

***Guachos (Who Am I, Anyway?)* by Carlos Pais (Argentina)**

A play in one act, divided into six scenes

Director's Notes

The word *guacho* derives from Quechua, a language spoken in several Argentinean provinces at the farthest reaches of the former Incan empire in what today is the province of Santiago del Estero. And in Jujuy (setting for our 2004 hit *Venecia*), where the high plains stretch into southern Bolivia and southeastern Peru, Quechua continues to have some prevalence.

To an Argentinean, a *guacho* is a bird, lamb or goat who is either lost or whose parents have died or disappeared. When applied to humans, *guacho* is another word for *orphan*.

The word was first used mainly as derogatory slang but later evolved and softened and now may imply either affection or scorn. The dictionary describes *guachos* as those who wander the streets, homeless and abandoned, eating and sleeping wherever they can, whether in outlying areas, slums, or in the middle of great cities.

This theatrical piece, ***Guachos***, presents two people of distinct social levels who are brought together by chance. *Patricia*, a young writer, has rented a house in an outlying suburb with the intention of writing her own history, hoping to determine if the people who raised her are indeed her parents or if she was one of the many children whose real parents were "disappeared" in Argentina. The fact that she was born in late 1976 or early 1977 generates both her strongest doubt and her greatest certainty.

Patricia discovers that the wiring in her rented house is in bad shape, and seeks out an electrician living under a railway bridge. The man who accompanies her to try to solve her problem is a veritable social outcast living on the margins of society, the son of a prostitute who abandoned him as a child. *Poyo*, completely illiterate, approaches life with the simplicity of someone with nothing to lose, since he never had anything at all, not even an identity.

As the plot develops we see that he who has no origin may be an orphan or a *guacho*, and takes on his role within the society that has shut him out—he is the man with no identity who goes through life anonymously. In the case of the writer, on the other hand, society has not shut her out but has allowed her origins to be obliterated when her identity is transferred to other parents, a different social station, another environment that seems to contradict her own feelings. She too is an orphan, a *guacha*, product of social mores where usurpation and thievery mean nothing and cause no shame, and where identity is discounted.

The encounter clarifies nothing, but it does expose a reality that goes beyond these two individuals, a reality that demands a response: the clear and conclusive identity of all of today's children, and of today's adults who were yesterday's children. From the Spanish Civil War, when orphans were taken to Russia, to similar stories for Korea, Vietnam, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina ... and how many more societies that have a debt to humanity.