

# Death and the adorable orphan: *Marcelino pan y vino* (1954; 1991; 2000)

Jessamy Harvey

## Abstract

The Spanish journalist and writer José María Sánchez-Silva, unaware that he was adapting a folk tale about religious devotion rewarded, produced a complex narrative about the mother-son dyad: *Marcelino pan y vino* (1952). This was the basis of a popular Spanish film adaptation directed by Ladislao Vajda, released in 1954. It was then remade in 1991 as an Italian/Spanish/French co-production, directed by Luigi Comencini, and, recently, it has been translated into animation for television, the result of Spanish/Japanese/French collaboration in 2000. This article analyses how each version reveals shifting perceptions of childhood by focusing on the ideological function of the orphan child and the spectacle of the 'adorable boy'.

**Keywords:** orphan; childhood; maternal; Oedipal; ideology; animation; adaptation; remake

In 1952, José María Sánchez-Silva (1911–2002) published a pious book for children entitled *Marcelino pan y vino* [*Marcelino Bread and Wine*] which was about an orphaned boy, raised within a religious fraternity, whose devotion to a large carving of Christ agonizing on the cross would eventually lead to his death. At that time, the representation of death in childhood as 'a triumphant experience for the individual and an affirmation for the community' (Avery and Reynolds 2000: 7) was a common feature of Spanish children's reading material, for not only were they exposed to stories about children as religious martyrs in didactic material, but such stories also appeared regularly in children's comics.<sup>1</sup> However, five-year-old Marcelino's death was not portrayed as an unhappy ending, or even a tragic one; it was narrated as the miraculous fulfilment of his longing to be reunited with his dead mother. This children's story is the basis of a popular, and commercially successful, Spanish film adaptation directed by Ladislao Vajda (1906–65), released in 1954. Furthermore – with the title unchanged – it was remade in 1991 as an Italian/Spanish/French co-production, directed by Luigi Comencini (1916–), and, recently, it has been translated into animation for television, the result of Spanish/Japanese/French collaboration in 2000. (To avoid confusion, I will henceforth refer to them as the adaptation, the remake and the animated series respectively.) In this article, I propose to examine the ways in which these three versions of *Marcelino pan y vino* reveal shifting perceptions of childhood. To do so, I will explore the ideological function of the orphan child and the spectacle of the 'adorable boy', and discuss how the

representation of a child's death, whilst remaining peculiarly powerful, has become increasingly problematic in late modernity. As Gillian Avery and Kimberley Reynolds have asked: 'how far is it possible to make the death of the young meaningful in an age which values achievement?' (Avery and Reynolds 2000: 10).

Children represent those who belong to the family, and orphans represent those who are excluded from this social structure. As Diana Pazicky observes, the appeal of the orphan to the cultural imagination is twofold: the orphan, detached from familial bonds, dramatizes the search for a self, representing 'the ultimate metaphor for identity issues' (Pazicky 1998: xi), and is also 'inseparable from familial imagery' (Pazicky 1998: xiii). The family is imagined as not only a unit of stability within society but one of the principal regulatory powers, in charge of ensuring that the individual child's personality becomes continuous with the goal and means of society itself. Given that children are a complex site in culture, in that they are the privileged locus for the transmission of culture as well as the 'uncivilized' Others in need of adequate socialization, the correct 'parenting' of orphaned children becomes an issue fraught with anxiety. When a child is bereft of parents, but still young enough to need adult care and supervision, and, in the absence of a legitimate family structure, who can safely be considered appropriate substitute nurturers? Therefore, representations of orphanhood can be seen to point to how the family unit and its possible alternatives are imagined at any one time.

Texts that project concerns about the vulnerable child have to make that child appealing to mobilize protective feelings. To discuss the way in which the two cinematic versions of *Marcelino pan y vino* have chosen to film, edit and project each little boy's performance, I will use the term 'adorable boy'. 'Adorable' contains within it a reference to the Christian heritage of childhood, and its particular mode of child-worship. The animated version imagines and illustrates Marcelino as markedly cute: this, according to Lori Merish, is 'usually designated by roundness of form and thickness of limbs; roundness and flatness of face; largeness of eyes; and especially by largeness of head in proportion to the body – all attributes of the human infant' (Merish 1996: 187).<sup>2</sup>

The ways in which these ideas are presented in the adaptation, the remake and the animated series are linked to the external and internal historical moments. I will be discussing the internal historical moment in the analysis of each version, but it is pertinent to point out here that, in terms of the external moment, Vajda's adaptation has to be studied as an example of national cinema on two levels: in terms of production and, also, ideology, as it refracts the original narrative through the nation state's discourse. However, both the remake and the animated series, as co-productions, participate in, to quote Martine Danan, 'the emergence of commodified postnational productions' (Danan 2002: 243) and this affects the way Sánchez-Silva's story is retold, in that Comencini's remake is marked by the European film industry, while the animated series – given the participation of Nippon Animation studio – transcends the cultural boundaries of Europe. But, in the first instance, it is necessary to examine the 'original' story.

