
'Discourse with the Incorporeal Air': Spectres of Walsh in *Plata quemada*

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Abstract

This article suggests that Ricardo Piglia's non-fiction crime novel *Plata quemada* (1997) be read as a conscious homage to Rodolfo Walsh's earlier non-fiction novel *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1969). The suggested reading takes as its point of departure the appearance in Piglia's text of an oblique reference to the 'play-within-the-play' of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which also contains echoes of a detail from *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*. Following on from this, the article's argument is threefold: 1) that *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* and *Plata quemada* are both concerned with a dramatization of economic paradigms, which amounts to an unveiling of the hidden violence of capitalism; 2) that *Plata quemada* reflects the evolution of the nature of capitalism, labour, and society in the period between 1969 and 1997; 3) that in its engagement with Walsh's text via *Hamlet*, *Plata quemada* constitutes an act of mourning for Walsh, who was killed by the 1976–1983 military regime, but also in respect of the decline of the traditional left more generally.

Resumen

Este artículo propone leer *Plata quemada* (1997), la novela negra de no ficción de Ricardo Piglia, como un homenaje deliberado a la novela de no ficción de Rodolfo Walsh *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1969). Como punto de partida, la lectura aquí propuesta toma una referencia al 'teatro dentro del teatro' de *Hamlet* de William Shakespeare, que se encuentra presente tanto en el texto de Piglia como en *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*. A partir de lo anterior se pueden identificar tres argumentos en este trabajo: 1) que las dos obras antes citadas tienen un interés por sacar a la luz la violencia oculta del capitalismo; 2) que la novela de Piglia refleja los cambios económicos, laborales y sociales ocurridos entre 1969 y 1997; 3) que *Plata quemada*, en su compromiso con el texto de Walsh a través de *Hamlet*, constituye un acto de duelo no solo por Walsh, quien fue asesinado por la última dictadura argentina, pero en términos más generales por el declive de la izquierda tradicional.

'The Mousetrap'

Rodolfo Walsh's *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1969) is the second of three non-fiction novels produced by the Argentine author, although both it and *Caso Satanowsky* (1973) tend to garner considerably less attention than the first in the series, *Operación masacre* (1957). It is easy to see why this is so. *Operación masacre*'s account of the arrest and summary execution of innocent civilians by the so-called Liberating Revolution government has, retrospectively, come to be read as paradigmatic in respect of twentieth-century Argentine politics, not least in that it prefigures the human rights abuses that were carried out on a much larger scale by the military regime of 1976–1983. *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* does not contain these immediate resonances, appearing as it does to be concerned primarily with syndicalist infighting rather than state-mandated violence. Walsh gives an account of his investigation into the circumstances surrounding an armed skirmish involving high-ranking metal union officials, which occurred in a café in Avellaneda in May 1966, and which resulted in the deaths of two local metalworkers as well as the union heavyweight Rosendo García. He convincingly puts forward the hypothesis that the sequence of events was planned by union leader Augusto Vandor in order to contrive circumstances that would result in the 'accidental' killing of García, whom Vandor had come to perceive as posing a challenge to his own authority.

Almost 30 years later, another celebrated Argentine author, Ricardo Piglia, published a non-fiction novel which related a sequence of events which had taken place over a short period in autumn 1965, just a few months prior to the events described by Walsh in *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*. *Plata quemada* (1997) centres on the circumstances surrounding an armed bank robbery carried out by a loose affiliation of career criminals in Buenos Aires. The group was subsequently forced to flee the city and was eventually tracked down by Uruguayan police to an apartment in Montevideo. There followed a bloody siege, which culminated in the event referenced in the title: rather than see the money fall into the hands of the police, the men opted to set it on fire.

Plata quemada is considerably more stylized than any of Walsh's non-fiction works; where Walsh claims to stick to 'la reconstrucción de los hechos' (2010: 26) via interviews and other evidence, Piglia's work avails of a wide-ranging artistic licence, as he himself argued when one of the fringe protagonists attempted to sue him for defamation (Abraham 2004: 124–25). However, given that Piglia has often affirmed his admiration for Walsh, as well as his predilection for literary homages, it seems likely that the novel is at least in part designed to speak to Walsh's legacy. But to which part of Walsh's legacy is it designed to speak loudest? On the surface, the events upon which *Plata quemada* is based seem to bear little relation to the shootings that took place in Avellaneda less than a year later, or to anything discussed in Walsh's political writings in general. In this article, however, it will be my contention that Piglia's novel constitutes a specific homage to *Rosendo* and that, in the terminology of Gérard Genette (1997), it can be understood as bearing a palimpsestic and inscriptive relation-

