a curious coincidence, the company's logo is three overlapping rings, which to my mind evoke the overlapping cultures and spatial triangulation that we find in this work.

⁷ In her comments on the proliferation of Argentine plays of recent decades that focus on what we might call "scientific" or "mathematical" subject matter, Beatriz Trastoy lists the Sedlinsky play as one of many works that function as a "parodia al pensamiento científico en general, y, en particular, al positivismo decimonónico" (36).

⁸ This is the setting specified in the *versión estrenada* published by Teatro Vivo. In the other versions, the estate is merely close to the wilds. At any rate, when Rüdín comments to Osorio, the owner, that he likes the country, the latter assures him that this is not the country: "Ahí no más empieza el monte, las alimañas, la brutalidad de esta tierra..." (Laragione 13, my emphasis). Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of his response is his attitude. As he articulates these words, both he and Gregorio "contienen la risa" (13), suggesting that they are mocking the citified European and his naive concept of "country" as an at least partially controlled nature.

⁹ Rüdín's difficult-to-pronounce, Germanic-sounding name, as well as his work in genetics, immediately leads the spectator to suspect some type of association with the Nazis. That suspicion is reinforced later when we learn that he worked for the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology (18), a name that he revealingly shortens by omitting the last four words of the institute's real name—the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics—and then affirmed when we learn that he is escaping from pursuers who have extradited others from the nation.

¹⁰ In fact, in the present of the frame play he has already returned and is now presenting his findings to members of the scientific community.

¹¹ One presumes that the new breed will not carry Rüdín's name, in part, at least to avoid providing clues to his pursuers as to his whereabouts or the trajectory of his journey.

¹² The article by María Infante and Adriana Libonati, as well as the one by Hernández, discusses the details of the disposition of the scenery in the production of the Laragione work.

¹³ Indeed, I was seated in the first row and could have touched the actor who played Rüdín as he worked at his desk. Hernández has also underscored the small size of the theater as well as the division of the scenic space into inside and outside (61).

¹⁴ The other two versions emphasize this aspect more since in them Rüdín categorizes the classical music that enralls him as "la expresión esencial del carácter de mi pueblo" (Laragione, *Argentina / Dramaturgas* 86).

¹⁵ The other versions add the words, "como al descuido," which we do not find in the *versión estrenada* (Laragione, *Argentina / Dramaturgas* 92).

¹⁶ Since the miniature model of the jungle does not appear in the published text, I presume the director conceived it. Interestingly, however, that miniature of the jungle was on a table that divided, specifically, into three parts.

¹⁷ The scene with which the play begins does not appear in the published versions.

¹⁸ This aspect of the spatial arrangement of the scenic space is not found in the published text.

¹⁹ Although somewhat peripheral to my primary concern in this paper, a comment on the question of space and the female characters seems appropriate. While we have traditionally associated interior space, that of the "home," with the female, this is not the case in these two plays. For one thing, females form part of what the male scientists perceive as an inferior cultural and/or socioeconomic group—they are not "appropriately" European. But, at the same time, both plays take this one step further and seem

to acknowledge an important detail that has seldom been dealt with in the arts—the fact that women traditionally have been very much on the margins of the scientific arena and its endeavors, which, until recently, have been considered a man’s work and world. In this respect, the female characters in both plays are shown to be doubly marginalized.

²⁰ The term “contact zone” refers “to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations” (Pratt 6), while the term “transculturation” “refers to the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropolises” (Ashcroft 233).

²¹ Aurelia’s song in the final moments of the play, a song that comes to us from beyond the grave, reinforces the fact that her murderer was Miguel, not Rolando. As she says, “Vuelvo al río, asesinada por el hombre que amé” (62), which would be Miguel. In addition, the father’s preference for the younger son surely evokes the Biblical story of Cain and Abel and the fact that God, the Father, accepted the sacrifice of the younger Abel but not that of the elder Cain.

²² The exception to this silence would be the final act of the circus performances, which concludes with “Dos disparos sonoros” (54). Revealingly, it is an act that again centers on Franz and contains several indirect references to the crime as well as to the denouement of the play.

²³ It is worth noting that when Eck abandons the group, he clearly outlines which parts of his patrimony he is leaving to each son. While his bequest to Rolando is clear and includes his concubine, as if she were property to be disposed of at his will, his legacy to Miguel is less clear but seems to comprise the secrets of the family and its profession.

²⁴ See Hernández for a cogent discussion of Delia’s withholding of speech as an act of empowerment. María Silvina Persino views Delia’s muteness in Kristevan terms, as the result of not having received the necessary love and attention from her mother that would allow her to pass from the semiotic to the symbolic (58).

²⁵ The fact that Gregorio, the laborer who was rejected by Delia when he attempted to have sexual relations with her, is the one who informs Osorio that she uttered this word to the gypsy lover leads us to question the validity of his report and suspect that he may simply be retaliating for her rebuff.

²⁶ Similarly, in her discussion of *Criaturas de aire*, Hernández points out that calling them “criaturas de aire” or “criaturas errantes” underscores the fact that they are perceived as children (62).

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