### The tenacity of a simple story

Sánchez-Silva dedicated *Marcelino pan y vino* to his daughter, adding: 'en verdad, ni siquiera sé si el cuento es mío, por habérselo oído tanto a mi madre' (Sánchez-Silva 1953: 5) ['to tell the truth, I do not even know if the story is mine, as I heard my mother tell it often'].<sup>3</sup> Although he attributes the tale's authorship to his mother, its basic structure is recorded in the Aarne-Thompson Index as 'AT 767: Food for the crucifix. A boy offers bread to a statue of Christ or the Virgin' (Aarne 1964: 265), indicating that variants of this folk tale have been gathered throughout Europe.<sup>4</sup> Common to all variants is the ending, the death of the boy as a reward for sharing food with the religious icon. The brothers Grimm recorded a variant under the title 'A heavenly wedding'. It has been noted that a result of the diffusion of Grimm's tales is that folklorists 'eventually came across the Grimm's own stories, learnt by the peasants from cheap popular translations and absorbed into the native oral tradition' (Carpenter and Pritchard 1984: 229). But neither Sánchez-Silva nor his mother were recycling the brothers Grimm. As Josef Svoeverff comments: 'in the Middle Ages the story was quite popular, and countless versions of it are preserved in medieval manuscripts' (Svoeverff 1957: 58). In his *Index to Spanish Folktales* (1930), R. S. Boggs notes that a Spanish version first appears in the thirteenth-century collection of Alfonso the Wise: *Las cantigas a Santa María*.<sup>5</sup> Unaware of these sources (Pascual 2000: 10), Sánchez-Silva fixes the folktale and transforms a relatively simple story about religious devotion rewarded into a complex narrative about the mother-son dyad.

The generic pious boy of the folktales is given not only a name, but a personality, and a geographical and temporal location. The action takes place in rural Spain around 1902, within the walls of a monastery, home to twelve monks and Marcelino, the orphan, who was abandoned at the gates as an infant. The monks are not able to trace his parents, whom they presume dead, and raise him themselves. Unlike the feature-length cinematic versions and the animated series, composed of twenty-six episodes, this narrative is brief, around seventy pages, and cannot linger on Marcelino's upbringing and socialization. Instead the narrative hinges on one prohibition. In an attempt to erect boundaries to circumscribe his wandering into dangerous situations, particularly by climbing up crumbling steps to the attic, Marcelino is threatened with a bogey man who steals children. Eventually he succumbs to temptation and finds there a potential playpen filled with boxes, tools and furniture, but in the corner lurks: 'la figura de un hombre altísimo, medio desnudo, con los brazos abiertos y la cabeza vuelta hacia él' (Sánchez-Silva 1953: 34) ['the figure of a very tall man, half naked, with his arms extended and his head turned towards him']. Screaming in terror, Marcelino flees.

Eventually, filled with curiosity, he goes back. On the second sighting, Marcelino recognizes that it is a life-sized statue of Christ on the crucifix and decides that he looks hungry. He returns with a slice of bread, which the statue reaches out for and eats. At this point, the narrative focuses on the boy's efforts to steal food from the kitchen and the growing friendship between Christ and Marcelino. Soon their conversation turns to the subject of motherhood. Christ explains that mothers are loving and beautiful and that they always deny themselves food and drink and clothing in order to provide

for their children. Sánchez-Silva presents a vision of maternal love that is in keeping with the dominant ideological construction circulating in children's recreational and educational literature published during the Francoist regime (1939–75): mothers satisfy all their children's needs and desires to the extent of total self-abnegation.<sup>6</sup> Although Spain's post-Civil War period began in 1939, with the fall of the Republic to Franco's Nationalist troops, the early 1950s were still dominated by scarcity and by the need for national reconstruction. 'Children have been linked in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state' (Rose 1990: 121), and they are highly valorized in Francoist ideology, hence the importance of affirming the myth of selfless motherhood.

However, there is another way of reading the maternal here. Sánchez-Silva's emphasis on the importance of the mother/son bond can be seen to disturb the Oedipal narrative, to the extent that, when given a choice, Marcelino rejects the possibility of growing up and entering the realm of the phallus, the symbolic. In the last chapter, the carving of Christ descends from the crucifix and draws the boy close, offering to grant him whatever his heart desires: 'Dime: ¿quieres ser fraile como los que te han cuidado?' (Sánchez-Silva 1953: 70) ['Tell me: do you want to be a monk like your carers?']. To which Marcelino replies: 'Sólo quiero ver a mi madre y también a la tuya después' (Sánchez-Silva 1953: 70) ['I only wish to see my mother and yours too after that']. At this point, Christ embraces Marcelino and commands that he sleep the sleep of death. Lorenzo Gofñi illustrated Marcelino's death by portraying a lifeless boy in the arms of a wooden figure of Christ, the child's head tilted to one side and his little arms folded neatly across his chest. But the appeal of this tale to film-makers and animators does not entirely reside in the sacred or in the representation of a 'good' death, but in Marcelino's overwhelming desire for the maternal figure.