ship to Walsh's text. As I will show, Piglia's text incorporates *Rosendo* as an implicit, ghostly archive in a way that is designed to invoke spectral remnants of the political projects that propelled Walsh, and that were core to the identities of the victims at Avellaneda. Simultaneously, it invites us to reread *Rosendo* with particular attention to how it both adumbrates and enhances the historiographical legibility of the 1990s' neoliberal *menemismo* that defined the years leading up to the publication of *Plata quemada*. In this way, I suggest, both texts become locked into a symbiotic economy of historical signs, and *Rosendo*, far from being a niche exploration of a semi-forgotten syndicalist conspiracy, comes to the fore as the text of Walsh's that most cogently speaks to the post-dictatorship period and beyond. By way of a point of departure from which to elaborate on these claims, it is first necessary to briefly visit the key crime trope of the *ratonera* that occurs in Walsh and reoccurs in Piglia, and to place this coincidence in the context of a third text, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.

Although the title, *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*, refers explicitly to Rosendo García, it quickly becomes apparent that Walsh's real concern is with the fate of the workers killed in the confrontation, as well as the broader fate of an Argentine working class which he perceives to have been on the receiving end of an historic betrayal by its unions in the years following the 1955 military coup that ended the presidency of Juan Domingo Perón. As Walsh indicates in the opening pages, the death of Rosendo is a 'tema superficial' (Walsh 2010: 23), whereas the 'tema profundo es el drama del sindicalismo peronista a partir de 1955' (2010: 23). In the opening chapters, Walsh repeats the method deployed in *Operación masacre*, giving short biographical accounts of the workers who were present in La Real café at Avellaneda when hostilities broke out that would lead to the three deaths. In the fifth chapter, he describes the layout and seating arrangements in the café on the night of the shootings, with Vandor and his associates and the workers seated at opposite ends of the room. Walsh pieces together the sequence of unusual interactions that take place in the moments leading up to the outbreak of violence, which will subsequently lead him to believe that the entire chain of events has been orchestrated by Vandor himself. He concludes this fifth section by remarking that the workers '[e]staban en una ratonera' (2010: 63). The latter term, which translates literally as 'mousetrap', is apparently intended here to indicate nothing more than that the workers were now trapped inside a plot devised by Vandor, and that the tragic fate of two of them (Domingo Blajaquis and Juan Zalazar) was now sealed.

Piglia's repeated, and to my mind deliberate, use of this same term at the same point in *Plata quemada* invites the reader to attend to how its usage might be designed to engage with Walsh's text; the term occurs at the end of *Rosendo*'s fifth chapter, and again at the end of the fifth chapter of *Plata quemada*. The context for the latter is that the apartment where the fugitive bank robbers have set up in Montevideo constitutes a trap of sorts; the local police have been tipped off about the location of the group's hideout before they arrive there, allowing them to prepare for the group's capture in advance by bugging the

apartment with listening devices. Piglia affirms that the site is therefore ‘una auténtica “ratonera” preparada por la policía’ (2000: 125), but underscores the significance of the term with three further occurrences over the following three pages: ‘preparaban una ratonera’ (2000: 127); ‘es cosa corriente en los procedimientos policiales el armarles “ratoneras”’ (127); ‘Se armó la ratonera al revés, de afuera para adentro’ (128). Interesting light can be shed on how this term had come to be deployed in law enforcement circles in Argentina during the 1990s and beyond. A brief note that appeared in *Clarín* in 2002 identifies the term as designating ‘una trampa por la cual la Policía “entrega” un hecho (da los datos a un contacto para robar un banco, por ejemplo), deja que se concrete y luego va a buscar a los ladrones y los detiene’, with the latter generally occurring amidst a whirlwind of bullets and fatalities. A later report by Gustavo Carabajal in *La Nación* in 2012 suggests that this accompanying spectacle of violence should be considered as inherent rather than collateral to the police operation. Citing four examples spanning from 1986 to 1999, Carabajal classifies the ratonera as ‘una modalidad aplicada por algunos oficiales que entregan el dato para un robo y arman una trampa para lograr impacto mediático, y así demostrar la efectividad policial.’ Throughout *Plata quemada*, it is strongly suggested not only that members of the police have actively colluded in enabling the robbery itself, but also that appearance, credibility, and spectacle take precedence over concerns for public safety.

