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## The Significance Of Memory As Linked To Trauma In The Orphanage

Memory and trauma have an immense power over the human psyche. The effects of a traumatic event can last well into a subject's life, and may affect them in ways in which they are not aware of. *The Orphanage* (2007) by J.A. Bayona examines how traumas of the past can haunt the events of the present, and how an individual can come to terms with trauma by interacting with it. The film follows Laura, who was an orphan. As an adult, she adopts a child of her own, Simón; she buys her childhood orphanage and converts it into a home for her son and for children in need. Simón gets lost, which sends Laura on a tedious search that allows her to uncover many heinous truths about the orphanage she once loved. When she finds Simón dead in the house, trauma is revealed from her grief and within the very foundation of the orphanage, which taints her previous memories of the home. Laura deals with her troubles in a way that is in line with a Freudian approach to trauma. Freud seeks to categorise and unveil trauma, allowing hauntological histories to be exhumed in order to mend psychological pain. The Spanish public dealt with trauma similarly, as their interaction with the horrors of the Spanish Civil War was repressed for years. The memory of the war encouraged the persistence of trauma, which damaged the national psyche. Learning to condemn their violent past and make amends with it contributed to the way Spain was able to grow from their trauma. Reliving memories and the traumas associated with them can inhibit the individual, while simultaneously encouraging the process of coming to terms with traumatic events because the subject is no longer repressing them.

Memory and trauma have a paradoxical relationship: one can help draw out the other, while still presenting a hinderance. As Freud says, remembering traumas gives the subject the ability to heal; however, traumas also have the capability to destroy the very memory that seeks to heal said trauma. Freud's intention, then, is 'to discover how our past, despite being irretrievably absent, maintains the power of its presence; and, to the extent possible, to devise means for undoing this power.' The only way to heal one's traumas is to dig up the past and make amends with it. Laura is sent on a search through her home with clues that Simón and the orphan children leave her. She is, in a way, uncovering the past, since Simón is already dead as she is playing the game. In discovering her son's dead body, she can find closure in knowing that her son is no longer lost. Freud explains that 'recovering lost history is therapeutic. Restoring lost links to the past produces relief, liberating the patient from some of their burdensome past.' She finds him, faces her trauma, and realises that the only way to cope with it is to be reunited with her past forever.

As Freud explains, 'memory of the trauma... [act] like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.' Trauma can linger in the mind much like the ghosts of the orphan children – a snapshot of trauma suspended within the walls of the orphanage – remain within the house long after they've passed. Jacques Derrida calls this concept hauntology. He says, 'after the end of history, the spirit comes by coming back [revenant], it figures both a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again.' To Derrida, hauntology is the persistence of the past: memories of trauma can be both living and deceased. Laura experiences a haunting when she meets the deceased remnants of the children she once knew at the orphanage. The orphans

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are an example of a traumatic event that stands suspended in time, transcending the boundaries of physical presence. Laura experiences a memory that becomes a reality because of trauma: a theme of unfinished business. Because the ghosts manifested in relation to the trauma they endured, there must be a purpose to their haunting. Laura is meant to take care of them along with Simón; here, trauma presents itself as a physical representation, one in which seeks to be fixed. Derrida says it is important 'to speak to the specter, to speak with it, therefore especially to make or to let a spirit speak.' Ignoring a haunting would be an error, because hauntings are representations of a past that needs repairing. In *The Orphanage*, Laura interacts with the ghosts of the orphans. She plays 'Un, dos, tres, toca la pared,' with them, and participates in the game of clues which she played with Simón once. In following the ghosts and interacting with them, as Derrida suggests, Laura is uncovering aspects of her past. She is linking the memory of Simón's living form to the trauma of his lost existence. Laura only finds her son because of her interaction with the orphans; therefore, she is able to face her trauma and live forever in the land of her memories with Simón and the orphan children. Hauntology is at the core of the film's approach to the past; the film not only represents haunting with the physical presence of ghosts, but also comments on the hauntological aspects of trauma that Spain endured during the Franco years.

For thirty-nine years, Spain had to live with the constant threat of the Franco rule. It is estimated that about 500,000 people died during the reign of Spain's military dictator, Francisco Franco. The devastating destruction of the regime still weighs heavily on Spain's national conscience. After the Spanish Civil War, Franco worked tirelessly to censor the Spanish population in a way that was beneficial for his regime. Spanish neurologist, Carlos Castilla del Pino, characterises 'the Spanish inhabitant' after the war as having little 'perception of [reality] and refined his/her sense of this to adapt to the rules of the game of the existing sociopolitical context.' Repression was so ingrained in Spanish society that Franco succeeded in completely altering the way society thought and felt. After Franco passed and democracy was established, 'there was not an organised demand, not even an articulated discourse, addressing unwanted legacies from the violent past' for years. Spain had to live with its repressed trauma, which led to a feeling of lost identity. In *The Orphanage*, Bayona creates characters that are influenced by their past and 'represent future possibilities for change or transcendence' within Spain. In 2007, the *Ley de Memoria Histórica* (Law of Historical Memory) was passed by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which called for the recognition of those affected by the Franco regime, and encouraged the digging up of mass graves. This was the same year that *The Orphanage* was released, which offers a parallel between Spain's sociopolitical context and the need to explore a new identity: one that is shrouded in remembrance and healing. The presence of ghosts within *The Orphanage* 'confirm the persistence of ghostly hauntological traces within the national psyche,' and the need to recognise this past history and trauma in order to heal.

The film also has elements of intertextuality, with its reference to J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. For the majority of the film, Laura searches for her lost son, thus, Simón is painted as a lost boy. The theme of lost history resonates with the orphanage, Laura's muddled past, and the loss of history and identity that Spain experienced during and after its years of Francoism. At the end of the film, Simón and the orphans become the lost boys and girls of Neverland, because they will forever live in a land of memories, unable to physically grow old. Laura becomes Wendy, the one who lived outside of Neverland and grew up; however, Laura is able to reunite with Neverland because of her choice to take her life after confronting the trauma of losing her son. Bayona is able to rearrange an English classic in order to encourage the psychological healing of Spain's relationship with their violent past.

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Memory and trauma influence an individual in ways that are hidden deep within the human conscience. Freud acknowledges the power of the past; traumatic events affect the individual, whether that affect is obvious or not. The only way to heal is to seek to unearth repressed traumatic experiences – to confront the ghosts within our psyches. Bayona creates a narrative of humans who are influenced strongly by their past. It keeps the orphans tied to the place in which the events of their trauma took place. The orphans seek to heal from the violence they experienced in the orphanage, therefore, Laura is used to help them heal; but, Laura also uses the orphans as a way to come to terms with the grief she feels from losing her son. Her interaction with them is what leads her to her son's dead body, and ultimately leads her to the decision to join her son and the orphans in a world that is reminiscent of Neverland – a world that is surrounded by immortal memories.

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