### **Feminizing the nation and restoring social order**

*Marcelino pan y vino* (1954), a monochrome melodrama, responds to the external moment – the dictatorial regime – in a variety of ways: as I will discuss, not only does it rework the original narrative through National-Catholic discourse, the film also complicates the representation of masculinity. Jo Labanyi has suggested that, in the late 1940s, Spanish cinema played 'a crucial role in helping men make the transition from the military values of wartime' to 'a privatized domestic model of masculinity appropriate to peacetime under dictatorial rule' (Labanyi 2000: 181). Film was valorized by the regime as a medium capable of provoking the transformation of the viewing subject to fall in line with socio-political needs and I believe that, although released in 1954, the adaptation can be seen to participate in the process of feminization that Labanyi has observed in late-1940s missionary films. Labanyi notes that the alteration of the regime's power structure in the late 1940s and early 1950s, 'as the Church gained political ascendancy with the Falange's downgrading' (Labanyi 2000: 173), is reflected particularly in religious films; although women become marginal players, femininity is central because not only do these films supplant the virile body with 'a feminized, domestic model of masculinity', the religious male figure can be seen to represent 'the "maternal" man able to express emotion' (Labanyi 2000: 173).

Co-scripted by Vajda and Sánchez-Silva, the film relocates the action to the aftermath of the 'Guerra de la independencia' (1808–14) [the Peninsular War], which permits the insertion of Nationalist propaganda: a rhetoric of national reconciliation and hostility to foreign influence. These messages are built into a narrative that frames the telling of Marcelino's life and death which, as will be seen, enables the adaptation to ascribe a social, as well as a personal, meaning to Marcelino's death.

The film opens with a religious procession which journeys from town to monastery. A monk, however, is headed into the town to visit a dying girl. He tells her the legend of a venerated little boy, Marcelino, and the camera cuts from the girl's attentive face to the re-enactment of a victorious local battle against the invading French troops and the subsequent regeneration of the community.<sup>7</sup> One house, though, at a distance from the village, remains in ruins until the arrival of three Franciscans who request permission from the town's mayor to set up a monastery there; in return they will rebuild it. They are shown feebly struggling with the rocks when the town's menfolk make an appearance. With their farming tools slung across their shoulders – the same tools used to drive away the Napoleonic troops – the men appear threatening, but they have come to help. This shot contrasts the masculinity of the town's men with the feminized monks dressed in skirt-like habits. And, whereas the town's men are shown to have a vital role in national defence during wartime and to channel their virile strength into the task of national reconstruction during peace time, *Marcelino pan y vino* does not privilege this type of masculinity but places at the centre of the narrative a community of 'maternal' men: gentle, caring and emotional. The paradigmatic 'maternal' man in this film is the rotund Fray Tomás, later to be renamed 'Fray Papilla' [Brother Baby Food] by Marcelino.

One morning a baby is abandoned at the gates. The monks all crowd around and delight in him, particularly Fray Tomás who cradles the baby and gives him a damp cloth to suckle on. As the film lingers on comical scenes that show how the routine of the community is being disrupted by the presence of a baby, it emerges that his parents are not to be found. Although the monks wish to raise Marcelino, the Abbot insists that an adoptive family be found: 'una buena familia, honrada, cristiana, trabajadora' ['a good family, honest, Christian, hard-working']. Only one man, the blacksmith, accepts. However, the scene in the forge is a violent and uncomfortable one. When the monk asks if he will raise Marcelino, the camera cuts to a close-up of the blacksmith's anxious wife, before showing their two young children working. One of them drops a horse's shoe into the embers, and the blacksmith slaps him brutally across the face. Condemning him for cruelty, the monk retracts his offer, and the blacksmith – who will succeed the current mayor – vows to destroy the religious community.

A voice-over, which states that five years have elapsed, combined with a panning shot of the monastery and surrounding terrain littered with signs of child's play, indicates that Marcelino is still living in the community. A musical interlude introduces the child actor Pablito Calvo and narrates his daily routine. On film Pablito Calvo was an adorable and luminous boy: 'cuyos grandes, vivos y brillantes ojos y tierna sonrisilla hicieron estragos, con razón, entre los corazones espectadores'

(Maqua Lara 1998: 539) ['whose large, lively and bright eyes and tender smile wreaked havoc, with reason, in the hearts of viewers']. James R. Kincaid observes that 'kids are especially adorable when they are still: the sleeping child or [...] the child in the coffin, stilled forever' (Kincaid 1998: 114), and this song fetishizes Marcelino/Pablito by allowing the viewer to gaze at him, offering one charming scene after another: waking with a smile, dressing, reluctantly washing his face, eating, playing, learning the multiplication table and praying before falling asleep. Films preserve what we want to hold on to, the image of the child before he or she betrays us by growing up, and, here, the camera lingers on the ever so still boy.