What I suggest here is that we read this deployment by Piglia, and its micro-citation of Walsh, in the context of ‘The Mousetrap’, the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*. In Shakespeare’s play, the appearance of the ghost of the late King Hamlet of Denmark has led his son Prince Hamlet to believe that his father was murdered by Claudius, who has now acceded to the throne. In order to prove this, or to provoke Claudius into a confession, Hamlet devises a scheme whereby he amends the script of an existing play, ‘The Murder of Gonzago’. Elements in the original play already appear to suggestively echo the murder of the deceased monarch, but Hamlet adds ‘some dozen or sixteen lines’ in order to foreground the potentially explosive message, famously stating: ‘the play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king’ (Shakespeare 1994: II.ii 606–607).

I claim that the significance of Piglia’s micro-citation of Walsh via *Hamlet* is threefold. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, ‘The Mousetrap’ in Shakespeare constitutes an attempt to reframe and thereby seize authorial control from a corrupted state in respect of the narrative of a crime, in this case the murder of the king. A contestation of established narratives by way of a dramatization of the concealed relationships of violence that undergird the polity is likewise crucial to both *Rosendo* and, as has been explored elsewhere by Joanna Page (2004: 37), *Plata quemada*; in other words, Piglia’s novel subverts and repurposes the ‘impacto mediático’ of the *ratonera*, not to demonstrate ‘efectividad policial’ but rather to unveil the hidden violence that underwrites the body politic. Secondly, in relation to this, and in a way that builds on Page’s study, I also suggest that this quasi-theatrical element in both texts can be further elucidated

with reference to the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. Secondly, I will show how this establishment of *Hamlet* as a point of reference provides a framework for consideration of how *Plata quemada* operates as sequential to *Rosendo*. It is my contention that a threading together of both texts can constitute a narrative of how Argentine labour, economic orthodoxy, and leftist politics evolved in the 28-year period bookended by their respective dates of publication. Among other things, this period encompasses the brutality of the 1976–1983 military dictatorship, one of whose victims was Walsh, and whose objective was the elimination of the politics of labour. With this in mind, and again with *Hamlet* as a key point of reference, I finally want to suggest that *Plata quemada* be read as an engagement in an act of mourning in respect of figures such as Walsh and the workers themselves, but also in respect of the wider revolutionary moment encapsulated by *Rosendo*.

'The play's the thing'

The *ratoneras* that are recounted by Walsh and Piglia may be intended by Vandor and the Montevideo police as literal traps within which to ensnare Rosendo and the fugitives respectively, but, like Hamlet's mousetrap, both also operate within these texts as theatrical stagings of the political that are intended to make manifest a violence that has become obscured. As Walsh affirms, his investigation serves as a counterpoint to the 'official' version, according to which Vandor and his associates were assailed by unprovoked gunfire by the group of Peronist workers, and only subsequently returned fire. Walsh's version points instead to the ascendant union career of Rosendo, considered a political threat by Vandor, and alleges that the initial aggression emanated from Vandor's group, that the workers were unarmed, and that the event was engineered by Vandor himself in order to create circumstances in which to covertly assassinate Rosendo, while shifting the blame onto the disgruntled workers. Walsh contends that the police helped to conceal what had really happened through the 'sistemática adulteración y manipuleo de la prueba' (Walsh 2010: 119), and notes that the media reporting of the event further corroborated the official version.

As is indicated in Walsh's early distinction between the 'tema superficial' and the 'tema profundo', he also wants to situate this event within the longer story of the decline of unions in post-Peronist Argentina. Official trade union activity in Argentina had increasingly come to be characterized by a new pragmatism and diminished levels of protest and militancy; Augusto Vandor himself was the figurehead of this new tendency (Romero 2002: 142–43). Walsh asserts that the killings acquire a 'singular coherencia' (2010: 25) in the context of the deceit and betrayal of the workers by *vandorismo*, whose *modus operandi* over the preceding decade, as Walsh explains, has been to achieve a too-comfortable consensus with corporate interests. In fact, Walsh makes an even greater claim for the significance of the events, describing *Rosendo* as 'una impugnación global del sistema' (qtd in Jozami 2006: 143), seeming to identify the event as a point of confluence

at which covert, systemic links between unions, business, media, and formal institutions of governance might momentarily make themselves known. In a series of articles on the Buenos Aires police written around the same time as the *Rosendo* investigation, Walsh had concluded that 'la policía es, en general, una institución destinada a reprimir a la clase trabajadora por el gobierno que la comanda' (Walsh 2007b: 324). And as he argues in the final chapter of *Rosendo*, the police, media, government, and justice system are all 'cómplices' in the triple homicide of La Real; all fall under the general rubric of the *sistema*, of which, Walsh concludes: 'El vandomismo es una pieza necesaria' (193).