However, Marcelino is a child unmoored from his legitimate family. The regime constructed its national identity around the concept of caring, responsible family values, and this informs the portrayal of Marcelino in the adaptation. Laura Peters points out that because the orphan is 'an outsider, a body without family ties to the community, a foreigner' (Peters 2000: 6), this figure is charged with great symbolic powers: the orphan 'is both vital to and a disruption to notions of being – particularly home, nation, discourse and writing. The orphan performs a paradoxical function: he or she is both redemptive and a threat' (Peters 2000: 28). Peters mentions Girard's theories on the scapegoat (1977), and these insights are pertinent to a reading of the adaptation. Whereas Sánchez-Silva narrates the boy's death as the fulfilment of a personal satisfaction, the return to original plenitude, the film privileges the propagandistic message of National-Catholic reconciliation.

At one point, Marcelino is taken to the town's annual fair, a commercially oriented gathering, and, unaccustomed to being too far outside the monastery walls, he marvels at the crowd and thronging activity. The monk asks him to wait a moment, but Marcelino is coaxed into helping a lad with a heavy load. Lost in the crowd, Marcelino spies a stall laden with grapefruit, and, without a thought, he pulls the one at the bottom of the display. As the fruit tumbles, chaos ensues and the cattle are accidentally released, causing damages and injuries. This gives the mayor – formerly the blacksmith – a reason to expel the monks from the monastery. The monks punish Marcelino by ostracizing him. Rejected and lonely, he recalls the terrifying tall figure he saw one day in the attic and decides that his company is better than none. The adaptation picks up Sánchez-Silva's narration and dramatizes the friendship between the boy and Christ based on the gift of food. In their encounters, the camera focuses on Pablito Calvo's radiant face, not the carved figure (apart from making the miracle manifest by showing the motionless wooden nail-pierced hand slowly becoming flesh and reaching out for the slice of bread). They converse often, and, once again, Christ becomes the mouthpiece of the regime to define sacrificial motherhood: 'dan de todo. Se dan a sí mismas. Dan a los hijos sus vidas y la luz de sus ojos, hasta quedarse viejas y arrugadas' ['they give everything. Themselves. They give their children life and the light in their eyes, until they become old and wrinkled'].

The Abbot, aware that wine is disappearing, and noticing that the boy's personality has altered, commands Fray Tomás to follow the boy into the attic. Fray Tomás knows the boy better, as he performs the maternal role: cradling Marcelino, feeding him and soothing him. Through a gap in the door, Fray Tomás – but not the audience –

witnesses Christ and Marcelino's last exchange and the fatal embrace which leaves the boy lifeless. Unlike Sánchez-Silva's narrative, he is the sole witness to the moment of death, and he does not cry out – as the entire community does in the original – '¡Milagro, milagro!' (Sánchez-Silva 1953: 71) ['Miracle, miracle!']. The other monks rush to witness the miracle, but, for a moment, the camera focuses on Fray Tomás, inconsolable in his grief, recalling Catholic culture's ultimate image of maternal agony: the Mater Dolorosa. Marina Warner has written that 'the Virgin was the instrument mediating bafflement at the mystery of the Redemption into emotional understanding. She made the sacrifice of Golgotha seem real, for she focused human feeling in a comprehensible and accessible way' (Warner 1976: 209). The framing of Fray Tomás in tears fulfils this function, that of making the inexplicable death of the adorable boy emotionally comprehensible. With his death comes the salvation of the community and the restoration of Catholic spirituality to the monks – often shown to be more absorbed in their domestic activities than in fulfilling their religious duties – and to the town, which redefines its annual commercial fair as a religious pilgrimage.

The adaptation is an important mobilizer of national identity, intimately connected to the regime's discourses, but it has become part of an international Catholic cinematic canon: 'Es la más universal de las películas españolas: marcas de recaudación en Japón, traducida al inglés en los Estados Unidos, premio del público en Berlín, siete meses en la cartelera de Roma, ocho minutos de aplausos ininterrumpidos en Cannes' ['It is the most universal of Spanish films: box-office success in Japan, dubbed into English for the American market, voted audience favourite in Berlin, a seven-month run in Rome, eight minutes of uninterrupted applause in Cannes'].<sup>8</sup> The sentimental and sacred aspects ensure its ability to transcend national and, given its longevity, temporal boundaries.

### The remake's Oedipal dynamic

*Marcelino pan y vino* (1991) reshapes the adaptation to such an extent that Harvey Greenberg's speculation of the Oedipal impulse intrinsic to remaking comes to mind: 'the original, a signet of paternal potency and maternal unavailability-refusal, incites the remaker's unalloyed negativity. This precipitates a savage, contemptuous attack upon the original, in which its significant elements are erased, disfigured and/or parodied' (Greenberg 1998: 125). My purpose is not to discuss the merits of this remake, but to examine its portrayal of the mother-son dyad, the reformulation of the orphan trope and displacement of Marcelino's death off-screen. As Paul Yates has stated: 'death is not a forbidden area in late modernity; rather it is hidden' (Yates 2000: 222).

Although the action is relocated to Italy, the film does not engage overtly with national discourses but can be interpreted economically and aesthetically as an example of *fin-de-siècle* European cinema. The major financial backers were Italian, followed by Spain and France in equal measure, and there was additional funding from Eurimages, the European Union's fund for co-productions. Which is why, given that it is a co-production, it is difficult to attribute the Oedipal impulse solely to the

director, Luigi Comencini.<sup>9</sup> Spain's investment, however, does raise the spectre of national revisionism. The funding was justifiable under the problematic 'Miró Law', a Socialist policy that encouraged 'quality' cinema to the detriment of 'comedy, gore, boulevard schlock, and "lower" genres that had proved popular mass entertainments' (Besas 2002: 225). The remake reflects the visual spectacle characteristic of the 'heritage' film, thus fulfilling the criteria for quality: 'extensive exterior locations, numerous extras and rich soundtrack music and photography' (Mazdon 2000: 73). Furthermore, after the Dictator's demise, a political and cultural anti-Francoist stance meant that this policy tended to favour cinematic projects that revised or erased Spain's National-Catholic past.

The audience is introduced to the child actor, Nicolás Paolucci, in the opening credits: a rotating slide show of still images of an ethereal boy, blonde, slender and dressed in a robe. The effect is, once again, to make the viewer marvel at the adorable boy; it recalls Kincaid's criticism of films featuring children, in that they can offer 'one enticing scene after another in an attempt to achieve the groaning dessert table effect of a family album' (Kincaid 1998: 121). It opens with a panoramic shot of the ochre hills of Umbria, but disturbs the audience's expectation by zooming in on two blue buses making their progress towards a monastery. Streams of happy children clad in jeans are told that they have fifteen minutes to tour the building, and one girl stops at a stall selling religious souvenirs to pick up a book 'de ese niño Marcelino' ['on that boy Marcelino'].<sup>10</sup> A child's voice narrates over the flashback to the seventeenth century to a town in the aftermath of a violent battle: 'mi historia empieza en estos lugares en el año 1600, no recuerdo bien el año exacto, en cambio sí recuerdo que había una guerra como tantas otras' ['my story begins near this place in 1600, I can't remember the year exactly, but I do remember that a war was taking place like so many others'].

Allowing Marcelino to tell his own story reflects a cultural shift in the way we understand the child, in that there is a growing 'recognition of children as particular persons' (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 6). Rather than being merely pre-adult, needing to be guided and moulded, children are 'understood as social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstances' (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 6). This, as I will discuss shortly, affects the way Marcelino's death is portrayed here as an informed independent choice rather than a supernatural seduction. The remake is more interested in exploring a boy's active pursuit of the pre-Oedipal – that phase of psychosexual identity formation in which the mother is privileged and which can be devalued once the father intervenes in the mother-son dyad – than in engaging with the now outmoded theme of death as a heavenly reward. As we shall see, the domain of the father, the symbolic, is spurned in favour of the lost mother's domain.

Amid the town's ruins two monks hear a cry, and they follow the sound into a patch of land and find an infant nestling amid the cabbages. This humorous reference to the origin of babies is one example of the remake's aim to transform a religious tale into the stuff of legend. This infant is taken back to the monastery, and fussed over but the voice-over continues: 'pero allí entre todos aquellos hombres no veía a quien



podía sustituir a mi madre' ['but there, among all those men, I could not see who could substitute my mother']. In a move to reinforce the strong bond between Marcelino and his dead mother Marcelino's babyhood is prolonged considerably in the remake. The monks are gathered around the baptismal font, and Marcelino's voice-over says: 'mientras los frailes rezaban sucedió algo misterioso' ['as the monks prayed something mysterious happened']. Marcelino states that only he can see a woman approach the group: 'me tomó en sus brazos, sentí su calor y la ternura de sus caricias [...] era mi madre' ['she took me in her arms, I felt her warmth and the tenderness of her caress (...) it was my mother'], the camera lingers on this last maternal embrace, but does not explain whether it is a supernatural event or a lingering memory trace. Cut to midnight mass, and the annual re-enactment of the crib scene in the chapel: the monks are singing *Adoramus te* and Marcelino – in the place of the Christ-child – turns in the crib to gaze up in adoration. At this point, the camera takes the infant's point of view and we can see that he is adoring a plaster cast life-sized Virgin, an abstraction of purity and love. Faced with the absence of a biological mother, the infant transfers his desire to the Holy Mother, a devotion that Marcelino maintains while growing up.