Walsh's meticulous reconstruction of the moments leading up the shootings has prompted one critic to describe the text in terms of 'la captación de un momento de vida' (González 2008: 206); his attention to the broader historical arcs compels another to describe the scene as a space where there intersect 'diferentes líneas de significación' (Ferro 2010: 34). In other words, the accumulation of background historical and sociological data, when viewed in its moment of intersection with the particular events of the night investigated by Walsh, serves to invest the specifics of those events with additional layers of expositional meaning. In ways that anticipate Piglia's explicit invocation of Bertolt Brecht, these interpretations of how Walsh envisages his own project contain strong echoes of Brecht's epic theatre mode, predicated on 'capturing' a moment in time that exposes an historically contingent set of social relations. In Walter Benjamin's formulation, the epic is designed 'not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions' (1998: 18–19). The snapshot quality of the scene is reinforced in *Rosendo* through the inclusion of a crudely drawn floor plan of La Real café showing the locations of the two groups and indicating bullet trajectories. This mapping of the scene serves a necessary procedural purpose within Walsh's investigation, but also has the supplementary effect of inviting consideration of how it captures the broader themes in *Rosendo*. The *ratonera* is the premeditated trap that awaits the men, but also the larger systemic trap of exploitation, referred to earlier as 'ese férreo círculo de las cosas' (Walsh 2010: 31). Walsh clearly intends that meaning be inferred from the expensive imported liqueurs ordered by the union officials, and from the fact that they have just come from the relatively bourgeois activity of theatre-going; the historic archetype of metalworkers as Argentina's class warriors par excellence further sharpens the semiotics of the scene (Svampa 2005: 14). The bullets that are finally dispatched can thus be figured as concretizations of a set of relations that, under the normal run of events, are obscured. In this way, the sequence depicted is not so much a violent rupture in the fabric of the social, but the very point at which the fabric of the social itself finally quilts into its own legible signature. Where the tragic Prince of Denmark sought to 'catch the conscience' of King Claudius through a staging of an amended play, Walsh's aim is to catch the conscience or, more correctly, the consciousness of the Argentine workers who are, as he affirms in the introduction, the book's 'destinatarios naturales' (2010: 23).

The intended readership (and overall purpose) of *Plata quemada* is less immediately clear. It was, however, Piglia's most conventionally structured novel up to that point, and generated mainstream commercial success. Like *Rosendo*, it culminates in a quasi-theatrical *ratonera* that is concerned with a process of unveiling. The novel opens with an epigraph that cites Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*: '¿Qué es robar un banco comparado con fundarlo?' (9), foreshadowing the way in which, echoing *Rosendo*, the stagecraft applied to Piglia's account will impugn the 'system' writ large. The implications of Brecht's maxim, and how it plays out across the novel, have been touched on by several critics. In the manner of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, the alienation effect that serves to make the familiar strange, Piglia's narration of the money-burning episode is intended to momentarily 'lay bare' the artifices of capitalism by staging 'una guerra total al sistema a través del máspreciado de sus símbolos' (Fornet 2007: 137) that 'rompe la cadena de repeticiones y mutaciones del dinero' (Berg 1973: 126), and that provides the formal basis for 'un mundo en el cual no existe la lógica de acumulación' (Garabano 2003: 90). Within the novel itself, the effect is to produce a series of meditations among the horrified members of the public, who are moved to contemplate 'los carenciados, de los pobres, de los pobladores del campo uruguayo que viven en condiciones precarias y de los niños huérfanos a los que ese dinero habría garantizado un futuro' (Piglia 2000: 172). According to the papers, the act 'era peor que los crímenes que habían cometido, porque era un acto nihilista y un ejemplo de terrorismo puro' (2000: 174). The ashes of the burned money on the ground resemble 'una pila funeraria de los valores de la sociedad' (2000: 174).