Six-year-old Nicolás Paolucci has the old-fashioned allure of the sentimental child, one that is pious, well-behaved and other-worldly.<sup>11</sup> He is often shown delighting in religious iconography, and, it is this that gains the attention of the local count. At this point, the remake adds an interesting twist to Sánchez-Silva's original story about an abandoned child. Whereas the original proposes that the boy's parents are deceased, Commencini makes use of the legendary 'lost-child plot' which involves an abandoned 'aristocrat who is saved by peasants, raised in primitive surroundings, discovered through a talisman or birthmark, and returned [...] to his biological parents' (Estrin 1985: 13), thereby restoring a dynasty. The count has commissioned an artist to paint a fresco in the monastery's chapel in honour of his deceased wife: the count is to be portrayed bathed in celestial light radiating from the Madonna – in the countess's likeness – cradling the Holy Child. The iconography of Renaissance art, intent on reflecting social status, undermines the count's sincerity and moral integrity as it demonstrates that he is more intent on self-aggrandizement and perpetuity than in commemorating a loved one. Marcelino, who has conflated his absent mother with the Virgin, innocently points at the fresco and says 'es mi madre' ['she is my mother']. However, the remake is intent on exploring the implications of a fundamental psychological choice – to identify with either the maternal or the paternal – and subsequently overturns the formula and the audience's expectation that the orphan hero will turn out to be noble and wealthy and, thereafter, achieve happiness. The finding of the father is not the happy ending, and, anyway, is the count the biological father or is Marcelino just a convenient discovery? After confiding that, during the war, his wife was driven out of the palace and died giving birth near the town walls, he adds: 'tengo que tener un hijo antes de mis cuarenta años o si no todo pasa a mi primo' ['I must have a child before I turn forty or everything will be transferred to my cousin']. The count takes the boy to his palace, but despite being assured a promising destiny, Marcelino runs back to the monastery. The remake, by overturning the 'lost-

child plot', demonstrates a highly critical attitude to patriarchal familial strategy, where children are crucial for the family's perpetuation, instead of being valued in themselves: 'each child becomes a piece of property, a way of holding the already acquired – and extending the still coveted – family realm' (Estrin 1985: 19). Marcelino rejects the paternal legacy and historical time in favour of a return to the maternal embrace, even if this means death and the dissolution of self.

In the remake Marcelino's death is portrayed, not as a supernatural seduction – in the adaptation, Marcelino hesitates after Christ's offer, and says 'no tengo sueño' ['I am not tired'], to which He replies 'ven, yo te lo daré' ['come, I will make you tired'] – but as an informed independent choice. In fact, Marcelino's relationship with Christ appears as an afterthought in this version as he will not encounter the statue until the final reel, whilst hiding in the attic from the man who claims to be his real father. At the moment of death, whereas Vajda created a sense of wonder and mystery by focusing only on Pablito Calvo's expressive face, Comencini shows the boy and the statue of Christ embrace: '¿Puedo acercarme? Ahora Tú puedes llevarme a donde está mi madre y hablaré con ella' ['Can I get closer? Now You can take me to where my mother is and I will speak with her']. The camera lingers on the child actor Paolucci's tears – an uncomfortable spectacle of distress – but cuts away from their embrace before the moment of death to focus on shadows. In the remake, there is no portrayal of the dead child's body. Instead it transforms the moment of death into one of absence: as the camera leaves the shadows it records that the attic is now empty and Marcelino and Christ have departed. Is that because the dead child is too disturbing an image for it to be used as entertainment in late modernity?

### Translating Marcelino into an animated little hero

*Marcelino pan y vino* (2000)<sup>12</sup> reveals its status as a global media product through its connection to transnational capital and Third World labour, which complicates issues of authorship and reception. The division of creative work was as follows: Jaime de Armiñan provided the script and José Luis Moro illustrated the main characters, the Japanese studio Nippon Animation provided the animation works and background painting (usually farmed out to sweatshops in Korea) and France was in charge of post-production. However, it was released during a media panic, 'Pokemonmanía', about the effects of Japanese animation – anime – on children's behaviour. The anime series, and related merchandise, was considered so addictive that the British media dubbed *Pokemon* 'Kiddie Crack' (Howe 2000: 2), and, interestingly, Spain's national television channel, TVE, failed to acknowledge Nippon Animation's contribution in their annual report. TVE has to account to the government and the public and it positions itself as a moral guardian of childhood, aiming to emphasize values such as solidarity, justice and citizenship; stimulate the imagination; and promote 'la realidad pluricultural de España' (RTVE 2002: 272) ['Spain's multicultural reality'].<sup>13</sup> In its report, TVE defended its decision to broadcast *Marcelino pan y vino* (2000) instead of *Pokemon*, and it criticized the latter as typical of 'series con mensajes discutibles, alto contenido violento o estética poco cuidada' (RTVE 2002: 274) ['series with dubious messages, high violence content or poor aesthetic standard'].