The Brechtian epigraph, on the other hand, enforces a precise inversion of these diegetically staged readings, insofar as it articulates the presence of an originary theft upon which the distribution of resources is predicated, and to which they must all be ultimately referred. Although the police had intended the *ratonera* as a means of quickly forcing the fugitives into surrender, it becomes a prolonged and bloody siege that, by way of metonymic displacement, unveils the concealed violence of capital itself. *Plata quemada* supplies an array of visceral bloodshed, mediated through citations from reportage; the reader is forewarned of what will be described as a 'verdadera orgía de sangre' (111); a six-year-old child caught in the crossfire is left with her face 'convertido en una cavidad sangrante' (52); the bodies of dead police are reduced to 'trozos de huesos, pedazos de intestinos' (149). In this strategy of displacement, the novel also contains echoes of *Hamlet*, wherein the frequent rupturing of flesh (through disease, injury or posthumous decomposition) connotes the play's pervasive theme of rot in the body politic (Charney 1988: 120–24). In a similar vein, Brecht's rhetorical question suggests that the newsworthy event of bank robbery is a mere epiphenomenon that diverts attention from the illegitimate structures that buttress socio-economic reality. Following this logic to its conclusion, the visceral violence that is 'staged' in the apartment, and voraciously consumed by the media, can be traced to its origins by following the trail of money back to the bank. Read metonymically,

the ever more violent denouement can be interpreted as indexing capital's own bloody conception made visible. In ways that echo Hamlet's deployment of 'The Mousetrap', both Walsh's rendition of the La Real café and Piglia's rendition of the Montevideo apartment respond to a need for dramatization that would momentarily give form to the opaque architecture of everyday social reality; as Brecht wrote of his latest innovations to epic theatre in the mid-1930s, 'Oil, inflation, social struggles, war, the family, religion, wheat, the meat market, all became subjects for theatrical representation [...] the "background" came to the front of the stage' (qtd. in Brooker 2006: 213).

'Don't let yourself get attached to anything'

Plata quemada does not, however, merely recapitulate *Rosendo*'s impugnation of 'el sistema'; my contention is that it is intended to be historicized and read diachronically along with Walsh's text, so that an emergent account of Argentine labour history unfolds. *Plata quemada* narrates an event that took place in 1965, and that is therefore chronologically prior to the events described in *Rosendo*. Although Piglia initially began to write his account in 1970, he subsequently put the project on hold, only to complete and finally publish the novel against the not-coincidental backdrop of advanced neoliberal reform under the presidency of Carlos Menem in the 1990s. As Piglia coyly remarks in the epilogue: 'Siempre serán misteriosas para mí las razones por las que algunas historias se resisten durante años a ser contadas y exigen un tiempo propio' (2000: 226). My suggestion is that we pursue the various strands of this emergent 30-year narrative by arranging them in their relationship to the topic at the core of *Rosendo*, and which, as I will suggest, is at the implicit core of *Plata quemada*: namely, the evolution of labour. As I shall argue, the changing nature of work is foreshadowed by Walsh and thematized by Piglia: the latter's text, in particular, must be considered in the context of the diminished stature of labour as a political stakeholder. These developments are in turn intertwined with the rise of neoliberalism and the contemporaneous decline of the revolutionary left.

Walsh devotes his second chapter to a description of Avellaneda, emphasizing the extent to which the city is defined by industrial labour: 'las fábricas son aquí los puntos de referencia: la papelera, la cristalería, la Ferrum, la textil' (Walsh 2010: 41). This could serve as synecdoche for *Rosendo* at large, whose protagonists' lives are scheduled and oriented around the world of factory-based manufacture. However, in the book's final section Walsh documents and analyses the significance of the reduction of factory employees in the metallurgical sector, which was taking place as a function of monopolization and technological advance, even as productivity scaled unprecedented levels. This incursion of the 'post-industrial society' and the related phenomenon of post-Fordism were already being theorized in the 1960s (Bell 1999: 36), and presaged the eventual decline in the global agricultural and manufacturing workforces, along with the rise of service industries, professionals, and technicians, as well as increased job insecur-

rity (Southwood 2011: 8; Castells 2002: 316). Writing over 30 years later, Enrique Arrosagaray (2006) supplies a brief sketch of Avellaneda as it stood in the early years of the twenty-first century: La Real and other central cafés and bars had closed down, and had been replaced by establishments that were 'globalizados, sin personalidad', all but one of the city's old cinemas had disappeared, and buildings that had previously housed heavy industries had either fallen to ruins, or been replaced with shopping malls or media corporations (2006: 80–81).

In *Hamlet*, the conditions surrounding the production of 'The Mousetrap' contain a curious subtext on the obsolescence of certain forms of labour. Prince Hamlet first has the idea of staging the amended play when a band of out-of-work 'tragedians of the city' arrive at Elsinore. The situation of these displaced players mirrored the real experiences of Shakespeare and his troupe of actors, who were negatively affected by the decline of the Globe Theatre. This had taken place in the wake of the new practice of casting up-and-coming child actors, a development referred to obliquely in *Hamlet* as 'the late innovation' (Rosenberg 1992: 418). Labour obsolescence is also to the fore in *Plata quemada*. The story features a variety of workers: police, bank officials, and functionaries, as well as those who operate in the twilight economies of sex work and hustling. However, the novel's real thesis on the displacement and devalorization of labour is enforced through the ideology of the thieves, among whom workers are held up as objects of scorn. The security guards are ridiculed: 'siempre cuidando la plata ajena' (Piglia 2000: 32). One of the thieves, Dorda, later states: 'No se gana nada trabajando [...] cuánto más se trabaja menos se tiene' (2000: 68). Later, as he begins to burn the money, Dorda reflects again on the futility of work, observing that 'un cajero de banco, según la antigüedad, puede tardar casi un mes para recibir un billete como éste a cambio de pasarse la vida contando plata ajena' (171). The assumptions that underlie these remarks are entirely at odds with the world of the Avellaneda workers, for whom waged employment is an object of obsession and a source of pride (90). Raimundo Villafior, for instance, recalls his participation in a strike; on being threatened by a member of the armed forces, he responds by demanding respect for himself and his colleagues, 'porque nosotros éramos trabajadores y nos tenía que respetar' (33). Another story gives an account of a labour activist meeting broken up by police. As attendees are arrested on the charge of being thieves, the appalled victims cry out '¡No somos ladrones, somos obreros!' (35). In *Plata quemada*, the values operative in this declamation are precisely reversed.

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) tracks the evolution of the cinematic crime thriller as a response to the rise of the individualism that he reads as coeval with the ascent of neoliberalism and the post-Fordist workspace. Juxtaposing the familial ties that define criminality in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) with the rampant individualism of crime in Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995), Fisher concludes that the social cost of the modern economic logic is well encapsulated in the maxim adhered to by career criminal Neil McCauley (Robert De Niro) in the latter film: 'Don't let yourself get attached to anything

you are not willing to walk out on in 30 seconds flat if you feel the heat around the corner' (Fisher 2009: 31). This same evolution in personal morality and its symbiotic relationship to the socio-political can be mapped in the relationship between *Rosendo* and *Plata quemada*. Historically, the construction of factories in Buenos Aires was constitutive of community, forming nodal points of consolidation for an otherwise dissolute immigrant population (Cúneo 1965: 90). For the workers displaced by their closure, Walsh suggests that 'el cierre de una pequeña fábrica es un desastre: se bajan las persianas, y a cantarle a Gardel' (2010: 169). The disappearance of the collective workspace precipitates the crumbling of shared social space and the lack of a *sensus communis*, and this is reflected in *Plata quemada* at the level of inter-personal relationships, rife (like *Heat*) with betrayals and double-crossings between allies.

The metonymies at play in *Plata quemada* work and rework the theme of capital as a numinous element that, by the 1990s, had become severed from the intermediary of labour. The 'protagonism' of money in Piglia's novel has been noted by Ben Bollig (2017: 506), and also by Francine Masiello, who avers in her study on cultures of neoliberalism in Latin America that money lies at the novel's centre, producing its language, plot, and symbolic system (2001: 202); Alejandra Laera likewise situates this aspect to the novel within a broader cultural trend, identifying *Plata quemada* as among a set of Argentine novels written in the 1990s which all feature money as a central protagonist, and which at the same time reveal money as being 'artificio, [...] mutable, volátil y abstracto' (2014: 26). The historical transition from manufacture to dematerialized finance capital is alluded to in the paradoxical 'burnt silver' of the literal title, as well as in the immolation of the stolen money itself. With the abolition of the Bretton Woods system of monetary management among international states in 1971, and the triple-digit inflation that occurred in Argentina during the mid-1980s, capital acquired increasingly opaque guises (Lewis 2007: 15, 293) and yet, as is affirmed by the public response to the burning, can never be killed off entirely. Like the ghostly 'incorporeal air' with which Hamlet discourses and yet which (in later productions) arrives on stage encased in armour, capital in *Plata quemada* performs the illusion of self-erasure while enforcing its own indestructibility; the spectacle of the burning only serves to reveal the 'real subsumption' of life by capital, insofar as every aspect of life in post-Fordist societies, as Antonio Negri argues, is colonized or subsumed by capitalist logic (2008: 21).