TVE was setting up a false opposition between ‘bad’ Japanese anime and ‘good’ Hispano-European animation; however, many seasoned viewers of Japanese anime, or those who share collective memories of consuming visually similar animated texts – anime adaptations of European literary classics, such as *Alps no Shojo Heidi* (1974) [*Heidi, Girl of the Alps*], based on Johanna Spyri’s novel (1881), and *Haba o Tazunete Sanzenri* (1976) [*From the Apennines to the Andes*], based on Edmondo de Amicis’s *Cuore* (1886) – will recognize its Japanese aesthetic. They all contrast idealized and atmospheric natural landscapes, where the ever-changing sky becomes a barometer for the protagonist’s mood, with highly detailed, even cluttered, stifling urbanscapes and interiors. However, whereas in the past Japanese animated adaptations of European children’s classics aimed to achieve a hyperrealist mode, where the characters are more or less subject to physical laws, the animated version of *Marcelino pan y vino* is based not on the original text, but on Jaime de Armiñan’s script. Armiñan’s script exploits ‘the “openness” of the animated vocabulary’ which is ‘conducive to fantastical or supernatural contexts’ (Wells 2002: 210). Armiñan has said: ‘la mayor dificultad de los 26 episodios estaba en el propio libro de Sánchez-Silva. Es muy corto, y había que sacar a Marcelino del convento’ [‘the greatest difficulty of the 26 episodes was in Sánchez-Silva’s book. It is very short, and it was necessary to take Marcelino out of the monastery’].<sup>14</sup> Not only does Marcelino experience three distinct spaces (the monastery, the nefarious duke’s manor house, and the forest), he also travels to the centre of the earth, flies around on the back of an eagle, converses with animals and even befriends a ghost, Don Silvino. The storyline may bear little resemblance to either of the cinematic versions, but Moro’s illustrations are a homage to the adaptation. Marcelino and Fray Tomás are loving caricatures of Pablito Calvo and Juan Calvo-Domenech, and the scene in which the small boy raises the slice of bread to the large carving of Christ recreates in animation Vajda’s camera techniques to generate a sense of awe: drawn as using a low camera angle, allowing only one shaft of light from a high window, it focuses on Marcelino and shows only Christ’s carved wooden hand become human flesh.

However, despite the ending which respects Sánchez-Silva’s narrative, Marcelino’s relationship with Christ is minimized, as is the mother-fetish. She is discussed in only a small number of episodes, but the moment of abandonment features in the opening credits which act as a continuous reminder of Marcelino’s condition of orphanhood. It is winter, and a woman dressed in rags hauls herself through the snow to place her baby at the monastery’s gate. All we see are her tear-filled eyes. In this respect, the mother’s act appears to function as a simple narrative strategy to detach him from familial bonds in order to inaugurate his quest for selfhood.

Here the ideological function of the orphan is not that of a scapegoat, but Marcelino does embody both ‘promise and threat’ (Peters 2000: 18). The world that he inhabits is populated by two types: kind people and noble animals, corrupt people and naughty animals. Marcelino, a tiny but effective hero, is a symbol of promise to all of those under threat, while continually preventing evil: foxes tormenting chickens, the duke’s stag-hunt and child exploitation.<sup>15</sup> In the end, all the corrupt characters – apart from the nefarious duke – are reformed, thanks to Marcelino.

Throughout the series, Marcelino often expresses his desire to become a bullfighter, a pilot, even a cowboy when he grows up. He is shown to value achievement, and is characterized by having a potentially rewarding future, and yet, in the last episode, 'Un día muy especial' ['A very special day'], Marcelino makes a radical choice. Children 'definitionally are characterized by having futures' (Yates 2000: 221) but Marcelino elects to have no future. Although over the last twenty-five episodes Marcelino has proved himself a brave, resourceful and capable little hero, he feels that life is not worth living without a mother, and rejects life for the idea of a heavenly reunion. This signals that the orphan figure still occupies a complex position in *Marcelino pan y vino*: to embody the mourning for the unsustainable ideal of lost maternal love and the desire to keep the biological family together. It is his sixth birthday, and Marcelino shares a slice of his cake with Christ. The next morning, neither Marcelino nor the carved Christ on the crucifix are anywhere to be found.

### Conclusion

Not one of these versions of *Marcelino pan y vino* is able to avoid the primary burden of Sánchez-Silva's narrative: the death of the little boy. Instead, the portrayal of Marcelino's death is continuously reinterpreted, revealing not only how our attitudes to death are culturally constructed, but how they are subject to rapid change from modernity to late modernity. The adaptation appeared at a time – in the 1950s – and in a society – National-Catholic Spain – when audiences could still sustain their belief in the idea that death was socially meaningful and, therefore, not necessarily tragic. The camera lingers on an adorable corpse – the child actor, Pablito Calvo, sitting motionless, arms folded across his still chest, eyes closed and head slightly slumped – for social, moral and emotional effect. The adaptation did not perceive this aesthetically pleasing portrayal of childhood death as incompatible with entertainment. But in late modernity there has been a gradual shift in attitudes to the death of young people and children, and both the remake and the animated series shy away from showing Marcelino's inert and lifeless body on screen. The representation of a child's corpse is no longer appropriate or even palatable entertainment, and these remakes move the spectacle of the dying – or, perhaps, disappearing – child off screen. And yet *Marcelino pan y vino* obviously remains a compelling story in late modernity, as each remake proves that a child's death is still moving when it is narrated as a reunion, in this case the return to the maternal embrace and original plenitude. Furthermore, each version refuses to alter the original ending and does not allow Marcelino to grow up and have a future. We may no longer find the adorable corpse a visual treat, but we remain fascinated with the idea of a child whose development is arrested and who, therefore, remains adorable for ever and ever.