'Hamlet, remember me'

While analysis of the visitation by the ghost of Hamlet's father has naturally tended to emphasize the theme of justice and the retribution that is sought by the dead king, a question of mourning is also evidently at stake. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, the ghost delivers a specific injunction to Hamlet on this score: his parting command of 'Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me', which marks a 'shift of spectral obligation from vengeance to remembrance' (Greenblatt 2001:

207). The ghost of a deceased father also features obliquely in Piglia's novel, and although the details given are scant, I suggest that enough is divulged to allow us to further reinforce the proposed reading of the text as bearing a palimpsestic relationship to *Rosendo*, mediated by *Hamlet*. One of the thieves, Brignone, relates a story about a visitation from the ghost of his dead uncle Federico: 'Era una fantasma ... Se me aparecía. Nunca se lo cuento a nadie, pero es verdad' (Piglia 2000: 100). It is revealed that Federico died of grief, having witnessed the death of his son. While alive, Federico and his son worked together as mechanics in Tandil; the son was fatally electrocuted while welding. The ghost appears intermittently to Brignone 'como si yo fuera el hijo' (2000: 100).

In the overall context of the novel's depiction of labour, Federico and his son stand out for their occupation as traditional workers – specifically, artisanal metalworkers – whose deaths both figure in a metonymic chain wherein metallurgy is cast as the point of origin of a misapprehended tragedy. Brignone's implicit suggestion that the most natural destination for the restless spirit of a father would be the son, rather than a nephew, heightens the displaceability stakes, but also leads the chain of connections back to Western culture's most iconic example of a dead father who *did* visit his son, namely King Hamlet of Denmark. However, unlike the ghost at Elsinore, the ghost of Federico smiles but does not speak. According to Piglia's own theories of narrative, an explicit silence or erasure in any text is potentially the site of its core meaning. As he says in *Tres propuestas para el próximo milenio (y cinco dificultades)* (2001), a text in which Piglia pays explicit homage to the narrative voice of none other than Rodolfo Walsh: 'Lo más importante de una historia nunca debe ser nombrado' (2001: 17). For Piglia, the task of the attuned reader is to infer meaning from 'lo que se dice en lo no dicho' (2001: 17). What is it that Federico means to tell us?

Paul Hammond suggests that ghosts introduce 'the traces of past narratives'; in *Hamlet*, for instance, 'the irruption of the Ghost into Elsinore effects a contamination of one world by another' (Hammond 2009: 20). As a text that is temporally bilocated due to its 1965 setting and 1997 publication, *Plata quemada* is constitutively vulnerable to hauntings of this kind and undergoes 'strange effects of temporal crossing' (Masiello 2001: 205). Whereas the former milieu is coeval with the ascent of Argentina's *nueva izquierda* and other emancipatory projects worldwide, the latter corresponds with what was widely perceived as the aftermath of the definitive collapse of Marxism. *Plata quemada* is contaminated by both ends of this narrative continuum with the result that, between the lines of the text's typologies of amoral behaviour, there linger spectral archetypes of past politics. On arrest, for instance, a member of the group claims the status of 'un hombre de principios, un preso político', on the basis of his by now lapsed political affiliation with Peronism (Piglia 2000: 120). Later, when addressing the police through the apartment intercom, Brignone describes himself and his accomplices as 'políticos peronistas, exiliados, que luchamos por la vuelta del General' (2000: 145). Attention to the group's 'estructura celular' (23), whereby separate units operate in relative isolation and with strategically limited inter-

communication, seems designed to activate memories of the form taken by radical insurgency in Latin America, which took its cue from Gilles Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri* (1966). The police commissioner Silva speculates that the ensnared criminals are Quixotic fantasists who have succumbed to the confection of war film cliché (181) and, at this precise moment inside the apartment, another member of the group recalls a scene of heroic resistance from Allan Dwan's *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) (Piglia 2000: 182). A couple of pages after that, Brignone is overheard singing a Mexican Revolution-era *corrido*. As these references to 'meaningful' causes proliferate, the men in the apartment switch from the drug of neoliberal consumerism, cocaine, to the one most readily associated with the 1960s liberation movements, marijuana. Rather than identifying with the archetypal 1960s subject positions, the novel's profit-driven protagonists seem to momentarily (if opportunistically) inhabit those positions, becoming involuntary memory conduits that produce formal reiterations of revolutionary tropes; consequently, like Hamlet's Denmark, the time of *Plata quemada* becomes increasingly out of joint.