### Notes

- 1 There were many, but the paradigmatic Spanish child martyr revived during the early Francoist period was San Dominguito del Val (1243?–50), said to have been crucified by the Jewish community of Zaragoza. This medieval anti-Semitic propaganda was widely promoted in Francoist children's educational and recreational culture.

- 2 To see how José Luis Moro's illustration echoes Lori Merish's definition, visit Nippon Animation studio's website: [http://www.nipponanimation.com/seleccion/select\\_109/index.html](http://www.nipponanimation.com/seleccion/select_109/index.html).
- 3 In this article I will be referring only to the first book, not *Historias menores* (1953), a prequel with anecdotes of Marcelino's boyhood, or *Aventura en el cielo de Marcelino pan y vino* (1954), the sequel narrating his journey through the afterlife into his mother's arms.
- 4 Shorthand for *The Types of the Folktale*, a single classification system for international folk tales developed by the Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne and enlarged by the American folklorist Stith Thompson. Although this method is now considered unfashionable, it remains an invaluable reference work.
- 5 Cantiga 353, 'Quen a omagen', recounts a miracle about an orphan boy adopted by an abbot who had the pious habit of sharing his food with the statue of the Christ-child seated in the arms of the Virgin Mary. The Christ-child returns the favour by inviting the boy to dine with him and the heavenly Father. The abbot, upon noticing that the boy has grown pale and withdrawn, finds out about the invitation and begs that he too may go and 'eat such delicious food' (Alfonso X 2000: 430). Shortly after, both the child and his adoptive father fall ill and die.
- 6 One schoolbook, M. Antonio Arias's *Mis segundos pasos* (1951), states that a good mother 'se quitaría el pan de la boca para que nosotros no pasásemos hambre' (Arias 1951: 186) ['would take the bread from her mouth so that we should not feel hunger'].
- 7 It is not too fanciful to perceive that the film's contemporary audience was feminized, infantilized and depicted as ailing in this motion; the girl, the implicit audience and Spaniards in the 1950s, the explicit audience, are all placed in the roles of viewers to a morality tale whose intent is to reform.
- 8 <http://www.teacuerdas.com/nostalgia-personajes-pablito.htm> (accessed June 2003).
- 9 Childhood is also the subject of some of Comencini's earlier works: *La ragazza di Bube* (1964); *Infanzia, vocazione e prime esperienze di Giacomo Casanova, veneziano* (1969); and *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1976).
- 10 The remake is not currently available commercially on video or DVD, but the Filmoteca Española was able to provide access to the Spanish version for viewing, hence the use of quotes in Spanish throughout.
- 11 Although I do not have the space to analyse the remake's laborious plot, it is interesting that Marcelino only learns how to be what we currently consider childlike – i.e. play games, pranks, laugh and career about the monastery – after meeting a travelling gypsy boy.
- 12 This series was released in September 2003 as a collectable *fascículo* [partwork] on sale in newsagents and kiosks throughout Spain. The collection is made up of the entire animated series on video, plastic figurines of the main protagonists and activity books, and will be on sale for forty weeks. The collection sells itself as an educational tool which aims to inform children about wildlife and nature.
- 13 The animated series fulfils TVE's criteria for appropriate childhood entertainment in that it promotes positive values such as solidarity and justice, stimulates the imagination and nods towards Spain's multicultural reality: one of Marcelino's protectors is a gypsy girl, Candela, who acts as a fairy godmother (and, when unavailable, she can detach her shadow from the soles of her feet to assist him).
- 14 Scriptwriter Armiñan quoted on-line: <http://www.sueviafilms.com/suevia-dis/infantil/marcelino.htm> (accessed July 2003).
- 15 In fact, the sentimental concern for children without childhood is a thread that runs through all versions of *Marcelino pan y vino*. In the adaptation and the remake, the monks are shown to condemn childhood exploitation and protect Marcelino from this fate: from the violent blacksmith, in the first, and from a miller who makes even his two-year-old son turn the heavy wheel of the mill, in the second. In the series Marcelino takes on the

role of protector. In episode 13, 'Casio, el leñador' ['Casio, the woodsman'], Marcelino finds out that he enslaves abandoned children, but, with the help of his adult friend Thursday, manages to transform Casio into a loving parent-substitute.

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