If my hypothesis concerning the presence of *Hamlet* in these texts is correct, Piglia was not alone in reading Shakespeare's play in the context of neoliberalism during the 1990s. Just four years prior to the publication of *Plata quemada*, Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* appeared. Derrida's decision to finally address the Marxian legacy came at a wilfully unorthodox juncture. A couple of years previously, the petering out of the Cold War had prompted Francis Fukuyama to prognosticate the 'end of history', which Fukuyama himself described as 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government' (Fukuyama 2006: 421). Derrida's text is largely based on a deconstructive reading of Marx's writings, though it becomes clear that the titular spectres are also intended to invoke the present-day legacy of Marx himself, who returns to haunt the triumphant celebration of the end of history as a spectral remainder that continues to hover at the edges of the body politic. Throughout *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (1994) makes repeated reference to *Hamlet* and, specifically, to the entry of the ghost of Hamlet's father as figurative of a spectrality that pertains to Marxism itself but also to the post-Cold War era, from which Marx is at once ideologically excluded and yet spectrally present.

Walsh described himself as a Marxist, albeit a bad one, admitting that his conceptualization of the political was 'más bien empírica que abstracta' (2007a: 142). As David Viñas articulates, however, in the latter-day political imaginary the figure of Walsh continues to operate as a synergetic emblem around which the aspirations and failures of the 1960s and 'la generación del Che' continue to coagulate (1996: 215). The presence of the *Rosendo* narrative beneath the inscriptive act performed by *Plata quemada* is therefore redoubled in the presence of Walsh himself as a spectral avatar. As Viñas further indicates, the iconicity that adheres to Walsh is a function not solely of his texts but also of his death at the hands of the military regime in 1977. This moment is in turn inextricable

from the demise of the political projects around which the lives of the workers documented in *Rosendo* are structured. The historic significance of the brutally repressive *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* enacted by the military was signalled in Walsh's epoch-defining 'Carta abierta' (1977), which the author addressed to the junta and posted the day before he was killed. As Walsh seems to suggest in this furious missive, the violence of the regime (which had already taken the life of his daughter Vicky), was perhaps merely the 'tema superficial' in respect of the radical economic restructuring that was taking place, which amounted to a wholesale dismantling of the Peronist legacy. According to this interpretation of history, the dictatorship was not a blip in the transition from the *nueva izquierda* to the neoliberal orthodoxy, but a necessary precondition (Harvey 2005: 15; Avelar 2000: 26). The *Proceso* then emerges as a hollowed out locus around which these texts must be oriented when considered together. Read in this register, the chaos of *Plata quemada*'s denouement is doubled: the ruins of the apartment and the remaining fugitives who appear as 'espectros' serve as formal enactments of a scene of mourning that is haunted by these past narratives and events.

Walsh commented that 'Un libro no es solamente un producto acabado que se vende a determinado precio, por lo general demasiado caro para que un obrero pueda comprarlo. Un libro es, además el efecto que produce, los comentarios que produce' (2007a: 144–45). Historically, this has been especially true of *Hamlet*, whose endless adaptations and reworkings continually renew the source text across wildly diverse cultural settings (Owen 2012: 1). In 1980, the state-run Teatro Municipal San Martín in Buenos Aires staged an adaptation directed by Omar Grasso, with Alfredo Alcón cast as the lead. The production was interpreted by some as a critique of the military and Alcón himself has spoken of how his delivery of the line about something 'rotten' in the state of Denmark ('hay algo podrido en Dinamarca') would habitually generate murmurs of disquiet from the stalls. It has been my contention here that, with *Plata quemada*, Ricardo Piglia further collaborates in the continual rewriting of the *Hamlet* legacy. More importantly, I would suggest that this simultaneously involves a deliberate engagement of *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* in a way that not only appends itself to Rodolfo Walsh's text but also overlays it with a new set of hypertextual inscriptions, unveiling its latent meanings and resonances and so alerting us to its singular prescience.

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